











S E R M O N S

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CONTENTS.

SERMON I.

THE SELF-EVIDENCING NATURE OF DIVINE TRUTH, PAGE
1

“By manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man’s conscience in the sight of God.”—*2 Corinthians*, iv. 2.

SERMON II.

SELF-IGNORANCE, 33

“Who can understand his errors? Cleanse thou me from secret faults.”—*Psalms* xix. 12.

SERMON III.

SPIRITUAL INFLUENCE, 54

“Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again. The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit.”—*John*, iii. 7, 8.

SERMON IV.

PART FIRST.

THE INVISIBLE GOD, 83

“No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, He hath declared Him.”—*John*, i. 18.

SERMON IV.

PART SECOND.

	PAGE
<i>THE MANIFESTATION OF THE INVISIBLE GOD,</i>	100

“No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, He hath declared Him.”
—*John*, i. 18.

SERMON V.

<i>THE SOLITARINESS OF CHRIST'S SUFFERINGS,</i>	111
---	-----

“I have trodden the wine-press alone.”—*Isaiah*, lxiii. 3.

SERMON VI.

<i>PARTICIPATION IN THE SUFFERINGS OF CHRIST,</i>	138
---	-----

“Rejoice inasmuch as ye are partakers of the sufferings of Christ.”
—1 *Peter*, iv. 13.

SERMON VII.

<i>SPIRITUAL REST,</i>	159
------------------------	-----

“Return unto thy rest, O my soul!”—*Psalms* cxvi. 7.

SERMON VIII.

<i>SPIRITUAL PROSPERITY,</i>	181
------------------------------	-----

“Beloved, I wish above all things that thou mayest prosper and be in health, even as thy soul prospereth.”—3 *John*, 2.

SERMON IX.

<i>THE CHRISTIAN'S HERITAGE,</i>	205
----------------------------------	-----

“All things are yours; whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come; all are yours; and ye are Christ's; and Christ is God's.”
—1 *Corinthians*, iii. 21, 22, 23.

SERMON X.

	PAGE
<i>THE SIMPLICITY OF CHRISTIAN RITUAL,</i>	226

“Then verily the first covenant had also ordinances of divine service.”—*Hebrews*, ix. 1.

SERMON XI.

<i>THE COMPARATIVE INFLUENCE OF CHARACTER AND DOCTRINE,</i>	250
---	-----

“Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee.”—1 *Timothy*, iv. 16.

SERMON XII.

<i>RELIGION IN COMMON LIFE,</i>	273
---	-----

“Not slothful in business; fervent in spirit; serving the Lord.”—*Romans*, xii. 11.

SERMON I.

THE SELF-EVIDENCING NATURE OF DIVINE TRUTH.

“By manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God.”—*2 Corinthians*, iv. 2.

THE truth we receive from the lips of another may either derive its authority from the teacher, or reflect on him the authority it contains. As the receiver of money may argue, either that the money is good because it is an honest man who pays it, or that the man is honest because he pays good money; so in the communication and reception of truth, it may be a valid inference, either that the doctrine is true because it is a trustworthy man who teaches it, or that the man who teaches is veracious or trustworthy because his doctrine is true. It is the latter mode of inference which is employed in the text. The apostle appeals to the doctrine he taught as in itself a sufficient attestation of his character and credibility. The message he had spoken was so completely in accordance with reason and conscience—it so reflected the profoundest convictions of the human intellect, and responded to

the deepest longings of the human heart, that he needed no other credentials in proclaiming it : it became at once its own witness and his. The fragrance of the heavenly deposit clung to the garments of him to whom it was intrusted, and rendered him "a sweet savour of life unto them" who received it. The lamp of truth was not only seen by its own light, but shed back its brightness on the face of him who bore it. By the simple "manifestation of the truth, he commended himself to every man's conscience in the sight of God."

That there is an order of truth, such as that to which the apostle refers, every thoughtful mind must be aware. As there are some truths which we reach inferentially, by a process, longer or shorter, of argument, deduction, demonstration ; so there are other truths which are perceived immediately and intuitively whenever the mind is brought into contact with them. All science is based on truths which constitute their own evidence. At the root of all knowledge there are first principles which are independent of proof, which to state is to prove to every mind that apprehends them. Follow the links in every chain of reasoning far enough back, and you will come to a first reason which hangs on no other, but is self-existent and self-sufficient. Examine the contents of your knowledge, and sooner or later you will penetrate to the primary strata, which, unsupported, support all besides. Of innumerable objects of thought you may be able to say why you conceive them to be true, or right, or beautiful ; but there are some with respect to

which you can give no such reason, of which you can only say, I believe them to be true, or good, or fair, because I believe them to be true, or good, or fair; my mind is so constituted that I cannot otherwise regard them; they commend themselves at once to my consciousness in the sight of God.

Now to this class belong many of the truths of revelation. Of much that is contained in Scripture the mind of man is so constituted, as, immediately and intuitively, when brought face to face with it, to recognise the truthfulness or reality. As it needs no outward attestation to prove to the tasteful eye the beauty of fair scenes, as sweet sounds need no authentication of their harmony to the sensitive ear; so, between the spirit of man, and that infinite world of moral beauty and harmony which revelation discloses, there is a correspondence so deep and real that the inner eye and ear, if undiseased, discern at once in divine things their own best witness and authority. In the original structure of the soul, there is an unwritten revelation which accords with the external revelation of Scripture. Within the depths of the heart there is a silent oracle, which needs only to be rightly questioned to elicit from it a response in accordance with that voice which issues from the lively oracles of God. In one word, the appeal of Scripture to the unbiassed conscience or consciousness of man is, in great part, direct, immediate, irresistible. It is this doctrine which I now propose to explain and illustrate. As, however, it is a doctrine which, if unguardedly stated, is extremely liable to misconstruction, I shall endeavour to

show, in the first place, what is *not*, before going on, secondly, to explain what *is*, its true import.

I. By the statement that the truths of revelation commend themselves to the conscience or consciousness of man, it is not implied, *that man, by the unaided exercise of his consciousness, could have discovered them.* In claiming for man's spirit a power of recognising and responding to the truth of God, we do not arrogate for it a capacity, of itself, to originate that truth.

If there be an internal revelation already imprinted on the human spirit, what need, it might be asked, for any other? If the truths of Scripture be so congenial to man's mind, in such exact correspondence with the principles of reason and conscience, might not reason and conscience work out those truths independently of any external aid? What necessity for an outward authority to announce to me that which, by the fundamental laws of my being, I cannot help believing? If the doctrines of religion accord with man's conscience as the principles of arithmetic or geometry accord with man's reason, what need for an oracle to reveal the former any more than the latter? In asserting that divine revelation is self-evidencing, do we not virtually assert that it is uncalled-for or superfluous?

Now, to all such questions the obvious answer is, that the power to *recognise* truth, when presented to us, does not by any means imply the power to *find out* or *originate* the same truth. The range of intellect which enables a man to perceive and appreciate thought, falls far short of that which is necessary to excogitate

or create thought. We may apprehend what we could not invent. To discover, for instance, some great law of nature, to evolve some grand principle of science, implies in the discoverer the possession of mental powers of the very rarest order ; but when that law or principle has once been pointed out, multitudes who could never have discovered it for themselves may be quite able to verify it. The law of gravitation was unknown to man for ages, till one great mind arose, of grasp sufficient to penetrate into the arcana of nature, and bring to light this great secret of her order ; but, now that the discovery has been achieved, all men of ordinary intellectual capacity can apprehend its evidence, and satisfy themselves of its truth. Viewed merely as what is knowable—involved in the laws of human thought—all Euclid is in the mind of a savage ; but whilst minds of the rudest cast may easily be educated into the capacity to verify Euclid, how very few of the whole human race could have struck out his discoveries for themselves ! All abstract science or philosophy, in fact, is but the evolving of the latent contents of our consciousness—the bringing to light by observation, reflection, analysis, of those truths which implicitly are possessed by all ; but though, virtually, these truths would never become really ours, they would never be known at all by common thinkers, but for the aid which the discoveries of high and philosophic minds afford them. So again, to what is it that the great poet owes the power to charm and thrill the minds of men—what is the secret of the spell which his genius exerts over multitudes, but this, that he

gives expression to their own indistinct and unuttered thoughts and feelings—to thoughts and feelings which, though none but men of rarest genius could articulate them, the common heart and soul of humanity recognises as its own? Millions can perceive and appreciate the power, the reality, the trueness to nature, of the great writer's productions, who could never themselves have produced them. There are multitudes of "mute inglorious Miltons," though there never lived but one who could write the 'Paradise Lost.' Dim, indistinct, nebulous, the thoughts of beauty and truth lurk in many a mind, but it is only the creative voice of genius from without that condenses and shapes them into visible beauty—gives to them local habitation and name—and so, by interpreting ourselves to ourselves, commends its utterances to every man's consciousness in the sight of God.

Now, to apply this principle to the case before us:—It is obvious that the appeal of Scripture to man's reason and conscience does not by any means imply in man's reason and conscience a capacity to discover divine truth by their own unaided exercise. Here, too, is a case in which it is possible for the human mind to recognise and identify that which, of itself, it could not have found out. There may be, and we shall in the sequel attempt to show that there are, in the soul, latent beliefs, dim inarticulate yearnings, unexplained hopes and aspirations, which are to itself unrealised and unintelligible, till the outward shining of divine truth pours light and meaning upon them. There may be, and we maintain that there are, inscribed

on the mind and conscience of man, the characters of an unknown language, to which revelation alone supplies the key, and which, read by its aid, become the truest verification of that which interprets them. Bring "one that believeth not, or one unlearned," face to face with him who speaks the Word of inspiration, and, as he listens, there will be roused within him a something that claims in that Word a strange affinity with itself; "he will be convinced of all, he will be judged of all; the secrets of his heart will be made manifest, and so he will worship God, and report that God is here of a truth." In that world of eternal and invisible realities to which, as spiritual beings, we belong, there are heights too vast for human soaring, mysteries too profound for fallen humanity, of itself, to penetrate. But though by no unaided "searching" could we "find out God;" though, again, the conception of a pure and holy moral law, or yet again, the vision of a glorious immortality, be unattainable by any spontaneous effort of human reason, yet there is wrought into the very structure of man's nature so much of a divine element, there is a moral standard so ineffaceably inscribed on the conscience, there slumbers in the universal heart a desire and yearning after immortality so deep and strong, that that Bible, which contains in it the revelation of God and Holiness and Heaven, finds in the awakened soul an instant response and authentication of its teachings. Divine truth, therefore, undiscoverable by human reason, is yet so in harmony with it; inaccessible to the human mind, yet so accords with all its half-acknowledged principles and aspirations;

inexpressible by human lip, yet so expresses for man things which he thought but could not utter for himself,—that it “commends itself to every man’s consciousness in the sight of God.”

2. Again, in averring that the truths of revelation commend themselves to the consciousness of man, not only do we not ascribe to the consciousness a power to discover those truths, but we do not even imply *that the consciousness in its unrenewed and imperfect state is qualified fully to recognise and verify them when discovered to it.*

It might be admitted that the mind of man, in its unimpaired and perfect state, is so in harmony with the mind of God, as at once to echo and respond to the utterance of that mind in His revealed Word. But the mind of man is not perfect and unimpaired. The moral reason has become dimmed and distorted, so that, instead of affording a perfect, unerring reflection, it breaks and refracts the light of truth into a thousand unreal forms and phantasms. It might be possible for the inner eye and ear, if endowed with all the soundness and delicate susceptibility of health, at once to recognise the beauty and harmony of divine things; but the vision of the soul is blurred, the spiritual ear has lost its sensitiveness to heaven’s music. How then any longer can the soul be regarded as the criterion of truth—how can it be asserted that the truth commends itself to every man’s consciousness? Is not such a statement at variance with that other doctrine of Scripture, that “the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, neither can he know them,

because they are spiritually discerned?" And if, in answer to this, it be said that there is a restorative operation of the Spirit of God on the minds of those who receive the truth, still it may be rejoined, that it is by the truth, apprehended and believed, that the Holy Spirit works in restoring or renewing the mind, and that therefore the apprehension or recognition of the truth must be, in some sort, prior to the restoration of the mind to purity and goodness. How then, again, may it be asked, can the truth be said to commend itself to an impaired, imperfect conscience? How can light be perceived by blind eyes, harmony by dull or deaf ears?

The solution of this difficulty will perhaps be found in the consideration that divine truth exerts on the mind of man at once a restorative and a self-manifesting power. It creates in the mind the capacity by which it is discerned. As light opens the close-shut flower-bud to receive light, or as the sunbeam, playing on a sleeper's eyes, by its gentle irritation opens them to see its own brightness; so the truth of God, shining on the soul, quickens and stirs into activity the faculty by which that very truth is perceived. It matters little which of the two operations, in logical or in natural order, be first; practically they may be regarded as simultaneous. The perception rouses the faculty, and yet the faculty is implied in the perception. The truth awakens the mind, and yet the mind must be in activity ere the truth can reach it. And the same twofold process is carried on in the whole subsequent progress of the soul. Light and the Organ

of Vision, Knowledge and the Understanding, Divine Truth and the Spiritual Reason, grow and expand together. They act and react. They are reciprocally helpful. They are, each by turn, cause and effect. It is in this case as in secular studies and contemplations, each advance in knowledge disciplines the knowing faculty, and the discipline of the faculty renders it capable of still further advances in knowledge. With each new problem mastered, each difficult step in science or philosophy overcome, the powers of observation, comparison, analysis, are invigorated, the mental habits of attention and application are strengthened, and thus a wider range of knowledge, a larger, clearer, more comprehensive view of truth, becomes possible to the mind. So, again, the observation of Nature both presupposes and cultivates the sense of beauty. The sight of her material glory rouses the dormant imagination into action; but it needs long familiarity with her presence, long and reverent study and contemplation of her manifold forms and aspects, till her full splendour breaks upon the chastened eye. In the very act of contemplation, the contemplative powers are expanded, the perceptions quickened, the elements of feeling and of thought purified and enriched; and so the whole mind and spirit of the observer of Nature becomes qualified for the more perfect apprehension of her loveliness. In like manner the powers of spiritual discernment, incapable at first of recognising the full glory and beauty of divine truth, become, by daily converse with it, more and more qualified to know it. In each act of earnest study of God's word a reflex

process of refinement is going on ; something of the mind's dulness and insensibility is thrown off, and some new touch of spiritual acuteness communicated. The spiritual appetite, growing by what it feeds upon, becomes capable of assimilating more and more of its divine nutriment. The inner eye and ear acquire by exercise a more and more delicate acuteness and accuracy of perception ; until at last, as the result of its long converse with truth, the soul learns to recognise it with an almost instinctive sureness, and with a sensitiveness on which not the slightest shade of its beauty, not the most evanescent tone of its heavenly harmony, is lost. Thus, impaired and defective though our nature be, inasmuch as the truth restores and refines the very powers by which it is recognised, it may still be maintained that it "commends itself to our consciousness in the sight of God."

II. Such, then, being some of the limitations under which the doctrine of the text is to be understood, I now proceed more directly to explain its true import. In what way may we conceive of divine truth as commending itself to the consciousness of man ? It does so, I answer, first, *by revealing to man the Lost Ideal of his Nature.*

The Gospel is, in one view of it, the disclosure to man of the true ideal of humanity, the discovery of the perfect type of our being, lost by sin, and yet recoverable in Christ. And whilst man, fallen and degraded as his nature has become, could never have found out that ideal for himself, yet when it is presented to him

in Scripture, there is that within him which is capable of recognising it as his own. For the recognition of a lost ideal is a mental act, the possibility of which, to a moral and spiritual being, it is not difficult to conceive. The degenerate plant has no consciousness of its own degradation, nor could it, when reduced to the character of a weed or a wild-flower, recognise in the fair and delicate garden-plant the type of its former self. The tamed and domesticated animal, stunted in size, and subjugated in spirit, could not feel any sense of humiliation when confronted with its wild brother of the desert, fierce, strong, and free, as if discerning in that spectacle the noble type from which itself had fallen. But it is different with a conscious, moral being. Reduce such an one ever so low, yet you cannot obliterate in his inner nature the consciousness of falling beneath himself; you cannot blot out from his mind the latent reminiscence of a nobler and better self which he might have been, and which to have lost is guilt and wretchedness. So that, should there ever be brought before a fallen moral nature, in outward form and reality, a Being the noble realisation of its own lost spiritual excellence—the full, perfect, beautiful reproduction in actual existence of that splendour of moral loveliness which once was its own—it is conceivable that the latent instincts of the soul would be roused to recognise and identify therein its lost original. Confront the fallen moral intelligence with its own perfect type, and in the instinctive shame and humiliation that would arise within it, as at the spectacle of a glory it had lost, a native nobleness from which it

had degenerated, there would be elicited an involuntary recognition of the truthfulness of the portraiture.

Now, such is the response which the spirit of man, in the hour of contrition, renders to the perfect type of moral excellence which the Gospel brings before it. For it is to be considered that the sorrow and self-abasement which the "manifestation of the truth" calls forth in the awakened and penitent heart, derive their peculiar poignancy from the fact, that it is a sorrow not so much of *discovery* as of *reminiscence*. In the contemplation of God's holy law, and especially of that perfect reflection of it which is presented in the person and life of Jesus, the attitude of the penitent mind is that, not simply of observation, but of painful and humiliating recollection. The mental process that takes place may be described as analogous to one with which we are all familiar—that in which the mind goes in search of some word, or name, or thought, which we cannot at once recall, yet of which we have the certainty that once we knew it; so that, when at last, after laborious groping, it flashes on the memory, we recognise it not as a new word or thought, but as one the familiar form and aspect of which at once commend it to our consciousness. Or the recognition of the truth as it is in Jesus by the awakened soul, may be represented as still more closely parallel to the feeling of one who revisits, in reverse of fortune, and after long years of absence, a spot with which, in other and happier days, he was familiar. It is conceivable that such an one might move for a while amidst old scenes and objects, unconscious of any past and personal con-

nection with them ; until at last something occurs to touch the spring of association, when instantly, with a rush of recollection, old sights, impressions, incidents, come thick and crowding on the spirit, and the outward scene becomes clothed with a new vividness, and is perceived with a new sense of identity. The contemplation is no longer sight but recognition ; and as every object which the eye surveys recalls to the saddened spectator a bright and better past—brings up, in contrast with what he now is, the joyous, healthy happy being which once he was—it is a keener and deeper anguish far, a sorrow sharpened by the whet of reminiscence, which now pierces his soul. Now, analogous to this is the process which is involved in the manifestation of the truth to the awakened mind. In the Scripture ideal of holiness, and in that sublime embodiment of it which is presented in the character and history of Jesus Christ, the soul when brought face to face with it recognises a something which comes home to its inner consciousness with all the painful reality of a lost and abandoned good. If the life of Christ were an ideal of excellence altogether foreign to us, the shame of the convicted conscience would lose half its bitterness. Did we perceive in it only a vague grandeur, which, out of the sphere of our consciousness, could be only half understood by it, we should feel no more shame in falling short of that ideal than the worm in that it cannot cope with the eagle's flight, or the stammering child in that he possesses not the wisdom and eloquence of the sage. But the latent element that lends sharpness to the stings of self-accusation in

the mind aroused by the manifestation of the truth, is the involuntary recognition in Christ of a dignity we have lost, an inheritance we have wasted, a perfection for which the spirit of man was formed, but which it has basely disowned. Repentance is the recognition by the fallen self of its true self in Christ. As the touched and troubled heart listens to the story of that beautiful life ; as there rises before the spirit's quickened eye the vision of a Perfect Innocence in human form—of a sublime purity with which no alloy of sternness mingles, a mental and moral elevation in which no trace of self-consciousness can be detected, a piety rapt as an angel's combined with the unassuming simplicity of a child—as we ponder the narrative of a life of holiest fellowship with God, maintained amidst incessant toil and intercourse with men, a life of persistent self-sacrifice, undimmed by one thought of personal ease, or one act of selfish indulgence—a life in which love, tender as a mother's, grew more fervent amidst ingratitude, waxed stronger and deeper amidst insults and wrongs received at the very hands of its objects ;—in one word, as inspiration summons up to the awakened mind, the spectacle of a perfectly holy human life, the deepest instincts of our nature are stirred to discern herein its own lost ideal—the type of excellence after which it may have vaguely groped, but which it never realised till now. “Here”—is the soul's involuntary conviction—“Here is that conception which haunted me ever in my sinfulness, yet which I never fully discerned till now ; here is that Light to which my darkened conscience was vainly

struggling, that standard to which my dim sense of a Right I was abusing, a Purity I was sullyng, a home of my spirit's peace and innocence I was forsaking, ever unconsciously pointed. And in this my vague and shadowy Ideal now become the Real, in this which gives to the fantasy of my weak and wavering imagination correctness, condensation, reality—in this truth of life in Christ Jesus there is that which 'commends itself to my conscience in the sight of God.' ”

2. Again; the truth as it is in Jesus commends itself to our consciousness, not only in revealing to man the Lost Ideal of his nature, but also *in discovering to him the mode of regaining it*. The Scriptures appeal to man's nature for a verification of their account, not only of the ruin that affects it, but also of the mode of recovery; they claim from the conscience not only a response to their description of the disease, but also a recognition of the suitability and sufficiency of the remedy they prescribe. The Gospel awakens in man's breast an echo to its teaching, first, in the mournful acknowledgment, “this is the purity and peace I have lost,” and then in the joyful recognition, “this, and none but this, is the mode of regaining it.”

No state of mind can be conceived more distressing than that of the man who, voluntarily or involuntarily, is falling below his own ideal. To have within me the conception of a high and noble standard with which my own performances are in miserable contrast, the vision of a beauty and excellence which I admire and honour, but which, in all that I am, and all that I do, I practically disown; this is a condition the painful-

ness of which no mind can long endure. For a man's own comfort, he must either forget his ideal, or strive to realise it ; banish from his mind the thought of his lost purity and happiness, or set himself to regain it.

It would be mistaken kindness to take a child, whose destined lot in life is a lowly and penurious one, and let him live in a home of wealth and refinement long enough to familiarise him with the tastes, habits, feelings of a high social sphere ; for by so doing you would only awaken in his mind unsatisfied desires, and render him wretched in his humble condition by the consciousness of a standard far above its resources. Or take the poor member of some rude and savage race, and permit him to reside in a civilised country till his mind has become in some measure receptive of the ideas, and accustomed to the amenities, of civilisation, and then send him back to his former haunts and companionships. Would not the result of such a discipline, in all probability, be that which has sometimes been witnessed in the contact of barbarism with civilisation—profound melancholy in the remembrance of a lost social elevation, or recklessness in the attempt to forget it? But such illustrations fall far short of the misery of a mind on which has dawned the true conception of the nobleness of human life, the lofty ideal of moral greatness in Christ Jesus, whilst yet its own life is one of selfishness and sin. To such a mind there are but two ways in which it can attempt to regain its lost tranquillity—viz., either the miserable and ineffectual way of reckless self-forgetfulness, or the true and Christian way of earnest aspira-

tion and endeavour to reach its own ideal, and become that which it admires.

Now, the gospel not only brings before man the true representation of his lost perfection and glory in Christ Jesus, but it so meets and adapts itself to the soul which is in the attitude of aspiration after that perfection, that the whole conscious nature recognises and responds to the provision that is made for its wants and exigencies.

The great obstacles to the soul's recovery of its lost ideal are obviously these two—the sense of Guilt and the consciousness of Moral Weakness; and the two great needs, therefore, of every awakened mind, are the need of Forgiveness, and the need of Moral Strength. And it is in meeting and supplying these wants that the truth as it is in Jesus commends itself most profoundly to the consciousness of man.

(1.) The soul aspiring after holiness craves,—to take the former of these,—deliverance from Guilt; and to that deep-felt want the gospel responds in the revelation of God in Christ Jesus. Consider how it is that the sense of guilt represses aspiration and energy in the awakened mind, and what, consequently, is the precise nature of that deliverance from guilt after which it longs. In some respects the analogous case of the debtor's embarrassments may help us to conceive of the needs of the guilty soul. When a man becomes deeply and inextricably involved in debt, we know that his condition is often one of deplorable incapacity and weakness. Debt acts as a dead-weight on a man's energies. He who rises day by day to the conscious-

ness of obligations which he cannot meet, who sees no possibility of extrication from pecuniary difficulties, not seldom loses all elasticity of mind—becomes spiritless, languid, enervated. He has no heart to enter on any new work or enterprise so long as the past, with its hateful involvements, is ever confronting him. Do what he may, he feels that no effort of his can do more than clear off a mere fraction of the burden that oppresses him, and so the main stimulus to exertion is gone. Unable to retrieve the past, he perhaps resigns himself with a dull hopelessness and inactivity to his lot; or, feeling that he cannot make matters better, becomes careless how he makes them worse. What this man wants in order to rouse him to effort, is to cut off his connection with the past, to sweep away its accumulated and insoluble obligations, and let him have a fair start in life again. Or, again, it may aid us in conceiving of the needs of a soul conscious of guilt, if we reflect on the depressing influence often produced by loss of character and reputation in the world. A man who has lost caste in society, has lost with it one of the most powerful incentives to effort. The atmosphere of mistrust and suspicion which past misdemeanours create around the erring, has a notorious tendency to crush hope and energy within him. The incitements of sympathy, honour, public opinion, no longer act upon him. The impossibility of regaining his lost place in the respect and estimation of society, quells hope and ambition in his breast; and, aware how bad is the opinion which is entertained of him, he perhaps becomes careless how much he deserves it. If he

could begin life anew—if the hateful Past, with its indelible memories, could be annihilated—it might be different with him ; but that dreadful Past haunts his thoughts, is reflected from the looks of his fellow-men, disturbs and oppresses him wherever he goes. Do what he may, men will not think well of him, and he perhaps abandons himself to the wretched contentment of despair.

Now, such analogies as these may aid our conceptions of that obstacle which guilt presents to the soul that is longing to regain its lost moral glory. Like debt, conscious guilt hangs upon the awakened spirit, and clogs its energies. Of what avail any new effort to be good, so long as that record of neglected duties and responsibilities confronts it ? The utmost exertion is insufficient even to meet the demands of daily duty, much less can it serve to wipe off the old score of guilt. Each day but adds to the undischarged and ever-growing debt ; and the burden on the conscience, do what the man will, becomes heavier and heavier. If he could but begin life anew—if the past could be lived over again—if the troubled soul could be made to feel as if the past had not been, and all its accumulated obligations were swept away—if the conscience were left free to enter, with all the elasticity of innocence, on a new life of duty—then there might be hope for the future. But no earthly power can effect such a discharge. Nothing can dis sever the soul from its terrible responsibility for the debt of sin. So, again, like the ban of social condemnation, guilt, reflecting in the conscience the divine disapproval, incapacitates

the soul for effort. But all such analogies are but partial and inadequate representations of the moral hindrance of guilt. For debt, however heavy, is not, in the nature of things, insoluble or untransferable; but guilt is. There is at least the possibility that the insolvent man may, by redoubled exertions, or by some unexpected access of fortune, or by the intervention of a friend, be freed from the depressing responsibility for the past. But in sin the aroused conscience feels that there is a certain strange indelibility. Sin, once committed, cannot be unsinned. No conceivable earthly resources can ever pay off the debt which a guilty deed involves, and there is no possibility of transferring the obligation to another. The man, again, who has compromised himself with human society, may, by lapse of time or removal from the scene of his misdeeds, escape from the depressing influence of social suspicion and mistrust. But from the ban of Omniscience there is no such escape. Infinite Justice is independent of space and time. It knows no locality, no lapse of ages can wear out its hostility to a sin. Nay, even if it could be conceived capable of such leniency, it would be in vain. If God, by a simple act of oblivion, could pass over the awakened sinner's guilt, his own conscience would not suffer him to forget it. He would be "the wrath of God unto himself." The aroused conscience does not want a mere act of amnesty. It craves for the condemnation of its sin, in the very agony of the desire to be freed from it. It sympathises with the law by which itself is condemned; and no good-natured cle-

mency, no slight or easy pardon—nothing will satisfy it, unless the sin be branded with the mark of the law's offended majesty—be exposed to the righteous wrath of that awful and absolute Purity it has offended, —unless the culprit sin be, as it were, led out to execution, and slain before it.

Now, it is this deep necessity of the awakened spirit which, in the revelation of God in Christ, the gospel meets—a revelation in the person, life, and death of Jesus, which includes at once the most complete condemnation of sin, and the most ample forgiveness of the sinner. For here, for one thing, we have set before us, in the Person of Christ, Infinite Purity taking the very nature of the guilty into most intimate union with itself; and surely this, to the troubled conscience, is no slight indication of divine forgiveness. It were no light thing for some poor outcast from society, if, while brooding over its misery and despair, some good and holy man should, setting all false dignity at defiance, come to the home of infamy, and offer to that poor child of sin and shame his love, his friendship, his affiance. Abandoned of society, lost to others' respect and to its own, yet yearning for one ray of hope or comfort, what cheering, what hopefulness, what new life, would reanimate that saddened spirit when it discovered itself not so utterly lost as that a gentle, pure, and good man could not love and care for it! But here, in this revelation of God in Christ, is the assurance that that Holy One, in whose presence angelic purity grows dim, stoops to take the very nature of the guilty, and blend it in mysterious affiance

with His own. Surely the trembling heart may cease to despair of itself, or regard the past with hopeless despondency, when that very Being, in whom all law and right are centred, who is Himself essential Holiness, identified in His very being with absolute Good, condescends to wed the nature of man, guilty and fallen though he be, into closest affinity with Himself. But more than this: the gospel brings relief to the self-condemned spirit by exhibiting Infinite Purity, not only condescending to assume the nature of the guilty, but also in that nature passing through a history which brings it into ceaseless contact with sin in all its undisguised hatefulness and hostility to God. As if it were designed to prove to the most alarmed and desponding conscience that it is from no inadequate perception of man's guilt that mercy is extended to him, the Purity of heaven Incarnate exposes itself to a long continued contiguity with evil in its most hateful forms, permits itself to be pierced with all the anguish which sin's hostility could inflict upon it; stands with the sensitive front of innocence the mark of all the poisoned arrows from sin's quiver; suffers earth and hell to brand upon that holiest, gentlest spirit, as if in letters of fire, sin's hatefulness; and at last yields up itself as sin's victim into the hands of death. Yet, with all this, from first to last, infinitely loving right, unerringly cognisant of man's guilt, taking the full gauge of the abhorrent nature of that which he forgave, Jesus is seen with mercy ever on His lip, forgiveness, compassion, love to sinners in His every look and act. And, finally, the gospel permits us to think

of Christ as one who, in conveying pardon to guilt, instead of relaxing the strictness, or bringing slight on the unbending rectitude of God's law, offers up the grandest possible tribute to its majesty and the most awful atonement for the sins that infringed it. Here, therefore, in this gospel of Christ is the most ample provision made for the guilty spirit's needs. Though my sin cannot be literally unsinned, though the past is irrevocable, though no moral act once done can ever be annulled, yet surely in this my trembling heart may find the rest for which it craves—the assurance that the past may be forgotten, and that sin is blotted out by an act in which its guilt is most fearfully condemned and expiated—when I behold the very God who is Law, Righteousness, Absolute Justice, in human form offering Himself up to the death to save me.

(2.) The other great obstacle to the re-attainment of the lost perfection of our nature is, as I have said, Moral Weakness,—the conscious inertness and impotence of the soul in its endeavours after holiness ; and it is in providing for this need of man's spirit also that the gospel commends itself to the consciousness.

It is in the attempt to reach its Lost Ideal that the soul becomes aware of its own moral weakness. It is not when the sick man lies prostrated by disease that he feels most his own feebleness, but when he begins to rally, and attempts to rise and walk,—it is then that, by the trembling step and tottering limb, he becomes aware how his strength has been wasted. When despotism has so quelled a nation's spirit that it cares not to put forth the feeblest resistance to its

thralldom, it is not then that it is in a condition to discover the hopelessness of its bondage ; but when, the spirit of insurrection roused, the attempt has been made to throw off the hateful yoke, and made in vain,—it is then that, in the strife and pain and mortification of discomfited rebellion, it learns by bitter experience the terribleness of that power which keeps it down. So it is not when sin holds undisturbed dominion in the soul, but when the new ideal of holiness dawns upon its vision, when the first faint rallying efforts after God and duty begin to be made,—it is then that, in the feebleness of its resolutions, and the miserable ineffectiveness of its attempts to be good, there is forced upon it the painful conviction of its own moral weakness. And then, too, rises the intense longing for spiritual help. “Of what avail,”—is the unconscious utterance of its hopelessness and its aspiration—“Of what avail my knowledge of this glorious moral beauty in Christ ; of what use my perception of the noble thing humanity might become, when this only serves to mock my misery by the spectacle of unattainable good ! Tell me not of the beauty of goodness, the hatefulness of sin, the blessedness of a holy life. I know it—I admit it ; but all this is but to talk of health’s joyous activity to the paralytic, to point out to the poor slave the freedom for which he sighs in vain. Help me. Show me how to reach the ideal of good that is before me. Oh for some gift of power, some heaven-sent strength to nerve my enfeebled energies and arm resolution with ability to fulfil its aims !”

Now, the gospel commends itself to the consciousness by responding to this deep want of the spirit also. For it reveals to the soul Christ as not only outwardly the Ideal, but inwardly the Hope and Strength of humanity. It would go no little way towards meeting the needs of a soul conscious of lofty desires and low attainments—of high aims and miserable performances—if, in its loneliness and its weakness, there should be granted to it the perpetual presence and guardianship of some lofty angelic nature. Imagine what it would be, if, amidst all your conscious moral weakness, some bright and loving spirit from the heavens should assume the task of watching over you. Think what aid it would afford you in your religious life—weak, wavering, perplexed as you often are—to have a guardian spirit, strong with heaven's strength, and pure with heaven's purity, ever near you. Think how all your better nature would be stimulated, your evil self repressed, the whole moral tone of life elevated and ennobled, if, wherever you went, the sweet, bright, hallowing sense of that loving spirit's presence hung around you like an atmosphere. Conceive of him accompanying you into all scenes of temptation, and whispering, in the moment of irresolution, the prompting word of counsel, warning, or remonstrance; in all perplexities imagine your spirit-friend ever at hand to solve your difficulties, and point out the path of duty: in the world a presence that gave dignity to life's humblest, coarsest cares; and in your lonely or meditative hours still beside you, breathing the air of heaven into your solitude, and by his converse elevat-

ing thought, enkindling devotion, and causing the whole soul to swell with high resolves and holy aspirations. What a boon were this to weak and wavering man ! How would each poor self-distrustful spirit leap forth to welcome such ennobling companionship ! Or would it not be still better—a blessing still more adequate to your needs—if not an angelic visitant, but Jesus Christ, your divine Lord Himself, should return in visible form, and in like manner as of old He frequented earthly homes, so come and abide in yours. Let any contrite soul, longing for the goodness it cannot reach, perturbed by the evil from which it cannot escape, think what it would be to have Jesus of Nazareth dwelling for a single year with it as a familiar companion and friend. Imagine that, when in your conscious spiritual weakness your cry for help ascends to the throne, that glorious Saviour should hear, and in answer condescend Himself to leave yonder heavens, and for a while share your lot on earth, however lowly, and abide beneath your roof as your ever-present counsellor and guide. What a home would that be where such a presence rested ! What an atmosphere of heaven would pervade it ! What a resource would its happy inmates possess in all difficulties and perplexities ! What holy ardour, what strength for duty would fill every heart ! If this blessed presence and guidance were offered to us, would not each self-distrustful soul hail it as a boon inestimable ? Would not the response of the spirit be—“Come, O my Saviour, for sorely I need thy presence : my thoughts are confused, my affections languid, my purposes weak and wavering.

Come, O my Saviour, and with thee my whole being shall grow bright and strong !”

But if an outward presence or guardianship such as this would meet the soul's needs, how much more fully are they met in that which is the great crowning blessing of the gospel—the dispensation of the Spirit. For, if angelic guardianship would be a boon to any soul, if the attendance of a guardian spirit, counselling, prompting, strengthening, would help us in our spiritual life, here we have this, and more than this, actually bestowed upon us. A Spirit, would we but realise His presence, is ever with us to prompt each holy thought and nerve each pure resolve. If Christ, as an outward visitant, would be eagerly welcomed, if it would be a blessing to have Him dwelling for a season within our home, here, in the dispensation of His grace, we are told of a blessing greater still—of a presence of Jesus not within the house merely, but nearer and closer still—within the breast—within the heart. To every soul that will receive him, that very Jesus who departed as a visible presence from this earth, comes back as an inward and invisible Comforter. As really and more intimately than when men beheld His countenance, and listened to His words of love and power, Jesus is with us still. If it would strengthen you in your difficulties and struggles to know that He is near, to hear Him speak, to take hold of His strengthening hand,—know that He is nearer still than this. Every pure thought that rises in your breast is Christ's suggestion ; every holy desire and resolution the proof that He is at hand ; every kindling of the spirit into

devotion the unconscious recognition by the spirit of His heavenly presence near. Open the door of the heart to Him, and the very mind and soul of Jesus will pass into yours ; your spirit will be suffused with His ; the very heart of Jesus will be beating within your breast—Christ will be “in you the hope of glory.” O say, weak and wavering soul, is not this all thou needest in order to be holy, peaceful, strong ? As a reviving cordial to the fainting body, does not His divine grace commend itself to the inmost consciousness in the sight of God ?

The subject which we have now examined suggests to us, in conclusion, an obvious lesson as to the universal responsibility of man for the belief of the truth. For the evidence on which divine truth bases its claim to our reception, is one cognisable and appreciable by all. It appeals not to man as an educated or intellectually accomplished being, but to man as man. It requires no intellectual effort for its recognition. It addresses itself not to any faculty in man which is developed only in the minds of the few, not to his logical or reasoning powers, but to that higher reason, that moral nature, which is common to all. Its appeal, in one word, is mainly, not to the head, but to the heart. No one who listens to the message of divine truth, can excuse his neglect or rejection of it by pleading intellectual incapacity—by saying that he is incapable of following out a process of historic proof, or of weighing elaborate arguments, and investigating subtle trains of reasoning. If the truth as it is in Jesus were

a philosophy, such an excuse might be valid. If it pre-supposed, in order to the reception of it, the same powers which qualify, for instance, for the intellectual and critical study of the higher mathematics or metaphysics, then would its evidence be utterly beyond the range of the vast majority of men, and the humble and illiterate might justly be exonerated from all responsibility for their ignorance or unbelief. But the gospel is no philosophy. The truth of Christ is to be verified, not by the critical intellect, but by the common heart and consciousness of humanity. Wherever there is a heart that throbs with the common sensibilities of our nature—wherever there is a soul capable of love, and pity, and tenderness, and truth—there is fit audience and sufficient attestation for the gospel. The lisping babe, that stammers forth its first prayer of wondering awe and love to the great Father; the poor day-labourer, whose intellect never ranges beyond the narrow round of his daily toils; the weak worn sufferer, stretched on the bed of pain, incapable of the faintest approach to consecutive thought or reasoning, bereft of almost every other power but the power to love and pray,—these, as much, nay more, than the most erudite assemblies of high and philosophic minds, constitute the auditors to whom the gospel appeals for the verification of its claims.

It is true that the highest minds may fitly occupy their ratiocinative powers in the investigation of the evidence, and the systematic study and development of the truth. But let us never confound the gifts and acquirements necessary for the theologian with those

of the believer. The powers sufficient to perceive and know and relish, are ever to be distinguished from the powers that are needed in order to theorise. It may imply much intellectual power to draw out and digest the theory and laws of music, but many who know nothing of the subject theoretically can sing and be delighted by song. And to make a man relish music, a good ear is better than all the analytic powers in the world. It may demand the most subtle intellect to discuss metaphysically the theory and laws of beauty, but no such powers are needed to gaze with delight on the glory of the grass and the splendour of the flower. In investigating the problem of the foundations of morals, metaphysical minds of the rarest order have been employed for ages; but to honour an unselfish or noble act—to perceive and hate baseness and selfishness—to appreciate what is pure and lovely and of good report—needs qualities which no metaphysic skill can confer, and yet which may be found in the garret or hovel where rude and unlettered poverty dwells. And so it is not the scholar's or the theologian's acquirements that best qualify for apprehending and appreciating the evidence of the truth as it is in Jesus. These may be indispensable for the theoretic analysis and development of the truth, but the consciousness of spiritual need—the yearning after pardon and reconciliation with God—the orphan instincts of the spirit towards its lost Father—the contrition, the humility, the meek trust and self-devotion of an awakened and earnest soul,—these are the qualities which, apart from all theologic talents and attainments,

constitute the humblest, rudest mind that possesses them, a deeper critic of divine truth than the profoundest intellect or the rarest scholarship. The truth of the gospel, hid from the wise and prudent, may be revealed to babes. Ages of intellectual study will not serve to teach that of the gospel's truth and power, which may be learned by one upward glance of a tearful eye at the great Deliverer's feet. Honour to those who bring their genius and their intellectual lore to the service and illustration of the truth ! But be your gifts of reason what they may, to you, as capable of knowing it, as bound to receive it, the gospel appeals. Open your heart to it—yield up your spirit to its blessed teachings—pray for the grace and guidance of the Spirit of God, and the truth will constitute to you its own evidence. It will carry conviction to your heart of hearts. As you listen to it, the music of a heavenly voice will steal upon the inner ear ; a beauty that is not of this world—a beauty more glorious far than that which sits on mountain and stream and forest—will shine forth upon the inner eye of faith, in the discernment and recognition of which the Truth will “commend itself to your consciousness in the sight of God.”

SERMON II.

SELF-IGNORANCE.

“Who can understand his errors? Cleanse thou me from secret faults.”—*Psalm xix. 12.*

OF all kinds of ignorance, that which is the most strange, and, in so far as it is voluntary, the most culpable, is our ignorance of Self. For not only is the subject, in this case, that which might be expected to possess for us the greatest interest, but it is the one concerning which we have amplest facilities and opportunities of information. Who of us would not think it a strange and unaccountable story, could it be told of any man now present, that for years he had harboured under his roof a guest whose face he had never seen—a constant inmate of his home, who was yet to him altogether unknown? It is no supposition, however, but an unquestionable fact, that to not a few of us, from the first moment of existence, there has been present, not beneath the roof, but within the breast, a mysterious resident, an inseparable companion, nearer to us than friend or brother, yet of whom, after all,

we know little or nothing. What man of intelligence amongst us would not be ashamed to have had in his possession for years some rare or universally admired volume with its leaves uncut?—or to be the proprietor of a repository, filled with the most exquisite productions of genius, and the rarest specimens in science and art, which yet he himself never thought of entering? Yet surely no book so worthy of perusal, no chamber containing objects of study so curious, so replete with interest for us, as that which seldom or never attracts our observation—the book, the chamber of our own hearts. We sometimes reproach with folly those persons who have travelled far, and seen much of distant countries, and yet have been content to remain comparatively unacquainted with their own. But how venial such folly compared with that of ranging over all other departments of knowledge, going abroad with perpetual inquisitiveness over earth and sea and sky, in search of information, whilst there is a little world within the breast which is still to us an unexplored region. Other scenes and objects we can study only at intervals; they are not always accessible, or can be reached only by long and laborious journeys; but the bridge of consciousness is soon crossed; we have but to close the eye and withdraw the thoughts from the world without, in order at any moment to wander through the scenes and explore the phenomena of the still more wondrous world within. To examine other objects, delicate and elaborate instruments are often necessary; the researches of the astronomer, the botanist, the chemist, can be prosecuted only by means

of rare and costly apparatus : but the power of reflection, that faculty more wondrous than any mechanism which art has ever fashioned, is an instrument possessed by all ; the poorest and most illiterate, alike with the most cultured and refined, have at their command an apparatus by which to sweep the inner firmament of the soul, and bring into view its manifold phenomena of thought and feeling and motive. And yet, with all the unequalled facilities for acquiring this sort of knowledge, can it be questioned that it is the one sort of knowledge that is most commonly neglected ; and that, even amongst those who would disdain the imputation of ignorance in history or science or literature, there are multitudes who have never acquired the merest rudiments of the knowledge of Self ?

What has now been stated as to the too common neglect of self-knowledge in general, is emphatically true with respect to that branch of it to which the text relates. It is the moral part of our nature with reference to which defective knowledge is at once the most common and the most dangerous. As a matter of curiosity, an object of interesting study, every intelligent man should know something of the structure, organisation, laws, and processes of his physical and of his intellectual nature ; but as a matter, not of curious interest merely, but of the last and highest necessity, we ought to be acquainted with our moral nature—with the condition of our hearts in the sight of God. The care of our bodily health we may depute to another, and the skill of the physician may render our ignorance of physiology of little or no practical

moment ; to be unacquainted even with our intellectual nature, inobservant of its operations and mistaken as to its character, may lead to no consequences more serious than vanity, self-conceit, an undue reliance on our own opinions ;—but when our ignorance relates not to the body but to the soul, not to the head but to the heart, no language can exaggerate its danger. For the care of our spiritual health, the moral culture and discipline of the soul, we can never depute to another ; no friend on earth can be the soul's physician, or free us from the burden of our solitary responsibility with regard to it ; and unnoticed errors in the heart, unlike intellectual deficiencies, not merely affect our temporal condition or our social reputation, but may issue in our eternal ruin.

Yet the text suggests, what all experience corroborates, that it is a man's *moral* defects that are most likely to elude his own scrutiny. There is a peculiar secrecy, an inherent inscrutability, about our sins. Bodily disease or injury, in the great majority of cases, manifests its presence by pain—so obtrudes itself on our consciousness, that it is impossible for the sick man to be long unaware of his danger, or indifferent to its removal. But it is the peculiar characteristic of moral disease, that it does its deadly work in secret. Sin is a malady which affects the very organ by which itself can be detected ; it creates the darkness amid which it injures us, and blinds the eyes of its victim in the very act of destroying him. If there be any bodily disease to which it is analogous, it is to that fatal malady which often cheats the sick man into a

delusive tranquillity, the deeper and more deceitful in proportion to his danger. And if the unconscious cheerfulness of the dying be sometimes both strange and sad ; if it has ever happened to us, as we looked on the wan and wasted countenance on which consumption had set its ghastly seal, to listen with mingled wonder and pity to the words of unabated hopefulness from the sick man's lips, surely more deserving of our pity is he who, all unaware of his spiritual disease, is hastening on, in undisturbed tranquillity and self-satisfaction, to everlasting despair and death !

Now, it is this self-concealing tendency of sin, and the consequent difficulty of forming a right estimate of ourselves, to which the Psalmist refers in the prayer of the text—"Who can understand his errors ?—cleanse thou me from secret faults !" And what I now purpose, in following out the train of thought here suggested, is to point out to you a few of the causes or considerations which serve to explain the self-ignorance of the erring and sinful mind.

I. One reason why the sinful man does not "understand his errors" is—*That sin can be truly measured only when it is resisted.* It is impossible to estimate the strength of the principle of evil in the soul till we begin to struggle with it ; and the careless or sinful man—the man who, by supposition, is not striving with, but succumbing to sin, cannot know its force. So long as evil reigns unopposed within the soul, it will reign, in a great degree, unobserved. So long as a man passively and thoughtlessly yields up his will to

the sway of worldly principles or unholy desires and habits, he is in no condition to measure their intensity—scarcely to discover their existence. For in this, as in many other cases, resistance is the best measure of force. The most powerful agents in nature, when unopposed, do their work silently and without attracting observation; it is only when some counteracting power arises to dispute their sway that attention is drawn to their presence and their potency. The rapid stream flows smooth and silent when there are no obstacles to stay its progress; but hurl a rock into its bed, and the roar and surge of the arrested current will instantly reveal its force. You cannot estimate the wind's strength when it rushes over the open plain; but when it reaches and wrestles with the trees of the forest, or lashes the sea into fury, then, resisted, you perceive its power. Or if, amidst the ice-bound regions of the North, an altogether unbroken, continuous winter prevailed, comparatively unnoticed would be its stern dominion; but it is the coming round of a more genial season, when the counteracting agency of the sun begins to prevail, that reveals, by the rending of the solid masses of ice, and by the universal stir and crash, and commotion over the face of nature, the intensity of the bygone winter's cold.

Now, so too is it in the spiritual world. Sin's power is revealed only in the act of resistance. No agent more potent, and none, if undisputed, more imperceptible in its operation. In many a worldly and godless heart it reigns viewless as the wind—silent as the smooth and rapid stream. Rule in whatever form

it may — in selfishness, or worldliness, or pride, or ambition, or covetousness, or sensuality — sin often breathes over that inner world an influence, not only as stern and withering, but also as still and unobtrusive as an unbroken winter's cold. On the other hand, resistance discloses it. When the aspiration after a purer, nobler life, begins to rise within the breast, and the long passive spirit rouses its energies to check the pride of evil, to force back and stay the current of unholy desire and passion; when the softening principle of divine love and grace begins to thaw the icy coldness of a godless heart, then it is that the soul becomes aware of the deadly strength of sin. Often the sense of guilt breaks upon the awakened spirit with all the strangeness of a discovery. With the rise of its new and higher consciousness there comes upon the soul the feeling of a hitherto unrealised burden—a heavy and intolerable weight of evil, restraining and crushing back its new-born energies. Hitherto at ease in the embrace of sin, when the vision of God dawns upon the spirit, there is a yearning to get near Him, and an impatience and galling sense of bondage in that which keeps it away from Him; as when a child, contentedly reposing in a stranger's arms, no sooner catches a glimpse of the parent than it struggles and stretches out towards the loved form, ill at ease in that embrace in which it had till now unconsciously rested. Nor is it only in the first struggles of penitence that sin is revealed in its true character to the soul. With every increase of spirituality, whatever of evil remains in it becomes more repulsive to its keener sensibilities,

more irksome to its aspiring energies. Faults and errors, unapparent or venial to its former consciousness, become in the higher stages of the spiritual life more and more odious ; and in the purest and best actions more of evil is now discerned than formerly in the basest and worst. The quickened conscience feels the drag of sin at each successive step the more heavy ; and as the believing spirit yearns with an intenser longing for the life of God, with a more indignant impatience does the cry break from the lip—"Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?"

II. Another reason for the self-ignorance of the sinner is—*That sin often makes a man afraid to know himself.* The suspected existence of something wrong in the soul makes us shrink from self-inspection. Strange though it may seem, the state of mind is by no means an uncommon one in which a man has a latent misgiving that all is not right with his soul ; yet, from a disinclination to know the whole truth and to act up to it, refrains from all further examination. There are few men who do not know a little of themselves ; multitudes whom that little so disturbs that they refuse to know any more. Ever and anon, even in the most careless life, the veil of custom drops, and the soul catches a glimpse of its own deep inward wretchedness ; but the glimpse so terrifies that few will look again. The heart of a sinful man, laid bare in all its nakedness to its own inspection, is a sight on which it would be terrible to look long ; and most men prefer the delusive tranquillity of ignorance

to the wholesome pain of a thorough self-revelation.

And yet this voluntary ignorance, where interests so momentous are at stake, strange in itself, becomes the more strange when contrasted with our conduct in other cases. In the affairs of this world men will, indeed, often shun the sight of inevitable evils, and refuse to disturb themselves by the contemplation of calamities which it is beyond their power to avert. But where the suspected evil is not beyond the reach of remedy, in most minds there is a disposition of quite an opposite character—a disposition that seeks, on the least appearance of any alarming symptom, to know the worst at once. Does the prudent man of business, for instance, light on something strange in his confidential servant's accounts, or are his suspicions awakened as to the state of some debtor's affairs with whom he is deeply involved—what, in the great majority of cases, will be his immediate mode of action? To shut his eyes to the disagreeable information, and, by refraining from all further investigation, purchase present ease at the risk of future ruin? Not so; but rather instantly to set about a rigid scrutiny, and not to rest till he has sifted the matter to the bottom, though the unpleasant discovery should be that his servant has embezzled his property, or that his debtor is on the brink of bankruptcy. Or does the anxious and affectionate relative note with alarm the symptoms of dangerous disease in the person of one he loves—does he see, or persuade himself he sees, the hectic flush beginning to gather on the cheek—does he hear, or think he hears, the

short sharp cough, that rouses all his fears for the future—and need I ask what, in general, will be the effect of such misgivings? What parent, husband, friend, at such a time, could consult his own selfish tranquillity by ignoring the danger, taking no means to discover its extent, and, if possible, to check its progress?

But, however rare in the sphere of our worldly interests, this voluntary blindness, this reckless evasion of disagreeable intelligence, is in spiritual things, even among prudent, wise, sagacious men, not the exception but the rule. Inquisitive, restless, easily alarmed in other cases, most men become strangely incurious here. Our fears and suspicions diminish instead of increasing, in proportion to the magnitude of the interests involved; and when it is not our health, or wealth, or worldly fortunes, but the character and happiness of the soul for time and eternity that are implicated, the almost universal endeavour is, not to provide against threatened danger, but to evade or forget the signs of it. Few men, indeed, however thoughtless and indifferent to religion, can pass through life without occasional misgivings as to their spiritual state. There are times when conscience speaks out even to the most careless ear, and passing visitations of anxiety as to the soul and its destiny trouble the most callous heart. Amidst the superficial cares and pleasures of a worldly existence a man's deeper nature may slumber; the surface-ripple of the stream of common life may fill the sense and lull the soul to sleep, but to almost every one there come occasions when the smooth current of the life of

sense is interrupted, and his true self is roused to a temporary wakefulness. In the stillness of the lonely sickbed, amidst worldly reverses, in declining health, or under bitter bereavement, when we stand by the bier, or bend over the closing grave of old friends and coevals—in such passages of man's history, the soul, eternity, God, become for the moment real things, and the most thoughtless and worldly-minded is forced to pause and think. Or, again, when the sinful man listens to some very earnest exhibition of divine truth, or is brought into contact with one who is living a very holy, pure, unselfish life, a painful impression of his own deficiencies—a transient glimpse of a nobler, purer ideal of life, to which his own presents a miserable contrast—may visit his mind. But such thoughts are too distressing to be long dwelt upon. Very rarely have men the resolution voluntarily to arrest and detain them before the mind's eye. We do not like to have the easy tranquillity of our life disturbed by spiritual anxieties. We do not care to have our self-complacency hurt by the repulsive spectacle of our proper selves: and, as the fair face on which disease has left its ugly seams, turns with pain from the first sight of the reality which the mirror reveals, so the mind hastens to avert its view from the too faithful reflection of self which an awakened conscience presents. Instead of seeking true comfort by the steady, however painful, contemplation, and then, through God's grace, by the deliberate, persevering correction of its evil self, the mind too often seeks a speedier, but most unreal, satisfaction, by forgetting its convictions,

and seeing itself only in the false glass of the world's opinions. Thus, with many, life is but a continuous endeavour to forget and keep out of sight of their true selves—a vain eluding and outstripping of a reality which is still ever with them, and to the consciousness of which they must one day awake. Often, however, it is an endeavour attended only with partial success. Deep down, in the most worldly and careless mind, there is often a hidden restlessness, an uneasy disquieting consciousness, as of an evil half realised, and which it would fain, but cannot, forget. Inadequate to produce any serious reformation, the convictions of conscience yet remain as a latent foreboding—a vague sense as of a debt undischarged, and still hanging over us—a disease uncured and secretly working within us. Refusing to know himself, the man is often far from happy in his forgetfulness. His brightest hours are overshadowed as by the vague sense of a coming danger. There is a feverishness and unreality in all his joys; and the nearest approach to happiness he attains is but, after all, as the wretched enjoyment of the poor spendthrift, who revels on for a little hour in unreal splendour, rather than be at the pains to examine into his embarrassed affairs; or of the hapless wretch in the sinking ship, who drives away by intoxication the sense, but only thereby unfits himself the more to encounter the reality, of danger.

III. Again, the self-ignorance of the sinful may be accounted for, by *the slow and gradual way in which, in most cases, sinful habits and dispositions are acquired.*

Apart from any other consideration, there is something in the mere fact of the gradual and insidious way in which changes of character generally take place, that tends to blind men to their own defects. For every one knows how unconscious we often are of changes that occur by minute and slow degrees. If, for instance, the transitions from one season of the year to another were more sudden and rapid, our attention would be much more forcibly arrested by their occurrence than it now is. But because we are not plunged from midsummer into winter,—because, in the declining year, one day is so like the day that preceded it, the daylight hours contract so insensibly, the chilly feeling infuses itself by such slight increases into the air, the yellow tint creeps so gradually over the foliage,—because autumn thus frequently softens and shades away into winter, by gradations so gentle, we scarcely perceive while it is going on the change which has passed over the face of nature. So, again, how imperceptibly do life's advancing stages steal upon us? If we leapt at once from boyhood into manhood, or if we lay down at night with the consciousness of manhood's bloom and vigour, and waked in the morning to find ourselves grey-haired, worn and withered old men, we could not choose but be arrested by transitions so marked. But now, because to-day you are very much the same man as yesterday—because, with the silent growth of the stature, the graver cares, and interests, and responsibilities of life gather so gradually around you; and then, when you reach the turning-point and begin to descend, because this year the blood

circulates but a very little less freely, and but a few more and deeper lines are gathering on the face, than in the last ; because old associations are not suddenly broken up, but only unwound thread by thread, and old forms and faces are not swept away all at once by some sudden catastrophe, but only drop out of sight one by one,—you are not struck, you are not forced to think of life's decline, and almost unawares you may not be far off from its close.

Now, if we know that changes such as these in the natural world and in our own persons take place imperceptibly, may not this prepare us to admit, that analogous changes, equally unnoted, because equally slow and gradual, may be occurring in our moral character, in the state of our souls before God ? And with many I maintain that it is actually so. There is a winter of the soul, a spiritual decrepitude and death, to which many are advancing, at which many have already arrived, yet all unconsciously, because by minute and inappreciable gradations. For character is a thing of slow formation. Seldom or never does the soul reach its mature and consolidated state by broadly-marked and rapid transitions. The incidents of each passing day help by minute touches to mould it. The successive changes of our outward life leave each their little deposit behind, though it may be long before the formation becomes of noticeable dimensions. Every passing breath of moral influence shakes and sways the stem of our being, but it may be many a day ere, by the bent acquired in one particular direction, we can mark the prevailing wind. Differing as we all do

from each other, perhaps as much in our individual characters as in the form and expression of our outward features, we did not issue, each with his own separate stamp of character full formed, from Nature's mintage ; and in the case of the irreligious and sinful, it has been by the slow and plastic hand of time that the natural evil of man's being has been moulded into the manifold forms and aspects which their characters now exhibit. A character of confirmed selfishness, or covetousness, or sensuality, or harshness and irascibility, or hardened worldliness and unspirituality,—whatever may be the special type of character in any one here, it never was formed in a day, or by a few strokes upon the raw material of mind. On the contrary, it has been by many a small sin, by innumerable minute tamperings with conscience, by a thousand insignificant sacrifices of principle to passion, of duty to inclination—by multiplicity of little fits of anger and unnoted acts of sensual indulgence—it has been by a long series and succession of such experiences as these, that many a man's moral being has been fashioned into the shape it wears. The change for the worse, though on the whole, and to other observers, very marked, has been from day to day slight and inappreciable ; so that not only the worldly, the careless, the unspiritual, but even the openly wicked and abandoned, have often a comparatively slight and imperfect sense of that evil in them which has grown, and deepened, and darkened, shade by shade. The most hardened and shameless profligate, had he reached his present maturity in sin by a single stride, would probably be as much horrified at the change, as if the

merry innocent face and clear bright eye of his childhood had been transformed, in a single day, into the bloated aspect and suspicious scowl of guilt. But just as men note not the lines of deformity settling day by day over the countenance, so neither do they discern the lineaments of moral repulsiveness daily deepening into the soul.

IV. It tends greatly to increase this insensibility to the progress of sin in the soul, that, *as character gradually deteriorates, there is a parallel deterioration of the standard by which we judge of it.* As sin grows, conscience declines in vigour. The power that perceives sin partakes of the general injury which sin inflicts on the soul. It does not remain stationary while the other elements of our being—the desires, affections, moral energies—are in downward motion. It does not resemble a spectator standing on the shore, who can discern the slightest motion of the vessel in the stream, but rather to the other powers conscience stands in the relation of a fellow-voyager, who cannot perceive in his companions the motion of which himself partakes. Or, as in fever and other diseases that affect the brain, the disease soon unhinges the power by which the patient is made conscious of its ravages; so sin is a malady which cannot proceed far without injuring the moral consciousness by which its presence can be known. Even to the natural conscience, weak and unenlightened though it be, sin, in many of its forms, has an ugly look at first, but its repulsiveness rapidly wears off by familiarity. To the call of duty, the voice of re-

ligion, the first announcement of the solemn truths of death and judgment and retribution, the mind, even in its natural and unrenewed state, can never be altogether insensible ; but, if unregarded, the impression soon fades, and the solemn sounds grow fainter and fainter to the ear. By every act of disobedience to its dictates we sin away something of the sensitiveness of conscience ; and it is quite possible for the process of disobedience to go on until even from the grossest sins all the first recoil of dislike is gone, and to the voice of warning and instruction there rises not the faintest echo of compunction in the soul. Just as in winter the cold may become so intense as to freeze the thermometer, and thereby to leave you without the means of marking the subsequent increases of cold, so there is a point in the lowered temperature of the inward consciousness where the growing coldness, hardness, selfishness of a man's nature can no longer be noted—the mechanism by which moral variations are indicated becoming itself insensible and motionless. And then—*then* in an awful sense—does his sin become a hidden thing to the sinner ; *then* is attained a dreadful freedom, an ominous emancipation from all restraint. The soul has reached that condition in which it can sin on unchecked, contracting a daily accumulating debt of guilt, yet all unconsciously,—inflicting deeper and more incurable wounds upon itself, yet without pain,—heaping up, without remonstrance, wrath against the day of wrath. No matter how rapid its fatal descent, no warning voice can retard it now ; no matter how terrible the ruin before it, no prognostic

of danger can startle it now. "The light that was in it" has become "darkness ; and how great is that darkness !"

Such, then, are some of the ways in which sin effects its own concealment. And surely, if it is possible that any one who now hears me is in the condition I have attempted to describe, it will need few words to set before him its guilt and danger ; its guilt, —for let no man flatter himself that unconsciousness of sin divests any act of its culpability, or even of necessity extenuates the fault of the transgressor. Voluntary ignorance, so far from being a palliation, is only an aggravation of the offence. He who willingly extinguishes the light escapes not the consequences of the errors to which darkness leads. The drunkard, who prepares for crime by first heating his brain to madness, is not therefore treated as if he were naturally irresponsible. And to have evaded the light of conscience, or persisted in sin till the light of conscience dies out, instead of palliating ulterior acts of guilt, is itself one of the greatest which can be committed. No ! he who never knew, and could not know, God's will, may honestly offer the plea of ignorance ; but the wilful ignorance of hardened insensibility is at once a grievous aggravation of the offence and its most awful punishment.

And the danger of self-ignorance is not less than its guilt. For of all evils a secret evil is most to be deprecated,—of all enemies a concealed enemy is the worst. Better the precipice than the pitfall ; better

the tortures of curable disease than the painlessness of mortification ; and so, whatever your soul's guilt and danger, better to be aware of it. However alarming, however distressing, self-knowledge may be, better *that* than the tremendous evils of self-ignorance.

If indeed there were any possibility of your state being beyond hope or help, if your sin were irremediable, and your doom inevitable, then might you be excused for refraining from all inquiry,—then might further remonstrance be cruelty, not kindness. The dying man need not be tormented with useless remedies. The doomed felon may be let alone, to pass quietly the interval till his execution. But it is not so with you. No man here need, by himself or others, be given up for lost. No living soul is beyond the reach of remedy. You need not shrink from laying bare the sore, however hideous—from probing the wound of the soul to the quick, however painful the process, as if it were all in vain. Far less need you “heal your hurt slightly,” or seek from false remedies a superficial peace, when, for each and all, the sovereign specific, the divine Healer, is at hand. “There is balm in Gilead ; there is a Physician there.” No case beyond His intervention ; no soul so far gone in sin as to baffle His skill. Open your whole heart to Jesus. Tell Him all your case. Confess at His feet every hidden grief, every secret sorrow, every untold guilty fear. He is ready to hear and help ; He is infinitely able to save unto the uttermost all that come unto Him. At the last extremity, spiritual life and death trembling in the balance, call Him in ; lay open your soul to His

inspection ; cast yourself in confiding love on His all-sufficient aid, and your recovery is sure.

But, on the other hand, if indolence or indifference prevail, and you refuse to know your danger, and to seek the Saviour's proffered aid, reflect, I beseech you, that a time is approaching when self-knowledge shall be no longer a matter of choice. It is possible now to exclude the light ; but a light is soon to dawn that, whether we will or no, shall pierce to the hidden depths of every heart, and lay bare the soul at once to the eye of Omniscience, and to its own. It is possible now to seek the peace of self-forgetfulness,—to refuse to be disturbed,—to sink for a little longer into our dream of self-satisfaction ; but it is a peace as transient as it is unreal. Soon, at the latest, and all the more terrible for the delay, the awakening must come. There are sometimes sad awakenings from sleep in this world. It is very sad to dream by night of vanished joys,—to revisit old scenes, and dwell once more among the unforgotten forms of our loved and lost,—to see in the dream-land the old familiar look, and hear the well-remembered tones of a voice long hushed and still, and then to wake, with the morning light, to the aching sense of our loneliness again. It were very sad for the poor criminal to wake from sweet dreams of other and happier days—days of innocence, and hope, and peace, when kind friends, and a happy home, and an honoured or unstained name were his,—to wake in his cell, on the morning of his execution, to the horrible recollection that all this is gone for ever, and that to-day he must die a felon's death. But inconceivably more

awful than any awakening which earthly daybreak has ever brought shall be the awakening of the self-deluded soul when it is roused in horror and surprise from the dream of life — to meet Almighty God in judgment!

SERMON III.

SPIRITUAL INFLUENCE.

“Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again. The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth : so is every one that is born of the Spirit.”—*John*, iii. 7, 8.

THE change of which our Lord here speaks is not, as His incredulous auditor at first supposed, a physical one ; yet is it one which, in some respects, implies a revolution in man's being as great as if the strange fancy of Nicodemus had been literally true. Marvellous though it would be for the old man to become a little child again—for one surrounded with the cares and responsibilities of manhood, or sinking into the feebleness of age, to feel the shadow on the sundial of life going back, and the light of life's morning once more shining around him ; yet might such a return from the maturity or decline to the infancy of man's outward life involve nothing so wonderful as the entering upon a new spiritual history—the second birth of the soul. Could we for a moment entertain the supposition that some one here who is now far advanced in life, had this day

become conscious, as if by some mysterious spell passing over him, that a new freshness was beginning to be infused into the springs of his physical life, that the form and features on which Time's impress had unmistakably been set, were being moulded anew into the roundness and softness of childhood, and the worn and withered man was, by some strange influence, transformed again into the bright and buoyant creature of days long bygone,—yet even then, I repeat, extravagant and incredible as such a conception seems, we should have before us a transformation not at all so wonderful, so momentous, as that of which the text affirms the possibility. For it speaks, not of the reconstruction of the outward form, but of the re-creating of the inward life; not of a mere external metamorphosis, but of an inner and vital change. And it cannot be doubted that mental and moral changes are far more momentous than physical; that a transformation of soul would revolutionise a man's being far more completely than a mere modification of bodily form and feature. The soul is the true essence of man's nature. The character, spirit, moral temper of the inner being constitutes the man, and everything else is outward and incidental. The physical form and life, amidst a thousand changes, may leave the real man unaltered, or as little changed as the inhabitant by the re-construction of the house, or the person by the new making of the vesture that clothes it. Too early experience of life may force the mind into a premature exhaustion, so that beneath a youthful form there may be the old man's spirit; and, on the other

hand, there are instances in which, by the tempered use of strong vital energies, an old man has preserved to the last a youthful elastic spirit in the worn form of age. But in all cases, what the spirit is, that the man may truly be said to be. To regain, therefore, the child's form, would be but a slight transmutation compared with regaining the child-heart; and though the form and aspect of maturity or age remain without the slightest modification, yet if there be the birth of a new spirit-life, the revival of a childlike heart and soul in the hidden depths of man's being, then is the change more marvellous, more momentous, than if the old man could in very deed go back and enter life anew.

Now, it is this inward change, this recommencement of the inner history, which every soul experiences that passes under the plastic touch of the Spirit of God. It is no fanciful notion which the Scripture teaches when it declares of believers that, "laying aside all malice, guile, hypocrisies, envies"—all the unhallowed and sophisticated tastes and habits of their false manhood—"they, as new-born babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that they may grow thereby;" or, in other words, that the simple desires and tastes of a little child, in a sense, rise again within their hearts. For in the soul that begins in real earnest to be devoted to God, there will be felt by degrees the awakening of a new and diviner life. A joy more sparkling than the joy of infancy, yet deeper, more enduring far, will steal upon it. There will be a new meaning in life to the quickened vision of the new-born soul. A new and more glorious aspect will gradually dawn upon the

world, and outward objects and events will be invested with a novelty and vividness of interest akin to that of the happy time when, to the wondering gaze of childhood, all things were yet fresh and new. Within the heart, too, of the believer, there will rise, by degrees, a calm, unanxious trustfulness, a certain self-forgetfulness and freedom from worldly care, analogous to the unconscious and unquestioning reliance of a little child on the father's ability to provide for its needs. In one word, let the soul be visited by the renewing influence of the Spirit of God, and sooner or later there will be manifest in it the signs of a new and more glorious infancy—a reproduction of all the more attractive qualities of childhood, yet purer, nobler far than they, as the life of spirit is more glorious than the life of sense.

Such, then, is the transformation of man's being, the necessity of which our Lord announced to the wondering Nicodemus in the words, "Ye must be born again." And if the idea of a second birth seemed so strange and wonderful to the man who understood literally our Saviour's language, not less marvellous would it appear to the mind that could attach to the words their true and spiritual import. But you perceive that, in order to obviate the difficulties to which the announcement of this mysterious doctrine had given rise in the mind of his auditor, our Lord proceeds, in the text, to suggest to him what may be called a simple argument from analogy. With infinite condescension, the divine Teacher endeavours to remove the incredulity of the inquirer, by directing his mind

to certain phenomena in the natural world, equally real, yet equally mysterious and inexplicable, with the spiritual change of which He had spoken. He bids the startled listener look around him, and see, in the simplest and most familiar facts and occurrences in nature, the evidence of powers and processes as inscrutable as are involved in the doctrine of the soul's second birth. "Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again,"—every passing breeze contains the intimation of a mystery as great as this,—“The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, yet canst not tell whence it cometh and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit.”

The argument of the text, then, is derived from the existence of parallel difficulties in Nature and Revelation. Let us endeavour to follow out this argument a little further, with the view of obviating certain objections to the doctrine of Regeneration. The difficulties connected with the regenerating operation of the Spirit of God, to which the illustration of the text may be regarded as pointing, are these three—its *Supernaturalness*, its *Sovereignty* or *apparent Arbitrariness*, and its *Secrecy*. It is perhaps to the last of these points that the argument, in strict accuracy, should be confined, but the analogy holds not less obviously in respect to the other two.

I. In not a few minds there is a certain shrinking from the supernatural, which renders such doctrines as that of the text peculiarly distasteful and difficult of

reception. If, for the ignorant and superstitious, the invisible world possess a strange attraction, disposing the mind often to ascribe natural events to supernatural agencies, and to call in, on the most common occasions, the interposition of unseen and mysterious powers, there is an opposite class of minds in which the tendency is equally strong to explain everything by natural causes, and to exclude as much as possible the thought of any other than known and familiar agents. Ignorance may indeed be the mother of a spurious devotion, but there is a practical scepticism more to be deprecated, of which self-sufficient knowledge is often the parent. It may be the tendency of the religion of an unenlightened age to translate every unexplained fact or phenomenon into the immediate interposition of the Deity. The poor savage hears a wrathful voice in every storm, and trembles as at the presence of a retributive Power, when the portentous shadow crosses the sun's disc, or the white lightning quivers athwart the heavens. The ignorant mind creates out of its own terrors, in dreams, and impressions, and fluctuating moods, direct intimations of the divine presence and will. But as society advances in knowledge, and as many of those events, formerly attributed to supernatural agency, are discovered to be the result of natural causes, it too often happens that, with the superstitious recognition, all practical acknowledgment of the divine presence and agency is lost. Accustomed to the observation of natural causes at work around them, men cease to think of any other. The tendency becomes habitual to refer everything to laws

of nature, and to imagine that, when we have specified the outward and physical causes of any phenomenon, we have completely accounted for it. The voice of God is no longer heard in the thunder when the laws of electricity begin to be known. In the darkened luminary there is no shadow of the Almighty's wing to the observer who can calmly sit down and calculate the period and duration of the solar eclipse. The region of marvels is thus driven further and further back, but the territory lost to Superstition is seldom won for Religion. The old gods of heathenism have long vanished from the woods and meadows and fountains; but it is not that the one living and true God, but only gravitation, light, heat, magnetism, may be recognised as reigning in their forsaken haunts. And we carry the same tendency into the moral world. The outward agents in moral and spiritual changes are those on which we chiefly dwell. The power of motives, the influence of education, the natural efficacy of instructions, appeals, admonitions, warnings,—it is to these almost exclusively, and not to any direct operation of the Spirit of God, that we are apt to trace changes of character. We may be ready, indeed, decorously to remark, that no good can be done without the blessing of God, but we seldom realise the true significance of this statement. The interposition of a divine agent in every instance of moral improvement may not be denied or controverted, but it is too often practically ignored. A child grows up gentle, amiable, pious; and when we say that he had the benefit of a careful and religious education, we seem to ourselves to have

given the whole account of the matter. A careless youth develops into a thoughtful and serious manhood, and we remark on the sobering and mellowing effect of years. An irreligious man becomes devout, and the dangerous illness, or the severe domestic affliction, or the influence of a Christian friend or minister, has made him, we perhaps observe, a wiser and a better man. Seldom does the mind naturally turn to the thought—"the finger of God is here;" to many it would seem fanatical or irrational thus to speak. The idea of a mysterious Holy Spirit coming down from the heavens, and working in the man's mind, would but too often be regarded, if not avowedly, yet in our secret judgment, as a strange mystical notion peculiar to the domain of theology, but quite apart from our ordinary experience, having nothing in common with the plain realities of everyday life.

Now, it is to this habit of mind, this tendency, tacit or avowed, to shrink from the supernatural, that the text suggests a most striking corrective. For it brings before us the consideration that the supernatural is not confined to religion; it bids us look abroad upon the common world of sight and sense, and see there, in the most familiar processes and phenomena of nature, the proofs of an immediate divine agency as mysterious, as inexplicable to man as any to which religion appeals. Not in the dim region of theological mysteries alone, but amidst the sights and sounds of everyday life, we move in a world of wonders. Not spiritual things only, but every peeping bud, and every waving leaf, each glancing sunbeam and glistening dewdrop, the

passing breeze, the falling shower, the rippling stream, imply the presence of a mysterious power and agency ever secretly working around us. There is a sense, in which science, with all its triumphs, returns to the creed of the world's infancy, and is compelled to admit the immediate presence of a supernatural power in the most ordinary movements of nature. For, after all, not the most splendid revelations of science have ever been able to disclose anything more than the regular sequences of events, the ways in which the Author of nature generally chooses to work, the self-imposed rules of divine agency. Gravitation, light, heat, chemical affinity, are only abstractions; they are nothing in themselves without a personal will—a living agent, whose mode of working they express. Dead matter, however arranged, can never act of itself. Power, spontaneous activity, can never reside in dead and material things; it can dwell only in a person, a living, thinking, willing agent. A human mechanist may leave the machine he has constructed to work without his further personal superintendence, because when he leaves it, God's laws take it up, and by their aid the materials of which the machine is made retain their solidity, the steel continues elastic, the vapour keeps its expansive power. But when God has constructed *His* machine of the universe, He cannot so leave it, or any the minutest part of it, in its immensity and intricacy of movement, to itself; for, if He retire, there is no second God to take care of this machine. Not from a single atom of matter can He who made it for a moment withdraw His superintendence and support.

Each successive moment, all over the world, the act of creation must be repeated. The existence of the world witnesses to a perpetuity of creating influence. Active omnipresence must flood the universe, or its machinery stops, and its very existence terminates. The signs of an all-pervading supernatural energy meet us wherever we turn. Every leaf waves in it, every plant in all its organic processes lives in it; it rolls round the clouds, else they would not move; it fires the sunbeam, else it would not shine; and there is not a wave that restlessly rises and sinks, nor a whisper of the wanton wind that "bloweth where it listeth," but bespeaks the immediate intervention of God. Marvel not, then, when it is said that we must be born of the Spirit. If not the slightest movement of matter can take place without the immediate agency of God, shall we wonder that His agency is needed in the higher and more subtle processes of mind? If every echoing wind bespeak a present Deity, shall it seem strange to appeal to His power in the regeneration of a soul? Each time the furrow opens to the ploughshare, or the sail of the vessel expands to the breeze, we call in the aid of a mysterious agency, without which human efforts were vain. Can it be matter of surprise that the same mysterious agency must be invoked in every effort to break up the hardened soil of the human heart, or to communicate to the dull and moveless spirit of man an impulse towards a nobler than earthly destiny?

II. *The Sovereignty, or apparent Arbitrariness, of the work of the Spirit of God in regeneration, is another*

of those difficulties connected with this doctrine to which the illustration of the text seems to point. It is this to which our Lord seems to refer when He compares the Spirit's agency to that of the wind which "bloweth *where it listeth*," that is, with inexplicable uncertainty and variableness, or according to laws which are beyond the knowledge and control of man.

And how very much, to human eye, have the relations of God with man, as a religious being, been characterised by an aspect of strange uncertainty and arbitrariness! Religion, with all its ennobling influences, has not been communicated to man universally or indiscriminately. The Spirit of love and life has not breathed over every sin-blighted land; but while a few favoured regions have felt its reviving presence, and have begun to bloom with a moral beauty that is not of this world, others, unvisited by its quickening power, remain from age to age in the condition of moral wastes, barren as the desert, or rife only with weeds and thorns. Nor can human research discover any law by which this inequality is ordered. For the partial distribution of spiritual blessings to the nations we can give no other reason than the inscrutable and irresponsible will of a Benefactor who gives and withholds "wheresoever He listeth."

And as little in the case of individuals as of nations can we explain on what principle it is that the gracious influences of the Spirit are vouchsafed. In equal possession of the outward means of improvement, some are benefited whilst others continue unaffected. The seed of truth springs up into rapid and rich maturity in one

mind ; in another, on which perhaps it has been more profusely scattered, it remains dormant and unproductive. A word spoken in season, the utterance of a hallowed name, even a mere look of affectionate remonstrance, will fly straight to the core of some human spirit, as if guided by some unerring hand ; whilst, on others, all the strength of reason, all the force of logic, all the power of eloquence, may be spent, only to recoil ineffective as arrows from proof-mail. From the furnace of affliction one heart, on which an irresistible solvent has been acting, will come forth softened, subdued, spiritualised ; whilst others, from the superficial tenderness of unblest sorrow, speedily cool down into a hardness and insensibility more hopeless than ever. And if this diversity of results is to be ascribed, not to the variety of outward means, but to the presence or absence of an inward influence which alone can render them effectual, can we tell why that influence, given in one case, should be withheld in any other ? Is the hand of Jehovah ever shortened that it cannot save ? Is the reservoir of grace so scantily supplied that, while some receive the precious dole, others as needy must go unrelieved ? Or can we ascribe to Infinite Love the wayward fitfulness of earthly beneficence—to Infinite Wisdom the arbitrary and unreasoning favouritism of weak and erring men ? If grace be necessary to conversion ; if without it an angel of heaven might preach with heaven's eloquence, yet all in vain ; and with it, from the appeals of feeble human lips no careless auditor could retire unaffected, why—are we not tempted to ask—is not the Spirit of God poured forth without

measure on every assembly where unconverted souls are to be found? The atmosphere of selfishness broods over the soul, and stifles all its glorious capacities of excellence. Oh, why is there not an instant response to the call, "Awake, O north wind! and come thou south! breathe upon this garden, that the spices thereof may flow forth?" The dead in sin—the living, lost, never-dying dead—bespread the world, a spectacle more awful than in the prophet's vision; and can it be that boundless Mercy surveys it, and yet there is no answer to the prayer, "Come from the four winds, O breath! and breathe upon these dead that they may live?"

To all such questions—the not unnatural expression of the mind's anxiety in contemplating the seeming arbitrariness of the Spirit's work—we must again reply in the words of the text—"Marvel not that it is said unto you, Ye must be born of the Spirit." Marvel not nor be disquieted at your inability to explain the laws that regulate the operations of an infinite Agent; for in a province much more within the range of human observation there are familiar agents at work, the operations of which are equally inscrutable, arbitrary, incalculable. Think it not strange that the ways of the Spirit of God are unaccountable to a mind by which even the common phenomena of the wind are irreducible to law. "The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit."

And the force of this illustration it will need little

reflection to perceive. For what so fitful, wayward, incalculable, as the operations of the wind? Who can for a single hour foresee, or with certainty pronounce, what its course will be? Sometimes breathing in softness, sometimes rushing in storm; now gently fanning the summer fields, or wandering with scarcely perceptible movement over the vernal earth; anon sweeping and raging along with the wild impetuosity of the winter blast; leaving one spot or one region of the earth parched, cloudless, motionless; for days and weeks stirring not a branch or leaf, as it hangs droopingly in the dry and moveless air, yet at the same time bringing to other regions the fertilising influences of refreshing gales and showers. And the argument is—If even this simple agent so baffle man's highest wisdom to reduce to known laws its seemingly wayward movements, shall it be thought strange that the ways of the unsearchable Spirit of God are governed by no rules which finite minds can discern? If a phenomenon which, however complex the principles or intricate the conditions involved in it, is still a physical and limited one, present to the acutest minds a problem that is insoluble, what wonder that they should be baffled by the operations of an Agent who is limited by no conditions of time and space, and whose every movement is but a part of the vast and mysterious scheme of the moral government of the universe? If the fitful breeze that stirs a meadow or ripples a brook be a subject of investigation too extensive and complicated for mortal intellect to grasp, surely there is little marvel that it cannot explain and calculate the movements of that ineffable Power

which works on the scale of infinitude. No ! fully to comprehend the measures of the infinite Spirit, so as to see them freed from every semblance of obscurity or arbitrariness, would be an achievement implying a mind infinite as his own ; and surely *we* may defer that enterprise till finite problems have ceased to baffle us.

But the illustration in the text may suggest to us this further thought, that the arbitrariness which characterises the Spirit's work is, after all, only apparent, and that, beneath seeming irregularity, there is real and unvarying law. It is so with the material agent, it is so with the spiritual, of which that is the emblem. The capriciousness, fitfulness, lawlessness of the wind's motions is only in appearance. The wind never really does act at random. Its endless inconstancies, its ceaseless and unaccountable changes, are the result of material laws as fixed and stable as that by which the planets revolve, or the sun rises and sets. Science, indeed, with all its modern aids and appliances, has made but slight progress in the attempt to trace out the laws of winds and storms, and perhaps this is a province in which our knowledge must ever be imperfect and vague ; but the vagueness and imperfection is not in nature but in us. It is only because of the limits of our faculties that we cannot explain the reasons of every vagary of the restless wind, every motion of each everchanging cloud that forms, and floats, and dissipates, and forms again in the heavens, as easily as we can tell why a stone falls to the ground. And so too, undoubtedly, it is with that of which the wind is set forth as the type, the agency of the Spirit of God. In

His most mysterious dealings with the souls of men, God never acts without a reason. Where, to us, there seems inconstancy, to Him all is order. What arrogant impiety rejects as harsh and arbitrary, is, to the Mind that alone can comprehend the universe, luminous with the traces of beneficence and wisdom. And all that to human eye seems dark, unaccountable, capricious, in the economy of grace, is so only, we may be well assured, because our feeble minds are incompetent to grasp the explanation. A time was when the starry firmament presented to the eye of man only the aspect of a maze of luminous points, scattered hap-hazard, or moving at random over the heavens ; but at length the great thought was struck out which evolved from all this seeming confusion the most perfect order and harmony. And so, perhaps, a time may come when light shall be thrown on many things that seem mysterious in the arrangements of Providence and in the dispensation of grace, and when the undiscovered spiritual law of gravitation shall reduce all seeming arbitrariness to perfect order and beauty. But meanwhile, in presence of the inscrutable order of God's government, it is the befitting attitude of a creature so weak and ignorant, even in earthly things, as man's experience proves him to be, not to criticise, to question, to doubt, but to submit and to adore.

III. The reality of the work of regeneration may be questioned, finally, because of its *secret* or *imperceptible character* ; and it is this difficulty which the argument of the text seems specially intended to obviate. Mo-

mentous though the change be, which, in regeneration, the soul is supposed to undergo, it is one of which we have no direct consciousness—no immediate evidence. The finger of the mighty Agent is not felt as it works in the secret depths of our being. Nor is there any external sign, any glory resting on the countenance, any hovering flame or rushing wind, to intimate the presence of the heavenly visitant. Unseen He comes, unseen He departs. We reach and pass the crisis of our spiritual history all unconscious that an event so extraordinary is taking place within the breast. And it is not strange that a transformation, so utterly unevincenced by sense or consciousness, should at first sight be regarded as improbable, and that men should sometimes “marvel when it is said unto them, Ye must be born again.” We are accustomed to associate great events in man’s earthly history with outward stir and show, outward pomp and circumstance, and we can scarcely divest ourselves of the notion that external significance is inseparable from real importance. When the heir to earthly wealth or grandeur is born, the earliest cry of the feeble babe is the signal for loud and universal gratulation, and by a thousand obtrusive indications the tidings of the joyous event are borne far and wide. When a decisive battle terminates some great struggle, in which the nations are interested, the shout of victory has scarce died away on the field till it is caught up and reverberated from land to land, and by every outward sign that can give expression to joyful emotion—by banners, flung out on every height, and peals echoing on every breeze—do men strive to

mark their sense of the magnitude of the occurrence. How strange to be told that an event, infinitely more momentous than these in man's history, has taken place in silence and secrecy—that a Child of the living God—the heir of an inheritance, before which earthly splendours pale—has been born, and yet the event been unnoticed and unknown;—that a conflict, in which the powers of light and of darkness have been engaged, and the results of which time cannot measure, has been, in one auspicious hour, decisively terminated, and yet that in profoundest secrecy, without one whisper of triumph to mark it, the victory has been won!

But again let us turn to the simple argument of the text; for here we are taught that the association on which all such incredulity is based—the association between show and reality, outward significance and real importance—is an altogether fallacious one. For the proof that visibility and greatness, power and seeming, are far from inseparable, we are pointed to one out of many similar phenomena which daily meet our observation in the material world. In nature it cannot be questioned that more often than otherwise the greatest powers and agencies are invisible. Known to exist by their effects, in themselves and in their mode of operation they are imperceptible and unknown; so that, to believe only where we see, to discredit the existence and agency of all that is incognisable by sense, would be a maxim as fatal to science as to religion. When the magnet draws the iron, when the needle turns to the pole, who sees the strange

influence by which the attraction is effected? what eye can discern the infinitely minute threads of influence that draw the one object to the other? Or, when the earth and other planets revolve around the sun, and the moon and other satellites around those, who can perceive any mysterious ether flowing from world to world to convey the impulse that moves them? What keenest optics can see gravitation? Manifest by the mighty results it achieves, this greatest of material agents is in itself, and in the mode of its operation, unseen. So, too, is it, to name no other instance, with that natural agent to which the text specially refers—the impalpable, viewless wind. Visible in its manifold influences, it, too, is in its essence and operation imperceptible. As you have surveyed the face of nature in some tranquil season—the unbreathing summer noon, or the hushed twilight hour—every feature of the landscape has seemed suffused with calmness, every tree hung its motionless head, every unrippled brook crept on with almost inaudible murmuring, every plant and flower and leaf seemed as if bathed in repose. But anon you perhaps perceived a change passing over the scene as if at the bidding of some invisible power;—a rushing sound—as of music evoked by invisible fingers from the harp of Nature—began to fill your ear; the leaves began to quiver and rustle, the trees to bend and shake, the stream to dash onward with ruffled breast and brawling sound, and from every wood and glade and glen there came forth the intimation, that a new and most potent agent was abroad and working around you. And yet while you marked this

change on the face of nature, did you perceive the agent that effected it? Did the wind of heaven take visible form and appear as a winged messenger of God's will, hurrying hither and thither from object to object? Do you know, and can you describe, the way in which he worked,—how his touch fell upon the floweret and bade it wave, or his grasp seized the sturdy oak and strove with it till it quivered and bent? No, you cannot. You have not penetrated so far into the secrets of nature. You have seen only the effects, but not the agent or the process of his working. You have seen the wind's influences but not itself. But do you therefore marvel, or hesitate to believe that it has been indeed abroad and working over the face of the earth? or do you ever doubt whether there be any such agent as the wind at all? No; you have heard the sound thereof, you have witnessed the stir and commotion of nature that told of its presence, and so you believe in its existence, though you "cannot tell whence it cometh, nor whither it goeth."

So it is with every one that is born of the Spirit. You cannot see this mysterious agent any more than those natural agents of which I have spoken. But, as in the one case so in the other, though the agent is invisible, the effects of his operation are manifest. You perceive not the passing to and fro of a mysterious attraction between God and the soul of man, but you will not seldom see, as the needle is drawn to the magnet, some sinful soul, hitherto fixed in its worldly and selfish insensibility, as if touched by an invisible power, beginning to bestir itself, shaking off the torpor

of worldliness and selfishness, and drawn in love and devotion to God and heavenly things. You do not see the gale from heaven—the breath of the Spirit—wafted over any sinner's soul, but ever and anon, if you watch carefully the moral history of your fellow-men, you may perceive, in the life of one or another hitherto careless man, a change more or less marked,—the visible witness of a hidden and invisible work. Sometimes with gentle touch the Spirit comes. When affliction has softened the heart, when solitude or bereavement has made the soul susceptible of serious thought, when the character is naturally amiable, gentle, impressible, when outward circumstances have been from childhood favourable to piety,—the Spirit of God has often but to breathe, as it were, an insensible movement into the moral atmosphere, in order to waft into the heart the seeds of holiness, and cause the fruits of holiness to spring forth in the life. But sometimes in far different mood the Spirit comes—as if in storm and terror—on the wings of the loud and winter wind. When the heart is hardened by sin, or rendered stern and cold by long resistance to serious impressions, in these and similar cases the Holy Spirit has often come in influence of terror and alarm, breaking wildly over the trembling soul, and causing it to quake with thoughts of guilt, and death, and judgment, and the wrath to come; and then it has been as if the inner world were shaken to the centre, and in the groans of its anguish, or the cries of its penitence—now rising into hope, now sinking into despair—the soul has given witness how terribly the wind of the Spirit

was working within it. But neither in His gentle nor in His rougher visitations is the working of the Mighty Agent ever immediately discernible. Only by its effects,—by the fragrance and beauty of a saintly life, its truthfulness, gentleness, humility, self-denial ; or, again, by evil passions rooted up, inveterate sinful habits bent and broken, obstacles to holiness swept away—by the sorrow, the self-abasement, the penitence, the prayers of a soul at the footstool of infinite Justice and Mercy,—only by these, its outward effects, can the hidden presence and working of the Holy Spirit be recognised.

It is, then, no marvellous or incredible doctrine, but one corroborated by the most familiar analogies, that there is a supernatural, sovereign, and secret operation of the Spirit of God on every penitent and believing soul. And this is a doctrine fraught with many obvious practical lessons. For if the agency of the Spirit be, as we have seen, a supernatural agency—an agency above ordinary means, and apart from which ordinary means must prove ineffectual, consider, for one thing, how urgent the necessity for securing the Spirit's intervention. What an arrest would be laid upon many of the works of man, if that natural agent, to which we have so often referred as the Spirit's type, were suspended ! If the wind of heaven ceased to blow, conceive how abortive, in many cases, would be all human industry and skill. The wind withdrawn, the seas and rivers would become leaden and motionless ; the sail would hang idle on the mast, and every vessel that

floats the seas, arrested on her progress, would be perpetually becalmed. The labours of the husbandman, alike with those of the seaman, would be frustrated. No healthful showers wafted to our fields, every blade would wither, each dry and moveless stalk of grain perish in the growing, every green and beautiful thing decay from the earth's face. The very physical powers of man, deprived of healthful stimulus, would become languid, heavy, laborious, and at last incapable of action. And thus in a thousand ways the activity of man would be in vain, and his utmost ingenuity in the selection of means, or perseverance in the employment of them, fail of achieving any useful result.

But equally fatal, in the spiritual world, to the success of all human endeavours, would be the withholding of the supernatural grace of the Spirit of God. In vain as the sowing of seed on dry and barren soil, our reading and teaching, our sacraments and solemnities, if the secret grace of germination aid not our efforts. In vain as the spreading of sails beneath windless skies every aspiration after holiness, every attempt to break away from sin and live for God, if the favouring breath of spiritual influence descend not to co-operate with our endeavours. Pray, then, for the Spirit. In all your efforts to be good or to do good, seek this heavenly aid. Despair of success apart from it; rest not till you have obtained it. The wind comes not at the sailor's or the husbandman's call; but in this, blessed be God, the earthly type is far transcended by the heavenly reality; for the believer is possessed of a spell that can summon the gracious aid of the Spirit in every

time of need. The man whose voyage is arrested, and to whom delay is ruinous, may long and pray for the springing up of the favouring breeze, and yet days and weeks may pass, and no answer come. The parched earth may crave for moisture, and while the fruits of his toils are perishing before his eyes, the husbandman may fervently invoke the wind that wafts the shower-laden cloud to his fields, and yet the heavens may still be above him as brass. But not in spiritual things is our gracious Benefactor ever thus inexorable. "Your heavenly Father will give His Holy Spirit to them that ask Him." Our progress heavenward need never be delayed, the fruits of holiness need never be blighted for lack of that heavenly influence. Ask then in faith, nothing doubting. God may not will your earthly prosperity, but your spiritual welfare is dearer to His heart than to your own, and nothing that contributes to it shall be wanting to the earnest supplicant. In every emergency, in every Christian work and effort, therefore, pray for the abundant grace of the Spirit, without which you can do nothing, with which you can do all things.

And if the doctrine of the text furnishes us with a motive to prayer, not less suggestive is it of encouragement to effort. For whilst our natural powers soon reach their limit, to the supernatural aid on which we are encouraged to depend there is none. With the power of God to help him, no man need despair of moral recovery. With the infinite resources of God's grace at our command, no attainment in holiness is beyond our reach. Self-reformation, by the mere

strength of human resolution, soon proves a vain attempt; but the effort to repent and turn to God—to regain our lost purity and happiness—cannot fail, when the very Power that fashioned our mysterious being prompts and aids in the work of restoration. What man made, man may repair: but the soul is a divine work, a thing too noble and delicate, as well as too deeply disordered by sin, to be remoulded and restored by any finite skill or energy. But not to finite skill or energy is the work of restoration committed; and surely we may labour in this work with the most sanguine hope—nay, with firm assurance of success, when we know that the very Mind and Hand that devised and framed our spiritual being are working with us for its recovery. “We are labourers together with God: ye are God’s husbandry, ye are God’s building.” Nor, with such inexhaustible and ever accessible help, need we confine our endeavours merely to the restoration of the soul. There is no limit to our possible progress and advancement. The richest soil soon reaches its limit of productiveness. The enterprise of him who seeks earthly wealth is restricted by the extent of his capital or credit. But in spiritual things you need set no such bounds to your efforts: the soil from which the fruits of holiness are gathered, is prolific beyond all possibility of exhaustion; it is God who gives the increase. The treasury from which your capital is drawn is one which can never, by your largest demands for aid, be impoverished. Why, then, should any Christian rest content with past attainments? Every beautiful grace, every noble virtue that

has ever adorned the saintliest of mankind, may be yours. Why should any man be satisfied with small and scanty spiritual gains? In divine things there can be no avarice; to the most insatiable desire of wealth you may innocently give scope. You are not straitened in God, be not straitened in yourselves.

And again, if the agency of the Spirit is not only supernatural, but also sovereign—if in this respect also it can be likened to that material agent which is set forth as its type, the wind that “bloweth where it listeth”—surely in this aspect, too, the subject is replete with practical significance. For does not the very uncertainty and seeming fitfulness of nature’s influences act as a stimulus to the exertions of man? The fair wind that has long been waited for, and may speedily die away; the spring-tide that comes only at distant intervals, and must be taken at the flood; the balmy season propitious to the husbandman’s toils; the bright moments favourable to intellectual exertion, when thought flows quick, and the spirits are high, and winged fancies come in precious visitations on the soul—is there not something in the very uncertainty and evanescence of these happy influences and golden opportunities that tends mightily to quicken watchfulness and stimulate effort? And should it not be so in spiritual things too? If, explain it as we may, there is any similar variableness in the times and seasons of religious influence, how urgent the motive thus presented to Christian vigilance in waiting for every favourable opportunity, and to diligence in improving it! It is not for us, indeed, always to know the times

and seasons which God hath put in His own power ; but there are, perhaps, none of us who do not know from personal experience that ever and anon there come to the soul times of visitation—hours of softened feeling and deepened thoughtfulness, when the things of time lose their hold upon us, and the eternal world rolls nearer, with all its grand realities, to the spirit's eye. And are not these the spring-tides of the soul, the seasons propitious to the spiritual husbandry, every moment of which gathers round it the importance of that eternal harvest to which the rapid hours are bringing us ? Are not these, in one word, the times when the spiritual gales blow freshest and fairest from the heavens, and the soul, instinct with life, feels every expanded energy yielding to the almost sensible impulses of the Spirit of Truth and Love ? How precious such moments ! Who that reflects on their worth would not long and pray and watch for their coming, and, while they continue, strain every energy to catch to the last breath the blessing which they bring ?

And, finally, in that other aspect in which we have viewed the Spirit's work—as a work secret in itself, yet manifest by its effects—is there not conveyed to us a lesson of deepest practical interest ? For what inquiry so important to each of us as this, Can I discern in my character and life the signs of the Spirit's presence—the visible proofs of this mighty agent's invisible operation ? Unseen He may come ; unfelt and imperceptible may be His working, as it blends with the secret springs of thought and feeling within the breast ; but wherever He does work, sooner or later, the result will

be manifest and unequivocal. The external change, indeed, that indicates His presence may be, to all but the closest inspection, unapparent. For there is a formal and conventional propriety which may spring from many motives short of religious principle—from natural amiableness, from the absence of strong temptations, from the influence of circumstances, from regard to the opinions of men ; and the transition from that outward morality which is the product of such motives, to that holiness which is the fruit of the Spirit's work, may, in form at least, be but slightly observable. But slight or marked to the inspection of others, to the inward consciousness of the renewed mind itself the results of the Divine agency will, I repeat, sooner or later be obvious and unmistakable ; for that result will be not formal, but real—not outward reformation merely, but a change of heart—not surface goodness, but spirituality of mind and motive flowing out into holiness of life.

Apply this test, then, to your own consciousness, and be satisfied with none less searching. "If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His." "Except a man be born of the Spirit, he cannot see the kingdom of God." Would you discover whether you "have the Spirit of Christ,"—whether yours is the destiny of those who have been "born of the Spirit?" Then let not the question be, "Am I leading such a life as to escape the censure or win the commendation of the world?" for the stream may rise as high as its source, and the world itself may supply you with motive sufficient to reach its own standard of moral elevation. Let it not even suffice to ask, "Am I not

now a wiser and better man than once I was?—have I not abandoned many former irregularities of conduct, and ceased to gratify many passions to which in other days I yielded?” For it needs not the interposition of the Spirit of God to dry up the passions of youth, and extinguish the fires of sensuality within us; the inevitable influence of years will serve well enough for that; and the transformation of the heedless, or even vicious youth, into the sober and prudent man, may come as independently of principle, as much irrespectively of a change of heart, as the silvering of the hair or the whitening of the cheek. But the inquiry must be, “Am I leading a holy life from real, heartfelt, self-devotion to Christ? Are my inward principles, feelings, motives, such as will approve themselves to the eye of Him who seeth in secret? Do I not only outwardly abstain from what is wrong, but do I hate and shrink from sin in my inmost heart; pained when I am betrayed into it, glad when I gain the victory over it? Am I exercising a control, not over my outward conduct merely, but over my thoughts and affections—over my secret habits, dispositions, tempers? Is God so revered and loved in the inmost shrine of my being, that I strive to expel thence every evil thought, every vain, impure, selfish feeling, and to keep the temple of a pure heart sacred to Him alone?” By the response which an honest heart yields to such questions as these may we elicit the true answer to that other and most momentous question which involves and comprehends them all, “Have I been born of the Spirit of God?”

SERMON IV.

PART FIRST.

THE INVISIBLE GOD.

“No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, He hath declared Him.”—*John*, i. 18.

To see God! Has any created mind ever known what is included in these simple words? Has the highest finite intelligence ever fathomed their meaning? Is there any intellect but that of Deity itself which can comprehend the full sweep of their grandeur?

To see God—to look face to face upon the Supreme—every intervening veil of sense withdrawn, to gaze upon that awful Presence, of which all created excellence is but the faint reflection! What sights of beauty, and wonder, and awe, on which mortal eye has ever rested—what visions of uncreated glory that have ever passed before the imagination of man, can convey to the mind a conception of the vision of God?

To see God! What is the highest exercise of a believer's faith but to catch some wavering, transient glimpse of Jehovah's glory? What is the most exquisite happiness of any soul in Christ, but to rise, even for a moment, in thought and aspiration, into the

presence of the Infinite Good and Fair? What constitutes the very bliss of heaven, the joy of pure and glorified spirits before the throne, but to “see the King in His beauty?”

Yet it is declared in the text that “no man hath seen God at any time.” “Whom no man hath seen, nor can see,”—writes another apostle. He is designated “The Invisible God,” and again, “The King Eternal, Immortal, Invisible.” Is it then so? Must we, indeed, repress every longing of desire, every yearning of devout and loving hearts, after the nearer and brighter light of our Father’s countenance? “Oh that I might see Him!”—is not this sometimes the thought of the doubting and troubled spirit? “Oh that it were possible for that Great Being, if indeed He exist, to break through, even for a moment, the secrecy and stillness of creation, and by the visible manifestation of His person, to set my doubts and difficulties for ever at rest.” “Oh that I might see Him!” has not this been the involuntary cry of many a desponding heart, when the light of God’s love has seemed to be withdrawn, and the darkness of spiritual desertion has gathered over the soul?—“Oh that I knew where I might find Him, that I might come even to His seat! I go forward, but He is not there, and backward, but I cannot perceive Him. He hideth Himself that I cannot see Him. Strange that He should be ever near, yet ever distant; that the Being for whom my heart longs should be always beside me, and yet communication with Him be impossible,—that in every movement of nature, in every passing breeze, in every glancing sun-

beam—nay, in every throb of my pulse, and every thought of my mind—there should be the indication of a Father's nearness, whose face I yet can never see!" Or again, when the believer contemplates in thoughtful moments the spectacle of human ungodliness—when he looks round on a world where but too often God is forgotten, His laws dishonoured, His very existence disowned—when he watches the slender success which often attends the most earnest efforts for the moral good of mankind—how often does the wish rise to his lip, "Oh that men might see Him—that it were possible for the heavens above them to dispart, and that Great Being, the silent and awful Witness of sin, to reveal Himself even for a moment to their sight, and to arrest, by the spectacle of the offended majesty of the heavens, the folly and wickedness of man!" But in vain all such longings. Neither to convince the doubting, nor to comfort the desponding, nor to arouse the ignorant and profane, does God break through the awful seclusion of the universe, or withdraw for a moment the veil that hides Him from human sight. There are insuperable hindrances in this our imperfect state of being to any immediate vision of God. There are reasons which render it impossible, so long at least as we dwell in this region of sense and sin, that, without some obscuring medium to dim the full blaze of the Divine glory, human eye should be permitted to behold the face of God. We may linger at the foot of the mount, but it is a light inaccessible and full of glory that rests on its summit; and even the most favoured of mortals, in the hour when holy contemplation brings

them nearest to the throne, are debarred from all further approach by the stern prohibition, "Thou canst not see my face ; for there shall no man see God and live."

Yet whilst the text intimates that "no man hath seen God at any time," it further teaches us that "the only-begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He hath declared Him ;" and our Lord is elsewhere described as "the image of the Invisible God ;" and again, as "the brightness of the Father's glory, and the express image of His person." Moreover, Jesus himself, in answer to the inquiry of a disciple, declares, "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father."

Two truths, then, are obviously brought before us in this passage of Scripture—the truth, in the first place, that God, essential or absolute Deity, is to us, in our present state of being, invisible ; and the truth, secondly, that Jesus Christ is the declaration or manifestation of God to men.

I. God is invisible. We cannot see him. We are, in this world, debarred from looking upon the face or discerning the immediate presence of Deity. Why is it so ? If it would contribute to the happiness of the saint, or check the sinner in his course of wickedness, to behold God, why does God remain invisible ?

Now, in reflecting on this question, it will occur to you as one consideration, that it is naturally impossible for what is spiritual to be perceived by sense. There are even material agents in existence around us so subtle as to elude the cognisance of the senses. There

are powers in nature whose ever-present influence we perceive, yet which themselves are never directly discerned. The varied forms and colours of material objects around us the eye can detect, but not the latent electricity that pervades them. The masses and motions of the planetary bodies are appreciable by the sight ; but the keenest organs of sense cannot see gravitation, cannot detect that mysterious power, as it flies through space, binding orb to orb. And if thus on the confines, so to speak, of the material and spiritual worlds, there are agents impalpable to sense, much more, when we pass those limits, do we enter into a region where bodily organs fail us, and a vision and faculty far more divine is needed. Who has seen thought? What eye has ever rested on that mysterious essence which we designate mind, soul, spirit? If it be that spiritual intelligences surround us, if millions of spiritual beings walk the earth both when we wake and sleep, yet, as they pass hither and thither on their heavenly ministries, does the faintest sign of the presence of these glorious beings ever flash on the dull sense of man? Nay, are we not dwellers in a world of embodied spirits, holding continual intercourse with them, witnessing constantly the proofs of their existence and the effects of their activity ; yet has one human spirit ever become visible to another? No! it is but the forms of spirit that are visible to sense. We see in the busy world around us the mere houses of souls.

In this sense, then, God is now and ever must be invisible. If even a finite spirit cannot be seen by the bodily eye, how much less the Infinite Spirit? Finite

spirits may indeed be in some measure outwardly represented and recognised, when localised in bodily forms. Human souls may be identified by the material shapes with which they are clothed. But even in their case there is something nobler in spirit than the fairest form of human beauty or grace or majesty can depict. The robe is often unworthy of the wearer. And how, then, can the Infinite Spirit ever thus be made known? How can He be localised in matter whom the Heaven of heavens cannot contain? What corporeal organisation can ever adequately represent the Omniscient Mind? The material universe itself is but a feeble expression of God's illimitable greatness. Beyond all created forms of beauty there is ever a "glory that excelleth," which the imagination cannot conceive; nor does it seem possible for even Omnipotence to fashion out of matter an adequate embodiment of itself. Could we entertain for a moment the supposition of God condescending to contrive some resplendent form, some radiant shape of superhuman majesty and loveliness, by which to convey to man a conception of His spiritual glory, we might conceive the universe to be searched in vain for the materials of such a production. We might give the rein to fancy, and imagine the sun robbed of its glory and the stars of their splendours, and heaven, earth, sea, skies, all the myriad worlds in space combining to surrender whatever of beauty or grandeur they contain; still would the result be miserably insufficient to portray the unapproachable glory of the invisible Being of God. "These are but parts of His ways; how little a portion

is heard of Him ! but the thunder of His power who can understand ?”

But if God cannot be seen by the eye of sense, is an immediate *mental* vision of God equally inconceivable ? Is there no possibility of a direct and intuitive vision of spiritual objects by the *mind*, corresponding to that of sensible objects by the bodily organ of sight ? Cannot souls see face to face ? And is it simply because the thing is impossible that we are in this world precluded from beholding God ?

Now to this it must be answered, that so far from being impossible, an immediate mental or spiritual vision of God is both conceivable in thought and expressly revealed in Scripture. It *is* possible for spiritual beings, if we may so speak, to *see into each other* ; for we know that He to whom all hearts are open reads *our* unuttered thoughts and feelings, and there is nothing to hinder Him from bestowing on us an inferior measure of the same mysterious power of soul-vision, so that the soul might be rendered capable of seeing into God as God sees into it, of “knowing even as it is known.”

To aid our conceptions of this vision of God, entertain for a moment the supposition that we were endowed with the power of seeing directly into the mind of a fellow-man. The thoughts which delight us when we read them in the works of earthly genius, had a real existence in the mind of the poet or philosopher before they were moulded into words ; and forasmuch as even the noblest language is often but the feeble and inadequate expression of the still more noble thoughts

that glow within the breast, our delight, we can conceive, would be much greater, our privilege much higher, were it possible to dispense with the poor medium of language altogether, to look at once into the soul of the great thinker, and to see his grand conceptions as they burst into being on the surface of the spirit. So, again, the idea of beauty is prior to the external realisation of it ; it exists in the mind of the great artist before he labours to give visible expression to it in colour and form ; and it is ever the characteristic of great genius in art that it never satisfies itself, never fully reaches its own ideal, and that the creation of the hand, even when its touch is most delicate, lags far behind the rarer grace and beauty with which the soul is on fire. So that if even the comparatively faint embodiment of the beautiful in conception affords so much gratification when presented to the eye in the breathing marble or on the glowing canvass, we can perhaps imagine what would be the purer and more exquisite delight of the observer, were he endowed with a faculty of spiritual vision by which he could gaze at once on the inner types of beauty, the fresh undimmed originals hung up in the soul's picture-gallery, instead of looking only on the tamer copies which the hand produces.

Now, if we will but rise to a higher region of contemplation, and entertain for a moment the idea of one gifted with this power of soul-vision, who should be permitted to see immediately into the mind of God, to gaze directly on the thoughts and conceptions of that Infinite Mind which is the origin of all truth, beauty,

goodness, we shall have before us that which the Scriptures represent as constituting the chief element of the felicity of saints in heaven, the vision of Deity. The Bible, Providence, the visible creation, are God's thoughts, conveyed to us in outward expression—by words, symbols, material manifestations. But the grand ideas of Scripture existed in the Mind of the Infinite Spirit before they found utterance through the imperfect medium of human speech; and the conception of the universe, with all its beauty, and order, and harmony, was in the mind of the Creator ere it took form in the visible splendours of earth, and sea, and skies.

Conceive, then, what it would be to rise above and beyond these outward forms and shadows,—to look, not on the mere borrowed light of truth, but on that Light Ineffable from whence the noblest earthly inspirations have ever caught their fire,—to discern not merely faint reflections and representations of divine love through the dim cold atmosphere of earthly ordinances, but, heart to heart with God, to dwell where happy souls revel unsated, undazzled, in the Essential Element of Love. Or, when you look on some glorious scene of this world's loveliness—on mountain, lake, and forest breaking into beauty in the morning light, or flooded with the golden noontide, or softened, subdued, half concealed, half revealed, beneath the tremulous splendours of the nightly heavens—conceive what it would be to look on that Mind, of which even all this earthly glory is but the faint transcript, and to gaze directly and immediately upon the types of beauty there. And of this the Bible tells us that the soul of

man is capable. The veil that hides from us the all-glorious Father of spirits shall one day be withdrawn. The spiritual eye shall be quickened to look into the heart and life of the universe. The intercepting medium of sense shall be swept away, and the soul of the redeemed laid bare to the ineffable brightness and beauty of God streaming full-orbed around it. "Blessed are the pure in heart," it is written, "for they shall see God." "Beloved, now are we the sons of God; and it doth not yet appear what we shall be, but we know that when He shall appear, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is." "Now we see through a glass darkly, but then face to face; now I know in part, but then shall I know even as also I am known." "They shall see His face, and His name shall be on their foreheads. And they need no candle, neither light of the sun, for the Lord God giveth them light."

The idea, then, of an immediate vision of God, involves no impossibility. Though God cannot be seen by the bodily eye, there is a capacity in the soul which needs only to be developed in order to our attaining an immediate intuition of the all-present God. There is nothing incredible, nothing in the nature of things impossible in the supposition, that at any moment the great Ruler of the Universe might break forth from the awful seclusion of eternity, and by the manifestation of His presence at once consummate the happiness of His people and arrest the ungodly in the midst of their sins. The question, therefore, recurs, Why is such an interposition withheld? Why is the immediate sight of God reserved for the future world? Why is it the ir-

reversible law of the present, that "no man hath seen God at any time?"

Now to this question I answer, that the invisibility of God seems to be a necessary condition of the two-fold character of our present state of being, as a *state of trial*, and as a *state of training*.

View the present life, first, in the aspect of a state of *trial*, and you will see that such an economy necessitates the invisibility of God. For the idea of a state of trial is that of a condition of things in which neither the motives to good nor the motives to evil are of an overwhelming and irresistible character. There can be no trial where there is no possibility of error or failure. If a man's love of truth is to be tested, truth must not blaze before him with self-evident clearness and vividness. Clear enough for the candid and earnest inquirer to find it out, it must at the same time be obscure enough to escape the observation of the careless or prejudiced. If a man's love of goodness is to be tested, the consequences of goodness or wickedness must not be rendered so inevitable and instantaneous that only madness would hesitate to choose between them; on the contrary, the trial of moral principle will then be the most searching when holiness partakes the most of the character of a struggle or conflict, and the penalties of sinful pleasure are distant and seemingly uncertain.

Now there can be no question that our condition in the present life corresponds, in a great measure, to this conception of a state of trial. For whilst we must exclude from our minds the idea of any such probation as would involve in it a meritorious title to the rewards

of the future life, yet it is plain that we are placed in a condition in which truth and error, good and evil, life and death, are set before us, in which we are left on our own responsibility to choose between these alternatives, and in which the possibility of a wrong choice is not precluded. Divine truth does not pour itself like the light of the sun upon heedless eyes, or force its appeals, as by mighty thunderings and voices, upon inattentive ears. Not even the fundamental truths of religion, such as the Existence and Providence of God, are so obtruded on the attention, or supported by such overwhelming evidence, as to constrain the assent of the reluctant or careless mind. Notwithstanding all the light of reason and of revelation, these are still but the "open secrets" of the universe, seen only by the watchful eye—the "still small voices" from the eternal world, heard only by the willing and attentive ear: it is possible, sad experience proves, amid the din and distraction of earthly things, to remain blind and deaf to these eternal realities. And as with the truth of God, so is it with the claims of His law. The unholy are not forced into obedience by any overwhelming interposition of the Lawgiver. No audible voice from the heavens alarms the sinner in his career of wickedness. No lightning of vengeance shoots athwart his path, nor frown of visible wrath darkens the sky over his head. No portentous form passes before him, to blast him with the sight of the incensed Majesty he scorns. Creation preserves an awful stillness, an apparent indifference, around the transgressor, so that it is possible for men to forget and contemn the Almighty,

or to deem Him "altogether such an one as themselves."

But in order to the maintenance of such an economy, it is plainly necessary that God should remain invisible. If God were seen, refusal to believe would be impossible ; if there were an immediate manifestation of the awful presence of the world's Almighty Ruler, disobedience would be madness, and yet obedience would be no longer the sign of love. Scepticism and faith, impiety and virtue, would alike come to an end. The holiness of the saint would be no longer the triumph of faith over uncertainty ; the very energies of wickedness would be paralysed in the sinner's breast. The great Master of the Household has for a while withdrawn, and left His servants without any visible inspection, that by their diligence or remissness in His absence their fidelity may be tested. But His reappearance would put an end to the trial ; for the most careless servant alike with the most dutiful and devoted bestirs himself when the master's step is heard on the threshold, or the watchful eye of a visible authority is fixed upon him. A time, indeed, is coming, when, by such a visible manifestation of His person, the moral Governor of the universe shall put a period to probation, and when the secret Witness shall become the open and Omniscient Judge. Of that time it is written that then "every eye shall see Him, and they also which pierced Him ;" that the faithful shall "behold His face in righteousness, and be satisfied with His likeness," and the unbelieving call on the "rocks and mountains to fall on them, and hide them from the face of Him

that sitteth on the throne." But meanwhile, in calm and unbroken stillness, the economy of trial proceeds, and the Almighty Ruler hides His person and "holds back the face of His throne."

Equally does the invisibility of God seem to be connected with the aspect of the present life as a state of *training* or *discipline*. Our condition in this world is that of beings who are undergoing not merely a process of trial by which their future destiny is to be decided, but also a process of training by which they are to be fitted for it ; and the immediate manifestation of God to the soul is reserved till that process be complete. The faculty by which God is to be discerned is yet, even in the holiest of men, imperfect and undeveloped, and to the immature moral sensibility the full vision of God, if possible at all, would be intolerable as the blaze of the noonday sun to the weak or diseased organ of sight. For it must be considered that, in order to the perception and enjoyment of spiritual objects, there must be a previous preparation in the soul of the percipient. To know and appreciate Mind—its greatness, goodness, beauty—there must be a kindred spirit, a type of these same qualities in the soul of the beholder. The irrational animal recognises his master's person ; but that which truly constitutes the man—the mind, spirit, character—is, and ever must be, to the lower nature, invisible. Thought, reason, purity, reverence—intellectual and moral qualities, though incessantly displayed before it, are a blank to the mere animal ; and before it can perceive such qualities it must become possessed of them ; it must be raised to rationality

before it can know and appreciate the rational. So again, a child, or a man of grovelling and uncultured mind, though living in immediate contact with one of lofty, thoughtful, refined nature, cannot truly be said to see or know him. Present to each other from day to day, it is yet only a bodily contiguity which obtains between natures so opposite ; there is no spiritual communion or recognition, no vision of soul by soul. Above all, moral natures must be like, in order to know each other. To the impure, the sensual, the selfish, the perception of the holy and pure is an impossibility. Amidst worldly and evil natures, holiness isolates the good. Selfishness is a non-conductor of the divine. In the closest local proximity to the unholy, a pure and heavenly spirit is removed more widely beyond their range of vision than if oceans rolled between them ; it preserves amidst them a divine incognito. And before the veil can be dropped, and the pure soul reveal its inner beauty to the morally defiled, the latter must needs undergo a complete renewal of nature, a transformation and discipline into kindred goodness. Now, much more, without holiness, must it be impossible to see God. No external vision or revelation could disclose the Infinitely Holy to natures imperfect and sinful. They might be taken to heaven, and stand beside the everlasting throne, yet would the lustrous purity of its great Occupant be all dark and unapparent to them. Divine Being, in its wondrous manifestations, might play around the unrenewed mind, but it would be as a luminous atmosphere bathing blind eyes, or sweet music rippling round deaf

ears ; the heavenly effluence could not pass inwards, could wake no thrill of appreciation, no sympathetic delight within the soul. There must, in short, be something godlike in us before we can see and know God ; we must be “like Him” before we can “see Him as He is.” And into this divine affinity, this penetrative moral insight, it is one great end of the Christian’s life on earth to train him. By every holy deed, by every spiritual aspiration, by each sacrifice of inclination to duty, of passion to principle, of the wayward human will to God’s, the spiritual instincts of the believer are becoming more refined, his spiritual perceptions more acute. Not one fervent prayer, not one act of earnest thoughtful intercourse with God in holy ordinances, but is strengthening the wing of aspiration and purifying the eye of faith,—training the spirit to rise nearer to the region of eternal light, and to bear its divine effulgence with more undazzled gaze. . The time will come when this process shall be completed—when love shall be refined from all admixture of selfishness—when purity, freed from all disturbing objects, shall quiver true to the centre of right, and the soul to its inmost depths, in heart, breath, and being, assimilated to God, shall be prepared to reflect, without one dimming shadow, the beams of infinite beauty. But meanwhile, and so long as aught of earthly imperfection adheres to it, not only is the soul unprepared for the full enjoyment of God, but it is probable that immediate vision would involve emotions too overwhelming for its feeble capacities. As there is a degree of light which, to human eye, is equivalent to darkness ; so

there are thoughts and conceptions under which man's feeble apprehension sinks, and emotions too big for human heart to hold. Even in our earthly experience there have been occasions in which great and sudden illapses of feeling—the joy, for instance, of unexpected meetings with lost or long-absent friends, or the thrilling sense of escape from seemingly inevitable danger or death—have proved too much for the heart's capacity of emotion, and the weight of rapture has broken the cup which it filled. Indeed it is just because the greatest minds approach most nearly the limits of human reason, and converse with thoughts which strain by their grandeur the very largest capacity of thinking, that great wit is, proverbially, to madness near allied. But all thoughts, all emotions, possible to man on earth, make but slight demand upon his powers compared with those which, were the barriers thrown down that now shut out God and eternity, would come rushing in upon the soul! What mind, what heart, would be able to endure such august revelation? Surely we may well believe that such a vision is only for the soul that has been trained, purified, enlarged by long-continued fellowship with God on earth; that while our spiritual education is yet incomplete, it is in mercy that the curtain of sense is kept drawn, and that there is compassion to our earthly weakness in the law, apparently so stern, "that no man shall see God at any time."

SERMON IV.

PART SECOND.

THE MANIFESTATION OF THE INVISIBLE GOD.

“No man hath seen God at any time ; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, He hath declared Him.”—*John*, i. 18.

No immediate knowledge or vision of God, then, is possible in our present state of being. But provision has been made for the attainment of a mediate or representative knowledge of Him. Of the invisible God, Jesus Christ is the image or manifestation ; or, as the text expresses it, “The only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, He hath declared Him.”

The obvious import of these words is, not that Jesus Christ has told or taught us verbally who and what God is, but that in His own person and life He is the silent inarticulate manifestation of God to the world. A child may declare or describe to you the appearance and character of his father ; a pupil may tell you of his teacher ; an author may give an account of himself in his book ; but there may be in each of these cases an involuntary and indirect description, much more clear and emphatic than the direct one. For in his writings, the author, especially if he be an earnest writer, un-

consciously portrays himself, so that we may know as much of the heart and soul of a favourite author by familiarity with his books, as if we had lived for years in personal intercourse with him. So the pupil has caught the revered master's manner ; or the child bears, not only in his person, but in his temper, habits, sentiments, prevailing tone of thought and feeling, a strong family-likeness to the parent ; and though there may be much in the father which, from inferiority of talents or attainments, the character of the child may be inadequate to represent, yet, according to his measure, he may convey to us a better idea of what the father is than by any express and formal description of him we could attain.

Now, so it is in the case before us. The infinitely wise and holy One by personal intercourse man has never known ; but there is, if we may so speak, a book in which the whole mind and heart of God is written—a living epistle or Word of God, which may be read and known of men. The divine Father dwells in inaccessible light ; but from His presence one hath visited our earth, the exact reflection of the Father's being and character, the "brightness of His glory and the express image of His person." Let us contemplate this divine portraiture, this celestial light shining through an earthly medium,—let us behold "in the face of Jesus Christ the light of the knowledge of the glory of God."

How does Jesus manifest the Father ? He does so, I answer, by *His person*, by *His life and character*, and especially by *His sufferings and death*.

By the *constitution of His person*, Jesus is to us a

manifestation of God. The incarnation, the mysterious embodiment of the divine in the form of the human, meets a deep necessity of our nature, supplying, as it does, to our feeble apprehensions, a visible, palpable object on which they may fix in the effort to think of God, and to our sympathies and affections in the endeavour to love Him.* For every one must have felt how difficult it is to form any conception of a pure and infinite spirit, on which the mind can rest with satisfaction : how much more difficult so to realise such a being as to cling to Him with a simple human love ! We need the thought of God to be to us a thought of power and persuasiveness—an idea, not after which the mind, even in its loftier and more reflective moods, must strain with conscious effort, but which can be summoned up instantly, at any moment, a spell of potent influence amidst the pressing temptations of the world. But the idea of a pure Spiritual Essence, without form, without passions, without limits, pervading all, comprehending all, transcending all, is too vague and abstract for common use. It may furnish lofty exercise for philosophic minds, but it eludes the intellectual grasp of those of rougher mould ; it may visit the soul in quiet and meditative hours, but the ethereal vision vanishes when we turn where its presence is most needed, amid the coarser cares and conflicts of our daily life. Besides, as I have said, the mere abstract conception of the Spiritual God is not less foreign to our human sympathies and affections than remote from

* See this subject fully discussed in Archbishop Whately's 'Essays.'

our finite apprehensions. The devout heart yearns after a Personal God. It craves for something more than the works of God, however replete with proofs of His power and glory; it wants to get near Himself. Its instinctive desire is after a Father and a Friend—a loving ear into which its sorrows may be poured—a loving heart on which its weariness may rest. But Omnipresence, Omnipotence, Omniscience, Being without form or place, Existence without beginning or end, Eternal Rest without change or emotion—these in their very sublimity constitute a notion, which tends to repel rather than to attract, to overwhelm and crush rather than gently to raise and foster our human sympathies and desires. Our mortal feebleness shrinks from it in trembling awe. The heart cannot feed on sublimities. We cannot make a home of this cold magnificence; we cannot take Immensity by the hand. The soul lost in such contemplations, like a trembling child wandering on some mountain solitudes; longs amidst all this vastness and grandeur for the sound of some familiar voice to break the stillness, or the sight of some sheltered spot in which it may nestle with the sense of friendliness and security.

Now that which is thus the deep-felt want of our natures, is most fully and adequately met in the Person of Jesus Christ. For here is One whom, while we may reverence and adore as God, we can think of as clearly, and love as simply, trustingly, tenderly, as the best known and loved of our earthly friends. Here is a point around which our shadowy conceptions may condense, a focus towards which our aimless aspirations

may tend. Here we have set before us the Boundless limited in form, the Eternal dwelling in time, the Invisible and Spiritual God revealed in that Word of Life which human eyes have seen and human hands have handled. No longer, when we read or muse or pray, need our minds be at a loss, our thoughts wander forth through eternity in search of a Living God. To Him who lived among us, breathed our common air and spoke our human speech, loved us with a human heart and healed and helped us with human hands—to Him, as God, every knee may bow, and every tongue confess. No longer in our hidden joys and griefs, in our gratitude and our contrition, in our love and in our sorrow, when our full hearts long for a heavenly confidant, to whom as to no earthly friend we may lay bare our souls, need we feel as if God were too awful a Being to obtrude upon Him our insignificance or to offer to Him our tenderness or our tears. “Come unto Me,” is the invitation of this Blessed One, so intensely human though so gloriously divine—“unto Me,” in whose arms little children were embraced, on whose bosom a frail mortal lay; “unto Me,” who hungered, thirsted, fainted, sorrowed, wept, and yet whose love and grief and pains and tears were the expression of emotions felt in the mighty heart of God—“Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.”

Not merely, however, by the constitution of His Person, but also by the *moral beauty of His character and life*, does Jesus Christ declare or manifest the unseen God. God is mirrored in the moral being of

Christ. In that pure and lofty nature there was exhibited an image or likeness of the Holy and Spiritual God, such as the world before had never witnessed. Of all God's works, the soul of man is that by which He can best be manifested, by its structure it is the most transparent medium of the Divine. There is, indeed, much in God which humanity, even in its purest and loftiest type, is inadequate to represent. There is much in a great painting which the engraving taken from it fails to convey to the eye: for, though it may be an accurate representation of the drawing, it tells nothing of the beauty and harmony of colour in the original. There is much in the glorious landscape, or the living animated countenance, which the sun-picture, however correct up to its measure, leaves unexpressed: lines, form, contour, relative proportions, may be accurately rendered, but the colour, the expression, the variety, the life, cannot be arrested and reproduced, even by the limner power of light. So there is that in the nature of the infinite God which no copy graven on a finite soul, however noble—no reflection caught and fixed on the page of a human life, however holy and beautiful, can in the very nature of things fully render. Yet, though the finite can never be an exhaustive representation of the Infinite, of all finite manifestations of God, a perfect soul, a pure and holy mind, would be the noblest and the best. God can be imaged in a great and holy life, as He cannot be by the grandest objects which the material universe contains. If the soul of a little child were morally stainless, in that feeble tiny thing which a rude breath,

it might seem, could crush, there would be a nobler and nearer representative of God, than in all the combined splendours of revolving suns and systems. For of a spirit a spiritual being alone can be the true portraiture. Matter can be moulded into the likeness of matter, mental and moral glory can be reflected and represented only by a mind. There may be something of God discoverable in "the light of setting suns, and the round ocean, and the living air, and the blue sky;" but a living, thinking, loving soul, has in it that which mute and material things, however noble, can never possess—a direct affinity with His own spiritual nature. Man alone, of all God's works in the universe, is made "in His own image, after His own likeness;" and therefore, if God would reveal Himself to us, the form under which the revelation can best be given is that of a human character and life.

But in all ordinary specimens of humanity the medium has become sullied, dimmed, distorted, so that the heavenly light cannot shine through it, or, if at all, only brokenly and fitfully. Only once in its history has the world witnessed a perfect human nature, a flawless, stainless, unmarred soul. Only once has humanity formed a medium through which, in its unmingled brightness and beauty, the moral glory of God might pour its beams. In the profound yet unconscious wisdom, in the serene purity, in the tenderness, the forbearance, the persevering love, the combined magnanimity and lowliness of that faultless life of Jesus, we "behold, as in a glass, the glory of the Lord." As we ponder the record of His wondrous history who

shrank with the recoil of Infinite Holiness from those unuttered thoughts of evil which only Omniscience could discover, the mind is borne upwards to Him who, while He searches the hearts of the children of men, yet is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity. As we follow in His mission of unwearied beneficence, that gentle, compassionate Being in whom sorrow ever found its best consoler, and penitence its pure, yet pitying friend ; as we note how, wherever He came, the cry of the wretched awaited him,—wherever He went, the blessings of them that were ready to perish followed His steps ; how the hungry blessed Him for food, the homeless for shelter, the heavy-laden for rest ; how, one touch from His hand and the frozen blood of the leper flowed with the warm pulse of health,—one word from His lips, and the eyes of the blind gleamed back their gratitude upon Him ; how, too, far deeper ills than these—the pangs of conscious guilt, the woes of the troubled conscience, the incurable wound of remorse, the inner maladies that oftenest baffle mortal skill, found ever in Him their most tender yet most potent healer ; and, finally, as we observe in the agent of all this wondrous working, a simplicity, a self-forgetfulness, a certain calm unobtrusiveness, that in His mightiest acts bespeaks no effort and courts no observation or applause ; as we witness all this prodigality of goodness and majestic ease of power, does not the mind involuntarily ascend to that Being whose name is Almighty love,—does not the exclamation rise spontaneously to the lip, “ Surely God is here ” ?

There is yet one other aspect in which the manifesta-

tion of God in Christ Jesus may be contemplated—viz., that which is presented by *His sufferings and death*.

To our human conceptions, the noblest expression of love is that in which it assumes the form of suffering or self-sacrifice. Affection for an earthly friend is then most beautiful when it appears in the aspect of self-devotion,—of personal cost and endurance voluntarily borne on behalf of its object. Integrity, Piety, Reverence for truth and goodness, ever call forth our deepest veneration when they are seen withstanding the shock of calamity, unmoved by pain and hardship, and calmly submitting to every conceivable sacrifice, rather than that truth should be tampered with or rectitude infringed. In order, therefore, to our connecting with the character of God, this our grandest human ideal of love and holiness, it was necessary that there should be granted to us a manifestation of the Infinite Jehovah, in some such form as that we could conceive of Him as submitting to suffering, subjecting Himself to cost, undergoing sacrifice for the salvation of souls, and for the preservation inviolate of the honour of truth and righteousness.

Now, nowhere else than in the sufferings and self-sacrifice of Him who was Deity Incarnate could such a manifestation be afforded ;—by no other act of divine beneficence could this expression of love in God be reached. For no mere gift of benignity can be conceived of as impoverishing a divine giver, or requiring a personal sacrifice on the part of One who has the resources of the universe at His disposal. The beauty and bounty which, with so lavish and unwearied

munificence, God has for ages been scattering over the face of creation, have not left Him the poorer—have not detracted one iota from His boundless wealth. The ceaseless stream of blessing leaves the inexhaustible fountain as capable of flowing still. The beams of beneficence poured from the everlasting sun diminish not its power to shine. The gift of a world were no sacrifice to Him who has but to speak, and worlds of rarer beauty and glory fall from His open hand. In creation and providence, in short, there is never conveyed to the mind any sense of effort—any impression of expense or sacrifice on the part of the Infinite Creator.

But it is different when we turn to the sacrifice of Christ. Viewed merely as the gift of God to man, in Christ Jesus we behold the Infinite Benefactor surrendering for our sake, from the treasury of His goodness, that of which even He possessed no equivalent, and which by no stretch of Omnipotence could even He replace. God had but one Christ. Of this possession of deity, none but itself could be its parallel. The noblest creation of God on earth is a soul, but all other souls are imperfect—God had in all the universe but one perfect soul, and that, with all its inestimable wealth of thought and love and purity, He who alone knew its worth yielded up for us. There was but one noble vessel from the potter's hand that ever remained in its pure beauty, grace, and symmetry, unmarred, and that was cast for us to dishonour and ruin. There was but one spotless lamb in the flock, and that, the only one, the last, the best, was for us devoted to

destruction. The great Father had but one Son, one gentle, holy, loving-hearted child, and Him for us He surrendered to ruffian and murderous hands. But in Jesus we behold more than a gift of Deity to man,—in Him we see Deity giving Itself for man. In the sacrifice of Christ there is that of which we are permitted to conceive as the sacrifice of one who was Himself divine, as the self-devotion of God for the salvation of His creatures. For the obliteration of a guilty past, and the opening up of a glorious future to the world, no meaner price would avail than the sacrifice of Deity Incarnate, and that price was paid. There was here, as we are permitted to think of this most wondrous event in the history of the universe, the abandoning of power by Omnipotence, the renunciation of authority by Him who rules the world, the stooping of the Author and Sustainer of life to weakness, pain, and death. In that eye that for us was tearless with anguish, there was—mysterious thought! —the glance of Omniscience; in that bosom which heaved with strange emotion, there was a woe that Deity could feel; the wail of pitiless sorrow that broke from that awful sufferer's lips had in it the utterance of the very voice of God. Oh surely, if only by infinite sacrifice can infinite love be expressed, the dying Jesus is to us the sublime manifestation of the Invisible God!

SERMON V.

THE SOLITARINESS OF CHRIST'S SUFFERINGS.

“I have trodden the wine-press alone.”—*Isaiah*, lxiii. 3.

THERE is always a certain degree of solitude about a great mind. Even a mere human being cannot rise pre-eminently above the level of his fellow-men, without becoming conscious of a certain solitariness of spirit gathering round him. The loftiest intellectual elevation, indeed, is nowise inconsistent with a genial openness and simplicity of nature ; nor is there anything impossible or unexampled in the combination of a grasp of intellect that could cope with the loftiest abstractions of philosophy, and a playfulness that could condescend to sport with a child. Yet whilst it is thus true that the possessor of a great mind may be capable of sympathising with, of entering kindly into the views and feelings, the joys and sorrows of inferior minds, it must at the same time be admitted that there is ever a range of thought and feeling into which they cannot enter with him. They may accompany him, so to speak, a certain height up the mountain,

but there is a point at which their feebler powers become exhausted ; and if he ascend beyond that, his path must be a solitary one.

What is thus true of all great minds, must have been, beyond all others, characteristic of the mind of Him, who, with all His real and very humanity, could “think it no robbery to be equal with God.” Jesus was indeed a lonely being in the world. With all the exquisite tenderness of His human sympathies,—touched with the feeling of our every sinless infirmity,—with a heart that could feel for a peasant’s sorrow, and an eye that could beam with tenderness on an infant’s face,—He was yet one who, wherever He went, and by whomsoever surrounded, was, in the secrecy of His inner being, profoundly *alone*. You who are parents have, I dare say, often felt struck by the reflection, what a world of thoughts, and cares, and anxieties are constantly present to *your* minds, into which your children cannot enter. You may be continually amongst them, holding familiar intercourse with them, condescending to all their childish thoughts and feelings, entering into all their childish ways,—yet every day there are a thousand things passing through your mind, with respect, for instance, to your business or profession, your schemes and projects, your troubles, fears, hopes, and ambitions in life, your social connections, the incidents and events that are going on in the world around you,—there are a thousand reflections and feelings on such matters passing daily through your mind, of which your children know nothing. You never dream of talking to them on such subjects, and they could not understand

or sympathise with you if you did. There is a little world in which the play of their passions is strong and vivid, but beyond that their sympathies entirely fail. And perhaps there is no spectacle so exquisitely touching as that which one sometimes witnesses in a house of mourning—the elder members of the family bowed down to the dust by some heavy sorrow, whilst the little children sport around in unconscious playfulness.

The bearing of this illustration is obvious. What children are to the mature-minded man, the rest of mankind were to Jesus. Nay, such an illustration falls far short of conveying to us an adequate representation of the measureless inferiority of all other minds to that mighty, mysterious Spirit that dwelt in the bosom of Jesus. “He was in the world, and the world was made by Him, yet the world knew Him not.” “The Light shone in darkness, and the darkness comprehended it not.” He was a Being born from a loftier sphere, and living on a grander scale than the other sons of men. He had nothing in common with the spirit of the times in which He lived. His views, principles, motives, associations, object of life, were not those of His own nation, nor of any land or clime on earth: they were drawn from the infinite, the eternal. Nothing can be clearer, from the simple narrative of the Gospels, than that to those among whom the earthly life of Jesus was spent He was an unintelligible being; that they could not comprehend Him, however much they might be constrained to love Him. He moved among a narrow-minded, grovelling, sensual race, breathing a spirit of ineffable purity and holiness. Cast upon an age and

among a people intensely selfish, in a state of society where the conflicting passions of hostile classes and races surrounded Him with an atmosphere of bigotry and contention, *His* mind was ever calmly revolving designs of universal benevolence, of self-sacrificing love to all mankind. And whilst His whole life passed away, whilst every day, and almost every hour of it, was spent in intercourse with those whose minds never travelled beyond the petty circle of their own national prejudices and passions, *His* inner being was yet ever filled with thoughts that wandered through eternity, that communed with invisible intelligences, that mused upon the affairs and destinies of the universe. Oh, what depths were there in that mighty spirit which none around could fathom! What ineffable joys and mysterious sorrows, unintelligible to the beings with whom He consorted as to the veriest children! The seclusion of the wilderness could not have increased an isolation like His. He was solitary amid crowds. He "trod" the path of life "alone, and of the people there was none with Him."

The thought which I have now suggested to your minds, with reference to the entire life and earthly experience of Jesus, I shall take occasion from the text to follow out a little further with reference to one particular part of that experience—*His sorrows*.

The person who utters the words before us is commonly understood to be none other than Messiah, of whose return in triumphant mien from the conquest of His enemies the context gives a glowing description. There passes before the eye of the prophet the vision of a glorious being, a solitary warrior, with blood-soiled

garments, and the flush of victory on His brow. And in answer to the inquiries of the dazzled and astonished spectator, He announces Himself as one who had stood forth in the defence of His people, who alone and single-handed had borne the fearful onset of their foes, and whose garments, besprinkled as from the treading of the wine-press, were dyed with blood of the slain. Now, without any more minute exposition of the passage, and indeed without vindicating too positively this application of it, I shall take occasion from the words of the text to lead your minds to one, as I think, most instructive and suggestive view of the sufferings of our blessed Lord,—their *solitariness*. By this I mean not that they were solitary or peculiar as being propitiatory sufferings, though in this they were indeed distinguished from the sufferings of all other men. Nor do I mean merely that they were sufferings of extraordinary and unexampled severity, though that also is true. But the point to which I would confine your attention is this, that there were connected with the nature of this mysterious sufferer certain features or conditions which rendered His sorrows such as no other of our race could endure,—certain facts which gave to them, as to His whole history, a character of elevation and awfulness, beyond the range of mere human experience. So that forasmuch as amid all the sons and daughters of sorrow that crowd the page of human history, Jesus yet stands forth “the Man of Sorrows,”—the Solitary Sufferer of humanity; passing through a strife which none but He might encounter, bearing in His lonely spirit the awful pressure of a sorrow which none of mortals

save Himself ever bore, He might indeed with emphasis proclaim, "I have trodden the wine-press alone."

Following out, then, the view which I have now indicated, I shall endeavour to set before you one or two of those circumstances which rendered Jesus solitary in His sufferings.

I. One of the most obvious of these is, that all his sorrows and sufferings were, long ere their actual occurrence, *clearly and fully foreseen*. They were anticipated sorrows. Every calamity and affliction that awaited Him was disclosed to Him in all its certainty and severity from the very commencement of His history, and the terrible anticipation of approaching evil accompanied Him through His whole career on earth. This, obviously, is one feature of the mournful history of Jesus in which He stands alone—one condition of His earthly experience which must have lent a bitterness to His sorrows from which those of all other mortal sufferers are exempt. For need I remind you, what a great alleviation of the troubles and ills of life it is, that, in the great majority of cases, they are unforeseen. In the ordinary arrangements of Providence a veil of obscurity hides from us the threatening aspect of approaching evil, so that the happiness of the passing hour is not damped, nor the severity of present sorrows increased, by the gloomy prospect of the future. Thus even the man on whom life's calamities and afflictions fall the thickest, is permitted to find in the very weakness and ignorance of our nature a refuge from its troubles; for while memory is gradually re-

laxing its hold of past evils, hope is left free to people the future with all fancied good. May I not appeal for confirmation of this to your own experience? There are few or none now hearing me who are not, in greater or less degree, acquainted with grief. Whether they came upon you in the form of personal sickness and pain, or of domestic trials and afflictions, or of sad and bitter bereavements, or of disappointments and reverses of worldly fortune,—in whatever shape they came, you have all, I doubt not, had your sorrows and troubles in life, and not one of you but, if you live much longer, will in all probability have many more to encounter yet. But I beseech you to consider how very much it would have added to the severity of any trial through which you have passed, if you could have fully and certainly foreseen it long before it came. Not to speak of the petty vexations and trials that are matters of daily experience, and the anticipation of which would steal away much of the sunshine of life, think what has been the greatest sorrow of your past existence. Perhaps there are not a few before me who can instantly lay the finger of memory on that spot, so black in the retrospect, where that dire bereavement, or that terrible and crushing blow of misfortune, fell suddenly upon them. Imagine, then, what it would have been to have been able, for long years and months before, to foresee its certain approach. With what heart could you have entered into that enterprise, so enthusiastically and perseveringly prosecuted, could you have anticipated the disastrous issue—the frustration of your efforts, and disappointment of your fondest

hopes? Or when enjoying sweet intercourse with that much-loved friend, or looking forward, brimful of hope, to years of happiness in his society, what a stern interruption of your happiness and your visions had it been, if the darkness had rolled away from the future of your life, and the hour been revealed close at hand when that loved one would be torn from your side! And, need I add, to vivify this thought in your minds, that as with the past, so shall it be with the future experience of us all. There are, I doubt not, more than one or two in this assembly, happy, light-hearted, tranquil, it may be, who, if they could but look into the secrets of one little year before them, would find their happiness sadly disturbed. Whom do you love most in this world? In whose society and intercourse are you taking most delight? Who is that friend, that brother or sister, or husband, or wife, or child, on whom your hopes and affections are chiefly centred, and from whom you would feel it would be agony to part? What if the irresistible conviction were forced upon your mind that, ere a few months have come and gone, that friend will be by your side no more, the anguish of separation will be gone through, and you will be left alone? Or what if I could single out one, or another, or more, among this auditory, and convey to them, by some mysterious yet irresistible means, the intelligence that on a certain day and month in the coming year they shall be hurried away from life by some painful and humiliating malady? Alas! with such a terrible prescience of evil resting on our souls, there would be fewer light hearts and happy homes amongst us to-

night. Perhaps, these or similar events may actually be in reserve for some of us; but "we know not what shall be on the morrow." God has mercifully hid from us the future; and if such calamities await us, they do not disturb our present tranquillity, for they await us *unknown*.

I have enlarged on this thought at what may appear too great a length, that I might bring out more fully one element of the sufferings of our blessed Lord, which is perhaps not so frequently dwelt upon as others. For, let me now ask you to reflect, that that ignorance of futurity which mercifully tempers the severity of all human ills, was an alleviation of sorrow unknown to Jesus. "I could never have gone through it," we often hear men exclaim, who have passed through protracted struggles or hardships—"I could never have gone through it, had I known the half of what lay before me." But, whatever were the hardships of *His* sorrowful life, whatever the mysterious, nameless agonies of His death, this unenviable foreknowledge of them all belonged to Jesus. Even the smiles of infancy, may we not almost say, were darkened by the anticipated anguish of death, and in the very slumbers of the cradle He already in fancy hung upon the cross. This, at least, we do with certainty know, that, from the commencement of His public ministry, that hour and power of darkness, that cup of mingled woes from which at last it seemed as if His mighty spirit for a moment shrank, was clear and full before His eye. Words ever and anon dropped from His lips which showed how constantly this dread thought

was uppermost in His mind. Long ere it came, for instance, He told His disciples, in words they could but dimly comprehend, "I have a baptism to be baptised with, and how am I straitened till it be accomplished!" When on the Mount of Transfiguration He enjoyed a brief respite from His toils, in communion with celestial visitants, what was the topic on which He chose to discourse with them? "They 'spake," we are told, "of the decease which He was to accomplish at Jerusalem." As the dreaded hour drew nearer, He took His disciples apart on the way to Jerusalem, as if more fully to unburden His oppressed spirit, and said, "Behold, we go up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man shall be betrayed unto the chief priests and scribes, and they shall condemn Him to death, and shall deliver Him to the Gentiles, to mock, and to scourge, and to crucify Him." And at last, when the traitor came to take Him, we are told that "Jesus, knowing all things that were to come upon Him, went forth." Thus, from the very dawn of His earthly ministry, Jesus looked forward to its dreadful close. Thick-strewn with sorrows as was every step of His onward path, His eye gazed on that which made Him almost unconscious of lesser ills—the awful gloom that hung over its termination ever deepening to the end. And when we think how this projected shadow of coming evil continually brooded over His soul, how by this awful foresight of futurity He was separated off from the common race of men, and how He, so gentle, so tender, so ready to sympathise with others, had thus upon His own soul a weight of woe which none might share, a

sorrow which none might soothe,—may we not hear, as if an echo of the cry of His agony, those mournful words, “I have trodden the wine-press alone”?

II. Another circumstance which distinguishes the sorrows of Jesus from those of all ordinary men, and which gives to this greatest of sufferers an aspect of solitariness in their endurance, is this, that they were *the sorrows of an infinitely pure and perfect mind*. No ordinary human being could ever suffer as Jesus did, for His soul was greater than all other souls; and the mind that is of largest compass, or that is cast in the finest mould, is ever the most susceptible of suffering. As it is the cup that is deepest that can be filled the fullest—as it is the tree that rears its head the highest that feels most the fury of the storm, so it is the soul that is largest and most exalted that is capable of the greatest sorrows. A little, narrow, selfish, uncultured mind is liable to comparatively few troubles. The range alike of its joys and its sorrows is limited and contracted. It presents but a narrow target to the arrows of misfortune, and it escapes uninjured where a broader spirit would be “pierced through with many sorrows.” The higher, indeed, any being rises in the scale of existence, the greater becomes the character and range of its pains, as well as its pleasures, its susceptibility of suffering, as well as of enjoyment. The insect, in the summer breeze, brimful of mere animal happiness, is exposed to mere animal privation and pain. Its life is but one long sensation. The little child again has fewer capacities of suffering, fewer

cares, and anxieties, and troubles, than the mature-minded man,—the savage, than the civilised being,—the ignorant, unrefined, unreflecting man, than the man of high intellectual and moral culture, of thoughtfulness, and refinement of taste and feeling. In short, it is the great law of life that every advancing power, every improvement, physical, intellectual, moral, or spiritual, which a man gains, carries with it, as the necessary penalty, an additional liability, a new degree of exposure to surrounding evils.

To see this more clearly, conceive a man of cultivated mind, of intellectual tastes and habits of thought, compelled to take up his abode among a household of coarse, frivolous, low-minded persons,—forced to spend his days among them, to listen to their empty or degrading talk, and conform to their gross ways of life,—and would not the very culture and refinement his mind had received, render it more keenly susceptible of the miseries of such a position ; and the purer and more elevated his taste and sympathies, would not existence in such an atmosphere become all the more intolerable ?

In the same way, imagine one of genial and affectionate nature, tender-hearted, and alive to the wants and sufferings of others, becoming the spectator of scenes of heartrending distress and wretchedness, or forced to witness the bodily sufferings or mental anguish of those who are very dear to him ; would not the pain experienced from such sights be all the more intense because of the gentleness and beneficence of the nature of him who beheld them ? Does not the nobleness of

the patriot's or the philanthropist's nature assert itself in the very bitterness and oppression of spirit with which he contemplates the wrongs and the wretchedness of his fellows? Is it not the unenviable compensation for the curse of a cold, hard heart, that its possessor can walk unmoved amidst scenes of severest sorrow, or behold with unfeeling composure sufferings at which other hearts are bleeding?

Or, once more, turn your thoughts to one who has begun to receive that highest of all culture, whose soul is undergoing that noblest of all developments, the renewing influence of Divine grace,—and is it not so that he too by reason of that spiritualising of his inner being—that change which has expanded his intellect, and chastened his affections, and opened up to him a new range of exalted and ineffable enjoyments,—is it not so that he too becomes susceptible, in such a world as this, of pains and sorrows unfelt before? The blind know not the pains of sight, nor the deaf of sound, nor the dead and insensible, of living and breathing men. And so the quickening touch of God's Spirit wakes the believer's soul from a state of moral insensibility and death, to one in which the inner eye can be pained by deformities, and the ear by discords, and the spiritual nature by sicknesses and troubles, of which hitherto it had been all unconscious. He knew nothing before, in his unconverted state, of the joy and peace of believing, the deep, tranquil happiness of a soul that is at one with God, and that reposes on the sense of its Maker's love; but as little did he know of that deeper sorrow that gathers over the believer's soul in

times of failing and spiritual desertion, when the light of God's countenance is hid from him, and he sinks under the sense of his heavenly Father's frown. In the days that are past, he was incapable of that new and exquisite relish for all that is true, and pure, and good, for all things that are lovely and lovable, which has risen within his soul; but this very relish for what is good has brought with it a more sensitive shrinking from sin in every form, has rendered conscience more tender, and the least appearance of evil the cause of deepest and most painful self-condemnation. What self-loathing and prostration of spirit does one who has advanced far in the divine life experience when betrayed into sins, that to a careless mind would not cost a thought? Finally, there has arisen in the believer's mind a new delight in the progress of truth and goodness, a hitherto unexperienced longing for the success of Christ's cause on earth; but at the same time, and as the counterpart of this feeling, he becomes conscious of a degree of pain and sorrow heretofore unknown at the sight of the prevailing ungodliness and wickedness of men. He can sympathise now as he could not before in the lamentation, "Rivers of waters run down mine eyes because they keep not thy law." And the more he grows in holiness, in devotion to the will of God, and in appreciation of the importance of eternal things, so much the more will he be grieved and disquieted by the sins of those around him. What anguish does a Christian parent feel at the exhibitions of thoughtlessness and irreligion in the conduct of his children, or a Christian friend when he beholds those who are dear to him

living in open neglect of God, and in utter indifference to the grandest interests of life ! And all these again, we say, are causes of disquietude, of which an unrenewed mind knows nothing. They are sorrows that assert the greatness of the soul that feels them. They are the pangs and strugglings of a nature that is becoming too noble for the world to which it is confined, and which show, in proportion to their intensity, the grandeur of the destiny that awaits it.

But now if all this be so,—if the principle I have now endeavoured to illustrate, do indeed hold good, that the nearer a soul approaches to perfection, the more sensitive does it become to the evils, pains, sorrows, sins, that surround it in such a world as this,—surely, enough has been said to show how far beyond all human experience, how far even beyond all human comprehension, must have been the sufferings of the soul of Jesus. His was indeed the gentlest, noblest, purest spirit that ever dwelt in human breast ; it had therefore a capability of suffering, a cognisance of surrounding evils, an exquisitely-strung susceptibility to sorrow, such as soul of man besides never felt. His soul's delight was in holiness ; it recoiled with deep and instinctive abhorrence from sin : upon the pure, bur-nished mirror, so to speak, of that spotless nature, the slightest breath of outward impurity would have gathered dimness. What, then, must it have been for Him to live in such a world as this—to be exposed for thirty years to the foul atmosphere of its ungodliness and evil ?—His soul's delight was in happiness. The most tender-hearted spirit of human philanthropy, the most

generous benefactor of his species, never felt such a shrinking from the sight of the woes and sufferings of mankind as Jesus did. What, then, must it have been for that gentlest, tenderest, most loving-hearted Saviour, to walk through such a world of wretchedness as this,—to take in with His omniscient, world-wide glance, the tears, and griefs, and pains, and struggles, and sicknesses, and deaths, with which his Father's once-happy world was rife,—to hear, as it were, the great forlorn wail of humanity borne to his ear upon the four winds of heaven!—His soul's delight, once more, was in His Father's love. Never human heart was capable of loving, was large enough to love, with such a love as His. The infant clings not to the mother's breast with such confiding joy as His when reposing that mighty spirit upon the bosom of Infinite Love. The radiant earth opens not in beauty and gladness beneath the gleaming sun, as did His rejoicing spirit in the sunshine of Jehovah's love. That love cheered Him in languor, sustained Him in weariness, soothed Him in sorrow, nerved Him in the thought of pain, and shame, and agony, and death. What, then, must it have been to Jesus to feel, even for a moment, the sense of that love withdrawn—to undergo, through human pain and weakness, an impression as if of that countenance darkening over Him whose light had been the very life of His being from all eternity! Conceive of the sun struck out of yonder heavens, and the world suddenly overwhelmed with the horror of perpetual darkness and cold. Imagine the sustaining providence of God withdrawn from the universe, and everything hurrying to

desolation and ruin. But no emblem, no comparison can convey to us but the faintest conception of what it was for God's dear Son, as if God-deserted, to die.

III. But the feelings of Jesus in contemplating the sin and wretchedness of humanity, the mournful prevalence of evil in the world, were not those merely of a most holy and tender-hearted *human* being: let me add as one other consideration tending to show how very peculiar a sorrow was His, how very solitary Jesus must have been in His sorrow, that it was—*the sorrow of a Creator amid His ruined works.*

The feelings of Jesus, I have said, in beholding, and living amidst, the moral ruin and degradation of mankind, were not those merely of an exquisitely pure and sensitive human spirit: they flowed from a far deeper and more awful source. It was not merely the gentle-hearted and pitying Man of Nazareth that trod our fallen world; it was nothing less than the world's great Creator that, concealed in that humble guise, surveyed and moved for thirty years amidst the ruins of His fairest, noblest work, lying widespread around Him! For, though this indeed is a thought into which our imperfect minds can but faintly and inadequately enter, are we not borne out by Scripture authority in the affirmation, that grief for the moral ruin of humanity is an emotion to which the Divine mind is not a stranger? You all remember that remarkable passage in the Book of Genesis, in which the mind of God is represented as filled with sorrow and indignation at the sad issue of His great creating work

—“When God saw that the wickedness of man was great upon the earth, and that the imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually, it repented God that He had made man upon the earth, and *it grieved Him at His heart.*” And not to name other passages of a similar import, I would only remind you further of that mysterious grief of Him who was God manifest in the flesh, which, at the threshold of His own last sufferings, made Him almost lose sight of their approaching anguish in His grief for the moral blindness and hardness of His people. “When Jesus was come near the city,” it is written, “he wept over it, saying, Oh that thou hadst known, even thou, in this thy day, the things that belong to thy peace, but now they are hid from thine eyes !” On the authority of the word of God, then, as well as from the reason of the thing, we hazard the assertion, that one awful ingredient in the sufferings of that mysterious mourner must have been grief for the desolation of His grandest work—the anguish of spirit with which for thirty years He beheld everywhere confronting Him the proofs that the soul of man was a ruin.

There is a sort of sentimental melancholy which gathers over the mind of one who surveys the scene of some great nation’s bygone glory, now, it may be, strewn only with wreck of departed greatness. When the traveller visits those countries with which from childhood his mind has been accustomed to associate everything that is noble and elevated in humanity ; when he surveys around him the indications of former majesty and power, now long past away, or inspects

those exquisite remains on which human genius and art had lavished all their splendour, now rudely marred and defaced, and hastening to inevitable decay,—there is a certain pensive sadness which not unnaturally passes over the mind, and to which many have given expression. But surely an emotion of a far deeper kind may well be called forth in the thoughtful mind when contemplating the mournful moral and spiritual degradation of humanity, as contrasted with the glory of its original structure, and the splendours of that destiny for which it was created? What are the most exquisite productions of human thought and toil compared with that work on which, even in its ruins, the impress of Omnipotence may be traced? What is the destruction of the noblest fabrics reared by human hand, in comparison with the dishonour and desecration of the temple of the Holy Ghost? What are the overshadowing of all earthly greatness, and the extinction of all material glory, in contrast with the spiritual and eternal ruin of the soul of man? Even the body, the mere tabernacle in which the soul resides—even the human body, that fabric so curiously and wonderfully wrought by the hand of God, so marred and dishonoured by the effects of sin—even *that*, a work which only Deity could create, is a work over whose ruin even Deity might mourn. Yet every sickbed by which Jesus stood, and every sufferer's cry He heard, and every bier and grave to which His steps were led, were to His eye the ruthless destruction of another and another glorious work of God—the proofs of the triumph of the destroyer over the results of infinite wisdom and skill.

But the destruction of the body is insignificant in comparison with the ruin of the soul. The former is but the dissolution of a thing of material elements, the latter is the deforming and corrupting of a thing made in the image of God, partaker of a divine nature, and destined for His service and glory for ever. The former is but the breaking up of insensate matter, the latter is the reducing to impurity and wretchedness of a thing that shall survive in the consciousness of its misery when the material universe shall have passed away.

Shall we wonder, then, that the Creator of such a work as this—so noble, so deathless, so divine—should have experienced bitter grief for its ruin? When Jesus walked our world, His eye, we may well believe, was not arrested by the bustle and importance of its outward scenes and interests. From all mere external things His observation was ever diverted to what from all other eyes was hidden, the awful mystery and moral deformity of the secret world of souls. Could a human being for a single week be invested with a mysterious power of seeing into the hearts of those around him, and detecting all the feelings and motives that are working beneath the breasts of his fellow-men, doubtless, even to man's imperfect moral sensibility, the disclosures thus made would be too horrible for endurance, and the fatal power of inspection would be gladly resigned. But that which would be intolerable even to a fallen and imperfect being, was a spectacle from which the eye of the pure and holy Jesus could never for a moment escape. All hearts were unveiled to Him. He surveyed not merely the forms and counte-

nances of human beings : a thousand indications tell us that He "knew what was in man,"—that He read their souls. And everywhere as He looked He saw that soul that had sprung a pure, holy, happy thing from His hands, now filled with selfishness and pride and envy and impurity and all ungodliness ;—that soul that had been destined for the companionship of God and angels, now ripening for the blackness of darkness for ever ! And can we doubt that His was an anguish at the sight into which no finite mind can enter ? He could feel for external sufferings. He looked up to heaven and sighed for the deaf. He wept, and groaned in spirit for the dead. But what were external suffering and death to this ? To Him the world was strewn with a more awful than material desolation—with the wreck of spiritual grandeur, the memorials of lost and ruined souls. "O my Father," we almost hear Him exclaim, "is *this* the world over which the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy !"

Many reflections of a practical kind might be suggested from the train of thought in which we have now been engaged. All such views of the sufferings of Jesus are, for instance, most obviously suggestive of *gratitude for His marvellous self-devotion on our behalf*. For the views that have been presented to us—of the mysterious foresight and of the ineffable dignity, beneficence, and holiness of this greatest of sufferers—ought surely to convey to our minds a most vivid impression of the intensity of that love He bore for us. The grandeur of the sufferer enhances the value of the sufferings.

The height from which Jesus stooped, the moral glory of His nature, the exquisite purity and serenity of that atmosphere in which He had been accustomed to breathe, render it all the more astonishing that he should submit to descend so low, and so long for our sakes to dwell in the foul region of this world's ungodliness and evil. The most delicate and sensitive being trained from infancy in a home of purity and love, sheltered from the very breath of pollution, and then forced to live in some haunt of iniquity, and among the shameless and abandoned victims of profligacy, would not undergo the transition with such shrinking abhorrence as did Jesus that transition which He voluntarily underwent for us. An angel from the throne of God submitting to dwell amid the blasphemies and wailings of hell would not exhibit a spectacle of voluntary humiliation such as His, who stooped from infinitude to such a world as this. O, believer, what a love was that which braved and endured such humiliation; which bore thy Saviour onwards through such degradation for thee!

And let it vivify this feeling of gratitude still more to reflect on the view that has been before us of the *anticipative* character of all His sufferings. The love of Jesus for His people was no transient feeling. The sufferings and sacrifices He endured were not the effect of some passing impulse of affection. They were not the actions of one who has committed himself to an undertaking without well weighing or knowing the consequences, and who cannot afterwards draw back. He knew before all that His love for you was to cost Him. In His coolest and calmest moments, if we may so

speak, His view of all the horrors of the future were as clear as when on the very point of encountering them ; and His resolution was as firm and deliberate as His knowledge was complete. Human heroism has performed deeds of daring valour in the heat and high excitement of the conflict, from which, had they been foreseen in calmer hours, it would have shrunk dismayed. The voyager will tempt the sea when its waves are calm, and its aspect smiling : could he anticipate the terrors of the storm and the shipwreck, nothing would induce him to embark. But the Lord Jesus, the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world, had before His prescient gaze, amidst the heights of glory, all the darkness of that sea of sorrows through which He must pass, as clearly as when the waters went over his soul : yet was " His love stronger than death—many waters could not quench it." The Lord Jesus foresaw the fearfulness of that last conflict as fully when in His Father's presence He said, " Here am I—send me ;" " Lo, I come to do Thy will, O God ;" as when, in the very article of His agony, confronting the banded powers of earth and hell, " He trode the wine-press alone." " Who shall separate us " from such a love as this ?

Again, is not this subject *fraught with a most solemn warning to all who are living in carelessness or indifference to the spiritual interests of themselves and others?* What more awful intimation could be conveyed to us of the evil of sin, and of the infatuation of those who are indifferent to its fatal consequences, than in the grief and sorrow of Jesus ? If you are conscious of little or no anxiety about the soul and its eternal inter-

ests, consider that you are unconcerned about that which filled the omniscient Saviour with dismay and darkness of spirit. When the veteran in war grows pale at the sight of approaching danger, the inexperienced soldier may well tremble. When the skilful physician looks alarmed at the aspect of the disease, it would ill become the sick man to treat the symptoms with contempt. And when even an omniscient being is overwhelmed with sadness at the contemplation of sin, shall those on whom its fatal consequences must fall remain calm and unaffected? Constantly surrounded by the atmosphere of moral evil, we cannot form a right estimate of its pollution: but Jesus came amongst us from the free bright air of heaven,—from a region, and with a soul habituated to breathe in an element of salubrity and purity. And shall it not convey to us a vivid impression of the foulness of our spiritual state, when we behold Him shrinking with pain and abhorrence from its contact? We cannot see, or estimate adequately, the future results of sin; but this was One who could lift the veil and gaze upon the mysterious secrecies of eternity. We cannot follow the departing sinner in the hour of death, or form the faintest estimate of the consequences of that awful transition; but here was a Being who could look beyond the brink of life, who could not only see in all its inherent repulsiveness the guilt of the sinner in this world, but who, with that eye before which even “hell is naked, and destruction hath no covering,” could gaze upon the tremendous realities that await the sinner in the world to come. And when we conceive Him surveying, on the one hand, the multitudes of giddy,

thoughtless, infatuated beings around Him, engrossed with the affairs of the passing hour, trifling with the grandest concerns in the universe,—gay, sportive, careless, hurrying on to the verge of life ; and then, on the other hand, turning to behold the dread futurity, the awful gulf of ruin flaming forth the hot wrath of the Almighty God against the impenitent,—is there not in this an explanation, that may well appal the sinner, of the compassion, the grief, the yearning expostulations of Jesus? It was an awful testimony to the grandeur of the event that was taking place when, at the death of Jesus, the sun in heaven was darkened, and the solid earth beneath was rent ; but surely it testifies to a still more terrible catastrophe, when the face, not of the sun, but the sun's Creator, is overshadowed,—when, not the material earth is moved, but the spirit of Him who made it is rent with anguish. Oh, believe me, it is impossible for imagination to conceive a more awful measure of the guilt and danger of sin than the grief of Jesus.

But I would suggest, as a final reflection, that such views of the sufferings of Jesus *afford to every penitent soul the strongest encouragement to rely on the Saviour's love.* For, to name but one of several ways in which this inference presents itself, have we not seen that all the sufferings of Jesus were anticipated sufferings, and that He contemplated from the very beginning all the tremendous hardships of the enterprise in which He was to engage? Your salvation, then, was an object which even at such a fearful cost He was willing to seek ; and think you He is less willing to seek it now

—now when all hardships and sorrows are over, and the price of your redemption has been fully paid? Undeterred by anticipated sorrows, undismayed by evils from which every other being in the universe would have shrunk, He gave Himself to win the prize of life eternal for you,—will He, think you, withhold, or be reluctant to bestow that prize upon you now that His pains and toils are ended, now that He has only to speak the word, and it is yours? The salvation of your soul was an end so glorious, that He was willing to reach it though the way to it led through blood, and darkness, and death,—can you entertain any doubt that He is willing to secure it now, when nothing intervenes, when every difficulty has been overcome, when He has but to stretch out the hand of mercy, and the consummation of all His sufferings is attained?

Is there any anxious soul now present, bowed down, it may be, under the sense of its own guilt and hardness and insensibility, so as to be unable to take comfort from the message of mercy? Behold in this your strong consolation! Whatever you are, however deplorable your past guilt, your present coldness and hardness of heart, these did not deter Christ from undertaking all His anticipated sufferings for you,—why should they deter Him from saving you, now that His sufferings are ended for ever? Guilty, impenitent, ungodly though you are, to save you, and such as you, He was willing to endure the awful hiding of His Father's face,—shall He be thought less willing to save you now, when, for every redeemed soul, He anticipates

that face irradiated with the smile of infinite and divine complacency? He sought your salvation, when to gain it He needed to be impoverished—"to be made poor that you might be rich,"—can He be reluctant to secure it now, when every soul that is saved is another jewel added to His mediatorial crown,—another trophy of His glorious victory,—a new "portion of the spoil divided" to Him,—an accession, if that were possible, to the very wealth of heaven?

Away, then, with all such dishonouring doubts and difficulties! Shall the husbandman, for the sake of the harvest, waste his strength, and bear the burden and heat of the day, and then, when the ripe corn tempts the sickle, in very wantonness refuse to reap, and let it be destroyed? Shall the Lord Jesus undertake to suffer for us,—shall He actually toil, and groan, and grieve, and die for us,—and then let the fruit of all His sufferings be lost, and leave us to perish in our sins? No, it cannot be. It is impossible to exaggerate the certainty and freeness of that salvation that is in Christ for all who will but lay hold of it. It is impossible that anything in the universe can lie between you and eternal life, if you but accept it as the "gift of God through Jesus Christ our Lord."

S E R M O N VI.

PARTICIPATION IN THE SUFFERINGS OF CHRIST.

“ Rejoice inasmuch as ye are partakers of the sufferings of Christ.”—
1 *Peter*, iv. 13.

It is strange what a power there is in suffering to unite in deepest intimacy those who have nobly borne it together. No bond of union so close as the bond of common sorrows ; no brotherhood so deep and true as the brotherhood of calamity and misfortune. It would seem as if the affections could never be welded so firmly as when they have been exposed to the fiery solvent of adversity. Perhaps it is that we never so truly understand each other as when great and common trials sound the depths of our nature, and show to each what is in a brother's heart. Or it may be that love is strengthened most of all by the trials and hardships endured for the sake of its object. But whatever be the explanation, there is, we know, a subtle influence in pain and sorrow to knit fellow-sufferers, heart to heart and soul to soul, as no participation in joy and pleasure can ever unite them. The survivors of the wreck who can recall the days and hours of danger and exposure, of

alternating hope and despair, which they bore together ; the remnant of the forlorn hope, who have stood side by side while shot and shell were raining death around them ; or the few brave and true hearts who together have struggled through the protracted and terrible siege, and whose friendship is cemented by a thousand associations of sympathy and endurance,—cannot choose but feel in each other a deeper than common interest. Or if we seek an illustration from the quieter scenes of life, it is probable that the domestic affections never grow so deep and firm as when the inmates of a home have struggled on together through years of poverty and hardship, and can recall, perhaps, in more prosperous days, a long eventful history of common toils and sorrows.

Now, some such thought as this may have been present to the apostle's mind when he congratulated his suffering fellow-Christians on the fact that they were partakers of the sufferings of Christ. Fierce as was "the fiery trial which tried them," it had this blessed consolation, that it brought the sufferers closer to the heart, into more perfect sympathy with the spirit of a suffering Lord. The secret depths of that sorrowing heart they could better understand in virtue of the approximation to His grief which their own hearts had felt, and a fuller appreciation of His ineffable love could be theirs, when by experience they had learnt something of that penalty of suffering and sacrifice which for them He so willingly had paid. Kindred by the holy tie of sorrow, they became thus, as it were, more nearly related to "the man of sorrows, and ac-

quainted with grief." Instead, therefore, of regarding it as a "strange thing" that theirs should be a lot of suffering and trial, it would rather have seemed unnatural had it been otherwise. Strange it would have been had the servants' cup been all sweetness, when the Master's was one of unmingled bitterness—had they moved over a soft and easy path, while He toiled along a road every step of which was agony. Nay, rather, drinking the same cup, would they mingle their tears with His; and over that path, hard and rugged and thorny though it was, would they wish to tread, where the print of His bleeding feet could be discerned before them. And therefore, in one word, did they, because of the deeper sympathy, the more intimate nearness to Jesus which sorrow bestows, rejoice in their participation of His sufferings.

But it is not all kinds of suffering in which we have community with Jesus. There are sorrows, obviously, of which the infinitely pure and holy Saviour could have no experience, and in the endurance of which no man can appropriate the consolation of fellowship with Christ. It might seem, indeed, at first sight, as if *all* sorrow endured by imperfect and guilty beings lay beyond the cognisance and sympathy of Jesus; for into the bitterness of such sorrow sin enters, more or less, as an ingredient. Yet in the chapter preceding that from which the text is taken, the apostle speaks of Christ as "suffering for sin," and comforts the persecuted and sorrowing Christians by the thought that to this very suffering of Christ their sufferings were in some sort analogous. "It is better," he writes, "that

ye suffer in well-doing than in evil-doing ; for Christ also hath once suffered for sins." It is not, of course, to be understood that Christians can, in the full sense of the words, "suffer for sin" as Jesus did. Nevertheless, there is that in all noble and Christian suffering which assimilates the believer to his suffering Lord, and qualifies him to "enter into the fellowship" of Christ's suffering for sin. Let us endeavour, therefore, to find out what sort of suffering for sin is possible to a pure and holy nature. How far may suffering for sin be really noble and worthy? What elements must we eliminate from suffering caused by sin in forming our ideal of suffering purity? It is this question to which, with special reference to the sufferings of Christ, I shall now direct your thoughts ; and I shall do so by considering first, negatively, what Christ could not, and then positively, what He must, as a perfectly pure and holy Being, have "suffered for sins."

1. One element of suffering for sin, and that a most bitter one, of which Christ could have no direct experience, is *conscious guilt*. Wide as the range of its sympathies with the sinful, there is a line beyond which a nature which is itself sinless can never pass. Large-hearted, genial, all-embracing in its charities, the pure spirit of Jesus could yet never go with fallen humanity in its sorrows one step beyond that limit where loathing of sin passes into remorse: Into that dismal region, overshadowed by the gloom of guilt, and where rage the furies of an avenging conscience, He who was "in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin," could never follow us. With whatever

intuitive certainty He read the secrets of human hearts, with whatever yearning compassionateness He blended His soul with their sorrows, there were depths of guilty woe which that noble innocence could never sound. Self-loathing, the loss of self-respect, the sense of personal demerit, the self-disgust of satiated passion, the miserable weariness of a heart in which the capacity but not the desire of impure delight has burned out,—these are the feelings that constitute the most terrible ingredient of the sinner's agony, the most intolerable woes which human heart can feel; and yet these, it is obvious, could never cast their faintest shadow on the heart of the Sinless One. As there is a guilty rapture, so there is a guilty dismay, from all personal experience of which He is, of necessity, excluded. As it were blasphemy to ascribe to Him the joys of gratified ambition, the dark delights of satiated vengeance, or gluttoned avarice, or envy glorying in a rival's, or hatred in a foe's discomfiture,—so equally impious were it to attribute to Jesus the sorrows of wounded pride, or disappointed lust or ambition, the rankling wounds of envy or jealousy, or the unavailing agonies of despair. Whosoever of mortals is in pain, or loneliness, or bereavement, or grief, on the great Consoler he can lean with entirest confidence of sympathy; but whosoever, yielding up his soul to sin, is visited by sin's bitter fruit of guilty sorrow, excludes himself from holy sympathy, averts from him the tenderest, noblest, of mortal hearts, casts off the supporting arm of Jesus, and must suffer alone. With all godly sorrow Jesus sympathises, but He knows nothing, and never

can, "of the sorrow of the world that worketh death."

2. Another element in suffering for sin, of which a perfectly holy nature could have no experience, is a *personal sense of divine wrath*. Conscious guilt, indeed, is but the inward reflection of divine wrath, the shadow of the darkened brow of God cast upon the spirit of man, and the soul that is incapable of the former must be equally exempted from the experience of the latter. Even in this world, dim as are our perceptions of spiritual realities, the latent thought of God's anger—of a personal Majesty of the heavens whom he has incensed, an Infinitely Just and Holy One, whose dread indignation he has incurred—is one terrible ingredient in a wicked man's wretchedness. And how much more terrible this element of suffering in that world where spiritual things are seen and felt in their real magnitude. Before even a fellow man's indignation the guilty spirit sometimes cowers in terror. It is dreadful for detected impurity to meet the eye of a revered parent or friend, with all the shame of discovered sin fresh upon it. The craven heart of sin shrinks from the presence of even earthly goodness, and will sometimes seek the suicide's refuge rather than encounter man's contempt and indignation. But man's anger, the indignation against sin of earthly goodness, is but the imperfect reflection of God's. Who can tell what it is to go forth into a drear eternity, to meet the awful front of incensed Justice—to stand a guilty thing surprised, in shivering nakedness and shame, before the flashing eye of God! But this obviously is a sorrow

altogether alien to Christ's experience, a woe which God's dear Son could never feel. God could never dislike or be displeased with Christ, nor was it possible for that Divine Innocence to experience for a moment the terrible feeling of guilt cowering beneath God's anger. There is a sense, doubtless, in which it may be averred of Christ, that for His redeemed, and by mysterious implication of His being with theirs, He bore God's wrath; yet must we ever exclude from our minds any notion implying that Christ could think of God as indignant at Him. There was no wrath going forth against Him in those dreadful scenes amidst which a world's iniquities were pressing most heavily upon Him,—nay, rather, it was then, in the very midst of His agony for sin, that God approved of Him the most. Behind the gloom of the cross the radiant smile of divine complacency was beaming brightest. And Jesus knew and felt that it was. He passed to His sufferings with expressions of tenderest reliance, of yearning confidence in the Father's love; in the very article of His agony He felt and said that He was doing that which was the Father's will; and on the cross, though human pain and weakness seem for a moment to have beclouded His spirit with a sense of forsakenness, yet even then His words breathed unwavering confidence in God's love and favour—the yearning, clinging, confiding tenderness of a heart that knows itself to be loved, and incapable of being deserted. “*My God! My God!*” was still His cry; and His passing spirit He breathed away into the Father's arms, with indestructible consciousness of a divine love and care embracing

Him—"Father, into Thy hands I commend my spirit!" No! beneath all the outer perturbation of His history there was a deep abiding peace—the peace of innocence, the imperturbable quiet of conscious purity resting in the everlasting arms. Betwixt the experience of a guilty soul writhing under the frown of God, and His, even in His darkest hour of sorrow, there is an impassable gulf.

3. Nor, finally, though Christ "tasted of death for every man," could He ever experience personally that which constitutes to the sinner the very bitterness of death—the *fear of what comes after death*. If death were a mere sleep, a sinking into unconsciousness, its aspect to the guilty would be deprived of half its terror. The mere pain of dying is often far less than the pain of living. But it is because sin projects the shadow of its own fear into the future, because guilty deeds have sent on witnesses to wait him beyond the grave, that the wicked man dreads to die. Take away all fear of what comes after death, and most men would meet it calmly; but it is the thought that they go, they know not whither, into a world all strange, portentous, unknown; it is the mystery, the gloom, the uncertainty, the dim and dismal prevision of evil, all the more alarming that it is indistinct—it is this that makes death terrible. But into the dying sorrow of the sinner's Substitute this element of suffering could not enter. The dying hour of Jesus was disturbed by no fear of what awaited Him beyond the grave. There was to Him no brooding doubt, no uncertainty, no alarm hanging over the unseen world. He was not

torn by the relentless hand from a world to which He clung, to one from which His trembling soul turned away—driven, struggling, shuddering, reluctant, over the brink of life into darkness and despair. On the contrary, death to Jesus was an escape from protracted banishment to endless and unutterable union with His Father. It was the passing from a world in which all had been to Him toil and weariness and woe, to one on which the sweet memories of an eternity of joy were resting. Death to Jesus, in one word, was but a going home. “If ye loved Me,” were His parting words, “ye would rejoice because I go to my Father.” “I go to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.” “To-day,” was His promise to the companion of His agony, while a dawning heaven was breaking on His death-dimmed eye—“To-day shalt thou be with Me in Paradise.” Therefore, again, we conclude that of this element of suffering for sin Jesus could never have any personal experience.

II. I now go on to inquire what kind of suffering for sin may be conceived of as noble and worthy, and so not impossible to a pure and holy nature. Sin, though alien from the experience of a Being such as Christ, may yet be to Him the occasion or the cause of bitter pain and sorrow. There are indeed pangs of inward anguish on account of sin, which, in all their intensity, only such a Being can know. And it is only in proportion as our inner nature is refined into an approximate purity to Christ’s that we can with reference to these become “partakers of Christ’s sufferings.”

Amongst these kinds of suffering I notice, first, *that which a pure and holy nature must feel from the mere contiguity of evil.* In the accomplishment of His mission, it was necessary that He, the all-holy One, hating sin with an intensity of abhorrence of which our imperfect minds can form no adequate estimate, should become an inmate of our world, and dwell for many years in contact with its moral deformity and pollution. And this in itself—the mere spectacle of sin, the life-long contact of the sinless with the vile—implied on His part bitter suffering. To this element of Christ's sufferings I have adverted in a preceding discourse, as contributing to that loneliness of spirit which ever marked His earthly history. But, considered from another point of view, it is this very recoil of His pure heart from surrounding moral evil, this anguish of His soul in the inevitable contact with sin, which opens up to every Christian mind a medium of profoundest sympathy with the mind of Jesus. For more and more, as we grow like to Jesus, will our perception of the loathsomeness of evil be quickened, more and more will we shrink with sympathetic sensitiveness from the foul contiguity of sin, and so, in our painful oppression amidst the fetid moral atmosphere of the world, will we become, in an ever-increasing measure, participants in the sufferings of our Lord.

To man or woman of pure mind and tender conscience it would be intolerable to be forced to read through an obscene book; what agony of mind then—what pain and distress of spirit more unendurable than sharpest bodily tortures—would be involved in a

similar life-long contact with sin, not recorded merely, but hideously displayed in act ! But such an imaginable case as this can only partially help us to conceive of the condition of Jesus in a sin-polluted world. For not only was His purity infinitely more sensitive and abhorrent of evil than that of the purest of common men, but His cognisance of the world's evil was far more keen and comprehensive. His very presence roused the spirit of sin that pervaded the world, into more violent and frightful manifestation. In hatred of Him, the foulest passions in man's breast displayed all their hatefulness. The hell of malice and revenge that is in the fallen spirit of man showed itself openly and horribly before Him. In that most terrible crime in history of which He was at once the witness and the victim, sin reached its climax. Moreover, as was formerly said, He had a mind large enough to take in at one view the whole combined wickedness of humanity, and He saw sin not only in outward act, but in the hidden source of evil, the heart of man. No soft veil of conventionality disguised sin from His penetrating eye. No illusion of words and forms and professions subdued, before the glance of Incarnate Truth, the unsightliness of hypocrisy and vice. Wherever and in whatsoever guise sin was, He saw it. It was to Him as if the mask were torn off, and a skeleton face revealed in all its hideousness—as if a flower-strewn bank was laid open, and a nest of serpents disclosed beneath. With a nature formed and habituated to breathe the air of heaven's eternal purity, He dwelt amidst the charnel-house loathsomeness and corruption

of evil. And for this very reason, that He was Himself without the faintest personal implication in sin, He suffered from contact with it an agony all the more acute.

2. Another element of Christ's suffering for sin, in which, as we grow in kindred purity of nature, we shall learn to participate, is—*The reflected or borrowed shame and pain which noble natures feel for the sins of those with whom they are closely connected.* Christ was not a mere spectator of the world's sin, He was deeply implicated in the fortunes of the guilty, related to them by the closest ties of kindred and affection. And it is easy to see that this fact introduces a new element into our conception of His sufferings. For though deeds of sin and shame be always revolting to a pure-minded man, the spectacle becomes immeasurably more distressing when it is the sin and shame of one who is related to him by the ties of blood or friendship. There is a borrowed humiliation which we feel from the sins of those who are dear to us; there is a keen and cruel pain which pierces a good and generous heart in the contemplation of a brother's wickedness, and which is second only, and in some respects not second, to the agony of personal guilt. It is strange what subtle bonds may blend our being with the being of another, by what mysterious chords soul may be knit to soul, till not only one heart may vibrate spontaneously to another's joy or sorrow, but may feel an almost personal moral sensitiveness in another's righteousness or guilt. Reflect, for instance, on the distress and shame which a husband may feel for a

wife's, a wife for a husband's, dishonour. Or consider how close to conscious guilt is the agony of a good and holy father for the detected infamy of a child. There is a sort of organic unity in a family, so that no member of it can rise or fall, be honoured or disgraced, without implicating the rest. Bearing a deep attachment to the erring one, bound to him by the closest ties of blood and kindred, and by the deeper more mysterious affinities that connect spirit with spirit, and propagate character to character,—the natural relationship, moreover, confirmed by a thousand tendrils of memory, a thousand hallowed associations clasping soul to soul till affinity has become almost identity of being,—think what that father's feeling would be if his child should go wrong—if, after all his anxious care and watchful discipline, that child, perhaps his hope, his pride, his darling, should sink into impurity, and bring dishonour on a stainless name. The father, though himself innocent, though not literally guilty of the child's sin, would become relatively partaker of it; he would have an impression as if the ignominy and shame were overflowing on himself;—nay, he would be stung by an anguish in some respects more poignant than if the sin had been his own. The very fact that the child was capable of the guilty deed implies a weaker sense of its heinousness; and, on the other hand, the very fact that the parent is one who himself shrinks with loathing from foul and dishonourable actions, is the indication in him of a sensitiveness of conscience which must render his perception of the sin all the more distressing.

The bearing of these principles on the case before us is obvious. Christ is our friend. He took upon Him our very nature. We are bone of His bone and flesh of His flesh—nay, if we may so speak, more than that, spirit of His spirit, heart of His heart. “Forasmuch as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, He likewise took part of the same.” “In all things it behoved Him to be made like unto His brethren.” No earthly relationship so close, so deep, so real; no human affection so tender, so ardent, as that of Christ to His own. The most intimate of mortal unions is but the type and symbol of the union of Jesus and His redeemed. He blends and interfuses His pure Spirit with the common spirit of the race which He came to save, in such communion of feeling that there is but a step betwixt it and identity of being. Nothing that happens to us is indifferent to Him. Our minutest pain or grief thrills up to His mighty heart, our sins oppress His Spirit with an almost personal weight of woe. “He Himself takes our infirmities, and bears our sicknesses;” and in this, as in other senses, “our iniquities are laid upon Him.” More deeply and painfully than ever husband for a wife’s dishonour, or parent for the ruin of a beloved child, He feels grieved, humiliated, overwhelmed as with conscious infamy and guilt, by our sins. And the ineffable purity and holiness of His own nature, the intense acuteness of His moral perceptions, render it a more terrible thing to Him to be bound so intimately to the guilty and polluted. It is a connection with infamy from which He cannot free Himself, and yet which to that noble heart of purity

is all but unendurable. It is Innocence wedded to Vice, Purity tied to Pollution, a living man bound inseparably to a loathsome corpse. We see, therefore, in this implication of His being with the being of the guilty, another way in which Christ suffered for sin.

3. Once more, Christ suffered for sin, not only as bearing relatively its guilt, but also *as its victim*. In the persons of those He loved, sin transmitted to Him a borrowed humiliation ; but it hurt Him more deeply than thus, for it rose up against Him, to hate and assail and destroy Him. And this to such a nature as His was the saddest thing of all. It was not he pain and contumely, the loneliness, desertion, hostility, the manifold injuries and wrongs He endured on earth, that most keenly hurt Him, but it was the fact that these injuries were inflicted by the hands of those whom He loved so dearly. The wound itself was sharp, but there was a poison of ingratitude on the weapon that made it harder far to bear. Even to our feebler affections there is no pain that can compare with the pain of rejected love, or of injury and insult endured at the hands of those to whom our hearts cling. The unkindness of a friend or brother, the unfaithfulness or harshness of a husband or wife, to whom we still turn with yearning fondness—such offences, humiliating to a good and gentle spirit even when it is only the witness, become tenfold more distressing when it is itself the injured object of them. You remember with what inimitable pathos the great dramatist depicts the character and history of a generous kind-hearted old man suffering cruel wrong and ingratitude at the

hands of his daughters. With what infinite truth and tenderness is the progress of feeling delineated in the injured man's breast! At first the old man is represented as struck with astonishment, and as all but incredulous of the possibility of unkindness at the hands of those whom he loved so tenderly, and to whom he had surrendered his earthly all. Then as the proofs of ingratitude multiply, and can no longer be misconstrued, we see him, stung with the terrible wrong, bursting forth for a while into uncontrollable fits of indignation, flying forth to brave the wild war of the elements unconscious of their fury, or finding in it a strange consolation for the wilder tumult of sorrow and anger within his breast. Then as that phase of feeling passes off, as passion spends itself, and he is left free to brood over his wrongs, the mind begins to totter under the weight of woe that burdens it;—then misery and despair issue in madness—and then a broken heart—and then the grave.

But neither in the realms of fiction or of fact can we find any parallel to that saddest, strangest story of ingratitude, in which it is told how Incarnate Love was rejected at the hands of men. "He came to His own, and His own received Him not." They whom He came to save "hid, as it were, their faces from Him; He was despised, and they esteemed Him not." Had He come with anger on His countenance, and weapons of vengeance in His hands, His reception could not have been worse. But He came "not to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved." He came, love on His lip, and gifts of benign

nity in His hands. He went forth amongst men to heal and comfort and bless. Wherever He went, beneficence streamed out from Him on every side. No toil, or hardship, or weariness, or want, could damp His ardour, or interrupt His ministry of love—the self-forgetting, self-devoted, universal Benefactor. And for all this the only return He asked was—love. For food, healing, life—for pardon, purity, peace—for countless earthly blessings, and for a blessing transcending them far as heaven transcends earth—eternal mercy laid at every guilty, dying sinner's feet,—for all this, all He wanted, or asked, or cared for, was only that men would love Him, open their hearts, yield up their affection to Him, their divinest friend. But all in vain! With but slight exceptions, all He got was coldness, hard-heartedness, disdain. Stern looks, unkind acts, met Him wherever He went. He looked for some to pity Him, but He found none. His very kindred turned against Him. A few poor men, touched by His heavenly words, drew towards Him for a little; but as the toils of the hunters gathered closer round this pure and gentle One, even they forsook Him and fled—left Him to face His pursuers, to suffer, and to die, alone. What wonder if, with that heart of His yearning for sympathy, incapable of life without love, craving for affection with a longing which earthly heart has never known,—condescending to the lowliest, not rejecting the most worthless, nay, welcoming the penitent tenderness of foulest sinners,—having no happiness but in the recovered love of human souls to God in Him,—what wonder if at last His mortal strength

gave way, and not by bodily wounds alone, not by the scourging, the nails, the spear, but by the most piteous death that mortals know—by a broken heart, He died ! Surely He who thus died, beyond all men, suffered for sins.

Such, then, are some of those kinds of suffering on account of sin which are the signs of a true nobleness of nature, and in which it is not the shame but the glory of a man to participate. In the expiatory sufferings of Christ for sin it may be impossible for any follower of His to share, though even with regard to these there is a sense in which the sorrows of Christians are but a perpetuation of the great sacrifice ; for in every act of self-denial for the world's good, they are "filling up that which is behind of the sufferings of Christ." But whatever isolation may characterise our Lord's suffering for sin, contemplated in this aspect, there are other views of it in which the disciple may be regarded as entering into fullest communion with the Master. Believing in Him who is the only propitiation for the sins of the world, you are not only delivered from guilt, but brought into such sympathy with the heart of the Great Sufferer, that you regard sin with feelings that are the reflection of His own. You "know Him and the fellowship of His sufferings, being made conformable unto His death." "Rejoice," then, if thus "ye are partakers of the sufferings of Christ." "Rejoice" in the simple fact that you suffer with Jesus ; for to be near Him in suffering is a nobler privilege than to be with other men in joy. Even earthly affection has taught us how possible it is for a

loving heart to prefer poverty and hardship with some, to all the softness and splendour of life with others ; and how there may be a deeper, richer joy in sharing the sternness and ruggedness of the lot of one whom we devotedly love and honour, than in all the superficial delights of a selfish and sensual existence. And if that sentiment of mingled love and reverence and adoration, the profoundest of which the heart of man is capable—if devotion to Jesus possess your secret soul, then will you experience something of that strange sweet joy in sorrow, that bliss of woe with which martyr spirits have often welcomed the cross. For exaggerated though sometimes it may have been, it was often no unnatural and unreal feeling which throbbed of old in the hearts, and fired with a strange exultation the eyes of dying men, and which drew from dying lips the cry, "Welcome pain ! welcome the cross ! welcome dark death ! for it is my glory to bear them, O my Saviour, with Thee !"

"Rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings," for such suffering for sin as that of which we have spoken is the badge of a Christ-like nature, the proof of a spirit akin to His. Gladness is not the truest sign of a noble nature in such a world as this. There is a sadness that rises from a deeper source in man's nature than the light sparkle of superficial joy. There is a profound melancholy more enviable than rapturous delight. There are tears that sometimes spring "from the depths of a divine despair." In the contemplation of evil, the sight of the suffering and strife and wretchedness and wrong, which oppressed

the Saviour's soul, what but a superficial nature can be selfishly joyous? There is enough of sorrow and sin, surely, still left in the world to make a thoughtful mind no stranger to that grief which hung like a perpetual shadow over the spirit of Jesus. Beholding the desolation and ruin of souls, what man who loves his brother can remain unvisited by that agony of love and pity which broke the heart of Christ? A child will sport with thoughtless levity over graves, where man's deeper nature will stand in reverent awe and contemplation; but it is better to be sad with the wise man, than merry with the child. There are men so vain and superficial, or so hard and selfish, that, leave them but their animal enjoyment, let them alone in their epicurean sloth and selfishness, and the moral ruin of a world would fail to move them; but who would not rather weep with Jesus than be dry-eyed with these!

“Rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of the sufferings of Christ,” for if yours be His sorrows, yours also shall be His joys. “When His glory shall be revealed, ye shall be glad also with exceeding joy.” “If we suffer, we shall also reign with Him.” “If so be that we suffer with Him, we shall be also glorified together.” Your capacity of holy suffering is the proof and the measure of a capacity of holy joy. The ear that is most pained by discordance, knows best the pleasure of sweet sounds. The heart which enmity or estrangement wounds the deepest has ever the most exquisite susceptibility to love; and the oppression and sadness of the spirit amidst a world of imperfection and evil, is the silent prophecy and the sure criterion of that joy

unutterable which awaits it in a world where the triumph of truth and goodness shall be complete. If inevitable contiguity with sin distress you, estimate by your present pain the blessedness of that glorious future when you shall breathe the atmosphere of unmingled love and purity, when sin shall be a thing forgotten, or remembered only to enhance the deep joy of eternal good. If here, with the world's best Benefactor, your heart bleeds with an almost personal sense of injury for the souls in which sin is working bitter wrong, anticipate the exultation of that coming era when you shall company with none but the good, when spirits redeemed from sin, bright with ineffable purity, shall be your perpetual associates; and when you and they—light in every mind, love in every heart—shall wander side by side with Jesus amid the sun-bright expanses of eternity. If here, oppressed with “the bondage of corruption,” you sigh with the indignant impatience of the captive for the emancipation of the world from evil, conceive the rapture of that hour which the rapid years are hastening on, when the captivity of sin shall cease for ever, and you shall leap forth to liberty!

SERMON VII.

SPIRITUAL REST.

“Return unto thy rest, O my soul!”—*Psalm cxvi. 7.*

THE blessings of religion are often represented in Scripture as comprehended under the idea of “Rest,” and the rise of the religious consciousness, the stirrings of spiritual anxiety and aspiration, as the instinctive yearning of the soul after its true rest in God. Moreover, we are taught to conceive of this rest, not as a new and arbitrary gift to man, but as that which is, in some respects, the soul’s ancient and original heritage. Religion is to be regarded, not as an acquisition, but as a restoration—not as the gaining of a new friend or home, but as the recovery of a lost Father—the going back to a former home hallowed by ancient memories, and reviving in the heart a thousand dormant associations. “I will arise and go unto my Father.” “Return unto the Lord thy God, for thou hast fallen by thine iniquity.” “Return unto thy rest, O my soul!”

Now it is this thought which furnishes the true explanation at once of the soul’s misery and restless-

ness in sin, and of that repose and peace which it finds in reconciliation to God. For the deepest unrest is ever that of things or beings in an unnatural or distorted condition—the unrest of aberration from a proper place or course, and so, of interrupted harmony and equipoise. The restless streams and brooks fret their mountain channels till they reach their proper depths in river or sea; and the waves of the sea itself, disturbed by the storm, heave and sway themselves to rest in their natural and common level again. The thunderstorm is but the voice of Nature's unrest, when the balance and equipoise of her elements are disturbed, and she seeks to regain the wonted repose of harmony and law. And so, in the moral world, the disquietude, dissatisfaction, restlessness of the ungodly, finds its interpretation in nothing so much as this, that in sin the soul is in an unnatural state. For although to fallen man sin has become a second nature, it is never to be forgotten that the make and structure of his being is not for sin, but for holiness. The original type of humanity is to be found in God. The normal condition of the spirit of man is one of holy union and communion with Deity. And in the feverish desires, the fretting cares and toils and hopes and anxieties of life, we may hear the unconscious murmurings of a nature that has lost its true level, and is seeking it in vain; or in the wilder storms of human passion that sometimes burst forth, the intimation that in disunion from God the elements of our being are in fearful dis-harmony among themselves. Had man been born only for the things of time and sense, he had been

content and happy amidst them. The crawling worm is haunted by no reminiscence of the skies, nor is the born-beggar's heart embittered by the recollection of better days. But to man, ill at ease and consciously degraded in sin, the essence of his misery is the latent conviction that he has fallen beneath himself. It is possible, indeed, for the sinful soul to reach a false and spurious rest, to sink into the unreal tranquillity of hardened impenitence, in which evil becomes its good. But so long as the soul has not sunk thus low, so long as it cannot be quite at peace in sin, its very restlessness and misery are at once the tradition of a nobler and happier past, and the prophecy of a possible future nobler and happier still.

In this thought, moreover, we have the secret, not only of the soul's unrest in sin, but also of that true rest in God of which the text speaks ; for it is the rest of a being who has found again his proper and congenial sphere. Restored to God, man's nature is restored to harmony with itself, regains a condition in which all its faculties find full scope and fitting object, and each in perfect unison with the rest. Its noblest powers of thought, its deep and insatiable affections, its boundless moral energies, its cravings for a higher truth, aspirations after a purer good, and visions of a beauty fairer than earthly and finite things disclose—all find their one grand, all-absorbing, all-harmonising object in Him who is the alone Infinitely True and Holy and Fair. In reconciliation to God through Christ Jesus the soul regains its lost equilibrium, finds again the centre of repose for which it had been sighing

in vain. What sensual pleasure, wealth, ease, honour, power, the applause of men—what even intellectual pursuits, and the domestic and social charities of life, fail to bestow, or bestow for the moment only to stimulate the thirst they seem to quench, in the ineffable sense of union with God the soul finds at last—rest, satisfaction, perfect peace. “Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden,” is the invitation of Incarnate Love, “and I will give you rest.” And in the soul that yields to this invitation there rises the response of its deepest nature, the instinctive throb of a new yet natural affection, the calm sense of existence fulfilled, and unexplained hope and desire solved in fruition—the witness in its own inmost consciousness that its true rest is found at last. “Return unto thy rest, O my soul !”

Such, then, is the “rest” which true religion bestows. Let us meditate for a little on some of the qualities or characteristics of this rest, which lend to it a peculiar value and blessedness.

1. The “rest,” then, of which the text speaks, is, for one thing, *not bodily or physical*, but *mental or spiritual rest*. Physical repose, indeed, is one of the great and ever-recurring necessities of our nature, and it is strange to reflect how very much of the outward happiness of life is to be traced to it. When the physical energies have been tasked to the utmost, there is, as we know, a strange pleasure attached to the mere cessation of toil. How sweet and soothing the sensation of rest that steals over the bodily frame when the strained muscle is relaxed, and the nerves are unstrung,

and the will flings loose the reins of control over the active powers, and every limb and joint and fibre are bathed in repose! Who has not often felt the luxury of listlessness, the pleasing pain of languor, in the quiet evening hours that succeed to a day of hard, fatiguing work, when the very order of nature—her fading light, and gathering stillness, and tranquil solemnity of aspect—seem to minister to the instinct of repose which all living creatures feel? And then how manifold the benefits conferred on man by God's gift of sleep! How strangely potent the cordial which it pours into the exhausted frame, and from which the worn powers daily drink in new strength and elasticity! What a boon to many the mere bliss of unconsciousness, the periodic escape from self, the flight from toil and care and weariness, when we cross the bridge that separates the wakeful working world from the shadowy world of dreams! Surely not unworthy of infinite beneficence is that gift of which it is written, "He giveth His beloved sleep." And so again, not unnatural, however mistaken, is that half-sentimental dream of heaven, in which hearts, wearied with the conflicts and confusions of the world, have sometimes unconsciously reflected their own wistful yearnings after deliverance and rest—the vision of some land of serene and sheltered stillness, of unbroken and imperturbable calm, where the echo of the world's strife shall fall no more upon the ear, and happy spirits, emancipated from care and toil, steeped in everlasting oblivion of pain and sorrow, shall summer high in bliss upon the hills of God.

But there is a nobler rest than this. Physical re-

pose, however sweet, however salutary, is but the feeble type of that truer rest to which the text refers—a rest sweeter than sleep, deeper than death, and more pure in its unselfish calmness than the heaven which sentiment or poetry has pictured. When doubt and disbelief are gone, when the object of life is found in Christ, when God becomes the sure portion and sweetest joy of the heart, and the spirit within us, hitherto, it may be, groping bewildered amidst earthly hopes and pleasures, like one in the dark for the friendly hand, feels itself at last embraced in the sure grasp of strong and changeless love—then is the true rest of man, the stillness of the weary spirit in the everlasting arms. And by how much this is the nobler kind of rest you will not fail to perceive, if you reflect that, appertaining to the higher and nobler part of man's being, it is only repose which is independent of outward circumstances. Bodily repose reaches not to the true centre of man's peace. It is a blessing, whose domain is but a limited one, and continually exposed to invasion. But mental repose intrenches itself in the deepest region of man's nature, and renders him impregnable to outward assault. Stretch the body in luxurious ease, free it from pain and toil, smooth away every crease from the couch of its composure, yet, if the heart within be weary and anxious, the conscience disturbed, or the imagination unsettled, it is a very truism to say that in such a case there is no real rest. Bodily tranquillity becomes unfelt and unenjoyed in the deeper trouble that shakes the spirit. But, on the other hand, over bodily distractions a mind that is

deeply tranquil asserts its superiority. Calm and steady burns the guarded light of holy peace, even amid the gusts and storms of outward fortune. To many a troubled couch the Spirit of God has come in visitations of unearthly peace. On the cheek wasted by disease, or on the pale and pain-contracted brow, has not seldom been witnessed the calmness of a heavenly rest; and from lips quivering with anguish have fallen words of meek resignation, and even joyful hope, that told how the peace of the spirit can triumph over outward pain. Nor only is this the most independent, it is also the most constant and enduring rest. Physical repose can only be periodic. The enjoyment of bodily rest must be purchased by ever-recurring intervals of exertion. Continuous inaction becomes more unendurable than labour; the pain of effort and toil less irksome than the pain of unvaried and inglorious ease. Moreover, were it possible to prolong the sweets of physical repose through a lifetime, it is a repose which soon, at the latest, must be rudely broken. Could a man shut out all causes of mental disquietude, and pass life in one continuous dream of selfish ease, the hour is coming in which he can sleep no more. Death is no dreamless slumber; to the self-indulgent and the sensual it is rather the waking up of the soul to the awful burden of neglected responsibilities. The rest of the soul, on the contrary, is essentially continuous. It needs no intervals of unrest to sweeten its enjoyment. It never ceases, and never satiates. It is not the occasional refreshment, but the ever-flowing current of the inner life: "Thy peace shall be as a river, and thy

righteousness as the waves of the sea." Even amidst the outer toil and distraction of the world, it is "the peace of God which keepeth the heart and mind." Nor does death, which disunites and disturbs all else, for a moment interrupt its continuity: for the rest of the soul in Christ is identical with the rest of heaven—"the rest which remaineth for the people of God." Or if that differ from this, it is only in degree, not in kind; and the repose of the glorified succeeds to the peace of the faithful on earth, just as the rest of a child borne in loving arms on a journey, becomes only a little deeper and less disturbed when it sleeps on in the same arms at home.

2. The "Rest" of which the psalmist speaks may be described, again, as *the Rest, not of Immobility, but of Equipoise.*

There is in nature a kind of rest which is to be ascribed to the mere absence of force—the rest of immobility or inertia. There is another kind of rest which is the result of the highest exercise of force—the rest of balance, equipoise, of action and reaction. So in the soul there is a rest of torpor, when the inert intellect rusts, the unexercised affections stiffen into selfishness, and the will, long unused to effort, becomes enervated. And, on the other hand, there is another and nobler kind of mental and spiritual rest which is not the negation of effort, but the seemingly negative result of the highest positive exercise of inward power. It may, indeed, consist with the intensest outward activity; but even where there is no apparent activity, the very stillness, calmness, repose of the spirit, may be the result of the

inward action of powers working in fullest energy, yet with a mutual balance and harmony so perfect as to seem to the superficial observer identical with absolute immobility. It is but a vulgar error to measure force, physical or mental, only by motion, stir, outward activity. As much or greater power may be at work to produce stillness, as is manifested by the most violent outward commotion. Repose, as the commonest examples prove, may be the high and difficult result of manifold powers in constant operation, combining, modifying, blending, balancing each other's effects. When two equal and opposite forces, to take the simplest case, strain at a bar of iron, the combined force employed may be enough to hurl a heavy missile with an arrow's speed; yet the result is stillness, rest. The pressure of the atmosphere on our bodily frames is, we know, sufficient in itself to tear us limb from limb; yet, because of the counterbalancing force that meets it, we move and act unconscious of its existence. In the air we breathe, in the water of the stillest lake or sea, there is no stillness of mere inertia, but beneath the outer semblance of repose there is the activity of attractive and repellent forces ever with well-matched power striving against, but gaining no advantage over each other. And all around us, in the natural world, mighty agencies are at work, which, if any one or more of them were left to act unresisted, or if the balance that subsists between them were ever so slightly disturbed, might break forth in the most terrible conflict of nature's element; yet are these agencies, in their infinitely diversified character and endless complexity of opera-

tions, combined in such exquisite proportions, adjusted in such perfect equilibrium, that the result is the order, harmony, repose of nature—the grand rest of the material universe.

Now, analogous to this is that “rest” of the soul on which we are now reflecting. For in the repose of a saintly spirit there is latent power. The calmness, the peace, the holy tranquillity that sometimes breathes over a matured Christian’s mind, has in it nothing in common with mere listless inaction; it is rather the last result and highest expression of mighty and heavenly energies at work within the breast. In the inner world, not less than in the outer, there are counteracting or conflicting elements that require, for the preservation of order and harmony, the maintenance of the most perfect balance amongst them; and it is to the disturbance of this balance—to the restlessness of an ill-regulated, or the wilder disorder of an ungoverned spirit, that the misery of man is greatly to be traced. Even in this world, kept in check though the lawless and discordant elements of our nature may be by a thousand incidental causes, there is yet enough in the experience of every sinful heart to prove that, estranged from God, the ruling and harmonising principle of our inner being is lost. How little of unity or consistency is there in the lives of most men! How very many are the mere creatures of impulse—of fitful inclinations and unrestrained desires chasing each other over the restless surface of the spirit! What account, again, can we give of the fretful wayward tempers perpetually disturbing the inward composure of some, or of the

wilder excesses of passion that desolate for ever the peace of others? Or how, in fine, explain the constant strife that is going on, with more or less vehemence, in most minds—between reason and inclination, conscience and passion, the higher and nobler law of our being and the law in the members that warreth against the law in the mind? How, but that the controlling power that alone can give order, equipoise, unity, to the inner world, has become paralysed or enfeebled. And if it be so even with all the adventitious restraints of the present life, who can tell what fearful manifestations of the evil that is in the heart of man may await the godless soul in that world where all restraint is gone? There are latent destructive energies, possibilities of wrong and wretchedness, in every sinful breast, which here only rarely display themselves, and at which we can but dimly guess.

Now the rest of the believer is the return of the soul to harmony with itself. The inward repose which, sooner or later, true religion brings, is the result of the final conquest and subjugation of man's lower nature. It indicates the presence of a new principle of order, the introduction of a new element of harmony and coherence among the wayward powers of the soul. The peace of the holy mind is the peace, not of stagnation, but of self-conquest. Its intensity, therefore, the amount of moral force that is in it, is to be measured, not by what it displays, but by what it implies—by the strength of those evil passions which have been subdued, by the impetuosity of those appetites which have been mastered, by the repellent energy of those

powers of man's nature which have been reconciled. The calm and resistless power of Law can be gauged only by the chaos of seemingly conflicting elements out of which it educes harmony and peace. So, how much moral power does that calmness and quietude of a saintly spirit often bespeak! Under the tranquil simplicity of a meek and humble mind, what unrelaxing self-restraint, what restless vigilance, what stern repression of vain thoughts, ambitious longings, selfish, or envious, or unamiable feelings—what mightier than earthly power and energy may be present, though hid from outward observation. Estimate actions not by their overt results merely, but by the real though latent power that is implied in them, and the most brilliant deeds of outward heroism will sometimes fall far short of those quiet victories over self, to which the Omniscient eye alone is witness.

This process of self-subjugation, it is true, may be by no means an instantaneous or rapid one. The first and immediate effect of the soul's return to God is often very different from that repose and calmness of which we have spoken. For just as returning bodily health may first be indicated by the racking pains of convalescence in the sick man's frame, or as the fearful strife and carnage of revolution may be the earliest intimation of a reviving spirit of social freedom, so He whose kingdom is righteousness and peace may usher in its advent by "sending not peace, but a sword." The rise of religion in the heart may be indicated by the bitter pangs of an awakened conscience, and by the painful struggle of spirit with sense, of the reviving element

of moral freedom with the old and inveterate tyranny of sin in the soul. And it may only be by a long-protracted process of holy discipline—by many a weary hour of inward conflict, fainting, striving, falling, reviving, yet ever, on the whole, growing in conformity to the will of God—that the soul attains at last to the complete mastery over self, the perfect inward harmony of a spirit in which every thought and feeling and desire are “brought into captivity to the obedience of Christ.” But when that glorious end is gained, when self is quelled, and duty reigns supreme within the breast, when “the immortal soul becomes consistent in self-rule”—then the “weary strife of frail humanity” is at an end, and a repose—oh how deep, how tranquil, how sublime!—diffuses itself throughout the spirit—a repose in which there is at once calmness and power, the sweet serenity of an infant’s slumbers, yet the strength of an angel of God.

3. It is but a further development of the same thought to say, once more, that the true “Rest” of the soul is that, *not of Inactivity, but of Congenial Exertion.*

Labour is rest to the active and energetic spirit. To not a few minds, congenial activity, eager, absorbing, all but incessant, is the element in which they find repose. And the ardent and enthusiastic soul, conscious of power, and delighting in work that calls it forth, will sometimes seem to enjoy perfect serenity only in the whirl of occupation, as the bird on the wing, in the flow of joyous strength, while it cleaves the air at fullest speed, yet seems as if at rest, poised on its outspread pinions.


For it is to be remembered that the toil that is unfelt is no toil ; and the exercise of the mind's faculties on congenial objects, is not only unaccompanied by any irksome sense of toil, but is attended, and probably, were it not for the necessity of using gross material organs, would ever continue to be attended, with positive delight. Fatigue, waste, exhaustion, belong only to matter and material organisation. The mind itself does not waste or grow weary, and but for the weight of the weapons wherewith it works, it might think, and imagine, and love on for ever. Even with all its present drawbacks, a spirit of great power and energy, so far from resting, frets and feels ill at ease in inactivity. To it inaction is unrest and torture—no work so hard as doing nothing. Only in the putting forth of its energies, in the evolution of its inward power, in the devotion of thought and feeling to congenial pursuits, does it find itself tranquil, unburdened, at rest. That congenial activity is not work, but rest, a thousand familiar examples prove. Relaxation or amusement, to take an obvious one, is often, considered in the mere form of it, very hard work. Yet it is no work. So long as the bodily faculties bear the strain, what might otherwise be the most exhausting toil, becomes, by reason of the stimulus of inward delight, recreation, refreshment, rest to the spirit. So again, the mental activity of the student, whether in apprehending or excogitating thought, is not felt to be labour, if it be spent on a subject in which the mind is intensely interested. There is no work that has so little of the sense of work in it, as successful thought on a con-

genial theme. Let but the supply of nervous excitement continue unexhausted, and on the free-flowing stream of thought the mind might float on for ever in uninterrupted activity, yet in perfect repose. Once more, the work of the painter or the musician enthusiastically devoted to his art, is work from which the sense of effort is gone. Not to work while the mind and heart are full—to suffer the glowing conception to pass away unexpressed, to repress the tide of song welling up to the lip—this would be the true toil and unrest to these. In this case, too, the spirit rests in working.

Now it is in its application to the noblest of all work that this principle receives its highest illustration. The service of God, beyond all other kinds of labour, may become the most perfect rest to the soul. For it is when employed in this work that the soul is in its most congenial sphere of activity. The soul, by its original structure, was designed and adapted for this as its special work; and it is yet possible for it, as redeemed and restored in Christ Jesus, to reach that glorious state of moral elevation in which goodness becomes spontaneous, duty delight, the service of God perfect freedom. Moreover, there is no art that is capable of calling forth in the human spirit a more impassioned devotion than the art of being and of doing good. It may be from a lofty impulse and with a glowing spirit that the hand of genius shapes the marble, or vivifies the canvass into the outward form of human beauty or majesty. But there is a work nobler far, and capable of kindling and concentrating

in a holy ardour every energy of man's nature—the work of moulding the imperishable spirit within us into the likeness of the Infinitely Good and Fair. Wherever, therefore, this work becomes, as in every earnest mind it must sooner or later become, the grand and absorbing pursuit, difficulties will vanish, and the sense of effort be unfelt in the intensity of inward feeling. A divine ideal has dawned upon the spirit, and it is all on fire to realise that ideal in itself and other souls. Whatever obstacles impede its endeavours, give way before the force of strong desire ; and the difficulties of the Christian life become at last as the mechanical difficulties of a familiar art that have long ceased to be noted.

It is true, indeed, that this blessed facility of goodness comes not at the first to any, and may to many be, even to the close of their earthly history, all but unknown. Even sincere Christians may oftentimes feel in duty more of the friction of self-denial than the free motion of delight. The yoke of Christ may need long to be worn before it ceases to gall the wearer, and becomes “a yoke which is easy and a burden which is light.” Even earthly and secular arts are never easy at the first. No genius can render its possessor all at once and without practice superior to mechanical difficulties. And for the acquisition of the spiritual art, the art of pleasing God, there is a peculiar intractableness and indocility in the mind of man. Nay, for those arts there is not seldom found in individual minds a strong inherent aptitude ; but for this not only is there in no case in fallen man a natural predilection,



but there is ever a natural aversion and obstinacy to be combated. But as in those so in this, facility comes with use. The hand that at first, with laboured effort, feebly and disjointedly struck out the simplest air of music, learns by-and-by, with almost instinctive rapidity and lightness of touch, to sweep the notes, unconscious of all but the delight of harmony. And so, rising from earthly to heavenly things, is there not a diviner art in which holy hearts, by God's grace, may learn, with purer, deeper delight, to discourse a nobler melody? As love to Christ deepens in the soul that is truly given to Him, the work which it prompts us to do for Him loses the feeling of effort, and passes into pleasure. Less and less of set purpose do we need to constrain the mind to think of Him, or to approach Him in the formal attitude of devotion. The idea of Christ in the holy mind becomes gradually blended with all the actions of its daily life; thought goes out to Him as by a divine instinct; an ever-acting attraction draws the heart upwards to its great and first object, and life becomes an unconscious yet continuous prayer. The transition from motive to act, from holy intention and design to holy doing, becomes less and less marked, until at last the will acquires an almost mechanical certainty, an almost unconscious smoothness and rapidity of action. And so, with the unfettered ease of one "who playeth well upon an instrument," from the many-stringed harp of life the soul renders up to God the sweet melody of holy deeds. Then indeed has it "returned into its rest." Then indeed has it attained to that blessed state, in which its only repose is in

goodness, in which goodness becomes to it a very necessity, in which holy thoughts and works are to the soul as devoid of effort as song to a bird or incense to flowers—the state of those redeemed and glorified ones, of whom it can be said at once that “they have entered into rest,” and that “they rest not day nor night,” but “are before the throne of God, and serve Him day and night in His temple.”

4. There is yet one other aspect in which the soul’s “rest” in God may be contemplated—viz., as *a rest that is not absolute, but relative.*

As in the outward, so in the inward and spiritual world, there may be progress without effort, rapid advancement that is consistent with perfect repose. When the wearied child is taken up into the parent’s arms, though there relatively at rest, it may yet be moving more rapidly and steadily homewards than its own tottering feet could bear it. Relatively to the carriage or vessel that conveys him, the traveller may be in perfect stillness, whilst absolutely in swift progress to his destination. Or again, whilst the aspect of stillest repose sits on the face of the visible creation, with what inconceivable velocity is this globe on which we dwell whirled onward in its orbit. The most stable and moveless objects—the rooted oak that identifies the spot where it grows for centuries; the everlasting hills, that in their changeless stillness rebuke the restless mutability of man—are every moment hurried on through space with a speed wherewith thought cannot cope. In like manner there is in the moral world an order which embraces alike our activity and our still-

ness, in virtue of which our swiftest onward progress may consist with our deepest apparent rest. The range of human activity, even in the highest and holiest sphere of labour, is but a limited one, and the point is soon reached where our human insufficiency is taken up into the all-sufficiency of God. As the realm of our knowledge is infinitely exceeded by that of our ignorance, so is the contracted sphere of our activity by that boundless region in which all human activity is vain. In the moral, as in the material world, we are ever "encompassed by eternal laws," which are the complement of our feeble agency, and which do infinitely more for us than we can do for ourselves. Whilst, therefore, it is a great thing to be an earnest worker in Christ's service, yet the Christian life is not mainly a life of action, but of trust—not of independent exertion, but of self-abandonment to the working of a mightier agency than ours. Even at its outset it is not work, but faith. The beginning of true religion is not the setting out on a new course in the proud consciousness of unexhausted strength and resolution, but rather the casting of the spirit worn with the burden, soiled with the dust of life's friendless journey, on One who has offered, and is infinitely able, to sustain it. And so in its subsequent progress, whilst there is an aspect in which religion may be contemplated as a life of strenuous work, there is another and higher in which it must be viewed as a life of resignation and of rest. Calmly as the midnight voyager sleeps, whilst under watchful guidance the vessel bears him onwards, so calmly, with such trustful humility, does the believer

commit himself and his fates for time and eternity to the unslumbering providence of God. Staying his hand, indeed, from no duty, withholding from no work of self-improvement or of beneficent activity, yielding never to that spurious humility which is but the disguise of indolent fatalism, he yet ever retains in his spirit the unanxious quietness of one who knows that results are not in his hand, but God's. It is little, at best, that he can do to help on the world's progress, or his own; but whether he work or forbear from working, he knows that "the Father worketh hitherto, and will work." In the strife with sin, in the contemplation of moral evil withstanding God's work in the world, there may be much to discourage an earnest mind; but ever when doubts harass, or abortive efforts distress the spirit, and the sense of our human weakness becomes most oppressive, what relief to pass out of self into God, and to stay our feebleness on the everlasting arm! In the quiet confidence of faith, in the assurance that, independently of man's petty activities, the mighty revolutions of the moral world are ceaselessly moving on, and that all things are working together for good to them that love God, there is rest for the believing soul. "My puny efforts," is his thought, "are not necessary to God. 'He can work with them or without them. Though I and hundreds of such weak workers fail, He fails never.' There is a blessed consummation to which, though the motion be imperceptible to us, all things are tending. I work to hasten it if I may, and if I may not, yet not less will I believe that God's great day is coming. I will stay my soul

on God. I will 'rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for Him.' 'Return unto thy rest, O my soul!'

Such, then, is that rest which is the blessed heritage of the soul in God. Let me conclude these reflections by reminding you that it is a rest which is attainable through Christ alone. "No man cometh unto the Father but by Him." The way, else untrodden and impassable, between earth and heaven, between the region of selfishness and sin and the pure region of eternal calm and rest, Jesus hath consecrated by the shedding of His precious blood, so that all who will may have boldness to enter in. It is no mere local distance, no outward or material obstacle, that separates the sinful soul from its true home and rest in God. If it were, if the "rest that remaineth for the people of God" were only some far-off scene of outward bliss and beauty, Jesus would not be the Saviour we need. A mere mechanical exercise of power, a mere material omnipotence, might translate us from life's toil and sorrow to such a rest. But not such is the transition we need. No local change could bring us nearer to Him in whom every spirit lives and moves and has its being. The heaven which God's presence brings is already in local contiguity to saint and sinner alike. What keeps the sinner out of it is not material but moral barriers: break down these, and heaven's sweet rest would stream into the spirit. Guilt and sin separate the soul from God as the widest wastes of untravelled space could never separate. Remove these, and the distance is at once annihilated. A purified soul flies

instantly, as by an inevitable and resistless affinity, to its rest in the bosom of God. And guilt and sin Jesus alone can remove. From that sense of demerit, that painful consciousness of evil, which makes it terrible for a human soul to face the Infinite Purity, there is no escape but in Him whose blood cleanses from all sin. From that dread selfishness that kills in man's heart all nobler, diviner affections and aspirations, and makes the sinful soul shrink from God as the diseased eye from light, there is no deliverance but in that mighty restorer, Himself incarnate love, who revives within the heart its lost susceptibilities of goodness. Clothing it with an innocence that is but the reflection of His own, kindling in it a love that is pure as the heaven from whence its fire is caught, Jesus brings the finite soul again into holiest, sweetest union with the Infinite, opens to it heaven's door, and bids it go in and find in God its true joy and rest. Who would not yield the soul into this divine Saviour's hands! Who would not listen and respond to the invitation, while still, as of old—infinite pathos in His pleading voice—He offers pardon to the guilty, purity to the defiled, peace, joy, hope, heaven, to the wretched, or that which includes them all—that strange unearthly blessing—*rest* to the weary and heavy-laden soul!

SERMON VIII.

SPIRITUAL PROSPERITY.

“Beloved, I wish above all things that thou mayest prosper and be in health, even as thy soul prospereth.”—3 *John*, 2.

THERE are two worlds in which every man lives, two distinct yet equally real scenes of existence in which we spend the days and hours of life. To the outward world, with its material objects and interests, its scenes of beauty or deformity ; its busy throngs of men and women ; its houses, cities, fields ; its cares and toils and pleasures,—to this external sphere of existence no man altogether or exclusively belongs. You have but to close the eye or abstract the thoughts from outer things, and instantly you pass into another region : you become, as it were, the dweller in an inner world,—that strange mysterious region of thoughts and feeling and desires, of memory and conscience and will—that microcosm, that little but most real world within every human breast. To the majority of men, indeed, the latter is but a comparatively untrodden region, a country with whose wondrous aspects they are little familiar, to whose inhabitants they are all but strangers,

whose hidden depths they have seldom attempted to explore. Yet, known or unknown, frequented or unexplored, not less real are the scenes, not less marvellous the phenomena, not less stirring and complicated the events and interests of the secret world which the eye of consciousness surveys, than are those of the world we behold with the eye of sense.

Corresponding to these two worlds, the external and the internal, there are *two lives* we all may be said to lead,—the outer life of sense, the inner hidden life and history of the soul. In no case do physical condition and circumstances constitute the whole life of a man. Every soul, too, has a history. Beneath the vicissitudes and fluctuations of the former a deeper current ever runs. There is in every individual case a secret machinery at work beneath the surface, of which the movements above it are but the partial and uncertain indications. The visible material life is but the scaffolding under which the unseen and eternal life is rearing. The world, that notes the outward events and incidents of your life, discerns, after all, but a part, and that the most insignificant part, of the history of your being. And were each individual in this assembly to narrate to us the story of his past life, to describe to us with all minuteness in what spot he was born, in what places and houses he has dwelt, what positions in society he has occupied, what profession or trade he has followed, what money he has gained or lost, through what external changes of health and sickness, wealth and indigence, prosperity and adversity, he has passed; however interesting it might be to contemplate the

strangely diversified fortunes of so many human beings, yet after all, in narrating them, they would have left still untouched the half, and by far the more important half, of their real life. For, whether you have been accustomed to think of the fact or no, in the case of each individual who hears me there has been, amidst all these multifarious outward events and interests, another and more momentous history going on all the while. With respect to each of us, there has been, from the dawn of our existence, a mental as well as a material history—a life of the soul, a course of inward progress or retrogression, a series of changes for good or evil in the character of that mysterious dweller beneath every breast, more worthy to be chronicled, fraught, would we but believe it, with interest deeper, more momentous far, than the fortunes and vicissitudes of our outward career. We spend our years, it is written, as a tale that is told; but there is, may we not say, an under-plot in the story of every human life; and however stirring be the narrative of our outward experience, there is ever a deeper pathos, a more awful and absorbing interest, gathered around the history of the soul.

In the passage before us, the apostle, as you will perceive at a glance, makes reference to the two courses of human experience of which we have just spoken—the outward and the inward. The text is simply an expression of affectionate desire for the welfare of one who seems to have been very dear to the writer. It is the friendly greeting of a believer to a brother in Christ. And you perceive that the particular form it

takes is, not that merely of a simple wish for the friend's happiness, but of a wish more specifically for his happiness, his prosperity, at once in the inward and the outward life: in other words, for both his temporal and spiritual prosperity. Moreover, you will observe that the apostle makes the latter the measure or standard according to which he desires that his friend's outward or temporal prosperity should be regulated. "May you, my friend," is his sentiment,— "may you be as prosperous outwardly as you are inwardly; may the current of your outward life flow on as happily as flows the course of your spiritual being,—may you be happy as you are holy!" The idea thus enunciated may suggest to us a not unprofitable train of meditation, if we follow it out a little further, considering first, what is to be understood by prosperity of soul; and then, why this prosperity of soul should be made the measure of outward prosperity, or, in other words, why a believer should desire for his friend just so much temporal prosperity as he already possesses of inward and spiritual.

I. Of what in the language of the world is commonly designated prosperity, perhaps the two main elements are *Wealth* and *Power*. The individual who is growing richer or rising in station, the community or nation whose internal resources are increasing, whose influence and importance are extending, is universally held to be in a *prosperous* condition. It will not be difficult to see that there are in the spiritual condition of man elements analogous to these, of which his inward pros-

perity may be said to consist. There is a wealth, there is a power, of the soul.

To take the first of these, there is, it will need very little reflection to perceive, a *wealth* which may be predicated of the inward as well as of the outward life. There is, in no exclusively metaphorical sense, a riches of the soul, the inner spiritual part of a man, as well as of the outward and physical. Money, property, worldly goods, are not more real possessions than thought, knowledge, wisdom. Nor are the outward comforts and luxuries, the gratifications of sense and appetite that may be procured by the former, more literally a man's own, what belongs to him, what makes him richer, than are warm affections, a fertile imagination, a memory stored with information, and, above all, a heart full of God's grace. The common phraseology of life recognises this fact, when we speak, for instance, of "a richly-furnished mind," a mind "rich in intellectual resources," "a rich vein of thought," "an ample fund of information," and the like. And the word of God adopts the same idea with reference to divine things, when it applies to the spiritual condition of the believer such language as the following,—“Hath not God chosen the poor of this world rich in faith?” “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom ;” “Poor, yet making many rich ; having nothing, yet possessing all things ;” “There is that maketh himself rich, yet hath nothing ; there is that maketh himself poor, yet hath great riches.”

Nor let it be said that this is merely the language of metaphor. It is the language of metaphor, but of

more than metaphor,—and a moment's thought will convince you that it is. For, to think only of mere intellectual acquirements, take two men, one in comparatively straitened circumstances, yet possessed of great mental abilities and attainments—the other overflowing with money, yet narrow-souled and ignorant; you would not hesitate to say which is really the richer of the two. The wealth of the one may be invisible and impalpable compared with the other's. The soul and its treasures are alike unseen; and in the outward aspect of the body there may be little to distinguish the one from the other. But yet, beneath that bosom, in the one case, there dwells a soul in whose invisible repositories are laid up stores of intellectual riches, whilst emptiness and barrenness are the only characteristics of the other.

And if this be true of mere intellect, if even secular knowledge constitute a wealth more valuable than any outward possession, surely not less true must the same thought be when applied to that wisdom which maketh wise unto salvation. I do not know who in this assembly is the man most largely endowed with this world's wealth; but surely that man amongst us is indeed the richest, who bears within his bosom the treasure of a soul at peace with God, and safe for all eternity! There may be in this house not a few who, during the year that is past,* have added to their worldly gains; but if there be one amongst us in whose soul the grace of God's Holy Spirit has found a resting-place, on whose mind there has dawned at last the

* Preached on the last day of the year 1848.

knowledge of God as a reconciled Father in Jesus Christ, and whose erewhile joyless spirit is now lighted up with the calm deep joy and peace of a believer—oh, surely such a man, beyond all others, may be congratulated as one to whom the past has been a year of “prosperity!” Or if there be those of our number whose inward experience, during the months that have fled, has been one of growing faith, and purity, and love—of faith that rests upon Jesus with a more and more childlike trust, of a purity to which sin in every form becomes more abhorrent, of a love which every day’s successive intercourse with its heavenly object has rendered more intense; then, indeed, to such we may say, Yours has been an accession of wealth, for which any conceivable increase of worldly fortune were but a poor equivalent. Nay, yours is the only *real* wealth. For money, property, every worldly possession, is out of the man. It does not come into the soul. It can be separated from him; it is but an accident, not an essential property of his being. But knowledge, faith, spiritual-mindedness, love to Christ, these are a sort of wealth that go into and become transfused through the very essence of the man. They are locked up in no outward repository. Their possessor cannot leave them behind him with an uneasy mind to the care of others, or sleep with a feeling of insecurity for his treasures. They are laid up in the inmost recesses of his soul—they are part and parcel of the man himself. His very identity must be destroyed before they can be reft from him. Yours, too, is the only unvarying wealth. The money or

property of your prosperous neighbour is by its very nature fluctuating in value. Rich to-day, by some of the perpetually occurring vicissitudes of life, his secur-est investment may to-morrow become worthless. But the wealth of the soul is standard wealth; it has the stamp of Heaven's mintage upon it, and is always the same. A soul, on which the image of Christ is impressed, is a thing precious in the eye of Him who judgeth by the rule of infinite rectitude. It is precious everywhere, and for ever; it has not, like man's wealth, a different value in different countries, and at different times; it will pass current everywhere—it is free of the universe. Yours, finally, is the only lasting wealth. The time will come when the richest in this house to-day must abandon his wealth for ever. Whatever you have of this sort, though you should carry it safe up to the grave's brink, there you must leave it. You have but a loan, a life-interest of it. Death will rob you of everything, to the very garment that covers your body—yea, of that body itself. The only thing you *shall* be able to keep, is that which you have stored up in the soul itself. That alone will go out with the soul into eternity.—“Beloved, I wish above all things” that thus *your* souls may prosper.

The other element we have mentioned as commonly included in the idea of “prosperity,” is *power*. He is universally esteemed a prosperous man in his outward circumstances, who is advancing or has risen from comparative lowliness and obscurity to a position of eminence and influence in society. He, on the contrary, is deemed unfortunate, who has been reduced from a

former station of rank and power to one of indigence and meanness. The servant who has become the master, the subject who has gained the sovereign's place, is regarded as eminently prosperous. The dethroned monarch, the great man degraded to a position of servitude, is looked upon as everything the reverse.

Now, to this element of prosperity also there is a parallel in the inward life. We may be inwardly as well as outwardly powerful. In the little world within the breast there are stations of rank, dominion, authority, to which we may aspire, or from which we may fall. There is an inward slavery, baser than any bodily servitude; there is an inward rule and governance of a man's spirit, an object of loftier ambition far than the possession of any earthly crown or sceptre. For self-government is indeed the noblest rule on earth. The highest sovereignty is that of the man who can say, "He hath made us kings unto God." The truest conquest is where the soul is "bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ." The monarch of his own mind is the only real potentate.

And that this is not, any more than in the former case, a purely figurative use of words, a moment's thought will convince you. There is a real subjection, degradation, slavery of spirit, to which we may be reduced; there is a real power, freedom, emancipation, to which we may attain. It is not a mere metaphor, for instance, when, in common language, we say that the profligate man is "the slave of his appetites;" or when the word of God employs the same style of description in such expressions as these: "Whosoever

committeth sin is the servant of sin ;” “ The truth shall make you free ;” “ Sin shall not have dominion over you ;” “ Delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the sons of God ;” “ God hath given to us the spirit of power and of a sound mind.”

For is there not a real bondage, to take the most palpable example, in the case of the sensualist, the intemperate man, the impure or passionate man? If there be any one here of this character, how true, how sad, how debasing his inward bondage! Tyranny is always obnoxious to its victim. But you would feel it to be the worst of all tyranny, to be all but intolerable, if your tyrant resided constantly in your own family circle, obtruding his hateful surveillance, his despotic interference, into your most secret hours of retirement. But here, surely, there is a worse tyranny still; when the tyrant follows you, not merely to your home, to the domestic circle, to the closet, but penetrates your own breast, and resides perpetually within your own bosom. And yet how certain is it that a pampered appetite, an ungovernable passion, does wield such a tyrannous sway over the soul! Is it not the case—may we not say to such a one?—that Conscience, Duty, Sense of Right, that in you which ought to rule your being, has been enervated and enfeebled, and bereft of all power to govern your conduct? Have not a fierce democracy of lusts and passions driven conscience from its throne within your breast? Do you not feel that they, and not you, are the masters? that when temptation comes in its strength, though you see what is right, you cannot do it—though you see what

is wrong, you cannot resist it? Over your own thoughts and desires, your own will and working, is it not so that often you have no more command than the sea over its waters, or forest trees over their motions as they bend to the blast? Place the strong temptation before you, and in the hour of base and craving opportunity, you know that you will not, cannot choose but yield up your soul to their command. Conscience may secretly warn you that it is ruin to yield, that you are offending the great God by yielding, that every time you yield you are inflicting a deep wound on your peace; yet how often do you feel that you have introduced into your bosom a master mightier than conscience still! In moments of remorse, your feeble will may rise up and irresolutely strive to regain its authority; but it is speedily overborne again, and under the restless lash of appetite you are driven on, and on, in sin.

But there is another and more common state of mind, which may not less truly be described as a slavery—an abandonment of self-rule in the soul. There are few, it may be, amongst us to whom the former description is appropriate; but there are multitudes, the most cursory observation shows, who have abandoned the rule of their souls, if not to open profligacy, to a not less despotic principle of worldliness and spiritual indifference. Are there not many now hearing me, who feel that their case is—not that they do not know that their present course of life is wrong—but that they have no power of resolution to break off from it, and begin in good earnest the work of religion? It

is not that they are not aware of their danger, but that there is a dread paralysis upon their moral powers, a nightmare incapacity of resolute action, that will not let them flee. I am persuaded that I speak to the experience of not a few now present, when I say to them, You cannot resist the conviction that all is not right with your soul. You do not dare to assert that you are quite prepared for eternity—that you would not wish to be a different sort of person when death comes to you. You have occasionally been conscious of the feeling that you ought to bestir yourself, and think more than you do about religion. You have felt thus, for instance, when an intimate friend died at your own period of life ; or when you were seriously ill yourself ; or when some very earnest exhortation was addressed to you about your soul's state. The thought *did* force itself on your mind that you ought to be more serious, to repent, to break off from your careless ways, to set earnestly about the inquiry how your soul is to be saved. But still you do not repent ; you are not to-day a whit more serious than before. You have never, after all, taken any resolute step in the matter. You have let year after year slip by, and you are found still the same easy, worldly, careless man as ever. The world is too strong for you ;—you fear perhaps its ridicule ;—you love its contented selfishness ;—you are its slave. And oh what a miserable bondage this ! What a tremendous arrest upon your powers ! what a mighty tyranny over your soul must that be, which, amid the awful mystery of a life like ours—coming from eternity, hastening to eternity again

—can quell and stifle the great motives of religion! Sad, sad indeed, may be the openly abandoned profligate's condition; but is it extravagant to say that there is more hope of him than of such dead, numb, torpid worldliness as this? It is sad to look on the havoc and destruction of some fair region where the hurricane has been raging; but is there not something more sad, more appalling far, in the still, stern barrenness of the desert, where perpetual silence and unbroken desolation reign?

Is there, then, amongst us, any one who has escaped from such bondage as this?—he assuredly is prospering in spirit. Quickened by the secret energy of God's Spirit, has your will risen up, revolted from this ruinous thralldom, and, in the strength of a mightier than human power, cast it off for ever? Then, indeed, with you would we rejoice this day, and be exceeding glad. If the truth have made you free, you are free indeed. In the arms of Jesus you are safe for ever. No language, no emblems, can be found to convey any adequate idea of the blessedness of such a deliverance. Not the poor timid struggling bird springs forth from the snare with a note of more thrilling joyfulness—not the despairing heart-sick captive casts the first look of freedom on the bright heaven, or treads with bounding step the greensward of home with a more exultant throb of happiness, than this day may be yours. And never was that ancient song of deliverance sung with a deeper meaning than your lips may lend to it, "Our soul is escaped as a bird out of the snare of the fowler; the snare is broken, and we are escaped."

II. Such, then, are some of the elements of that inward or spiritual prosperity to which the apostle refers in the words, "even as thy soul prospereth." I would now point out briefly the reasons for which this soul-prosperity should be regarded in our desires as the standard or measure of outward prosperity.

Why did the apostle wish for his friend—why should we in like manner wish for *our* friends, outward, temporal prosperity, only in the measure in which they already possess inward, spiritual prosperity? Is it a sentiment founded in reason—"I wish above all things that thou mayest prosper and be in health, *even as thy soul prospereth*"?

That it is so will be apparent if you reflect, on the one hand, that, destitute of inward grace, it is neither for a *man's own good*, nor for that of his *fellow-men*, that he should be possessed of outward wealth or power; and, on the other hand, that if a man's soul be right with God, the possession of these outward advantages is both safe for himself and profitable for others.

To look for a moment to the former view of the matter, can it be doubtful to any one, that wealth, power, prosperity, are no blessings where God's grace has not come before them?—that it is not good to be happy, if, first, we are not holy? Imagine—nay, you need not imagine it; life teems with examples of men and women, surrounded with all its ease and comfort and outward happiness—it may be its gaiety and splendour—who are yet obviously and notoriously strangers to goodness and to grace. And do you need

to ask why such a state of matters, far from being desirable, is to be deprecated and deplored?

Is it fanciful to say, for one thing, that to a serious mind there is something singularly sad and affecting in the very contrast which such a spectacle presents? The rich, gay, happy, outward life, and the dark moral antithesis within! It is good to be gay, where the gaiety is real. But it is not good, it is not seemly, it is, sooth to say, the sorrowfullest thing under heaven, to be gay where there is every reason to be sad. Who loves not to listen to the merry ringing laugh of childhood, for it is the utterance of a heart that is yet a stranger to care? But have you not felt that there is something awful in the maniac's mirth—something that grates upon the mind's sense of reality, in the hollow merriment

"Of moody madness laughing wild,
Amid severest woe"?

Right pleasant, too, it is to behold the ruddy hue on the cheek, and the bright sparkle in the eye of health. But have you never felt that no sight is so truly melancholy as the unnatural brightness in the eye, or the glow that often gathers on consumption's cheek, the more beautiful as the end draweth near? And yet, sad though these contrasts are, there is something more truly pitiful, there is a more awful, because a moral sadness, in the sight which the minions of outward prosperity, of worldly comfort and happiness, not seldom present to a thoughtful observer's eye. Surveying the spectacle of the world-throng around us—

thoughtless, busy, careless, godless men and women, happy amid the empty din and joy of life, and yet remembering what is beneath all this, and whither, unless religion be one great lie, all this is tending—have you never felt, in moments of seriousness, an impression as if of something awful in this happiness of man? Looking on an irreligious man's life, mindful how rapidly the stream of time is bearing him onward to the unseen, does there not force itself on the mind a sense of something horribly incongruous in all this gaiety, as were the mirth of men in a sinking ship, or wild shouts of laughter from some crew hurrying onward to the torrent's brink!

“Whom call we gay? That honour has been long
The boast of mere pretenders to the name.
The innocent are gay.”

But oh, if God be true, if Christ be true, if heaven and hell be true, save us from the gaiety of such as these!

Again, as a second consideration, I need scarcely do more than simply express the thought, that outward prosperity is not desirable for a man's own sake, if unaccompanied by inward, because of the bad moral influence which it has on his own character. Outward prosperity, unattended by inward, is not only an incongruous, but also a positively injurious thing. For an irreligious man, nothing is more to be deprecated than an uninterrupted flow of worldly good. It may look like the mere commonplace language of the pulpit, yet universal experience proves it to be the language of

truth, to say that it is not good for any man, even the holiest and best of us, to be quite happy here, as to outward things. But where there is little or no strength of religious principle in the soul, an unbroken continuance of worldly happiness will almost infallibly exert a deteriorating influence on the character. Only in proportion as the dew of God's hidden grace is descending on the heart, can it be safe for a man to be exposed to the hot sun of worldly prosperity; and if that secret element of strength and fertility be not continually supplied, the scorching heat must speedily wither up, in the spiritual soil, every green and beautiful thing.

May I not appeal, on this point, to the experience of the people of God, of those who have ever attempted in good earnest to lead a holy life? Have you not felt—may I not say to many such?—how incessant is the tendency of even the innocent pleasures and possessions of life to draw off your heart from God and from divine things? Ease, comfort, social intercourse, the luxuries and enjoyments of a prosperous condition, have you not felt that these have a fatal, because a most stealthy and insidious power to hurt the soul? If you have been or are now surrounded by these things—nay, if even a share of worldly comfort by no means extraordinary has fallen to your lot—is it not so that only by the most unremitting watchfulness and prayer and secret self-discipline, can you be protected from their seductive influences? And as often as you have allowed yourself to intermit these secret exercises, has not your experience ever been, that gradually and imperceptibly conscience is deprived of its sensitiveness, love to God

and to Christ Jesus droops and languishes, and the strength of your renewed will, your powers of self-denial and of Christian activity, become enfeebled. Encompassed on all sides by the world's obtrusive, importunate pursuits and pleasure, only abandon yourself to them, only let them for ever so brief a period engross an undue share of your thoughts, and the inevitable consequence will be that prayer, self-examination, meditation on divine things, become irksome and distasteful, that the mind's jealousy of doubtful pleasures and equivocal acts of conformity to the world is relaxed, and that the whole tone of your spiritual life is lowered. There is, indeed, a mighty oblivion-power in the things of time and sense. Insignificant in themselves, their comparative nearness makes them seem great ; so that unless the far-seeing eye of faith be kept continually bright and clear, they speedily eclipse in our sight the things unseen and eternal, just as the light of the sun, though of greatly inferior intensity, hides from our view by day the distant brightness of the stars.

And if thus worldly prosperity, without a corresponding increase of spiritual strength, be dangerous even to the people of God, how much more so to others ! What must it be to be exposed to its baneful influences, with no strength of inward principle, no sustaining power of divine grace to counteract and resist them ? What, I ask, to bring it to the test of experience, is the effect upon any worldly man's mind, now present, of his increasing business, and growing wealth and influence and importance among his fellow-men ; what is the obvious result of all the stir and bustle of worldly

things around him, but to keep up the dream of folly and indifference in this life, and to confirm him in his insane heedlessness of what is beyond it! How intensely selfish and worldly does such a man's heart become when there has been little for a long while to mar or interrupt his outward comfort and happiness! His whole soul becomes of the earth, earthy. You cannot cross the threshold of his home without feeling how low and unspiritual is the atmosphere in which he breathes, how in the world and its good things his whole delight is placed. And every year, if you watch the process, you will perceive how the softness of a prosperous life is imbedding him more firmly in his selfish worldliness, like moss gathering round a motionless stone. Would one who really desired this man's welfare wish for him a continuance or increase of worldly good? Would not his truest friend rather long and pray that his fatal tranquillity might be interrupted—that, if need be, poverty, sickness, bereavement itself might invade his home—anything, any affliction, however sharp and sudden, by which this hollow peace, this ruinous security, might be broken up?

But I have said that it is not only for a man's own good, but also for *the good of others*, that he should prosper outwardly only in the measure in which his soul prospereth. "Beloved, I wish that thou wouldst prosper even as thy soul prospereth," is the apostle's wish; and to this we would add this other comment, "for if thy soul prospereth, if thy heart be right with God, then the world will get the good of whatever outward prosperity, whatever wealth or power or influ-

ence, God is pleased to send thee." For, obviously, wealth, power, influence, all outward advantages, are just so many means of doing good or evil put into a man's hands ; and whether such advantages shall be for the benefit or injury of mankind, depends on the inward character of him to whom they are intrusted. Mankind are losers when a selfish man prospers ; they are gainers by the prosperity of the generous and liberal-minded. The latter receive the blessings of God's providence as the sun receives light, to brighten and gladden the world, or as the healthy plant the influences of nature, to scatter them abroad in fertility and fragrance again. The former, on the contrary, like an excrescence on the fruit-tree absorbing the moisture that might have gone to produce leaves and fruit, receive any blessing at God's hand only to retain or abuse it ; or, like a rank weed, draw in the genial influences of the soil and atmosphere of life, only to poison all the air around them. But if this be so, well may we desire, for the world's sake, that those may prosper and be in health whose souls are prospering. For this is indeed but another form of expressing the wish, that they who have the desire and inclination to do good may also have the power. Are there those amongst us who have learned the secret of unselfish love, where alone it is to be truly learned, at the Cross of Jesus ? Beholding the glory of Him whose very name is Love in the face of Him whose whole life was but one living and breathing utterance of love, and whose death was the triumph of pure, unmingled, self-devoted love, are they becoming more and more con-

formed in spirit to the object of their adoration? In one word, believers as they profess to be in Him who pleased not Himself, are there those now hearing me who are longing and aspiring daily after a more gentle, holy, compassionate, Christ-like spirit?—then, indeed, on their behalf may all men unite in uttering the aspiration of the text. They “seek not their own.” They “look not on their own things, but on the things of others.” They are ever ready to “bear the burdens” of others, that they may “fulfil the law of Christ.” They are God’s agents in scattering His bounty over the world. They consecrate their wealth, power, influence to God’s glory and the world’s good. Prosperity descends upon them like rain upon a river, that they may diffuse its blessings wherever they go. Who then will refuse on behalf of such to echo the prayer, “We wish above all things that ye would prosper and be in health, even as your souls prosper”?

And now, my friends, let me only ask in conclusion, can we utter such a wish as that of the text on your behalf? Can we desire for all, for many now present, that they may prosper outwardly as their souls are prospering? Alas! in the case of how many must it be confessed that such a wish would be an imprecation instead of a prayer, a covert invocation, not of blessings but of curses on their heads. For only think what would be the effect, if to each one in this assembly it should indeed be granted to prosper just as his soul is prospering—to be in body and in outward condition, in health, wealth, fortune, just as he is inwardly in the

sight of God. How few would be outwardly bettered—on how many would the outward change be sad and shocking to behold! Let the body be as the soul is, and how many, who are now seen in youth and health and comeliness of aspect, would instantly assume the withered and wasted look of age and disease! how many would become forms and shapes from which the eye with instinctive disgust would turn away! Or let it be granted that every one in this house shall become in wealth and worldly condition just what he is in soul; and alas! are there not more than one or two, comfortable, easy, luxurious, in outward circumstances now, whom such a law would render bankrupt in body as they already are in soul, who would leave this house poorer than the poorest wretch that shrinks to-night into poverty's squalidest den? Ask yourself, each one who now hears me, "Am I such as this? If my body were made like my soul, would I become diseased and impoverished, if now rich or strong; or if poor or feeble, more wasted and poverty-struck still?" In plain terms, let me ask, Have you any ground to think that your soul is prospering? Have you any evidence that it has ever even *begun* to be well with your soul? Can you honestly say that you have any love to Christ in your heart? Are you making any real effort to drive sin out of your soul? Is your daily life governed by inclination or by duty—by the desire to please God, or by the reckless determination, at all hazards, to please self? You know what it is to be made happy by outward prosperity, or sorry by outward adversity—to be grieved or gladdened by worldly

gain or loss : Have you any such definite consciousness of joy or sorrow about your soul's progress or declension ? You have felt real pain many a time, for instance, for the loss of money, or of some place or project on which you had set your heart : Have you ever felt any such undeniable pain for sin ? Do you remember any time in your past life when sin cost you real trouble and sorrow of heart, when you were distressed to have been betrayed into it yourself, or grieved to behold it in others ? As a man is eager to retrieve his loss when he discovers himself to have fallen behind in his worldly circumstances, are you conscious of having ever made any real, resolute effort, of having been at pains to set your soul right with God, to get the better of worldly or unholy desires and habits in your inward character ? As you would rejoice at success in the one case, so if you have really succeeded in the other, if your soul has been reconciled to the Father of spirits, if you discern in it the marks of a progressive meetness for heaven, you cannot fail to have experienced some delight at the discovery. Are you conscious of this ? Or if you have been conscious of no spiritual progress, of no advancement in holiness to give you this joy in time past, would it rejoice you to get it now ? If you had your choice to-day of poverty with Christ, or riches and all worldly comfort and happiness without Him, which would you choose ? What you most value yourself, you will most desire for your children or your friends. Ask your heart, and let it honestly reply, whether it would give you more pleasure to see your family and friends get on well in the world, get good places, grow rich

and honoured of men, or to see them grow up good, holy, pious-minded men and women? It grieves us, my dear friends, to think what kind of answer many, many must make, if they speak sincerely, to such inquiries as these. And if it be with you, as we fear it is, surely never could a Christian friend address you in the language of the text. Godless, Christless, utterly unhappy in spirit, your worst enemy could not utter a more malignant wish than that you should prosper and be in health just as your soul is prospering. And destitute as you are of true love to Christ and to your fellow-men, to wish you outward prosperity, despite of your soul's state, would be a wish even more inconsistent still with your best welfare and theirs. You have never shown any disposition to serve God, or promote your brother's good with the means you possess; and to wish you more wealth or influence, would only be to desire for you increase of responsibility and increase of guilt. You, whom God has already blessed with health, or wealth, or influence, which you have consumed on self, or spent on sin, could the best friend you have on earth wish you more of these? As soon wish that fuel may be added to the raging fire, or fresh lading to the sinking ship;—as soon wish that treasures of gold may be cast into the sea, as into the cold, thankless, all-engulfing selfishness of the spirit within you!

SERMON IX.

THE CHRISTIAN'S HERITAGE.

“All things are yours ; whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come ; all are yours ; and ye are Christ's ; and Christ is God's.”—1 *Cor.* iii. 21, 22, 23.

THE unloveliness of envy, jealousy, pride, and the kindred vices which spring from the common root of selfishness, is never so apparent as when these vices manifest themselves amongst those who bear the Christian name. Yet the history of the Church but too often exhibits the strange anomaly of a religion of love producing the keenest haters, and a gospel of peace engendering strifes and animosities more bitter than the disputes and rivalries of the profane. It is a very early manifestation of this unhallowed spirit on which St Paul animadverts in the passage before us. The Christians at Corinth had quarrelled with each other on the merits of their respective teachers—each party boasting of the pre-eminent wisdom or eloquence of its own head, and contemning the gifts of his supposed rivals. The apostle rebukes this unholy strife, charac-

terising it as not only unlovely, but, among Christians, singularly foolish and irrational. And the thought by which he enforces this representation is a very striking one. Religious rivalries and competitions involve, he alleges, not only a sin, but an absurdity, inasmuch as it is the peculiar property of that which is the object of contention that it is not lost to any one man by another's gain. Each man's share of the divine treasure is not diminished, but rather increased, by reason of the multitude of participants. The prize gained by one earnest runner in the Christian race is not therefore lost, but rather rendered doubly secure and precious to the other competitors. In the pursuit of wealth it may be natural, however culpable, to begrudge another his gains, or to be elated at our own ; for wealth is a limited good. Your money cannot be yours and mine at the same time ; what you gain I may lose ; it is possible for you to be enriched at my expense. Neither, again, is it irrational, though it may be sinful, to contend with others for power, rank, social greatness ; for the very ideas of power, rank, greatness, imply their opposites—subjection, lowliness, inferiority. That one man attains to place or power, implies that others miss or lose it ; the successful man rises, not seldom, on the ruin of his rivals. But with respect to spiritual good—the gains and advantages of religion—it is altogether different. These belong to that class of blessings which possess the qualities of universality and inexhaustibleness. The light of the sun is not the less bright to me that it beams at the same moment on millions of my fellow-men. The beauty which I behold in earth

and sea and skies is not diminished to me because of the multitude of spectators who may share in my delight. A thing of beauty is not only a "joy for ever," but a universal joy. Of a thousand men who may behold the same landscape, each may be said to possess all its beauty. In like manner those blessings which constitute the Christian's portion—Truth, Love, Beauty, Goodness—may become the common possession of myriads, each one of whom may yet be said to possess the whole. The same truths which fill my mind may become the spiritual nutriment of all my fellow-believers, undiminished to me though other minds apprehend them. The love to Christ which burns in one Christian's breast, does not become enfeebled if other hearts catch the flame from his, but rather, by contact of congenial elements, glows in each separate heart with a fervour all the more intense. The peace of God may be diffused through the spirits of a multitude which no man can number, and yet each redeemed soul may say of it, "It is all my own"—nay, better than if all or exclusively his own; for it is a peace, a joy, a happiness, which, by the electric flash of sympathy passing from heart to heart, becomes, by reason of the multitudes who share it, redoubled, multiplied, boundlessly increased to each. Let no man, therefore, in spiritual things, glory in his own or envy another's good; for to every individual member of Christ's church it may be said, "Whatever others have obtained, still the whole, the illimitable all of Truth and Love and Joy, is left for you." "All things are yours; whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or

death, or things present, or things to come ; all are yours."

I shall endeavour to illustrate this statement of the apostle, "All things are yours," first by a general argument, and then by passing in review one or two of those special blessings which are enumerated in this catalogue of the Christian's possessions.

I. It may help to explain the universal proprietorship here ascribed to Christians, if you consider that the believer may be said *to possess all things in God*.

The mind of a great author is more precious than his books, the genius of a great artist than the most exquisite productions of his hand ; and if it were at our option to possess all the works of the greatest mind, or to be ourselves endowed with a portion of that intellectual power from which they emanated, who would hesitate in his choice ? To have the mind is better than to have merely the products of that mind. Give the fountain, and you virtually have the streams—the creative origin, and you possess that which is better than any special manifestation of its power. But no earthly or finite mind can transfer its gifts to another ; the superior nature can never make over a share of its inner intellectual or moral power as a dowry to the inferior. Yet this transfusion of minds, inconceivable between finite and created beings, is not inconceivable between the created mind and God. There is a sense in which we may become sharers of that Mind from which all that is true and good and fair in the universe proceeds. It is given to us not

only to see, admire, and share in the works of the Great Author of all, but to become endowed with the very mind, imbued in our inmost being, with the very Spirit and Being of God. It is a thought which lies at the foundation of all true religion, that God Himself is the supreme Good, the true and real portion of the soul. As there is an affinity between the Intellect and Truth, between the Imagination and Beauty, between the Conscience and Goodness, so there is a deep and ineffable harmony between the whole spiritual nature of man and that Infinite Being in whom is all Truth, all Goodness, all Beauty. So that as really as true, or noble, or holy thoughts pass into and become a portion of the mind which apprehends them, does God communicate Himself, diffuse His own divine Spirit through the spirit of the believer. More intimately than light becomes the possession of the eye on which it streams, or air of the organs of breathing that inhale it, or the food we eat, assimilated and diffused through the physical system, incorporates itself with the nature of him who partakes of it, does He, that Infinite One, the Light of all our seeing, the Bread of Life, the nutriment of our highest being, become the deep inward portion of each soul that loves Him. The happiness of this mysterious nature of ours is never to be found merely in the possession of God's gifts, the works of His hand, or the bounties of His providence. The soul can find its true satisfaction only in rising beyond the gifts, and claiming the Giver as its own. When you covet the friendship or love of a fellow-man, it does not satisfy you that he bestows upon you

only outward gifts—his money, his property, his books—what cares a loving, longing heart for these? Unless the man give you something more than these, give you *himself*, and become yours by the bond of deepest sympathy and affection, the rest are but worthless boons. So is it in the soul's relations with God. That after which, as by a mysterious and inborn affinity, every devout spirit yearns, is not God's gifts and bounties, but Himself. The wealth of worlds would be, to the heart longing after Deity, a miserable substitute for one look of love from the Great Father's eye. "My soul thirsteth for God," is the language in which Scripture gives expression to this deep want of our nature, and points to the ineffable satisfaction provided for it,—“My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God.”—“As the hart panteth after the water-brooks, so panteth my soul after Thee, O God!”—“If any man love Me, My Father will love him, and We will come unto him, and take up Our abode with him.”—“I in them, and Thou in Me, that they may be made perfect in one.”

Now, admitting the truth of this thought, that in some way, however mysterious or incapable of being fully expressed in words, God is Himself the immediate possession or portion of the soul, then the argument of the text becomes an obvious and conclusive one. As the scattered rays of light are all included in the focus, as the fountain contains the streams, as the object reflected is prior to and nobler than the different reflections of it—so all finite and created good is contained in Him who is the Supreme Good; all earthly

excellence is but the partial emanation, the more or less bright reflection of the Great Original. To have a portion, therefore, in God, is to possess that which includes in itself all created good. The man who is in possession of some great masterpiece in painting or sculpture, need not envy others who have only casts or copies of it. The original plate or stereotype is more valuable than any impressions or engravings thrown off from it; and he who owns the former, owns that which includes, is capable of producing, all the latter. So, if it be given to any human spirit to know and enjoy God, to be admitted to the fellowship, and have a portion in the very being of the Infinite, then is that spirit possessor of that whereof "Paul, Apollos, Cephas," "the World" — all material and all mental excellence, is but the faint copy, the weak and blurred transcript. Surveying the wonders of creation, or even with the Word of inspiration in his hand, the Christian can say, "Glorious though these things be, to me belongs that which is more glorious far. The streams are precious, but I have the Fountain; the vesture is beautiful, but the Wearer is mine; the portrait in its every lineament is lovely, but that Great Original whose beauty it but feebly depicts, is my own. 'God is my portion, the Lord is mine inheritance.' To me belongs all actual and all possible good, all created and uncreated beauty, all that eye hath seen or imagination conceived; and more than that, for 'eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, nor hath it entered into the heart of man to conceive what God hath prepared for them that love Him,'—all things and beings, all that life reveals

or death conceals, everything within the boundless possibilities of creating wisdom and power, is mine ; for God, the Creator and Fountain of all, is mine."

II. Passing from this general view of the subject, I shall now endeavour to illustrate the assertion, "All things are yours," by adverting to one or two of the special blessings here enumerated, as constituting parts of the Christian's universal inheritance. I shall take, as specimens, these three, — "The World," "Life," "Death."

1. In what sense, then, to take the first of these, may the Christian understand the announcement — "The World is yours" ? Not, obviously, in the literal sense of the words. This earth is not the exclusive property of the good. Christians are not, of necessity, lords of its soil or possessors of its wealth. It was not *their* Master, but another, who, displaying "all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them," said, "All these will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me." As often as otherwise, the rich in faith are poor in this world's possessions. Many a one, "of whom the world was not worthy," never owned a hand's-breadth of its soil, till he possessed that which to the veriest wretch is not denied—a grave. Of the purest, noblest, best of the sons of men, it is written, that often "He had not where to lay His head ;" and even that last resting-place to which His marred and bleeding form was borne, the hand of charity bestowed. No ! not literally can it be said to Christ's followers on earth, "The world is yours."

But if not literally, yet in this sense may the world be said to belong to the Christian, that he only has a legitimate title to the benefits and blessings He enjoys in it. This earth was not meant to be the home of evil. The make and structure of the world is for good. Nothing in it, save by abuse, has any affinity with sin. Its foundations were not laid of old by Omnipotence, nor its wondrous laws contrived and ordered by Infinite Wisdom, nor its garniture of beauty spread over it by the loving hand of God, only that a luxurious home might be provided for selfishness and impurity. God's sun was not created to shine, nor His rain to fall, nor His seasons made in orderly course to return, and all the processes contrived by which Nature yields up her annual abundance, only that it might be poured into the lap of folly, and prolong the existence of ingratitude and vice. Even mute and material things, the laws and agencies of nature, have in them something that asserts their divine origin, and proclaims that wrong is done to them—that they are in an unnatural and distorted condition—when forced into the service of sin. How exquisite, for instance, is that mechanism which we are at this moment employing, by which thought embodied in articulate sounds goes forth upon the viewless air, and by its invisible agency is conveyed from the preacher's lip to the ears, and so to the minds, of his auditory! What mechanism contrived by human art can compare with God's mechanism of speech and sound? And when this wondrous engine is compelled to carry hither and thither words of selfishness, and malice, and unkindness—when it is

laden with the swearer's oath or the slanderer's lie—when it is forced to hurry on, burdened with impurities and blasphemies—is it employed for its destined end, is it rightfully used, or not rather fearfully perverted and abused? Or, again, that agency of light, the mode of whose operation is still, with all its unvarying beauty and simplicity, an unsolved problem to human science—is it employed legitimately, and in accordance with the ends for which it was contrived, when on its tremulous ether, or its luminous waves, it is constrained to carry to and fro angry looks, lascivious glances, reflected sights and scenes of impurity and evil? It were blasphemy to suppose that the Almighty should send down angels to convey hither and thither messages of impurity, or to lend their potent aid to deeds of crime; yet are not “the winds God's messengers—the flaming fire His ministers,”—as truly as “the angels that do His commandments, hearkening to the voice of His word”? And as with these, so with all the other powers and agents which constitute the material system around us; are they not all obviously designed to harmonise with, and subserve, the higher moral order of God's world? If, therefore, you are living a godless and sinful life, you are out of harmony with the world in which you live. You exist in it by sufferance, not by right,—an intruder on its soil, a misappropriator of its benefits, a usurper and perverter of its laws. Nature and her laws and agencies do not serve you willingly, but as the captive servants of a gracious master, compelled to do the bidding of his enemy, only because “for a season” they have been “subjected to the bondage of

corruption." And so long as you continue in estrangement from God, it is as if His sun were unwilling to shine upon you, and His air to inspire you, and the fruits of His earth to nourish you, and that earth itself to hold you, and as if "the whole creation," weary of a bondage so degrading, were, according to the magnificent conception of the apostle, "groaning and travailing in pain."

On the other hand, return to God, let your soul be brought back into living union with the Father of spirits through His dear Son, and thenceforward the world will become yours, because you are God's. In harmony with the Great Centre, you will be in harmony with all things in His universe. Nature will serve him who serves her God; and all her varied powers and agencies will rejoice to obey the behests and minister to the welfare of one who is the loved and loving child of their great Master and Lord. The earth will be fulfilling its proper function in yielding you bread, and the heavens in shedding their sweet influences on your path. For you the morning will dawn and the evening descend. For you "the winds will blow, earth rest, heavens move, and fountains flow." You will be able to claim a peculiar property in the works of your Father's hand, and the bounties of your Father's providence. You will have served yourself heir to Him who is the Universal Proprietor, and become "heir of God, and joint heir with Christ." And so "the world" and the fulness thereof will become "yours," because "ye are Christ's, and Christ is God's."

2. Another of the blessings comprehended in this roll of the Christian's possessions is "Life." What, then, let us ask, is the import of the declaration, "Life is yours"? It is obvious that in the simplest view of it, considered as mere existence or duration of being, "life" cannot, any more than the former blessing, be regarded as the peculiar property of the Christian. For though it is true that religion, by reason of the moral habits which it inculcates, is really conducive to health and longevity, and that, in absence of its restraints, vicious excess often impairs the health and shortens life, yet this is by no means so uniformly its result as to warrant, in the literal import of the words, the assertion of the text. It is not always the holiest men who live the longest. Oftentimes "the good die first, whilst they whose hearts are dry as summer's dust burn to the socket." There is something more than mere sentimentality in the saying not seldom heard from sorrowing lips concerning the dead, that they were "too good for this world"—"they grew so holy, so gentle, so good," is the thought implied—"they breathed so much of the spirit of heaven upon earth, that, long ere to human eye their course was run, the Father called them home." And perhaps there are few of us who, as life wears on, do not learn to cherish among our deepest and most sacred recollections the memory of some loved and sainted one, some child, or brother, or sister departed, whose fair young face shines out to us, in thoughtful moments, from amidst the dim and vanished years, as that of one whom God hath early taken. No! we repeat, not

literally can they who are Christ's understand the promise, "Life is yours."

But there is a sense most real and true in which they *may* apprehend it. For if the good do not live longer, they live *more* in the same space of time than other men. Life is to be reckoned not only extensively, but also intensively; not merely by the number of its days, but also by the amount of thought and energy which we infuse into them. Existence is not to be measured by mere duration. An oak lives for centuries, generation after generation of mortals the meanwhile passing away; but who would exchange for the life of a plant, though protracted for ages, a single day of the existence of a living, conscious, thinking man? The briefest life of rationality, again, is worth more, has more of real life in it, than the longest of a mere animal. And, amongst rational beings, that life is longest, whether brief or protracted its outward term, into which the largest amount of mind, of mental and moral activity, is condensed. It is possible for the longest life to be really briefer than the shortest, and the child or youth may die older, with more of life crowded into his brief existence, than he whose dull and stagnant being drags on to an inglorious old age.

"We live in deeds, not years; in thoughts, not breaths;
In feelings, not in figures on a dial.
We should count time by heart-throbs. He most lives
Who thinks most, feels the noblest, acts the best."

But if it be so, surely, estimating life by this principle, it is only the Christian, the man who lives to God, who can really be said to live at all. For in him alone the

whole man lives—in him alone all the energies of man's being, physical, intellectual, moral, are called into fullest, noblest activity. In sleep we possess mere existence as truly as in waking, but in so far as our nobler conscious being is concerned, sleep steals away a great part of our earthly life: and if instead of a part, a man were compelled to spend the whole of life in sleep, then as a conscious, reflective, active being, life would be utterly lost to him. But there are men not a few in whose busy outward life, though the intellect may wake, the spirit slumbers, and who, amidst all the surface vivacity of a worldly and selfish existence, know as little of truest, noblest life, as if their years were spent in torpid unconsciousness. The man who merely vegetates through existence, who rises day by day only to eat and drink and pursue the same unreflective round of business and pleasure, without one lofty thought or pure spiritual emotion, never for one moment lifting his soul to commune with God, and the vast world of invisible realities around him,—surely, to such a one, life, in its real essence, its true significance, is lost. And comparing such a life with that of the man in whom the pulse of being beats quick—the reflective, earnest, high-souled man, alive to the noblest end of existence, governed by high principles and holy motives, crowding his days with deeds, and leaving scarce one hour of waking existence that is not instinct with energy, throbbing with the life's-blood of the spirit,—comparing the former sort of life with this, can we hesitate to pronounce that *that* is a mere blank, a life that is no life, a death in life, whilst *this* alone

deserves the name? The man of property who has an undiscovered gold-mine on his estate, is no richer for his latent wealth, and cannot be said really to possess it. And so, whatever other men contrive to extract out of life—as comfort, ease, honour, knowledge, power—they are, after all, possessors only of its surface wealth; the Christian alone, the man who has discovered and appropriated its hidden treasure of holy thought, feeling, energy, who has pierced down through life's common strata, and reached the divine element in it—he alone can be said to be its true possessor. Confine a bird for life to a cage, and could it be said to be in reality possessor of the unexercised, unenjoyed power to soar and sweep the heavens? But within every human breast there are capabilities of heaven, folded wings of thought, aspiration, energy, which need only the liberating touch of the Spirit of God to call forth their hidden power, and bear the soul upward to the true region of its life. The true ideal of man's life is that of a heavenly life, a "life hid with Christ in God,"—the life of one whose "conversation is in heaven," who is "risen with Christ, and made to dwell with Him in heavenly places," and who, even amidst the common duties of the world, derives his motives and principles from a nobler sphere of being. But the multitudes who never, in thought, desire, affection, emerge beyond the region of earthly things—such men know not what life is, have never discovered what, in its high and glorious reality, a human existence may become. To that man only who can say with the apostle, "To me to live is Christ," can we make answer

in the full significance of the words, Then "life is yours."

3. And if so, then finally may we add with the inspired writer in the text, "Death," too, "is yours." Outwardly, indeed, death bears the same aspect to all. He comes in no gentler form, with no more obsequious mien, to those who are Christ's than to those who are none of His. But yet, whilst of all other men it may be said that they are death's, of the believer alone can it be averred that death is his. Sin, unrepented and unforgiven, renders a man, in a sense, the rightful property of death, so that, when the hour of dissolution arrives, it is but the lawful proprietor coming to claim his own. In human society, a man forfeits by the commission of a crime his right to liberty. His person, by right, if not in fact, is the property of the law; and wherever he can be found, the emissary of justice may lay hold of the offender, and claim him as his own. The crime may be concealed, or the criminal may elude for a while the hands of justice; but, go where he may, he has no right to liberty or life—he is at the mercy of the offended law, wherever he can be detected. And when at last, it may be in some unwary moment, and after long-continued impunity has lulled him into forgetfulness of the past, he feels a stern hand laid upon his shoulder, and the terrible words, "You are my prisoner," fall upon his ear,—what sense of weakness and helplessness sinks heavily on his spirit! His guilty freedom is at an end. His game is up. A mighty power of human law and social order environs him. Resistance he knows to be unavailing; and

though shrinking in dismay from the fate that awaits him, go he must with the officer of justice to meet it.

Now, similar to this is the condition of the irreligious and impenitent man in relation to that law which he has dishonoured, and that dread penalty which he has incurred. Unrepented sin is Death's pledge. However long Death may delay, he will come—soon at the latest—to put in force the right he has established over the person of the sinner, and to claim him as his own. Every day that dawns, every passing hour, every throb of the pulse, is bringing him nearer. Every sickness, every sorrow, every sign of nature's decay, each secret pang of conscience, or momentary foreboding, that visits the sinner's soul, is as the shadow of the emissary of Heaven's justice falling athwart his victim's onward path. And then, when at last he comes, often most silently and suddenly—cold, stern, rigid, inexorable, God's awful messenger—there is that within the guilty breast which at once recognises his identity, and makes the man feel that resistance or escape is impossible. *Then* indeed is the hour and power of death, *then* the season of his long-delayed triumph, and of the appropriation of his rightful property. A power, mightier than the combined force of human law and social order and public opinion, lays hold of the guilty soul, prevents its escape, hurries it resistlessly away to the bar of its Judge. Oh, who can tell what dreary sense of weakness visits the heart in that awful moment—what mysterious consciousness of being borne helplessly onward from the old, friendly, familiar world, into the strange portentous dark of Eternity! Who can enter

into that feeling of amazed, awestruck impotence and abandonment with which the soul realises the thought :
“ This is death at last, and ah me, I am his ! ”

On the other hand, if you are Christ's, then death is yours. His power over you is gone. He has no right to detain you in his possession. In his hands you shall no more be the weak, but the strong ; for your condition will be analogous to that, not of the criminal, but of the innocent, unjustly apprehended man, in the hands of the law. Over the innocent man the law has no power. All its authority, its sanctions, its penalties, are on his side. Its retributive inflictions cannot touch him ; they may not injure one hair of his head. He is no longer theirs, but they are his. If wrongfully accused and imprisoned, he can demand as a right all the aids and appliances of justice to free his character from stain, and his person from unrighteous restraint. Or if he himself be incapacitated from action, his friends, if they can establish his innocence, may demand his person at the hands of the law—may insist on his instant liberation. And so, if “ ye are Christ's,” if, reconciled to God through His dear Son, the stain of guilt no longer rests upon you ; then has death no longer any claim to your person, any right to retain you in his hold. It may be still your mysterious fate to submit for a little while to the universal penalty, to pass into the prison-house of the destroyer ; but He to whom, body and soul, you truly belong, will soon claim you as one who, like Himself, cannot be “ holden of death,” and who must, at His summons, be set free. Not one soul dear to Christ will He permit to remain

as death's prisoner, or to receive any injury at death's hands. Nay, the very dust of Christ's saints is dear to Him. He guards their very graves with a deeper and tenderer care than that wherewith earthly affection watches over the spot where a loved one rests. And as the slightest memorial of one who has been taken from us is often prized and kept with fondest interest, so even the frail vesture with which the soul of one of Christ's redeemed was once clothed, is precious to His heart, and He will rescue it at last from the dust where it lies soiled and dishonoured. "Neither death nor life, nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come"—no created power, no lapse of time, no material change or revolution—can remove you from the sight, or separate you from the omnipotent love of Jesus. At His omnific word, death and the grave shall one day yield up their unlawful captives; and then, when the grave has heard the voice of the Son of God, and death, His servant and yours, has delivered up, unscathed, unharmed—yea, more glorious and beautiful than when they fell for a while into his charge—the bodies of Christ's redeemed, when "this corruptible shall put on incorruption, and this mortal shall put on immortality," then shall the believer discover the full and blessed import of the words, "Death is yours."

Be this, then, let me say in conclusion, your comfort and strength amidst the passing hours of life, and when anticipating its inevitable close. If ye are Christ's in earnest heartfelt self-devotion, in the entire surrender of yourselves to Him who hath redeemed you by His

precious blood, then indeed "death is yours." It may not be that, when he draws near to you, Death shall be welcomed with rapture, or even regarded without shrinking and dread. At the best, his is never a sweet face, nor is it a sound to which mortal ear can listen calmly when his step is heard on the threshold, or his knock strikes the door. But if you are Christ's, there is that in your condition which may well mitigate the fear, as it will ultimately triumph over the power of death. Death comes at Christ's command to call the believer to Himself; and grim and ghastly though be the look of the messenger, surely that may well be forgotten in the sweetness of the message he brings. Death comes to set the spirit free; and rude though be the hand that knocks off the fetters, and painful though be the process of liberation, what need the prisoner care for that, when it is to freedom, life, home, he is about to be emancipated? Death strikes the hour of the soul's everlasting espousals, and though the sound may be a harsh one, what matters that? To common ear it may seem a death-knell, to the ear of faith it is a bridal peal. "Now," may the fainting passing soul reflect, "now my Lord is coming, I go to meet Him—to be with Jesus—to dwell with Him in everlasting light and love—to be severed from Him no more for ever: O Death, lead thou me on!" Or, if frail nature should faint and fail in that awful hour, surely this may be its strong consolation, the thought that even in the article of dissolution, He to whom the soul belongs is near and close beside it, to sustain the fortitude of His servant, and shield him in the last

alarms. "The night falls dark upon my spirit; I tremble to go forth into that awful mystery and gloom: help, Lord, for my spirit faileth,"—is this the cry of its passing anguish? "Fear not," will be the sweet response that falls upon the inner ear—"Fear not, I am with thee; the night is far spent, the day is at hand; a little moment, and the shadows shall flee away for ever!" "O Death!" may not then the dying saint, rising into the magnanimity of his glorious faith, exclaim—"O Death, I fear thee not; I am not thine, but thou art mine! Thanks be to God that giveth me the victory through Jesus Christ my Lord!"

SERMON X.

THE SIMPLICITY OF CHRISTIAN RITUAL.

“Then verily the first covenant had also ordinances of divine service.”

—*Hebrews*, ix. 1.

THE language of sign or symbol enters very largely into all the affairs of life. It is not by articulate speech alone that the inner experiences of the mind are expressed or communicated to others; it is not in words only that we garner up for our own or others' use the fleeting phenomena of thought and feeling: there is a silent language of look and tone and gesture, which, as it is the earliest, is also the most vivid and impressive, medium of mind. The human spirit craves and finds embodiment for its impalpable, evanescent ideas and emotions, not merely in sounds that die away upon the ear, but in acts and observances that arrest the eye, and stamp themselves upon the memory, or in shapes and forms and symbols that possess a material and palpable continuity. Nor, with all the advantages which, by reason of its greater compass and flexibility, spoken language possesses as an instrument

for the communication of thought, can it be questioned that in some respects it is inferior in force and intelligibility to the unuttered language of symbol or sign.

The superiority of sign or symbol as a vehicle of thought is in some sort implied in the very fact that it is the language of nature, the first which man learns, or rather which, with instinctive and universal intelligence, he employs. Long ere the infant can make use of conventional speech, it receives and reciprocates intelligence. It discerns the intimations of thought and feeling in the mother's face; and by the responsive smile or tear—by the bright or beclouded face—by the clinging embrace or the cry of alarm—by the restless, ever-varying play of expression, motion, gesticulation—it indicates the possession of a most copious, though inartificial, exponent of mind. Betwixt the sign and the thing signified there is, in this case, a mysterious connection, deeply wrought into the very elements of our being, so that nowhere can the man be found to whom the gleaming countenance is not significant of joy and the trembling lip and tearful eye of grief, or to whom the manifold and subtle varieties of expression that flit over the human countenance and form are devoid of meaning. On the other hand, with but rare exceptions, the connection between words and the objects they represent is purely arbitrary, insomuch that it is only by conventional usage and artificial education that the instruction conveyed by words becomes intelligible to the auditor.

There is something, again, in a visible and tangible sign, or in a significant or symbolic act, which, by its

very nature, appeals more impressively to the mind than mere vocables that vibrate for a moment on the organ of hearing and then pass away. Embody thought in a material representation or memorial, and it stands before you with a distinct and palpable continuity; it can become the object of prolonged contemplation; it is permanently embalmed to the senses. Hence, when any feeling or sentiment—such, for instance, as that of regret or veneration for the dead—takes strong hold of the mind, there is a disinclination to rest satisfied with a mere verbal expression, or even written record, of the greatness we honour—a tendency to project and stereotype the inward feeling in some visible and enduring material form—to set up some palpable outward memorial in which thought and affection may see themselves reflected. Hence, too, the innumerable cases in which we seek, by forms and observances, to give external ratification and significance to the events and transactions of life. The coronation of the monarch, and the ceremonials generally attendant on investiture in office or dignity, the forms and solemnities that accompany the passing of laws, the administration of justice, the sale and acquisition of lands, the badges of knighthood and other social honours, the rites and festivities of marriage, the gloomy attire and solemn pomp of the burial of the dead—these are some of the many instances in which actions and events are deemed incomplete till the mind has satisfied its craving to externalise its thoughts and feelings in some palpable material type or symbol.

Moreover, it deserves to be considered that the lan-

guage of symbol lies nearer to thought than that of verbal expression. Words are in great part but the representatives of symbols. It is only by signs and analogies drawn from the material world that the invisible experiences of our minds can be communicated to others. As no man can look into another's mind and have direct cognisance of another's thoughts, we can only convey to others what is passing in our own minds, by selecting and pointing out some object or phenomenon of the outward world that bears an analogy to the thought or feeling within our breasts. An arbitrary sound or word or name could never convey to another the thought or conception, the feeling or fancy, of which I am conscious. But God has constructed this wondrous material world of beauty and order in which we dwell, replete with resemblances, analogies, types of the inner world of thought. And so, in the effort to make others comprehend our mental experiences, we have only to turn at any moment to nature in order to find in some one of her many aspects, processes, movements, the desired type or representation of our inner mental state. All nature is to the soul a vocabulary of symbols, a ready-prepared repository of signs by which it may tell forth its inward consciousness to others. And so all language descriptive of mental states and experiences is universally acknowledged to be, in its origin, metaphorical, and to derive its force and expressiveness from the fact that it summons up to the mind the phenomena of the visible world as symbols of thought. And if further proof of the utility and importance of symbol were wanting, it

might be found in the fact that all Nature is but one grand symbol by which God shadows forth His own invisible Being and character,—and that the chief glory of Nature lies not in her vastness or her order—in the beauty and grandeur of her forms, or the exquisite harmony of her adaptations,—but in this, that rock and stream and star and sea, the gleam of her sunshine and the gloom and mystery of her night, the voice of her waters and the silent majesty of her hills—all her mute and material and all her animate creatures alike, are but types and symbols of the invisible and eternal glory of Him concerning whom “day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night teacheth knowledge.”

The principle on which symbolic language depends being thus deeply seated in man’s nature, it might be anticipated that its influence would be apparent in that religion which is so marvellously adapted to his sympathies and wants. Entering deeply into nature and life, associated with our tenderest and holiest earthly relationships, the vehicle of our noblest sentiments of human affection, gratitude, veneration, it is natural to conclude that the voiceless language of sign and symbol will play no unimportant part in our religious life. But when, with these views, we turn to that religious economy under which we live, by nothing are we so much struck as by the simplicity of its external worship—the scantiness, unobtrusiveness, and seeming poverty of its ritual observances. And this absence of symbol in the Christian worship becomes all the more singular when contrasted with the sensuous beauty and splendour of the heathen religions amidst which Christianity

was developed, and with the imposing ceremonial, the elaborate symbolism, of that earlier dispensation from which it took its rise. Not unnatural would it have been for a heathen or a Jewish mind to be repelled by the apparent baldness and tameness of the Christian ritual; not strange, if, seated at the communion-table where a few Christian friends had met with the quiet informality of a common meal to partake of the elements of that simplest of festivals, the mind of the primitive convert had sometimes recurred with a feeling of wistfulness to the days when, in temples vast and spacious, and resplendent with the rarest efforts of the painter's and sculptor's art, he had mingled with the throng of awestruck worshippers, gazed upon the gorgeous procession of white-robed priests or virgins, or felt his soul thrilled with emotion when, amidst lamps and incense and garlands and music, the bleeding victim yielded up its life upon the altar. A religion without priest, without altar, without temple—whose places of assembly were the rude upper chamber, the mountain-side, or the sea-shore—whose most sacred mysteries involved no act more imposing than the breaking of bread or the washing of the person with water—must have appeared poor and unimposing to many a superficial observer who could recall the outward magnificence, the splendid vestments, the golden lamps, the ever-burning altar, the pealing multitudinous music, the awestruck prostrations, the mysterious shrine—the whole sumptuous symbolism of that ritual which had passed away. But in all such regrets the observer would have erred. The outward impressiveness and

material splendour of the ancient religion, "the ordinances of divine service and worldly sanctuary" of the "first covenant," were in reality but indications of imperfection and weakness. The ceremonial plainness, the literal, unsymbolic character of the new economy, is the exponent of its true dignity and glory. And just as we know that the student of history in our own day would greatly err who, captivated by the barbaric splendour of feudal times—by the show and spectacle, the jousts and tournaments and warlike pageants—by the gallantry and gaiety and glitter of an age long past, should fail to perceive that all these were but the signs of an imperfect and undeveloped civilisation—so would it be in the case before us. As the prosaic simplicity and unimposing quietness of our modern life is an indication of social progress and not of retrogression, so the comparative tameness and unimpressiveness of the Christian ritual is only a proof that the period of religious immaturity—the spiritual age of chivalry, so to speak—has passed away, and that we have reached a higher and more developed epoch of man's spiritual history. Accordingly, it is this thought which I shall now endeavour a little more fully to illustrate—suggesting to you various considerations in support of the doctrine that the simplicity of the Christian ritual is the exponent of an advanced, and not of a retrograde, condition of the Church.

I. The simplicity of worship in the Christian Church is a sign of spiritual advancement, inasmuch as it arises, in some measure, from the fact *that the gospel rites are*

commemorative, whilst those of the former dispensation were anticipative.

To depict the unknown, a much more elaborate representation is needed than merely to recall the known. To reproduce in the mind the idea of a former friend, or to revive the thought of an event with which we are conversant, is obviously a simpler and easier process than to portray the aspect and character of a stranger, or to convey to us an adequate conception of scenes and incidents with which we are altogether unacquainted. If I wish to give you a correct notion of the person and manner of one whom you have never seen, I must submit to you, not a mere outline, or hint, or imperfect sketch, but a carefully-drawn portrait, or a full, minute, detailed account of him. But if I only desire to revive in your imagination the idea of some old and once familiar friend, no such elaborate process is needed: all that is required is merely hints for thought, incentives to the mind's own power of reminiscence. The rudest outline—nay, a name, a word, some trifling object associated with him—is in this case enough; the mind itself does all the rest. And the eye no sooner rests upon the suggestive memorial—the locket, the book, the slight article of attire,—than instantly there rises up before you the old familiar form, the look, the smile, the gait, the tones of the voice, the thousand treasured details that constitute our conception of the man.

Now, analogous to this is the distinction between the ritual of Judaism and that of Christianity. The former partakes in some measure of the character of an

elaborate portrait or delineation intended for strangers, the latter of mere hints and suggestions for friends. To the Hebrew in ancient times Christ was a Being of whose person and character and work he had but the most vague and undefined conceptions; to the Christian worshipper he is no shadowy dream of the future, no vague and visionary personage of a distant age, but the dearest, most intimate, best beloved of friends, whose beautiful life stands forth before the mind with all the distinctness of history—whose glorious person and mission is the treasured and familiar contemplation of his secret thoughts. The former, accordingly, needed all the elaborate formality of type and ceremony, of temple and altar and sacrifice—of symbolic persons and objects and actions, to help out his idea of the Messiah and of His mighty work and mission. But to enable the latter to recall his Lord, no more is required than a few drops of water, a bit of broken bread, or a cup of wine. Around these simplest outward memorials, a host of thoughts, reflections, remembrances, are ready to gather. Deity Incarnate, Infinite Self-sacrifice, Reconciliation with God, Pardon, Purity, Peace, Eternal Life through the blood of Jesus, union with Christ, and in Him with all good and holy beings,—these are some of the great Christian ideas already lodged in each devout worshipper's mind, and which awake at the suggestive touch of the sacramental symbols to invest them with a value altogether incommensurate with their outward worth. The very simplicity of these material symbols implies that the senses have less and the mind far more to do in the process of spiritual

conception, than in a system of more imposing and obtrusive materialism. In the latter case, the mind, relying on the aid of forms and facts, could scarce proceed a step without them; in the former, facts but touch the spring, give the impulse to thought, and the full mind instantly loses hold of them, and passes on into the realm of spiritual reflection, independent of their aid. It is here in some respects as in the study of nature by the scientific observer. The mind that is already informed by the knowledge of great principles and laws, needs no grand and imposing phenomena, no illustration on a large scale to suggest to it their presence and operation. The fall of a stone is as significant of gravitation as the revolution of a planet; the print of a foot deciphered on a rock is enough to revive to the imagination an ancient and extinct world; and the form and structure of a wayside weed, or the colours that glisten in the dewdrop that trembles on its leaf, are replete with indications of grand laws of colour and symmetry that pervade the universe. In like manner, it is the very glory of the Christian economy that its symbolic forms are so slight and inelaborate; for this very fact indicates that they are prepared for minds to which their use lies only in their suggestiveness—minds already imbued with spiritual principles and laws of which the simplest outer forms serve as illustrations and remembrancers equally with the most imposing.

II. The simple and unimposing character of the Christian ritual is an indication of spiritual advance-

ment again, inasmuch as it arises from the fact, *that whilst the rites of Judaism were mainly disciplinary, those of Christianity are spontaneous and expressive.* In the old dispensation, ritual observances constituted an elaborate mechanism for the awakening of religious thought and feeling; in the new economy, they are the actual and voluntary manifestation of religious thought and feeling already existing. They were mere machinery in the former case; in the latter they are instinct with spirit and life: and therefore the very elaborateness of the ancient ritual is the exponent of its inferiority; the unobtrusive simplicity of the modern, the sign of its true glory.

For it is obvious that the most elaborate achievements of art ever fall short in value and dignity of the simplest manifestations of life. It is possible, indeed, for artificial training in its apparent results greatly to surpass natural gifts. Acquired accomplishments may sometimes seem to a superficial eye to excel original powers—the performances of a mere educational drill or discipline in their imposing exactness and elaborateness to be superior to the free and simple efforts of genius. By pouring glass into a mould, you may produce forms far more exact and symmetrical in appearance than that of the living crystal, which, from the nucleus within, works out its rough and careless natural beauty. By the pruning-knife and rigid training you may force the trees of a plantation into shapes and proportions far more exact, orderly, obedient to definite laws of form, than nature ever spontaneously manifests. But in either case, who would hesitate to pronounce the

inexact and seemingly rude results of life working from within to be infinitely more noble than the most elegant and methodical effects of art imposed from without. So, again, by dint of constant training, a person of but slight natural taste for music may acquire a certain superficial facility in musical performances—a mechanical ease, rapidity, and exactness far surpassing that of uninstructed natural genius; but the slightest air sung with native taste and feeling—nay, the irregular, wild instinctive melody that wakes the woodland echoes, is, in its untaught simplicity, essentially superior to all the achievements of a mere artificial discipline.

Now, these analogies may elucidate, in some measure, the comparative worth of the Jewish and Christian ritual; for the former partakes very much of the character of an artificial discipline, the latter of a life projecting itself spontaneously in outward forms.

In the infancy of nations, as of individuals, the imagination is ever more active than the intellect, and the impressions conveyed through the senses deeper and more abiding than those which can be produced by any direct appeal to the understanding. The immature mind thinks in images. Abstract truth has no hold upon it. Illustrations are more intelligible than arguments. To a race such as that for which the institutions of the Ceremonial Law were prepared, a religion of thought—a spiritual system in which intellectual teaching and mental exercise held a prominent place—would have been utterly inappropriate. It would have been as much lost upon them as would be

the literature and laws of England, if attempted to be introduced wholesale among savages. Accordingly, a religious economy was devised, in which truth was elaborately presented in a concrete form, and spiritual lessons were lodged in material objects and actions. The ritual of Judaism was not the spontaneous creation of the religious thought and feeling of the worshippers. Altogether above their inventive powers, it was contrived and obtruded upon them in all its completeness from without,—a ready-made system of religious symbols and exercises, to bring down truth to babes. The idea of God was embodied to the senses in a visible temple—of His holiness in an awful shrine or sanctuary, fenced off from curious gaze and unhallowed step. The notion of a Divine Order pervading human life was lodged in regulations for food and dress, distinctions between things clean and unclean, minute prescriptions and rules for all the varied relations and exigencies of social existence. The conceptions of sin, guilt, penitence, prayer, of atonement, pardon, purity, self-devotion, were forced on the senses, and drilled into minds otherwise incapable of rising to them, by laws of ceremonial exclusion, priests, costly sacrifices, sprinklings, lustrations—by the life's blood of victims dyeing the altar, or borne by priestly hands into the awful presence of the Deity—by the mysterious flight of the sin-burdened scape-goat into a region of darkness and forgetfulness, from whence it could return no more. Without these and other manifold aids to thought, spiritual ideas to such a race would have been unattainable. But by such material devices, all life became,

as it were, saturated with religious suggestions. The Jew could not eat or drink, or dress, or sow or reap, or buy or sell, arrange his household, hold intercourse with neighbour or friend, perform any one function of individual or social life, without being met by restrictions, forms, observances, which forced religious impression upon him, and, in combination with the more solemn ceremonial of the temple, left a constant deposit of spiritual thought upon the mind, and drilled the worshipper into religious habits. The entire ritual of Judaism was, therefore, essentially artificial.

In a more spiritual and reflective age, on the other hand, in which the spiritual perceptions have become developed, and the mind has become receptive of direct religious instruction, such sensible helps to the formation of thought are no longer necessary. The mind in which truth has become an intuition needs no longer to spell out its convictions by the aid of a picture-book. The avenue of spirit thrown open to the worshipper, he no more requires to climb slowly up to the presence-chamber of the king by the circuitous route of sense. But if ritual may in such an age be dispensed with in great measure as a means of instruction, it still performs an important function as a means of expression. No longer necessary as a mould for the shaping of thought, it has still its use as a form in which religious thought and feeling may find vent. If the necessity for a visible temple and sanctuary to symbolise God's residence with man has ceased, now that He who is "the brightness of the Father's glory and the express image of His person," the perfect symbol of the Divine, has

dwelt among us,—if to prompt our minds in conceiving of sin and sacrifice, no scenic show of victims slain and life's blood drenching earthly altars be needed, now that the stainless, sinless, all-holy One hath once for all offered up the sacrifice of a perfect life to God,—still there is in the Christian heart the demand for outward forms and rites to embody the reverence, the gratitude, the devotion, the love of which it is inwardly conscious. The soul, in its relation to an unseen Father, still craves for some outer medium of expression that shall give form to feeling—that shall tell forth its devotion to the heavenly Friend as the smile, the look, the grasp of the hand, the meeting at the festive board, the gifts and tokens of affection, externalise and express our sentiments towards those we love on earth.

But in this case it is obvious that no elaborate system of prescribed rites and symbols is possible. The very nobleness of the use to which ritual is devoted in the new economy, precludes all but the most general authoritative regulations. In Judaism it was necessary that all should be prescribed ; in Christianity, almost everything must be left to the discretion of the Church. There the lawgiver must do everything ; here he can do little or nothing. For when symbols are meant to teach, it were as absurd to leave anything to be determined by the worshipper as to permit a child to direct his own education. But you cannot so regulate the way in which a man shall express his sentiments and feelings. Nature and character are spontaneous ; they will not take any form, utter themselves through any

exact and inflexible mode of expression which may be furnished them from without. Who can love by rule, manifest sorrow by stereotyped gestures, indicate gratitude or admiration by adopting looks and postures authoritatively prescribed? Try to make a man do so, and instead of helping, you will cramp and vitiate his feelings, and by the effort to force consciousness into one special mould or shape, kill the life you mean to cultivate. In attempting to work up feeling into another's forms, a man would end by ceasing to feel, or by becoming a hypocrite and formalist. The reality of life is manifested by nothing so much as by the endless variety of its outward developments. Every herb of the field has its own individuality of form; every acorn enfolds a different oak. Attempt to construct some outward framework of uniformity for nature, and the latitudinarian oaks and elms, the informal lilies of the field and fowls of the air, will breathe forth their protest in beauty, and sound it out in song. And how shall the nobler life of the soul be constrained into uniformity? How shall human spirits, each endowed with a separate will and an individual character, adopt one measured routine of expression, without crushing that very nature whose life is freedom? The general principles of religion, the essential elements of Christian life, are indeed the same in all men; and so, in outline, it is possible to anticipate and regulate the forms in which the common life of the Church shall find expression. But all such regulations, it is evident, must be of the most simple and general character—not descending to the minutiae which the indi-

vidual genius of nations and communities may affect, but keeping to the broad platform of the common uses and needs of humanity. And the conclusion to which, from this argument, we are led is obviously this, that the glory of our Christian ritual lies in its very simplicity. For the manifestation of our common life in God, and of our common faith in Christ, the mind craves some outward badge or symbol; and so, in gracious condescension to our needs, our Lord has instituted the two sacramental rites; but even these He has prescribed but in outline, leaving all accessories to be filled in, as the varied needs of His people, in different times and places and circumstances, should dictate. The common heart of the Church, in all lands and ages, shall ever crave a medium of intercourse with its Lord, and so the ordinance of common prayer has been instituted; the universal and spontaneous voice of the soul's gratitude and adoration and love—as universal as the emotions themselves—is song; and so, for the outflow of its devotions, the channel of common praise has been provided. But forasmuch as not more various are the languages and idioms of the nations and races into which the human family is divided, than the modes of utterance through which the spirit of humanity in different regions and ages spontaneously expresses itself—forasmuch as the tones of the human voice are not more endlessly diversified than are the inflexions of the mind and heart, in giving vent to the same thoughts and sentiments—so our gracious Lord, in His loving wisdom, hath prescribed no one form of speech or song, no one inflexible

language of worship, for His church on earth. And in this lies the very grandeur of its worship, that in the "chartered freedom" of our Christian ritual, each nation and community, each separate society and church and individual, lifting up its own note of adoration, all are found to blend in the one accordant anthem, the one manifold yet harmonious tribute of the Universal Church's praise.

I conclude this discourse by the remark, that the simplicity of the Christian rites serves as a safeguard against those obvious dangers which are incident to all ritual worship.

The chief of these is *the tendency in the unspiritual mind to stop short at the symbol*—in other words, to transfer to the visible sign feelings appropriate only to the things signified, or to rest content with the performance of outward ceremonial acts, apart from the exercise of those devout feelings which lend to such acts any real value. Even in our common experience there is a strong propensity in the mind to invest significant objects and acts with the feelings due only to the realities, material or spiritual, which they represent. Our associations cling to the visible symbol of what is desirable or good, till it becomes in itself more precious to us than that which at first gave it all its value. To take the most flagrant instance—we know that money has no value, except as the conventional representative of things which gratify our natural desires. But money, desired and loved at first for the sake of other things, intercepts by degrees the attach-

ment of which it has been the medium, and becomes an ultimate object of desire and love in itself. The passion of avarice, however demonstrably irrational, is one against which reason is impotent. By the slow deposit of pleasurable associations on a false basis, it consolidates into a principle of action so potent that the enjoyments of life are one by one sacrificed for that which is but their worthless representative. If you could dispense, in whole or in part, with the symbol, the passion that is based upon it would be no longer possible. If society could conduct its commerce without the intervention of arbitrary signs of value, no room would be left for the foolish substitution which the vice of avarice implies. Realities alone would be regarded as important; fictitious symbols would cease to have any place in our regard.

Now this tendency of the mind operates still more fatally in our spiritual experience. The signs of spiritual realities are even more apt than those of temporal to arrest and absorb the sentiments due to the things signified. A religion in which ritual holds a prominent place is notoriously liable to degenerate into formalism. The feelings of awe and reverence for unseen and spiritual objects, coming often at the suggestive call of the sacred symbol, gradually transfer themselves to that with which they have been associated. The invisible good is less and less remembered. To the religious miser the mere showy counters become gradually all in all, and he learns to content himself with the ring and glitter of the worthless sign, to the utter abnegation of the blessings for which it stands. And this propensity

acts with greater force in religion, from the fact that the things represented or symbolised are not, as in our secular experience, in themselves palpable and agreeable. The pleasures which money represents are mainly pleasures cognisable by the senses, and for which we have strong natural desires. The objects represented by religious signs, on the other hand, are invisible, immaterial, requiring an effort of mind to summon them up—an effort which it is the less disposed to make that they are also objects which, to the defective nature of man, are not naturally and inherently attractive. If, therefore, the inclination of the mind to drop the reality and cling to the representative be strong in any case, it must be especially potent here. It is easy to employ the sacramental sign of purity; it is far from easy to bring the mind and heart into contact with the hallowing influences which it represents. It costs no effort to receive the emblems of a dying Saviour; to multitudes it is an irksome task to raise the thoughts and affections into communion with an unseen Lord. To bend the knee with external decorum, or to send forth from the lip mechanical sounds and intonations, is an act which calls for scarcely any mental exertion; but it demands the strenuous up-gathering of all our inward energies in order to pray with the spirit, or to offer up the true inner melody of adoring gratitude and love to God. The worldly and unspiritual mind is ready to avail itself of any excuse for evading the task of spiritual worship, and an excuse is too readily accessible in the decorous observance of its external forms. The tendency of multitudes even

in the case of the simplest ritual, and much more where ritual is obtrusive and elaborate, is to make the visibilities of worship the whole of it. The little measure of devotion they possess is expended on the mere machinery through which devotion acts. The spirit's wing, too feeble to bear it up to the empyrean heights of holy faith and love, flutters in the mere atmosphere of form. Conscience, ill at ease without some semblance of religion, is cheaply pacified by a respectful attention to its material accompaniments; and the more numerous and elaborate such accompaniments, the more satisfactory the bribe. The true way to avoid this error is, obviously, to remove as much as possible its cause. Let there be no arbitrary and needless intervention between the soul of the worshipper and the Divine object of its homage. Let the eye of faith gaze on the Invisible through the simplest and purest medium. Deprive it of all excuse to trifle curiously with the telescope, instead of using it in order to see. And forasmuch as, to earthly worship, formal aids are indispensable, let it ever be remembered that that form is the best which least diverts attention to itself, and best helps the soul to hold fellowship with God.

Moreover, the danger thus incident to an elaborate ceremonial, of substituting ritual for religion, is increased by the too common tendency *to mistake æsthetic emotion for religious feeling*. It is quite possible, apart from a religion of conscience and spiritual conviction, to get up a sensuous mimicry of pious emotion. As the outer form of a book, its showy binding or fair type, may be admired by many who have neither intel-

ligence nor taste to appreciate its contents ; or, as the fair and noble features and graceful form of man or woman may be beheld with delight by not a few, who are incapable of honouring the still nobler beauty of the mind within—so there is that in the mere dress and drapery of religion, the arbitrary form and accidents of spirituality, which may elicit deep emotion from many a mind that has never felt one throb of true religious feeling—of reverence or love for the inner spirit and essence of religion itself. Awe, reverence, rapt contemplation, the kindling of heart and swelling of soul, which the grand objects of faith are adapted to excite, may, in a man of sensitive mind or delicate organisation, find a close imitation in the feelings called forth by a tasteful and splendid ceremonial. Beauty, it is true, is not hostile to goodness ; on the contrary, the Beautiful and the Good, ever closely akin, blend ultimately in the one glorious unity of the Divine nature. The highest perception and keenest relish for the Beautiful, therefore, is that which is possible only to the pure and holy mind. Yet there is a lower sensibility to Beauty which is attainable apart from the moral condition of the heart, and which is often felt most keenly by the most unspiritual and irreligious of men. A refined bodily organisation, a susceptible nervous system, a strongly emotional temperament, especially if these be combined with a mind of some measure of intellectual culture, will render a man extremely sensitive to the beauty of the outer accompaniments of religious worship. The faculties which qualify their possessor for the pleasures of taste—

which enable him to take delight in art or nature, in poetry or painting or music, in scenic effects or dramatic exhibitions—are identical with those which an elaborate and poetic ritual calls into play. And there is, therefore, a semi-sensuous delight in religious worship imposingly conducted, which may be felt by the least conscientious even more than by the sincerely devout. The soul that is devoid of true reverence towards God may be rapt into a spurious elation while in rich and solemn tones the loud-voiced organ peals forth His praise. The heart that never felt one throb of love to Christ may thrill with an ecstasy of sentimental tenderness while soft voices, now blending, now dividing, in combined or responsive strains, celebrate the glories of redeeming love. And not seldom the most sensual and profligate of men have owned to that strange, undefined, yet delicious feeling of awe and elevation that steals over the spirit in some fair adorned temple on which all the resources of art have been lavished—where soft light floods the air, and mystic shadows play over pillar and arch and vaulted roof, and the hushed and solemn stillness is broken only by the voice of prayer or praise. Christian thought and feeling may indeed appropriate to its own high uses these outer things. All that is noble in taste and beautiful in art it may lay hold of, and, by the inner transforming power of devotion, ennoble and spiritualise. Nay, Religion, in one sense, asserts its right to all that is beautiful and noble and lovely on earth, and by its regal touch confers on earthly things a heavenly dignity. There are ways in which all the treasures of

genius, all the creations of poetry, all the resources of art, may be made tributary to the cause of Christ. Still it should never be forgotten that, if largely introduced into the act of religious worship, the refinements of art may become to multitudes, not the means, but the end. Instead of walking by the light you kindle, many, gazing on the beauty of the lamp, will stumble in the Christian path. For one that can take hold of the angel's hand, there are multitudes who will content themselves with gazing artistically on the splendour of his vesture. It is easy to admire the sheen of the sapphire throne, while we leave its glorious Occupant unreverenced and unrecognised. Banish from the service of God all coarseness and rudeness — all that would distract by offending the taste of the worshipper, just as much as all that would disturb by subjecting him to bodily discomfort, and you leave the spirit free for its own pure and glorious exercise. But too studiously adorn the sanctuary and its services ; obtrude an artificial beauty on the eye and sense of the worshipper, and you will surely lead to formalism and self-deception. The meretricious attractions of form may bring numbers, but it will not add true strength to the Church. The artistic splendour of ritual may kindle many hearts with emotion, but it will be with unhallowed fire. Better that the world should stay away than join Christ's ranks on false pretences ; better that the hearts of men should remain utterly cold, than that, warmed by spurious feeling, they should deem themselves inspired by a pure and holy flame.

SERMON XI.

THE COMPARATIVE INFLUENCE OF CHARACTER AND DOCTRINE.

“Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine ; continue in them : for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself and them that hear thee.”
—1 *Timothy*, iv. 16.

IN counselling his friend and follower as to the best method of doing good in the sphere of duty allotted to him, the apostle seems here to lay the chief stress, not on doctrine or teaching, but on life or conduct. “Take heed,” is his admonition, not first to what you *teach*, and then to what you *are* ; not primarily to your verbal instructions, and then to the spirit of your own character and life, but first “to thyself” and then “to the doctrine.” And the principle thus enunciated is, it will be easy to see, by no means exclusively applicable to ministers, or public teachers and office-bearers in the Church. It is, on the contrary, a principle fraught with instruction to all, of whatever standing, whose duty it may be to teach, or admonish, or administer moral and religious guidance to others—to every parent,

every Sunday-school teacher, nay, to every Christian man who wishes to do good by speaking a word of serious import to a brother. For it is nothing less than the broad principle that, in order to *do* good, the first and great effort must be to *be* good,—that extent and accuracy of religious knowledge, however important, are secondary, as a means of influence, to the moral discipline and culture of our own heart and life. In order to persuade others of the truth as it is in Jesus, the primary qualification, we are here taught, is to have our own souls thoroughly imbued with its power.

In asserting, however, the necessity of personal goodness in the religious instructor, it is not maintained that an irreligious man is absolutely disqualified for speaking God's truth, or even for so speaking it as to do some good to others. Both reason and experience are against the notion that it needs great personal piety to be an accurate expositor of the theory of divine truth, or that none but men of very holy lives can be profound theologians or able preachers. To be versant in a science does not of necessity imply that we must be skilled in the correlative art. Theory and practice, science and art, the knowledge of principles and the power to apply them, are attainments which depend on totally different faculties, and which may be, and in actual experience very commonly are, dissociated from each other. The able or eloquent writer on the principles of government would not always make the best practical statesman, or the acute expounder of theories in political economy the most sagacious financier. It is possible to know scientifically the principles of music

without being able to sing a note,—to discuss and enforce the principles of grammar and rhetoric, and yet be a feeble speaker or inelegant writer. And the same remark is borne out in the sphere of man's spiritual life. The facts and data being given, a man may play with the terms of theology as with the terms of algebra. There is nothing to hinder a clever reasoner, if he apply his mind to the subject, from working out a doctrine as he would work out a syllogism, from putting a point in theology as happily as a point in philosophy or law, or from throwing the lights of fancy, illustration, eloquence, around any of the high themes of religion as vividly as the clever special pleader around the most secular argument or appeal. The experience of mankind in all ages has shown how possible it is for a man to draw fine fancy pictures of the beauty of virtue amidst a life that is sadly unfamiliar with her presence, to utter pathetic harangues on charity with a heart of utter selfishness, and to declaim on purity and self-denial whilst living in sloth and luxurious self-indulgence. The truth of God may thus be studied as a mere intellectual exercise, and preached as a feat of rhetorical address, whilst yet the premises of the preacher's high argument are utterly foreign to his own godless experience. Like a sick physician, the preacher may prescribe, perhaps successfully, to others for the disease of which himself is dying. Like the "sounding brass or tinkling cymbal," he may give forth inspiring and animating strains to stir the hearts of men, of which himself is but the unconscious medium.

But whilst it is not denied that sound religious

instruction may emanate from a teacher of little personal piety—that true and holy words may be spoken by lips untrue and profane, we fall back with not less confidence on the assertion, that an experimental acquaintance with divine truth—deep religious earnestness, is the first and grand qualification in the teacher, incomparably the most powerful means of usefulness, and the surest pledge of success. Truth is indeed in itself a mighty instrument, whatsoever hand may wield it; but though its edge may be as keen and its temper as fine in the most unhallowed as in the holiest hands, in the former it must often prove a weapon unwieldy and ineffective as the warrior's sword in the weakling's grasp. Conveyed as correctly by human lips as by the pages of a book, truth spoken is yet for its influence by no means as independent of the moral make and structure of the living teacher, as truth written of the fabric of the printed page. To be duly effective, truth must not merely fall from the lip, but breathe forth from the life; it must come, not like incense from the censer that only holds it, but like fragrance, from a flower, exhaling from a nature suffused with it throughout. The doctrines and principles you teach, in order to manifest their inherent efficacy, must be known and reproduced, not in mere logical order and system, like dried specimens of plants in a naturalist's collection, but with the fresh waving fragrance of the living plant or flower—pervaded by the vital sap, unfolding to the sunbeams, and fanned by the breezes of heaven. In one word—and this is the principle which I wish now to illustrate—the first qualification of the religious

instructor is, not knowledge, but piety. As a means of moral and religious influence, life should precede doctrine, character be regarded as of even greater importance than verbal teaching ; we should have respect to the sequence of the apostle's counsels in the text, "Take heed unto *thyself and* unto the doctrine."—I will adduce in the sequel one or two considerations in support of this principle.

I. That life is in some respects of prior importance to doctrine may be perceived by reflecting,—*that life tends very greatly to modify a man's own views of doctrine*; in other words, that personal character tinges a man's perceptions of truth. It is a well-known law of our mental experience that the condition and character of the observing mind greatly modify the knowledge which it receives from outward objects. Whether it be things material or moral, objects of sense or objects of thought, in most cases we *perceive* according as we *are*. The same objects may be externally present to a hundred spectators, and yet be practically different to each of them. In surveying the outward world, for instance, we "half create and half perceive ;" and in order to the correctness and completeness of our perception of its varied phenomena, it is necessary, not merely that they be externally presented to us, but that we should "take heed to ourselves," that our powers of perception be in unimpaired, healthy, vigorous action. Every one knows, for example, that the varied colours wherewith the face of the visible earth seems to be clothed, exist not literally in the

objects themselves, but owe their splendour to the eye that surveys them. It is only the unknown or occult causes of colour that exist in nature ; colour itself is in the organism and mind of the observer ; and through physical disease or organic defect our perceptions of colour may be marred or destroyed. The jaundiced eye blanches nature. The peculiar phenomenon of colour-blindness shows that to many an eye the garniture of beauty which bespreads the green earth is lost ; and without any change on the face of nature, you have only to suppose, in any case, the organ of vision to undergo some strange affection, and instantly the whole aspect of the visible world would be changed ; the splendour would vanish from the grass and the glory from the flower, the purple from the mountain and the azure from the cloud, and all nature present to the spectator but one sombre and unvaried expanse of black or grey. Or if we pass from the mere organism through which man's spirit converses with the outward world to that spirit itself, still more obvious illustration have we of the principle before us. It is the state of the inner eye, the condition of that spirit within us which looks out on nature through the loopholes of sense, that makes the world's aspect to be to us what it is. It is the same world which is beheld by the man of deep thoughtfulness and sensibility, and by the dull observer in whom the sense of beauty has never been evoked, and yet how different that world to each ! The former, gifted with a spirit in profound sympathy with nature, and disciplined into exquisite sensibility to her loveliness, discerns and responds to her hidden

meaning ; sees behind the outer forms of meadow, wood, and mountain, a presence to which his own spirit thrills, and catches, with instinctive intelligence, as the child the smile or frown on the mother's face, the import of each expression on her ever-varying countenance ; whilst the latter, blind to every "remoter charm or interest unborrowed from the eye," beholds in the same scenes nothing more than a particular disposition of earth and wood and water, which calls forth scarcely any emotion in his mind. And though there may be much of this deeper insight into nature which is to be ascribed to an original and instinctive sensibility, yet it is only by long and careful training, by profound study and self-discipline, that this poetic instinct is developed and matured. It is only, in other words, by "taking heed to himself," that the observer can attain to the true knowledge of nature, and the deepest appreciation of her beauty.

Now the same law obtains in that higher province to which the text relates. As our perceptions of beauty, so our perceptions of moral and spiritual truth are modified by the inner spirit and character of the percipient. Self conditions doctrine. A man's own moral state is very much the measure of his moral convictions. The highest spiritual truths lie beyond the range of a soul that is not in harmony with them, and the glimmerings of truth which a defective nature gains, take their complexion from its moral tone and spirit. As the loveliest scene on which the eye of man can rest, contains no revelation of beauty to the insensitive and unreflecting observer, so the Bible is no revelation

of truth to the unspiritual mind. The glorious discoveries of divine things on the page of inspiration are lost to the soul in which the moral sense, the vision and faculty divine, is dull or dormant. God is but a name to the mind in which no divine instinct, no godly sympathies and aspirations, have begun to stir. There can be no true faith in the Incarnation, however logically accurate your notions of the person of Christ, until, by the intuition of a holy and heavenly heart, you feel Him to be divine. The sacrifice of the Cross, with all the love and tenderness and self-abnegation, the sorrow and anguish, yet joy deeper still than sorrow, that breathes around it, is no mere barren fact or intellectual dogma, of which historic proof or logical demonstration can convince us. For the true apprehension of this there is an essential inaptitude in the selfish and unloving spirit; it can be discerned only by the soul in which, however faintly, yet in reality, the pure, loving, self-devoted spirit of Jesus has begun to dwell.

Moreover, in farther illustration of the thought that self modifies doctrine, consider how notoriously our opinions in secular matters are affected by our prejudices and passions. Who of us, where personal interest is at stake, can trust with unerring certainty to the conclusions of his own judgment? Experience proves that agreeable falsehoods are at least as likely to be believed as disagreeable truths. The wish is often father to the thought; and where anything is to be gained or lost by our opinions, the winning side has almost invariably the majority of adherents. With

unconscious partiality, the attention is withdrawn from the objections and fixed with all its power of application on the arguments in favour of the foregone conclusion ; or, on the other hand, in the contemplation of some obnoxious truth, the focus of observation is instinctively shifted ; proofs are underrated or ignored, whilst every grain of counter-evidence is magnified into importance ; and with such unconscious, yet most damaging defectiveness in the mechanism of judgment, the desired, however erroneous, result is easily arrived at. How generally, again, does party spirit, education, early or hereditary associations, bias the beliefs of men ! Assail some old and time-hallowed notion, some revered fiction which has struck deep its roots into the soil of the uncultivated mind, and around which a thousand early and tender associations have gathered, and your most formidable arguments will fail to shake it. Endeavour to introduce new opinions, uncongenial to educational or class convictions, and often all the force of truth will in vain be exerted to obtain for them a place in the rugged and reluctant mind. Thus even on the lower ground of secular truth it needs, in the formation of opinion, the rarest candour and self-watchfulness to conduct the process aright. But this discipline is still more indispensable to the religious inquirer. For there are no interests so tremendous as those which are involved in our religious beliefs. In no other province of inquiry are deeper passions stirred, or prejudices, associations, habits, more numerous and inveterate, called into play. The very fundamental and primary truths of religion, the Being of God, the

Existence of a Moral Order and a righteous Retribution, the doctrines of Sin, Pardon, Salvation—all involve in their reception or rejection results bearing with overwhelming influence on the present and future interests of the inquirer,—all rouse into intense activity hopes, fears, appetites, desires, wishes, anxieties, which it is almost impossible in our investigations to set aside, in order that judgment may have scope for calm and undisturbed action. How urgent, then, the necessity for jealous candour and self-control in the study of divine truth. As the observer of the phenomena of the material heavens takes pains to perfect the instrument with which he works, aware that the slightest flaw in the speculum may vitiate his observations; so ought the contemplator of that nobler orb'd world of truth to take heed that the disc of the inner mechanism of conscience be polished from all distorting prejudice or soil of selfish passion. As the chemist seeks to render his balances exquisitely sensitive, and carefully eliminates from his results all variations of temperature or other disturbing elements; so should the student of divine things strive by God's grace to attain the acuteness and delicacy of a judgment freed from all deflecting influences, and poised with an exquisite nicety of discrimination on which not the slightest grain of truth is lost. He should cultivate, in one word, by the discipline of a holy life, a truer than philosophic calmness and candour—the calmness of a spirit that dwells in habitual communion with God, the candour of a mind that has nothing to lose, and everything to gain, by truth.

II. In further illustration of the principle that Life or Character comes, in order of importance, before "Doctrine," it is to be considered that *Life or Character affects* not only a man's own views of truth, but also *his power of expressing or communicating truth to others*. For if, from any cause, the organ of spiritual perception be impaired or undeveloped in a man's mind, of course he can communicate to others no clearer views than he himself has received. The stream can rise no higher than its source. The medium lends its own defects to the light which passes through it. Transmitted through you, truth will reach other minds in the same scanty measure in which it has entered your own; it will become, in the process of transmission, coloured, dimmed, distorted by the defectiveness of the intervening nature.

It is true indeed, as has been already said, that we may teach truth mechanically and by hearsay. It is possible for a man to talk above himself, and to convey to others correct formulas of truths that are foreign to his own experience. However weak, faulty, untruthful, in his own character, there is nothing to hinder a man from talking as wise and good as a book. If a worldly-minded parent can read, as easily may he speak, sage and solemn lessons to his children. An undevout preacher may have no difficulty in getting up the stereotyped phraseology of a religious sect or school, and pouring it forth as glibly as if it were the natural outflow of his own convictions and feelings. Nay, in so far as the mere intellectual and rhetorical part of the process is concerned, it is possible that the un-

spiritual man may preach or teach better than the more devout. For the intellectual vigour which, irrespective of personal character, would make a man an able reasoner or talker on politics, or science, or philosophy, does not desert him when he turns to theology. To compare and generalise facts, to evolve principles and laws, to follow out a chain of logical deduction, to trace out the connection and sequence of ideas, and lucidly to express or eloquently to enforce the results of thought, are operations for which there is at least equal scope in things spiritual as in things secular, and the talent for which, therefore, may be as strikingly manifested by the worst as by the best and holiest of mankind.

But however this may be, there is that in a defective or sinful life which will vitiate the ablest and most eloquent teaching. For besides the consideration that men will be little disposed to listen to arguments which have not been cogent enough to reform and regulate the life of him who employs them, it must be remembered that the teaching which has not its root in personal experience, will lack a certain undefinable yet most potent element, which lends to words their true effectiveness. To exert real power over men's minds and hearts, what you speak must be not only true, but true to you. For the conveyance of thought and feeling from mind to mind is not a process which depends on mere verbal accuracy. Language is not the only medium through which moral convictions and impressions are transmitted from speaker to hearer. There is another and more subtle mode of communica-

tion, a mysterious moral contagion, by means of which, irrespective of the mere intellectual apparatus employed, the instructor's beliefs and emotions are passed over into the minds of his auditory. Strong conviction has a force of persuasion irrespective of the mere oral instrument by which it works. Through the rudest forms of speech originality and earnestness make themselves felt, and a sentence of simple earnest talk will sometimes thrill the heart which the most refined and laboured rhetoric would leave untouched. But in order to the evolving of this element in the process of instruction, obviously the teacher's own religious nature must be penetrated and quickened by the truth he utters. The magnetic force must saturate his own spirit ere it flow out to others in contact with him. No stereotyped orthodoxy, no simulated fervours, however close or clever the imitation, will achieve the magic effects of reality. The preacher may reproduce verbatim the language of the wise and good, copy to the letter the phraseology in which religious thought and feeling have been often couched, but so long as they are but the echo of other men's experience, and not the expression of his own, the profoundest truths will fall ineffectively from his lips. There will be an unnaturalness and unreality in the very tone and manner in which he utters them. The words that once, spoken by true and living men, had life and power in them, spoken by him will be spiritless, lifeless, vapid. The rod is not in the magician's hand, and it will not conjure. In other great arts, there is, we know, a strange power which genius and originality confer on their pos-

essor, and which no mere intellectual discipline can communicate. The poet is born, not made ; and by no literary culture, however elaborate, can the man of mere cleverness, closely as he may echo the poet's style and manner, gain that nameless power to move and thrill and captivate the hearts of men—that secret charm of thoughts that breathe and words that burn, which we recognise in him on whom the true poetic spirit rests. So in that far higher region of thought and feeling with which the preacher of divine truth is conversant, there is a power of reality, an influence over men's minds and hearts, possessed by the man on whom a nobler and loftier than the inspiration of genius rests, and whose own soul is in daily communion with the heavens, which no mere intellectual discipline can emulate. Bring your own spirit to the fount of inspiration, live in habitual communion with the infinite Truth and Life, and the words you speak to men, whether rude or refined, will possess a charm, a force, a power to touch their hearts and mould their secret souls, which no words of eloquent conventionality can ever attain. There will be an intuitive recognition of the divine fire which has touched your lips. Other teachers may be more able, learned, accomplished. In apter words, and with more of the logician's or the orator's art, may they discourse of things divine ; but to them there will be something lacking still. The shape and semblance and colour of truth they may display, but it will be as a waxen imitation of the lilies of the field ; the divine aroma will not be there. The movement and play of vital thought and feeling

they may contrive to simulate, but it will be but a mimicry after all—the galvanising of dead thought, not the free and spontaneous power and grace of living truth.

III. The only other consideration I shall adduce in support of the principle involved in the text is—*that Life or Character has in many respects an influence which direct Teaching or Doctrine cannot exert.*

Actions, in many ways, teach better than words, and even the most persuasive oral instruction is greatly vivified when supplemented by the silent teaching of the life.

Consider, for one thing, that actions are *more intelligible* than words. All verbal teaching partakes more or less of the necessary vagueness of language, and its intelligibility is dependent, in a great measure, on the degree of intellectual culture and ability in the mind of the hearer. Ideas, reflections, deductions, distinctions, when presented in words, are liable to misapprehension; their power is often modified or lost by the obscurity of the medium through which they are conveyed, and the impression produced by them is apt very speedily to vanish from the mind. Many minds are inaccessible to any formal teaching that is not of the most elementary character; and there are comparatively few to whom an illustration is not more intelligible than an argument.

But whatever the difficulty of understanding words, deeds are almost always intelligible. Let a man not merely speak but act the truth; let him reveal his

soul in the inarticulate speech of an earnest, pure, and truthful life, and this will be a language which the profoundest must admire, while the simplest can appreciate. The most elaborate discourse on sanctification will prove tame and ineffective in comparison with the eloquence of a humble, holy walk with God. In the spectacle of a penitent soul pouring forth the broken utterance of its contrition at the Saviour's feet, there is a nobler sermon on repentance than eloquent lips ever spoke. Instruct your children in the knowledge of God's great love and mercy, but let them see that love cheering, animating, hallowing your daily life; describe to them the divinity and glory of the Saviour's person and work, but let them note how daily you think of Him, hear with what profoundest reverence you name His name, see how the sense of a divine presence sheds a reflected moral beauty around your own—and this will be a living and breathing theology to them, without which formal teaching will avail but little. Sermons and speeches, too, may weary; they may be listened to with irksomeness, and remembered with effort: but living speech never tires; it makes no formal demand on the attention, it goes forth in feelings and emanations that win their way insensibly into the secret depths of the soul. The medium of verbal instruction, moreover, is conventional, and it can be understood only where one special form of speech is vernacular, but the language of action and life is instinctive and universal. The living epistle needs no translation to be understood in every country and clime; a noble act of heroism or self-sacrifice speaks

to the common heart of humanity; a humble, gentle, holy, Christlike life preaches to the common ear all the world over. There is no speech nor language in which this voice is not heard, and its words go forth to the world's end.

Consider, again, that the language of the life is *more convincing* than the language of the lip. It is not ideal or theoretical, it is real and practical; and whilst theories and doctrines may be disputed, and only involve the learner in inextricable confusion, a single unmistakable fact, if you can appeal to it, cuts the knot, and sets discussion at rest. There is, for instance, a secret feeling amongst many who listen to an earnest and high-toned style of instruction, that much of what they hear, however fine and elevated, and proper to be spoken in the pulpit, is far too seraphic to be reduced to practice amidst the plain and prosaic business of life. Exhortations to communion with God, to spirituality, heavenly-mindedness, superiority to the world, its vanities and temptations—how often, for any practical purpose, do these fall powerless on men's ears. To a plain man of the world, steeped in its vulgar cares, struggling with its gross and familiar difficulties and trials, the delineations of the pulpit seem not seldom as if they belonged to a region of pietistic romance, a sort of spiritual dream-land, in which ministers and writers little acquainted with the world permit their pious imagination to revel. The theory is a fine one, they admit, but constituted as poor human nature is, there is this inseparable objection to it, that *it will not work*.

But in this, as in many other cases, experiment will be the test of truth. Men may dispute your theory of agriculture, and explanation or discussion might only serve to confirm them in their error; but show them, rugged though be the soil and ungenial the climate, your fair and abundant crops, and objection is silenced. Your system of education may be controverted or contemned as impracticable, but point to the undeniable results of your system in the intelligence, worth, high principle of those who, year after year, issue from your schools, and this argument will be unanswerable. The invaluable scientific discovery or project may be met by a thousand objections when first announced, but when it has bridged the ocean, or spread its network of intercommunication over the land, the most sceptical are forced to own their error. So, in the case before us, the ideal of the Christian life, with all its moral elevation and superiority to common motives and principles, may seem to many at best but a beautiful and pious fancy, too delicate and fine-spun for the rough uses of life; but apply to it the test of experiment—reduce the ideal to the actual—show in positive experience that it is possible to bring the loftiest spiritual motives into contact with the lowliest duties,—and your conception of a religious life will be proved beyond dispute. Let not worldly selfishness take refuge in scepticism as to the possibility of a life so pure, so high-toned, so self-denied. Show that such a life is not only desirable but practicable—not merely that it ought to be, but that it can be. Live down doubt. Let men feel as they behold your earnest,

sincere, unselfish life, that God, and truth, and duty, and Christ, and immortality, are not the mere themes of a preacher's discourse, the topics of a Sunday meditation, but the real and practical principles and motives of man's working life. So doing you will silence the gainsayer, and the spurious sagacity of the worldly-minded will be completely at fault.

Consider, finally, that the teaching of the life *is available in many cases in which the teaching of the lip cannot, or ought not, to be attempted.* There are many conceivable circumstances in which a man is disqualified from doing good to others by direct instruction or advice. Many, for instance, are incapable of expressing their sentiments clearly and forcibly in words, or are unwilling to peril questions so momentous as those of religion on their own feeble advocacy. Many, again, are unable to overcome a certain instinctive reserve on religious topics, a painful shrinking from the introduction in their intercourse with others of matters so awful and sacred; and though this is a disposition which may easily be indulged till it has become a false delicacy, a reprehensible remissness or selfish timidity, yet it cannot be denied that it is often the deepest natures that are the calmest and quietest, and the profoundest emotions of the heart that shrink most from outward expression. It is true that "out of the fulness of the heart the mouth speaketh;" but it is not less true that there are sometimes things we love and reverence so much that we cannot bear to speak of them. And even where no such disqualifications exist on the side of the instructor, there may be

that in the temper of the objects of his religious zeal, which would be repelled rather than benefited by formal admonition, or that in their position relatively to him which would render the attitude of the instructor or adviser presumptuous and unbecoming. There are few who can take in good part ghostly counsel or personal reproof. The utterer of unwelcome truth is not always discriminated from the slanderer who delights in it. The bearer of bad news becomes associated in our dislike with the message he brings; and our pride is wounded all the more by his strictures if the position of the censor lends no authority to his counsels, or positively detracts from their force.

But in all cases in which formal instruction or advice is precluded, how invaluable that other mode of access to the minds of men on which we are now insisting—the silent, unobtrusive, inoffensive, yet most potent and persuasive teaching of the life. The counsel you may not speak you may yet embody in action. To the faults and sins you cannot notice in words, you may hold up the mirror of a life bright with purity and goodness and grace. The mind which no force of rebuke could drive from sin, may yet be insensibly drawn from it by the attractive power of holiness ever acting in its presence. So that “they who obey not the word, may without the word be won by your chaste conversation coupled with fear.”

Is it, for instance, gross and degrading vice which it pains you to witness in another's life? Then evade not, through false delicacy, the duty of firm and earnest remonstrance. But if remonstrance be impos-

sible, there is another and often more potent mode of expostulation ; for there are times when the very look of purity is the keenest of all reproofs. Even from the majestic serenity of material nature there are moments when the perturbed and polluted spirit will avert its troubled glance ; and the bright happy innocent countenance of a little child, or its air of reverential awe and simplicity as it falters out its evening prayer at a mother's knee, has conveyed to the guilty heart a more overwhelming rebuke than human tongue could utter.

Or is it wayward harshness or sullenness of temper that is the prominent defect in one who is dear to you ? Who knows not that words of reproof, however gently administered, would often but add fuel to the fire of such a spirit ? But there is another and more excellent way of admonition, which will seldom, if ever, fail. Rebuke by love, remonstrate by gentleness, preach self-restraint by living it. Exhibit the softening power of Christ's grace—not by talking about it, but by acting in habitual subjection to it ; by your sweet, gentle, Christ-like temper and bearing, by your return of kindness for harshness, by your calm forbearance and unruffled serenity amidst sore provocations and wrongs : and oftentimes you will find that the spirit whose false pride direct remonstrance would only serve to rouse, will own unconsciously the all-subduing power of love.

Or is it not so much special faults and sins, as a general indifference to religion, which it grieves you to witness in the character and conduct of a friend ?

Then in this case too, if reasoning or remonstrance be possible, let not the painfulness of the task tempt you to cowardly silence. A brother's life is at stake, a brother's step is trembling on the awful brink, and will you not, for his truer good, brave his transient displeasure? There are times when tenderness is more cruel than harshness—reserve more criminal than savage barbarity; and surely of all such occasions this is the one on which most of all a true friend should feel himself impelled to throw false shame aside, and manfully to speak out. But here, too, where words may not be spoken, or if spoken, would be uttered in vain, another resource is open to you:—preach by the life. Let your daily life be an unuttered yet perpetual pleading with man for God. Let men feel, in contact with you, the grandeur of that religion to whose claims they will not listen, and the glory of that Saviour whose name you may not name. Let the sacredness of God's slighted law be proclaimed by your uniform sacrifice of inclination to duty, by your repression of every unkind word, your scorn of every undue or base advantage, your stern and uncompromising resistance to the temptations of appetite and sense. Preach the preciousness of time by your husbanding of its rapid hours, and your crowding of its days with duties. Though Eternity with its fast-approaching realities be a forbidden topic to the ear, constrain the unwilling mind to think of it by the spectacle of a life ordered with perpetual reference to hopes and destinies beyond the grave. Though no warning against an unspiritual, no exhortation to a holy life, might be

tolerated, let your own pure, earnest, unworldly character and bearing be to the careless soul a perpetual atmosphere of spirituality haunting and hovering round it. And, be assured, the moral influence of such a life cannot be lost. Like the seed which the wind wafts into hidden glades and forest depths, where no sower's hand could reach to scatter it, the subtle germ of Christ's truth will be borne on the secret atmosphere of a holy life, into hearts which no preacher's voice could penetrate. Where the tongue of men and of angels would fail, there is an eloquence in living goodness which will often prove persuasive. For it is an inoffensive, unpretending, unobtrusive eloquence; it is the eloquence of the soft sunshine when it expands the close-shut leaves and blossoms—a rude hand would but tear and crush them; it is the eloquence of the summer heat when it basks upon the thick-ribbed ice—blows would but break it; but beneath that softest, gentlest, yet most potent influence, the hard impenetrable masses melt away.

SERMON XII.

RELIGION IN COMMON LIFE.

“Not slothful in business; fervent in spirit; serving the Lord.”—
Romans, xii. 11.

To combine business with religion, to keep up a spirit of serious piety amidst the stir and distraction of a busy and active life,—this is one of the most difficult parts of a Christian’s trial in this world. It is comparatively easy to be religious in the church—to collect our thoughts and compose our feelings, and enter, with an appearance of propriety and decorum, into the offices of religious worship, amidst the quietude of the Sabbath, and within the still and sacred precincts of the house of prayer. But to be religious in the world—to be pious and holy and earnest-minded in the counting-room, the manufactory, the market-place, the field, the farm—to carry out our good and solemn thoughts and feelings into the throng and thoroughfare of daily life,—this is the great difficulty of our Christian calling. No man not lost to all moral influence can help feeling his worldly

passions calmed, and some measure of seriousness stealing over his mind, when engaged in the performance of the more awful and sacred rites of religion; but the atmosphere of the domestic circle, the exchange, the street, the city's throng, amidst coarse work and cankering cares and toils, is a very different atmosphere from that of a communion-table. Passing from the one to the other has often seemed as if the sudden transition from a tropical to a polar climate—from balmy warmth and sunshine to murky mist and freezing cold. And it appears sometimes as difficult to maintain the strength and steadfastness of religious principle and feeling when we go forth from the church into the world, as it would be to preserve an exotic alive in the open air in winter, or to keep the lamp that burns steadily within doors from being blown out if you take it abroad unsheltered from the wind.

So great, so all but insuperable, has this difficulty ever appeared to men, that it is but few who set themselves honestly and resolutely to the effort to overcome it. The great majority, by various shifts or expedients, evade the hard task of being good and holy at once in the church and in the world.

In ancient times, for instance, it was, as we all know, the not uncommon expedient among devout persons—men deeply impressed with the thought of an eternal world and the necessity of preparing for it, but distracted by the effort to attend to the duties of religion amidst the business and temptations of secular life—to fly the world altogether, and, abandoning

society and all social claims, to betake themselves to some hermit solitude, some quiet and cloistered retreat, where, as they fondly deemed, "the world forgetting, by the world forgot," their work would become worship, and life be uninterruptedly devoted to the cultivation of religion in the soul. In our own day the more common device, where religion and the world conflict, is not that of the superstitious recluse, but one even much less safe and venial. Keen for this world, yet not willing to lose all hold on the next—eager for the advantages of time, yet not prepared to abandon all religion and stand by the consequences, there is a very numerous class who attempt to compromise the matter—to treat religion and the world like two creditors whose claims cannot both be liquidated, by compounding with each for a share—though in this case a most disproportionate share—of their time and thought. "Everything in its own place!" is the tacit reflection of such men. "Prayers, sermons, holy reading"—they will scarcely venture to add "God"—"are for Sundays; but week-days are for the sober business, the real, practical affairs of life. Enough if we give the Sunday to our religious duties; we cannot be always praying and reading the Bible. Well enough for clergymen and good persons who have nothing else to do, to attend to religion through the week; but for us, we have other and more practical matters to mind." And so the result is, that religion is made altogether a Sunday thing—a robe too fine for common wear, but taken out solemnly on state occasions, and solemnly put past when the state

occasion is over. Like an idler in a crowded thoroughfare, religion is jostled aside in the daily throng of life, as if it had no business there. Like a needful yet disagreeable medicine, men will be content to take it now and then, for their soul's health ; but they cannot, and will not, make it their daily fare—the substantial and staple nutriment of their life.

Now, you will observe that the idea of religion which is set forth in the text, as elsewhere in Scripture, is quite different from any of these notions. The text speaks as if the most diligent attention to our worldly business were not by any means incompatible with spirituality of mind and serious devotion to the service of God. It seems to imply that religion is not so much *a* duty, as a something that has to do with *all* duties—not a tax to be paid periodically and got rid of at other times, but a ceaseless, all-pervading, inexhaustible tribute to Him who is not only the object of religious worship, but the end of our very life and being. It suggests to us the idea that piety is not for Sundays only, but for all days ; that spirituality of mind is not appropriate to one set of actions and an impertinence and intrusion with reference to others, but, like the act of breathing, like the circulation of the blood, like the silent growth of the stature, a process that may be going on simultaneously with all our actions—when we are busiest as when we are idlest ; in the church, in the world ; in solitude, in society ; in our grief and in our gladness ; in our toil and in our rest ; sleeping, waking ; by day, by night—amidst all the engagements and exigencies of life. For you per-

ceive that in one breath—as duties not only not incompatible, but necessarily and inseparably blended with each other—the text exhorts us to be at once “not slothful in business,” and “fervent in spirit, serving the Lord.”—I shall now attempt to prove and illustrate the idea thus suggested to us—the compatibility of Religion with the business of Common Life.

We have, then, Scripture authority for asserting that it is not impossible to live a life of fervent piety amidst the most engrossing pursuits and engagements of the world. We are to make good this conception of life,—that the hardest-wrought man of trade, or commerce, or handicraft, who spends his days “midst dusky lane or wrangling mart,” may yet be the most holy and spiritually-minded. We need not quit the world and abandon its busy pursuits in order to live near to God;—

“We need not bid, for cloistered cell,
Our neighbour and our work farewell:
The trivial round, the common task,
May furnish all we ought to ask,—
Room to deny ourselves, a road
To bring us, daily, nearer God.”

It is true indeed that, if in no other way could we prepare for an eternal world than by retiring from the business and cares of this world, so momentous are the interests involved in religion, that no wise man should hesitate to submit to the sacrifice. Life here is but a span. Life hereafter is *for ever*. A lifetime of solitude, hardship, penury, were all too slight a price to pay, if need be, for an eternity of bliss: and the results

of our most incessant toil and application to the world's business, could they secure for us the highest prizes of earthly ambition, would be purchased at a tremendous cost, if they stole away from us the only time in which we could prepare to meet our God,—if they left us at last rich, gay, honoured, possessed of everything the world holds dear, but to face an Eternity undone. If, therefore, in no way could you combine business and religion, it would indeed be, not fanaticism, but most sober wisdom and prudence, to let the world's business come to a stand. It would be the duty of the mechanic, the man of business, the statesman, the scholar—men of every secular calling—without a moment's delay to leave vacant and silent the familiar scenes of their toils—to turn life into a perpetual Sabbath, and betake themselves, one and all, to an existence of ceaseless prayer, and unbroken contemplation, and devout care of the soul.

But the very impossibility of such a sacrifice proves that no such sacrifice is demanded. He who rules the world is no arbitrary tyrant prescribing impracticable labours. In the material world there are no conflicting laws; and no more, we may rest assured, are there established, in the moral world, any two laws, one or other of which must needs be disobeyed. Now one thing is certain, that there *is* in the moral world a law of labour. Secular work, in all cases a duty, is, in most cases, a necessity. God might have made us independent of work. He might have nourished us like “the fowls of the air and the lilies of the field,” which “toil not, neither do they spin.”

He might have rained down our daily food, like the manna of old, from heaven, or caused nature to yield it in unsolicited profusion to all, and so set us free to a life of devotion. But forasmuch as He has not done so—forasmuch as He has so constituted us that without work we cannot eat, that if men ceased for a single day to labour, the machinery of life would come to a stand, an arrest be laid on science, civilisation, social progress—on everything that is conducive to the welfare of man in the present life,—we may safely conclude that religion, which is also good for man, which is indeed the supreme good of man, is not inconsistent with hard work. It must undoubtedly be the design of our gracious God that all this toil for the supply of our physical necessities—this incessant occupation amid the things that perish, shall be no obstruction, but rather a help, to our spiritual life. The weight of a clock seems a heavy drag on the delicate movements of its machinery; but so far from arresting or impeding those movements, it is indispensable to their steadiness, balance, accuracy: there must be some analogous action of what seems the clog and drag-weight of worldly work on the finer movements of man's spiritual being. The planets in the heavens have a twofold motion, in their orbits and on their axes,—the one motion not interfering, but carried on simultaneously, and in perfect harmony, with the other: so must it be that man's twofold activities—round the heavenly and the earthly centre, disturb not, nor jar with, each other. He who diligently discharges the duties of the earthly, may not

less sedulously—nay at the same moment—fulfil those of the heavenly, sphere; at once “diligent in business,” and “fervent in spirit, serving the Lord.”

And that this is so—that this blending of religion with the work of common life is not impossible, you will readily perceive, if you consider for a moment what, according to the right and proper notion of it, Religion is. What do we mean by “Religion?”

Religion may be viewed in two aspects. It is a *Science*, and it is an *Art*; in other words, a system of doctrines to be believed, and a system of duties to be done. View it in either light, and the point we are insisting on may, without difficulty, be made good. View it as a *Science*—as truth to be understood and believed. If religious truth were, like many kinds of secular truth, hard, intricate, abstruse, demanding for its study, not only the highest order of intellect, but all the resources of education, books, learned leisure, then indeed, to most men, the blending of religion with the necessary avocations of life would be an impossibility. In that case it would be sufficient excuse for irreligion to plead, “My lot in life is inevitably one of incessant care and toil, of busy, anxious thought and wearing work. Inextricably involved, every day and hour as I am, in the world’s business, how is it possible for me to devote myself to this high and abstract science?” If religion were thus, like the higher mathematics or metaphysics, a science based on the most recondite and elaborate reasonings, capable of being mastered only by the acutest minds, after years of study and laborious investigation, then might it well

be urged by many an unlettered man of toil, "I am no scholar—I have no head to comprehend these hard dogmas and doctrines. Learning and religion are, no doubt, fine things, but they are not for humble and hard-wrought folk like me!" In this case, indeed, the Gospel would be no Gospel at all—no good news of Heavenly love and mercy to the whole sin-ruined race of man, but only a Gospel for scholars—a religion, like the ancient philosophies, for a scanty minority, clever enough to grasp its principles, and set free from active business to devote themselves to the development and discussion of its doctrines.

But the Gospel is no such system of high and abstract truth. The salvation it offers is not the prize of a lofty intellect, but of a lowly heart. The mirror in which its grand truths are reflected is not a mind of calm and philosophic abstraction, but a heart of earnest purity. Its light shines best and fullest, not on a life undisturbed by business, but on a soul unstained by sin. The religion of Christ, whilst it affords scope for the loftiest intellect in the contemplation and development of its glorious truths, is yet, in the exquisite simplicity of its essential facts and principles, patent to the simplest mind. Rude, untutored, toil-worn you may be, but if you have wit enough to guide you in the commonest round of daily toil, you have wit enough to learn the way to be saved. The truth as it is in Jesus, whilst, in one view of it, so profound that the highest archangel's intellect may be lost in the contemplation of its mysterious depths, is yet, in another, so simple that the lisping babe at a mother's knee may learn its meaning.

Again : View religion as an *Art*, and, in this light too, its compatibility with a busy and active life in the world, it will not be difficult to perceive. For religion as an art differs from secular arts in this respect, that it may be practised simultaneously with other arts—with all other work and occupation in which we may be engaged. A man cannot be studying architecture and law at the same time. The medical practitioner cannot be engaged with his patients, and at the same time planning houses or building bridges,—practising, in other words, both medicine and engineering at one and the same moment. The practice of one secular art excludes for the time the practice of other secular arts. But not so with the art of religion. This is the universal art, the common, all-embracing profession. It belongs to no one set of functionaries, to no special class of men. Statesman, soldier, lawyer, physician, poet, painter, tradesman, farmer—men of every craft and calling in life—may, while in the actual discharge of the duties of their varied avocations, be yet, at the same moment, discharging the duties of a higher and nobler vocation—practising the art of a Christian. Secular arts, in most cases, demand of him who would attain to eminence in any one of them, an almost exclusive devotion of time, and thought, and toil. The most versatile genius can seldom be master of more than one art ; and for the great majority the only calling must be that by which they earn their daily bread. Demand of the poor tradesman or peasant, whose every hour is absorbed in the struggle to earn a competency for himself and his family, that he shall be also a

thorough proficient in the art of the physician, or lawyer, or sculptor, and you demand an impossibility. If religion were an art such as these, few indeed could learn it. The two admonitions, "Be diligent in business," and "Be fervent in spirit, serving the Lord," would be reciprocally destructive.

But religion is no such art ; for it is the *art of being, and of doing, good* : to be an adept in it, is to become just, truthful, sincere, self-denied, gentle, forbearing, pure in word and thought and deed. And the school for learning this art is, not the closet, but the world,—not some hallowed spot where religion is taught, and proficient, when duly trained, are sent forth into the world,—but the world itself—the coarse, profane, common world, with its cares and temptations, its rivalries and competitions, its hourly, ever-recurring trials of temper and character. This is, therefore, an art which all can practise, and for which every profession and calling, the busiest and most absorbing, afford scope and discipline. When a child is learning to write, it matters not of what words the copy set to him is composed, the thing desired being that, whatever he writes, he learn to write *well*. When a man is learning to be a Christian, it matters not what his particular work in life may be ; the work he does is but the copy-line set to him ; the main thing to be considered is that he learn to live well. The form is nothing, the execution is everything. It is true, indeed, that prayer, holy reading, meditation, the solemnities and services of the Church, are necessary to religion, and that these can be practised only apart from the

work of secular life. But it is to be remembered that all such holy exercises do not terminate in themselves. They are but steps in the ladder to heaven, good only as they help us to climb. They are the irrigation and enriching of the spiritual soil—worse than useless if the crop become not more abundant. They are, in short, but means to an end—good, only in so far as they help us to be good and to do good—to glorify God and do good to man; and that end can perhaps best be attained by him whose life is a busy one, whose avocations bear him daily into contact with his fellows, into the intercourse of society, into the heart of the world. No man can be a thorough proficient in navigation who has never been at sea, though he may learn the theory of it at home. No man can become a soldier by studying books on military tactics in his closet: he must in actual service acquire those habits of coolness, courage, discipline, address, rapid combination, without which the most learned in the theory of strategy or engineering will be but a schoolboy soldier after all. And, in the same way, a man in solitude and study may become a most learned theologian, or may train himself into the timid, effeminate piety of what is technically called “the religious life.” But never, in the highest and holiest sense, can he become a *religious man*, until he has acquired those habits of daily self-denial, of resistance to temptation, of kindness, gentleness, humility, sympathy, active beneficence, which are to be acquired only in daily contact with mankind. Tell us not, then, that the man of business,

the bustling tradesman, the toil-worn labourer, has little or no time to attend to religion. As well tell us that the pilot, amid the winds and storms, has no leisure to attend to navigation—or the general, on the field of battle, to the art of war! Where *will* he attend to it? Religion is not a perpetual moping over good books—religion is not even prayer, praise, holy ordinances; these are necessary to religion—no man can be religious without them. But religion, I repeat, is, mainly and chiefly the glorifying God amid the duties and trials of the world,—the guiding our course amid the adverse winds and currents of temptation, by the star-light of duty and the compass of divine truth,—the bearing us manfully, wisely, courageously, for the honour of Christ, our great Leader, in the conflict of life. Away then with the notion that ministers and devotees may be religious, but that a religious and holy life is impracticable in the rough and busy world! Nay rather, believe me, *that* is the proper scene, the peculiar and appropriate field for religion,—the place in which to prove that piety is not a dream of Sundays and solitary hours; that it can bear the light of day; that it can wear well amid the rough jostlings, the hard struggles, the coarse contacts of common life,—the place, in one word, to prove how possible it is for a man to be at once “not slothful in business,” and “fervent in spirit, serving the Lord.”

Another consideration, which I shall adduce in support of the assertion that it is not impossible to blend religion with the business of common life, is this: that

religion consists, *not so much in doing spiritual or sacred acts, as in doing secular acts from a sacred or spiritual motive.*

There is a very common tendency in our minds to classify actions according to their outward form, rather than according to the spirit or motive which pervades them. Literature is sometimes arbitrarily divided into "sacred" and "profane" literature, history into "sacred" and "profane" history,—in which classification the term "profane" is applied, not to what is bad or unholy, but to everything that is not technically sacred or religious—to all literature that does not treat of religious doctrines and duties, and to all history save church history. And we are very apt to apply the same principle to actions. Thus, in many pious minds there is a tendency to regard all the actions of common life as so much, by an unfortunate necessity, lost to religion. Prayer, the reading of the Bible and devotional books, public worship—and buying, selling, digging, sowing, bartering, money-making, are separated into two distinct, and almost hostile, categories. The religious heart and sympathies are thrown entirely into the former, and the latter are barely tolerated as a bondage incident to our fallen state, but almost of necessity tending to turn aside the heart from God.

But what God hath cleansed, why should we call common or unclean? The tendency in question, though founded on right feeling, is surely a mistaken one. For it is to be remembered that moral qualities reside not in actions, but in the agent who performs them, and that it is the spirit or motive from which we do

any work that constitutes it base or noble, worldly or spiritual, secular or sacred. The actions of an automaton may be outwardly the same as those of a moral agent, but who attributes to them goodness or badness? A musical instrument may discourse sacred melodies better than the holiest lips can sing them, but who thinks of commending it for its piety? It is the same with actions as with places. Just as no spot or scene on earth is in itself more or less holy than another, but the presence of a holy heart may hallow—of a base one, desecrate—any place where it dwells; so with actions. Many actions, materially great and noble, may yet, because of the spirit that prompts and pervades them, be really ignoble and mean; and, on the other hand, many actions externally mean and lowly, may, because of the state of his heart who does them, be truly exalted and honourable. It is possible to fill the highest station on earth, and go through the actions pertaining to it in a spirit that degrades all its dignities, and renders all its high and courtly doings essentially sordid and vulgar. And it is no mere sentimentality to say, that there may dwell in a lowly mechanic's or household servant's breast a spirit that dignifies the coarsest toils and "renders drudgery divine." Herod of old was a slave, though he sat upon a throne; but who will say that the work of that carpenter's shop at Nazareth was not noble and kingly work indeed!

And as the mind constitutes high or low, so secular or spiritual. A life spent amidst holy things may be intensely secular; a life the most of which is passed in the thick and throng of the world, may be holy and

divine. A minister, for instance, preaching, praying, ever speaking holy words and performing sacred acts, may be all the while doing actions no more holy than those of the printer who prints Bibles, or of the bookseller who sells them; for, in both cases alike, the whole affair may be nothing more than a trade. Nay, the comparison tells worse for the former, for the secular trade is innocent and commendable, but the trade which traffics and tampers with holy things is, beneath all its mock solemnity, "earthly, sensual, devilish." So, to adduce one other example, the public worship of God is holy work: no man can be living a holy life who neglects it. But the public worship of God may be—and with multitudes who frequent our churches is—degraded into work most worldly, most unholy, most distasteful to the great Object of our homage. He "to whom all hearts be open, all desires known," discerns how many of you have come hither to-day from the earnest desire to hold communion with the Father of Spirits, to open your hearts to Him, to unburden yourselves in his loving presence of the cares and crosses that have been pressing hard upon you through the past week, and by common prayer and praise, and the hearing of His holy Word, to gain fresh incentive and energy for the prosecution of His work in the world; and how many, on the other hand, from no better motive, perhaps, than curiosity or old habit, or regard to decency and respectability, or the mere desire to get rid of yourselves, and pass a vacant hour that would hang heavy on your hands. And who can doubt that, where such motives as these prevail, to the

piercing, unerring inspection of Him whom outwardly we seem to reverence, not the market-place, the exchange, the counting-room appears a place more intensely secular—not the most reckless and riotous festivity, a scene of more unhallowed levity, than is presented by the House of Prayer?

But, on the other hand, carry holy principles with you into the world, and the world will become hallowed by their presence. A Christ-like spirit will Christianise everything it touches. A meek heart, in which the altar-fire of love to God is burning, will lay hold of the commonest, rudest things in life, and transmute them, like coarse fuel at the touch of fire, into a pure and holy flame. Religion in the soul will make all the work and toil of life—its gains and losses, friendships, rivalries, competitions—its manifold incidents and events—the means of religious advancement. Marble or coarse clay, it matters not much with which of these the artist works, the touch of genius transforms the coarser material into beauty, and lends to the finer a value it never had before. Lofty or lowly, rude or refined, as our earthly work may be, it will become to a holy mind only the material for an infinitely nobler than all the creations of genius—a pure and godlike life. To spiritualise what is material, to Christianise what is secular—this is the noble achievement of Christian principle. If you are a sincere Christian, it will be your great desire, by God's grace, to bring every gift, talent, occupation of life, every word you speak, every action you do, under the control of Christian motive. Your conversation may not always—nay, may

seldom, save with intimate friends—consist of formally religious words ; you may perhaps shrink from the introduction of religious topics in general society : but it demands a less amount of Christian effort occasionally to speak religious words, than to infuse the spirit of religion into all our words ; and if the whole tenor of your common talk be pervaded by a spirit of piety, gentleness, earnestness, sincerity, it will be Christian conversation not the less. If God has endowed you with intellectual gifts, it may be well if you directly devote them to His service in the religious instruction of others ; but a man may be a Christian thinker and writer as much when giving to science, or history, or biography, or poetry, a Christian tone and spirit, as when composing sermons or writing hymns. To promote the cause of Christ directly, by furthering every religious and missionary enterprise at home and abroad, is undoubtedly your duty ; but remember that your duty terminates not when you have done all this, for you may promote Christ's cause even still more effectually when in your daily demeanour—in the family, in society, in your business transactions, in all your common intercourse with the world, you are diffusing the influence of Christian principle around you by the silent eloquence of a holy life. Rise superior, in Christ's strength, to all equivocal practices and advantages in trade ; shrink from every approach to meanness or dishonesty ; let your eye, fixed on a reward before which earthly wealth grows dim, beam with honour ; let the thought of God make you self-restrained, temperate, watchful over speech and con-

duct ; let the abiding sense of Christ's redeeming love to you make you gentle, self-denied, kind, and loving to all around you ;—then indeed will your secular life become spiritualised, whilst, at the same time, your spiritual life will grow more fervent ; then not only will your prayers become more devout, but when the knee bends not, and the lip is silent, the life in its heavenward tone will “pray without ceasing ;” then from amidst the roar and din of earthly toil the ear of God will hear the sweetest anthems rising ; then, finally, will your daily experience prove that it is no high and unattainable elevation of virtue, but a simple and natural thing, to which the text points, when it bids us be both “diligent in business” and “fervent in spirit, serving the Lord.”

As a last illustration of the possibility of blending religion with the business of common life, let me call your attention to what may be described as *the Mind's power of acting on Latent Principles*.

In order to live a religious life in the world, every action must be governed by religious motives. But in making this assertion, it is not by any means implied that in all the familiar actions of our daily life religion must form a *direct* and *conscious* object of thought. To be always thinking of God, and Christ, and Eternity amidst our worldly work, and, however busy, eager, interested we may be in the special business before us, to have religious ideas, doctrines, beliefs, present to the mind,—this is simply impossible. The mind can no more consciously think of heaven and earth at the same moment than the body can be *in* heaven and

earth at the same moment. Moreover there are few kinds of work in the world that, to be done well, must not be done heartily, many that require, in order to excellence, the whole condensed force and energy of the highest mind.

But though it be true that we cannot, in our worldly work, be always consciously thinking of religion, yet it is also true that unconsciously, insensibly, we may be acting under its ever-present control. As there are laws and powers in the natural world of which, without thinking of them, we are ever availing ourselves,—as I do not think of gravitation when I move my limbs, or of atmospheric laws when, by means of them, I breathe, so in the routine of daily work, though comparatively seldom do I think of them, I may yet be constantly swayed by the motives, sustained by the principles, living, breathing, acting in the invisible atmosphere of true religion. There are under-currents in the ocean which act independently of the movements of the waters on the surface; far down too in its hidden depths there is a region where, even though the storm be raging on the upper waves, perpetual calmness and stillness reign. So there may be an under-current beneath the surface-movements of your life—there may dwell in the secret depths of your being the abiding peace of God, the repose of a holy mind, even though, all the while, the restless stir and commotion of worldly business may mark your outer history.

And, in order to see this, it is to be remembered, that many of the thoughts and motives that most powerfully impel and govern us in the common actions

of life, are *latent* thoughts and motives. Have you not often experienced that curious law—a law, perhaps, contrived by God with an express view to this its highest application—by which a secret thought or feeling may lie brooding in your mind, quite apart from the particular work in which you happen to be employed? Have you never, for instance, while reading aloud, carried along with you in your reading the secret impression of the presence of the listener—an impression that kept pace with all the mind's activity in the special work of reading; nay, have you not sometimes felt the mind, while prosecuting without interruption the work of reading, yet at the same time carrying on some other train of reflection apart altogether from that suggested by the book? Here is obviously a particular "business" in which you were "diligent," yet another and different thought to which the "spirit" turned. Or, think of the work in which I am this moment occupied. Amidst all the mental exertions of the public speaker—underneath the outward workings of his mind, so to speak, there is the latent thought of the presence of his auditory. Perhaps no species of exertion requires greater concentration of thought or undividedness of attention than this: and yet, amidst all the subtle processes of intellect,—the excogitation or recollection of ideas,—the selection, right ordering and enunciation of words, there never quits his mind for one moment the idea of the presence of the listening throng. Like a secret atmosphere, it surrounds and bathes his spirit as he goes on with the external work. And have not you too, my friends, an Auditor

—it may be a “great cloud of witnesses,”—but at least one all-glorious Witness and Listener ever present, ever watchful, as the discourse of life proceeds? Why then, in this case too, while the outward business is diligently prosecuted, may there not be on your spirit a latent and constant impression of that awful inspection? What worldly work so absorbing as to leave no room in a believer’s spirit for the hallowing thought of that glorious Presence ever near? Do not say that you do not see God—that the presence of the divine Auditor is not forced upon your senses as that of the human auditory on the speaker. For the same process goes on in the secret meditations as in the public addresses of the preacher—the same latent reference to those who shall listen to his words dwells in his mind when in his solitary retirement he thinks and writes, as when he speaks in their immediate presence. And surely if the thought of an earthly auditory—of human minds and hearts that shall respond to his thoughts and words—can intertwine itself with all the activities of a man’s mind, and flash back inspiration on his soul, at least as potent and as penetrating may the thought be, of Him, the Great Lord of heaven and earth, who not only sees and knows us now, but before whose awful presence, in the last great congregation, we shall stand forth to recount and answer for our every thought and deed.

Or, to take but one other example, have we not all felt that the *thought of anticipated happiness* may blend itself with the work of our busiest hours? The labourer’s evening release from toil—the schoolboy’s coming holiday, or the hard-wrought business-man’s

approaching season of relaxation—the expected return of a long absent and much loved friend—is not the thought of these, or similar joyous events, one which often intermingles with, without interrupting, our common work? When a father goes forth to his “labour till the evening,” perhaps often, very often, in the thick of his toils, the thought of home may start up to cheer him. The smile that is to welcome him, as he crosses his lowly threshold when the work of the day is over, the glad faces, and merry voices, and sweet caresses of little ones, as they shall gather round him in the quiet evening hours—the thought of all this may dwell, a latent joy, a hidden motive, deep down in his heart of hearts, may come rushing in a sweet solace at every pause of exertion, and act like a secret oil to smooth the wheels of labour. And so, in the other cases I have named, even when our outward activities are the most strenuous, even when every energy of mind and body is full strung for work, the anticipation of coming happiness may never be absent from our minds. The heart has a secret treasury, where our hopes and joys are often garnered—too precious to be parted with even for a moment.

And why may not the highest of all hopes and joys possess the same all-pervading influence? Have we, if our religion be real, no anticipation of happiness in the glorious future? Is there no “rest that remaineth for the people of God,” no home and loving heart awaiting us when the toils of our hurried day of life are ended? What is earthly rest or relaxation, what that release from toil after which we so often sigh, but the faint

shadow of the saint's everlasting rest—the repose of eternal purity—the calm of a spirit in which, not the tension of labour only, but the strain of the moral strife with sin, has ceased—the rest of the soul in God! What visions of earthly bliss can ever—if our Christian faith be not a form—compare with “the glory soon to be revealed”—what joy of earthly reunion with the rapture of the hour when the heavens shall yield our absent Lord to our embrace, to be parted from us no more for ever! And if all this be not a dream and a fancy, but most sober truth, what is there to except this joyful hope from that law to which, in all other deep joys, our minds are subject? Why may we not, in this case too, think often, amidst our worldly work, of the Home to which we are going, of the true and loving heart that beats for us, and of the sweet and joyous welcome that awaits us there? And even when we make them not, of set purpose, the subject of our thoughts, is there not enough of grandeur in the objects of a believer's hope to pervade his spirit at all times with a calm and reverential joy? Do not think all this strange, fanatical, impossible. If it do seem so, it can only be because your heart is in the earthly hopes, but not in the higher and holier hopes—because love to Christ is still to you but a name—because you can give more ardour of thought to the anticipation of a coming holiday than to the hope of heaven and glory everlasting. No, my friends! the strange thing is, not that amidst the world's work we should be able to think of our Home, but that we should ever be able to forget it; and the stranger,

sadder still, that while the little day of life is passing, — morning—noontide—evening,—each stage more rapid than the last, while to many the shadows are already fast lengthening, and the declining sun warns them that “the night is at hand, wherein no man can work,” there should be those amongst us whose whole thoughts are absorbed in the business of the world, and to whom the reflection never occurs that soon they must go out into eternity—without a friend—without a home!

Such, then, is the true idea of the Christian life—a life not of periodic observances, or of occasional fervours, or even of splendid acts of heroism and self-devotion, but of quiet, constant, unobtrusive earnestness, amidst the commonplace work of the world. This is the life to which Christ calls us. Is it yours? Have you entered upon it, or are you now willing to enter upon it? It is not, I admit, an imposing or an easy one. There is nothing in it to dazzle, much in its hardness and plainness to deter the irresolute. The life of a follower of Christ demands not, indeed, in our day, the courage of the hero or the martyr, the fortitude that braves outward dangers and sufferings, and flinches not from persecution and death. But with the age of persecution the difficulties of the Christian life have not passed away. In maintaining, in the unambitious routine of humble duties, a spirit of Christian cheerfulness and contentment—in preserving the fervour of piety amidst unexciting cares and wearing anxieties—in the perpetual reference to lofty ends amidst lowly toils—there may be evinced a faith as

strong as that of a man who dies with the song of martyrdom on his lips. It is a great thing to love Christ so dearly as to be "ready to be bound and to *die*" for Him ; but it is often a thing not less great to be ready to take up our daily cross, and to *live* for Him.

But be the difficulties of a Christian life in the world what they may, they need not discourage us. Whatever the work to which our Master calls us, He offers us a strength commensurate with our needs. No man who wishes to serve Christ will ever fail for lack of heavenly aid. And it will be no valid excuse for an ungodly life that it is difficult to keep alive the flame of piety in the world, if Christ be ready to supply the fuel.

To all, then, who really wish to lead such a life, let me suggest that the first thing to be done—that without which all other efforts are worse than vain—is heartily to devote themselves to God through Christ Jesus. Much as has been said of the infusion of religious principle and motive into our worldly work, there is a preliminary advice of greater importance still—that we *be religious*. Life comes before growth. The soldier must enlist before he can serve. In vain directions how to keep the fire ever burning on the altar, if first it be not kindled. No religion can be genuine, no goodness can be constant or lasting, that springs not, as its primary source, from faith in Jesus Christ. To know Christ as my Saviour—to come with all my guilt and weakness to Him in whom trembling penitence never fails to find a friend—to cast myself at His feet in whom all that is sublime in

divine holiness is softened, though not obscured, by all that is beautiful in human tenderness—and, believing in that love stronger than death which, for me, and such as me, drained the cup of untold sorrows, and bore without a murmur the bitter curse of sin, to trust my soul for time and eternity into His hands—this is the beginning of true religion. And it is the reverential love with which the believer must ever look to Him to whom he owes so much, that constitutes the mainspring of the religion of daily life. Selfishness may prompt to a formal religion, natural susceptibility may give rise to a fitful one, but for a life of constant fervent piety, amidst the world's cares and toils, no motive is sufficient save one—self-devoted love to Christ.

But again, if you would lead a Christian life in the world, let me remind you that that life must be *continued* as well as begun with Christ. You must learn to look to Him not merely as your Saviour from guilt, but as the Friend of your secret life, the chosen Companion of your solitary hours, the Depositary of all the deeper thoughts and feelings of your soul. You cannot live *for* Him in the world unless you live much *with* Him, apart from the world. In spiritual as in secular things, the deepest and strongest characters need much solitude to form them. Even earthly greatness, much more moral and spiritual greatness, is never attained but as the result of much that is concealed from the world—of many a lonely and meditative hour. Thoughtfulness, self-knowledge, self-control, a chastened wisdom and piety, are the fruit of habitual meditation and prayer. In these exercises Heaven is

brought near, and our exaggerated estimate of earthly things corrected. By these our spiritual energies, shattered and worn by the friction of worldly work, are repaired. In the recurring seasons of devotion the cares and anxieties of worldly business cease to vex us; exhausted with its toils, we have, in daily communion with God, "meat to eat which the world knoweth not of;" and even when its calamities and losses fall upon us, and our portion of worldly good may be withdrawn, we may be able to show, like those holy ones of old at the heathen court, by the fair serene countenance of the spirit, that we have something better than the world's pulse to feed upon.

But, further, in availing yourself of this divine resource amidst the daily exigencies of life, why should you wait always for the periodic season and the formal attitude of prayer? The Heavens are not open to the believer's call only at intervals. The grace of God's Holy Spirit falls not like the fertilising shower, only now and then; or like the dew on the earth's face, only at morning and night. At all times on the uplifted face of the believer's spirit the gracious element is ready to descend. Pray always; pray without ceasing. When difficulties arise, delay not to seek and obtain at once the succour you need. Swifter than by the subtle electric agent is thought borne from earth to heaven. The Great Spirit on high is in constant sympathy with the believing spirit beneath, and in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, the thrill of aspiration flashes from the heart of man to God. Whenever anything vexes you—whenever, from the

rude and selfish ways of men, any trials of temper cross your path—when your spirits are ruffled, or your Christian forbearance put to the test, be this your instant resource! Haste away, if only for a moment, to the serene and peace-breathing presence of Jesus, and you will not fail to return with a spirit soothed and calmed. Or when the impure and low-minded surround you—when, in the path of duty, the high tone of your Christian purity is apt to suffer from baser contacts, oh, what relief to lift the heart to Christ!—to rise on the wings of faith—even for one instant to breathe the air of that region where the Infinite Purity dwells, and then return with a mind steeled against temptation, ready to recoil, with the instinctive abhorrence of a spirit that has been beside the Throne, from all that is impure and vile. Say not, then, with such aid at your command, that religion cannot be brought down to Common Life!

In conclusion, let me once more urge upon you the great lesson on which we have been insisting. Carry religious principle into everyday life. Principle elevates whatever it touches. Facts lose all their littleness to the mind which brings principle and law to bear upon them. The chemist's or geologist's soiled hands are no sign of base work; the coarsest operations of the laboratory, the breaking of stones with a hammer, cease to be mechanical when intellectual thought and principle govern the mind and guide the hands. And religious principle is the noblest of all. Bring it to bear on common actions and coarse cares, and infinitely nobler even than the philosophic or scientific, becomes

the Christian life. Live for Christ in common things, and all your work will become priestly work. As in the temple of old, it was holy work to hew wood or mix oil, because it was done for the altar-sacrifice or the sacred lamps ; so all your coarse and common work will receive a consecration when done for God's glory, by one who is a true priest to His temple.

Carry religion into common life, and your life will be rendered useful as well as noble. There are many men who listen incredulously to the high-toned exhortations of the pulpit ; the religious life there depicted is much too seraphic, they think, for this plain and prosaic world of ours. Show these men that the picture is not a fancy one. Make it a reality. Bring religion down from the clouds. Apply to it the infallible test of experiment ; and, by suffusing your daily actions with holy principles, prove that love to God, superiority to worldly pleasure, spirituality, holiness, heavenly-mindedness, are something more than the stock ideas of sermons.

Carry religious principle into common life, and common life will lose its transitoriness. "The world passeth away !" "The things that are seen are temporal." Soon business with all its cares and anxieties—the whole "unprofitable stir and fever of the world"—will be to us a thing of the past. But religion does something better than sigh and muse over the perishableness of earthly things ; it finds in them the seed of immortality. No work done for Christ perishes. No action that helps to mould the deathless mind of a saint of God is ever lost. Live for Christ in the world,

and you carry out with you into eternity all of the results of the world's business that are worth the keeping. The river of life sweeps on, but the gold grains it held in solution are left behind deposited in the holy heart. "The world passeth away, and the lust thereof; but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever." Every other result of our "diligence in business" will soon be gone. You cannot invent any mode of exchange between the visible and invisible worlds, so that the balance at your credit in the one can be transferred, when you migrate from it, to your account in the other. Worldly sharpness, acuteness, versatility, are not the qualities in request in the world to come. The capacious intellect, stored with knowledge, and disciplined into admirable perspicacity, tact, worldly wisdom, by a lifetime devoted to politics or business, is not, by such attainments, fitted to take a higher place among the sons of immortality. The honour, fame, respect, obsequious homage that attend worldly greatness up to the grave's brink, will not follow it one step beyond. These advantages are not to be despised; but if these be all that, by the toil of our hand, or the sweat of our brow, we have gained, the hour is fast coming when we shall discover that we have laboured in vain and spent our strength for nought. But while these pass, there are other things that remain. The world's gains and losses may soon cease to affect us, but not the gratitude or the patience, the kindness or the resignation, they drew forth from our hearts. The world's scenes of business may fade on our sight, the noise of its restless pursuits may fall

no more upon our ear, when we pass to meet our God ; but not one unselfish thought, not one kind and gentle word, not one act of self-sacrificing love done for Jesus' sake, in the midst of our common work, but will have left an indelible impress on the soul which will go out with it to its eternal destiny. So live, then, that this may be the result of your labours. So live that your work, whether in the Church or in the world, may become a discipline for that glorious state of being in which the Church and the world shall become one,—where work shall be worship, and labour shall be rest,—where the worker shall never quit the temple, nor the worshipper the place of work, because “there is no temple therein, but the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple thereof.”

THE END.







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