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*HEM OF HIS GARMENT*



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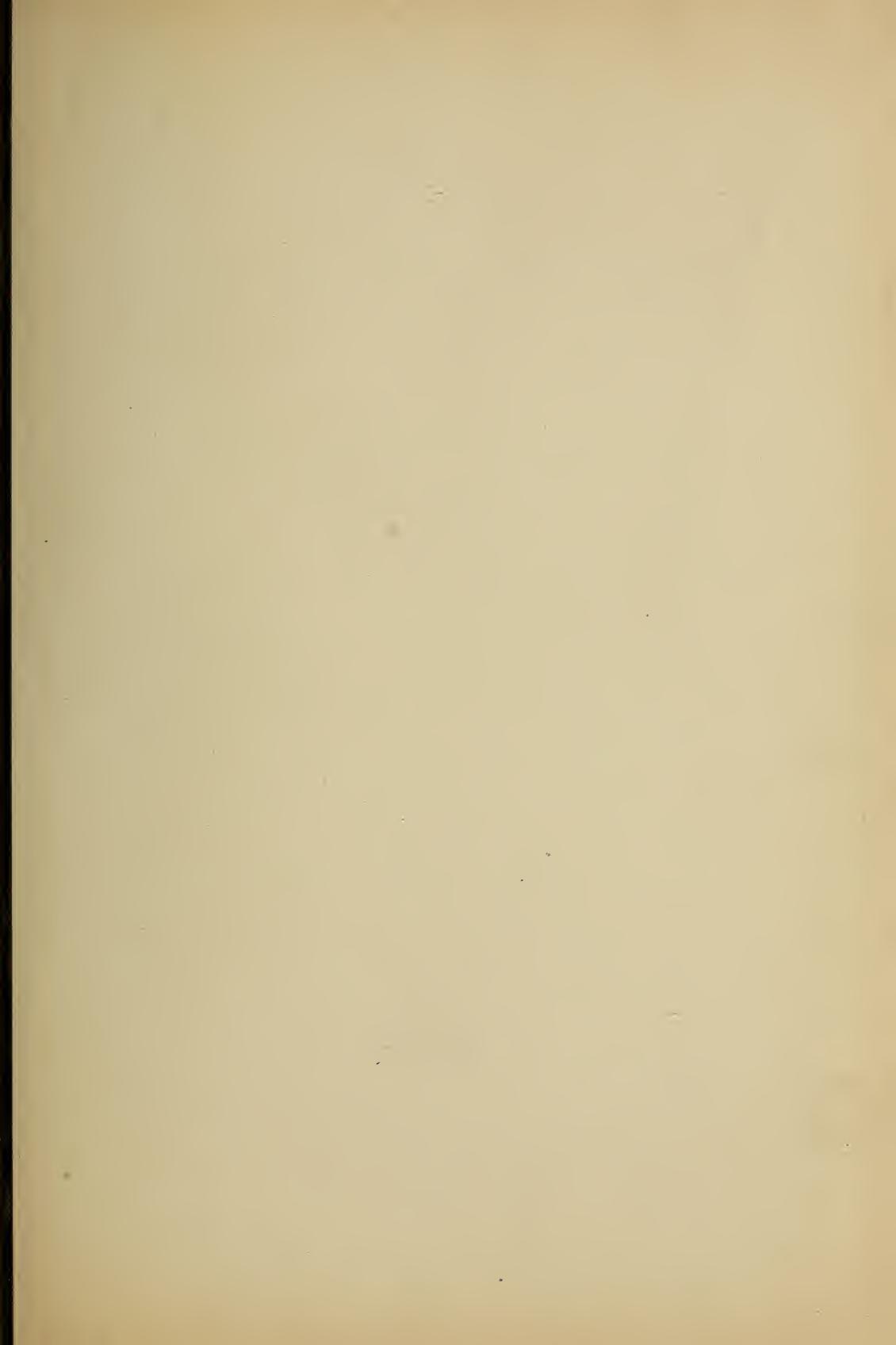
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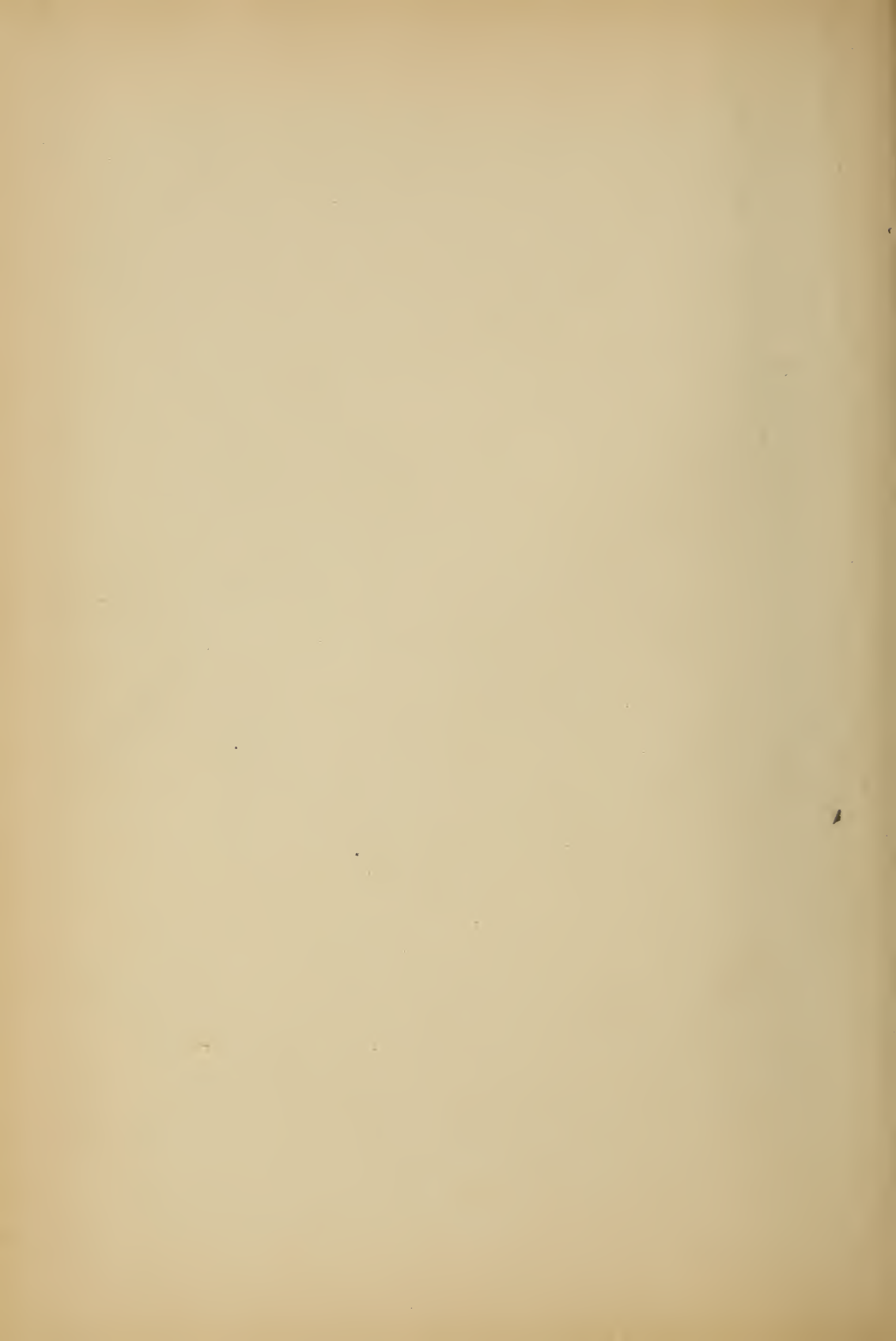
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THE  
HEM OF HIS GARMENT.

SPIRITUAL LESSONS FROM THE  
LIFE OF OUR LORD.

BY THE  
REV. FRANK SEWALL.

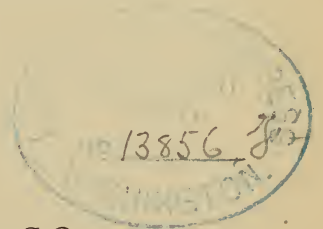
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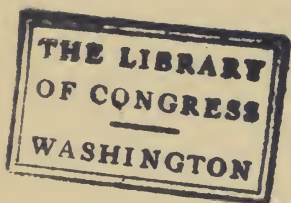
“ . . . if it were but the hem of His garment.”—ST. MARK vi. 56.

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BY THE SAME AUTHOR.

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## THE PILLOW OF STONES.

DIVINE ALLEGORIES IN THEIR SPIRITUAL MEANING.

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DEDICATION.

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TO

MY FATHER AND MOTHER,

*With Filial Love and Devotion.*



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I.

The Hem of His Garment; or, How to Begin the  
Religious Life.

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*If I may but touch his garment, I shall be whole.*—St. Matt.

ix. 21.

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THE Divine narrative from which these words are taken forms in itself an epitome of the whole gospel. It presents, in its little cluster of vividly-portrayed events, an allegory of our blessed Lord's whole life and mission in this world. For as our Lord, by birth, made his dwelling in our corrupt and sinful nature, and during his life was constantly administering his saving Word, by teaching, by example, and by his own spiritual combats with the inner kingdom of Satan; and as He, in death, became our complete Redemption and Resurrection into

everlasting life; so, here, does the narrative in its beginning find the Saviour sitting at meat in the house of publicans and sinners; thence He goes forth, on his saving mission, to call the dead to life, being summoned by a ruler of the synagogue, whose daughter lies even now dead; and on his way, by the ministry of his Word, of that virtue which goeth out of Him, He heals a poor woman, who, *coming behind Him, touches the hem of his garment, believing that thus she shall be made whole.*

This incident is eminently illustrative of the saving power of the Lord as the Word,—that is, the Divine Truth; and it affords at the same time a most needful and practical example of that humility and faith which must go together in the mind of any person who will share this salvation.

The woman which was diseased with an issue of blood twelve years, who had suffered many things of many physicians, and had spent all that she had, and was nothing bettered, but

rather grew worse, stands, in so far, as the type of our corrupt and degraded humanity, of our spiritual uncleanness and disease, which is beyond the help of mere human skill and effort; but, in her saying within herself, "If I but touch his garment, I shall be whole," and her coming behind the Lord, amidst the throng that pressed about Him, and silently, but in faith, touching only the hem of his garment, she becomes the illustrious and ever-memorable pattern of true Christian humility and of saving faith. "Daughter, be of good comfort; thy faith hath made thee whole;" here is the whole gospel of salvation preached in a single sentence to this healed woman, the type of our redeemed humanity. "Daughter,"—it is the Father of all who speaks: come down from heaven to save,— "be of good comfort,"—it is the good tidings of salvation that He brings,— "thy faith hath made thee whole;" this salvation is in such a faith as, overcoming all obstacles, shame, the fear of the multitude, the pressure of the throng, brings

the believing one to the Lord Himself, and impels him to perform in lowliness of heart the humblest and most external duties in the fear of the Lord, and in a trust in his mercy and saving power. But it is manifest that the practical import of this simple and comprehensive lesson all turns upon the significance of that act of the woman's faith, by which the Saviour perceived that virtue had gone out of Him, and by which the woman was made whole of her disease. For no one will question but that this diseased woman is the representative of our natural and unregenerate will, and that in her miraculous cure is typified the regeneration of man through the operation of the Holy Spirit. But the practical and all-important part of the lesson here afforded is, By what means does the Holy Spirit thus exert or put forth in us its healing, saving power? what have we on our part to do? how are we to do this? and how will this make us whole?

We see at a glance that the means of this

Divine operation, of this going forth of the healing virtue, was the woman's deliberate, voluntary, humble, trustful act. The Lord did not come to her specially, calling her by name, raising her, assuring her. At most He was passing by where she was. He was in the world, He was going then on his mission of mercy, of giving life to the dead. The woman beholds Him, believes that He not only can save her, but will save her. She comes to Him; she passes forward through the crowd; she allows neither shame nor fear, nor any impediment, to stand in her way; she is willing on her part to struggle hard for the attainment of her end; but, as regards the Saviour, she does not importune Him with her cries, nor even her presence; she will not stay his feet a moment; she asks not a glance of compassion from his eye, a word of comfort from his mouth; she knows that He is Love itself, ever merciful and ever strong to save; the effort is to be on her part, not on his; she will



not throw herself in his way,—she will not even utter a prayer in his outward ear; she will implore Him only in the silent desire of her heart; she will cry to Him in her earnest but unuttered faith; she will come behind Him, saying to herself, “if I may but touch his garment, I shall be made whole.” She does so: she touches but the hem of his robe,—the fringe or tassel of that garment whose pattern is given in the ancient Levitical law,—and immediately the fountain of her blood is dried up; she feels in her body that her plague is healed. ’Tis then the Saviour turns and looks upon her that has done this thing; ’tis then she falls trembling before Him, and in heartfelt acknowledgment of his mercy tells Him all the truth. And now she hears from his lips those comforting and gracious words: “Daughter, be of good comfort; thy faith hath made thee whole. Go in peace.” Her faith has been the means of her cure; but it was faith in act: and that act was none other than

coming and touching the hem of the Lord's garment.

Upon this act, then,—touching the hem of the Lord's garment,—hangs the whole significance of this event. That it is an act of great spiritual import, whose efficacy lies deeper than in the mere outward transaction, and is grounded on some interior truth which the act itself only typifies, is what every one must admit who believes that this narrative is written for our edification in spiritual things; since it would be otherwise not only wholly meaningless to us,—inasmuch as we can see no rational connection between touching a garment and healing a plague, but, moreover, since it presents to us a means of cure which it is utterly impossible for us now to enjoy in a literal manner. And that it was no mere accident or single occurrence of the kind, grounded only in the momentary conceit of the woman, follows from the statement in another place, that "*they sent out into all the*

*country round about and brought unto Him all that were diseased, and besought Him that they might only touch the hem of his garment ; and as many as touched were made perfectly whole."*

What, then, is the spiritual act typified by touching the hem of the Lord's garment? We know, in the first place, how the Lord came into the world; namely, as the Word made flesh. He is the Divine Truth, made present to mankind, to enlighten, to guide, to heal, to sanctify. He is the vehicle by which the Divine Love descends to earth to regenerate and raise from death our fallen race. The Father, the infinite and eternal Love and Life, dwells in Him; and through Him, as the Truth, this Love goes forth in wondrous deeds of mercy and power, overcoming evil of every kind, "healing all manner of sickness and disease among the people." Our Lord, as the Incarnate Word, becomes thus the clothing of the Divine Love, its garment, its form, and visible body. And everything our Lord did must, in its spiritual



significance, point to some operation of the Divine Truth as revealed to man. Whatever is exterior to the Lord, and appertaining to Him, as, in this instance, his garment, must, therefore, refer to this Divine Truth or Word in its more external aspect. We may regard the Lord's garment, therefore, as typifying natural or literal truth,—that kind of truth which clothes and contains within itself a wisdom which is spiritual and concealed from our sight. It is the letter of the Bible, which clothes and contains within itself a spiritual meaning; or it is the more external moral duties and religious acts of life, as, likewise, the vessel and the covering of corresponding spiritual duties and acts.

But the hem of the garment is that which is at the bottom and end of all. It may be understood as the tassel at the corner or the fringe all around the border, which, while it is the outermost part of all, is yet that which completes the form and the beauty of the garment. It represents, therefore, that kind of truth

which is most external, most natural, which belongs to the sensuous plane of the mind, and is connected with our outward experience and conduct in this material world.

That the hem of the garment is made so conspicuous in the precious narrative and teachings of the gospels is for no other reason than because this low, sensuous plane of our life is itself so prominent a thing, and one so directly in need of the saving precept and healing power of the Divine Word. The hem of the garment is even more conspicuous in the instructions of the Levitical law. We read of the priest's garment, that "*they made upon the hems of the robe pomegranates of blue, and purple, and scarlet, and twined linen. And they made bells of pure gold, and put the bells between the pomegranates upon the hem of the robe, round about between the pomegranates; a bell and a pomegranate, a bell and a pomegranate, round about the hem of the robe to minister in; as the Lord commanded Moses.*"—Ex. xxxix. 24.

And in another place, "*The Lord spake unto Moses, saying, Speak unto the children of Israel, and bid them that they make them fringes in the borders of their garments throughout their generations, and that they put upon the fringe of the borders a ribband of blue: and it shall be unto you for a fringe, that ye may look upon it, and remember all the commandments of the Lord, and do them.*"—Num. xv. 38. Into what importance is this otherwise trifling and insignificant matter, the hem or fringe of a garment, thus elevated in the Divine Word! And yet it is indicated with beautiful simplicity in both these passages just quoted what the spiritual significance of this fringe or border is; for of the one it is said it shall be so made *for the robe to minister in*,—that is, the proper symbol of the Divine Truth as revealed and dispensed to man; and of the other, *that it shall remind them of the commandments of the Lord, that they are to be obeyed*. Seeing this intimate connection between the hem of the garment to

the ministration of the Divine Truth and its observance, we shall now no longer wonder at seeing the hem of the Lord's garment being that medium by which his saving power goes forth. We can begin to understand at least how it was, and how it still is, spiritually a fact that "as many as touched the hem of his garment were made perfectly whole."

It is said of our Lord, that as soon as the woman touched the hem of his garment He perceived that virtue was gone out of Him. And this leads us to a hasty glance at that sublime and far-reaching topic,—the saving power of God as exerted by means of his incarnation in our human flesh and nature. The Lord descended, as we have already seen, as the Divine Truth, not separate from the Divine Love, but to make way for the Divine Love to descend into the hearts of men. The Father was in Him and did the works that He did. "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself." This He



did by overcoming error with truth, and evil with good; by lifting the chains of hell from the degraded and perishing souls of men, and opening their eyes to heavenly prospects, and implanting pure and heavenly motives in their hearts. Why—the question always has arisen, and will frequently arise from the natural reason—why could not God do this in heaven without coming into this world and assuming the very flesh, and entering into the life itself of us mortals, with all its corrupt tendencies, its temptations to sin, its sufferings, even the most painful? The answer is, that between the high realm of heaven and the souls of men on earth a thick cloud of wickedness, yea, a host of evil spirits, had stretched itself out, and hell, like a great shadow of death, brooded over the entire race of man. Through such a corrupt and malignant atmosphere of evil the rays of the heavenly sun—the saving influences of the Divine Love—could no longer come down to men. The Prince of darkness

and sin reigned over all the world. Then the Lord in his own omnipotence, Himself came a Light into the world, that whosoever should come to the light might be saved. Dispersing all these corrupted mediums, He became in his revealed Truth Himself the one great medium of the Divine Love and life to the souls of men; He put to flight these legions of the enemy; He scattered the darkness in which men had been groping; He opened again the clear depths of heaven, and in Him the sun of righteousness arose with healing in his wings. That nothing might stand between Him and our humanity, in its lowest, most sensuous, most external state, He Himself entered into this very humanity of ours, fallen, corrupt, ready to perish: yea, the hem of his garment swept indeed the very dust of the earth we tread. He brought his saving light and grace not only into the lowest social condition of our human life, but also into its extreme spiritual prostration, being tempted in every way that

mortal man is tempted, and yet overcoming with his Divine power all temptation, and thus conquering for us liberty and the hope of salvation. It was to reach man in this world that God Himself came into the world; it was to rescue man in his carnal, earthly estate that He put on this carnal, earthly nature, and in it fought against our common foes; it was to heal, to succor, to save man in his most degraded and lifeless condition, that He clothed Himself with our own degraded and perishing humanity. Into this, even to its lowest and most sensuous extremes, He brought his Divine life and power. His own humanity became glorified and Divine throughout, so that He could say of his own glorified, risen body, "Behold my hands and my feet." This descent of the Lord with all the power of his Divinity, to heal and to save, into the very lowest plane of our human life and nature, and the operation of his power through this assumed humanity, as a medium, is what is

illustrated by the healing virtue that went forth from Him when the hem of his garment was touched. For, as then the mere corporeal touch was sufficient to the imparting of an influence healing to physical disease, so now can man be spiritually healed by the Divine grace immediately imparted to him from the Lord's Divine Humanity. "Touch me and see: for a spirit hath not flesh and bones as ye see me have." It is by touching the glorified, natural degree of the Divine Humanity that we are saved! And we come into contact with the Lord by observing in humility and in faith the least and the most external of the Lord's commandments.

This may seem at first thought an easier way, if anything, of being spiritually made whole, than was that simple act by which the woman was physically healed. But let us look at the subject practically and see if it indeed be so. Not that it is desirable to make the religious life appear more arduous than it



is, but that, be it easy or not, we come at the facts and practical reality of it.

Now, first of all, two things are demanded of us,—faith and action. That is, that we no longer look to human physicians, to any human evidence or power, as such, for the cure of our spiritual disease, but to look humbly, prayerfully, and confidently to the Lord for the succor we need, and then make an earnest, determined effort to do that which, on our part, is needful as a medium of his working in us. Now this is itself just that which the natural mind is unwilling and finds it hard to do. It cannot readily convince itself that its own selfish and worldly motives and ends are not those which will conduce to real happiness. It goes on consulting year after year these human physicians, its love of wealth, of power, of distinction, of good reports, of the favor of men and their flatteries,—happy, indeed, if, like the woman of the text, it spends all it has, tries its every art and endeavor,

only to find itself at last nothing helped and only growing worse.

Then, looking above, to the Divine mercy and power for aid, it must begin to *act*, to do something with persevering effort; and what shall this be? It must be an opening of our hearts to the healing influence of the Lord by reforming our outward, conscious, voluntary conduct. We must touch the hem of the Divine garment of truth by beginning to obey the Divine commandments in our daily conduct. We must bring our actual life into contact with the Divine truth as applicable to it. We must apply the Ten Commandments to the reforming of the conduct of our own minds and bodies; for this external sense of the Commandments is the hem of the Lord's garment; it is the border that shapes, holds in, and gives strength to all the inner and spiritual truth we can receive. The hem is, as we have said, the Divine truth in the sensuous or most external degree; but this means, of course,

that aspect of the Divine truth that is applicable to the external conduct of our lives to whatever degree of spiritual advancement we have attained. For spiritual truth always becomes external and natural in our voluntary conduct and acts. We touch the hem of the Lord's robe when we think of and obey his Word in the little common duties of every day, when we correct ourselves in little faults and faithfully perform little duties.

Take, then, the Divine precepts of the Decalogue, and touch the hem of each holy truth. First: we must worship no idols. Wherein, then, in our conduct are we *practicing* idolatry? If we do not, with the pagans, worship images of stone or brass, it does not follow that this commandment has no literal force with us; for its hem, its external application, is just there where it strikes *our* actual conduct. If we are not worshiping brazen images, nor sun, nor moon, what, then, are we worshiping in our acts? Are we not worshiping, as a

God wealth, fashion, fame ; or some pet scheme and creation of our own minds ; or some human idol whose favor we regard before that of God, in whose devotion we forget all the duties and obligations of religion ? And take the second : *Thou shalt not blaspheme*. Are we given to open blasphemy, to using profane language, to making light of holy names and things ? Then begin at once to stop this practice : touch this garment on its hem, and virtue will go forth from the Lord into the soul to make us love and reverence his name and Word. Third : *Keep holy the Sabbath*. Are you a Sabbath-breaker, doing your own sensual and worldly pleasure, and thinking your own thoughts on the Lord's day, and neglecting the holy ordinances of his Church, omitting to pray to Him, to lift your mind to heavenly things, to read his Word, to go to church, and humbly, reverently, worship Him in word of mouth and on your bended knee ? Then begin here to reform, and be assured that the

Lord will help you, and give you new strength and life, in ways and in measure that you knew not of. And so with the others. Are you lacking in *honor* to your earthly parents, in obedience to the authorities set over you in spiritual and temporal things, in reverence and grateful love for the Church as your spiritual mother, and to God as your Father in heaven? Are you a *murderer*? if not in bloody act, then in revengeful feelings, in hatred and ill will, which we know, if unrestrained by outward laws and penalties, would soon run into the act itself? Are you an *adulterer*? if not actually, still, in your mental conduct, in your unclean thoughts and desires? Are you a *liar*, a slanderer of your neighbor, a bearer of false testimony, a deceiver, dishonest in your dealings with your fellow-man? Are you *envious* and *covetous*, dissatisfied with your own lot, and complaining that your neighbors enjoy what you do not?

These are precepts which, no one can deny,



do strike at the actual, every-day conduct of us all. They are no abstractions; no vague, shapeless, unclothed ideals of truth or religion; they are the visible, tangible garment of righteousness which the Saviour wore, and wore for us to touch, and, indeed, for us to touch *upon the hem!* By bringing our life into contact and conformity with these plain, literal truths, we open a way by which the saving grace of God can descend into our inner lives and regenerate us. And without this actual shunning of our natural evils of life as *sins*,—that is, out of faith in the Lord and in obedience to Him,—we cannot receive inwardly any spiritual help, any substantial religious life, with its real joys and everlasting blessings. Without this external obedience, this religion in our daily life,—its words, its motives, and its acts,—all that vague and fanciful notion within us which we call spiritual religion, which, with a vast array of truths never put to practice, and of good things which the heart, if the truth be

spoken, has never had the least desire for, floats about in the imagination and shows itself in fine and learned or pious discourse,—all this is but a garment *without a hem*, ragged and shapeless, and liable to be torn into tatters by the first catch of strong temptation with which it comes in contact.

What we all need in the midst of the pretentious and ambitious life of this world is true humility, and faith in the great power and value of patient effort in doing these external but actual and practical duties of religion. It would be a fine thing to be reformed at once,—to be made in an instant all spiritual, without knowing temptations any more, nor needing the outward constraints of religious obligation! So exclaims that same vain mind that wonders why Almighty God came down from heaven, put on our miserable humanity, suffered, and died, in order to redeem man from Satan's power. But let us be thankful that God did so come down, that man might even touch his

robe and be healed ; that his Word is so plainly revealed to us, and his religious precepts are so practically and so closely applied to our present condition and needs that all we have to do is to lay hold of them in humility and in faith, and thereby come into spiritual conjunction with the Glorious Body of our Lord Himself, and feel the healing and life-renewing power of his Divine Presence. What good comfort is there, indeed, in the truth that if we begin to put away a single evil forbidden in one of the Ten Commandments, and because God forbids, in place of that evil God puts a desire for the opposite virtue into the heart ; that thus we cannot touch the hem of the Lord's garment, be it ever so secretly, so silently, but that virtue from the Lord will actually go forth into our souls ; but that He will turn and look upon us, —will know him who has done this thing : and will then not let us depart till He have given us his blessing, "Go in peace!"



## II.

### The Generation of Jesus Christ; or, God's Descent to Man. A Meditation for New Year's Day.

---

*The book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham.—St. Matt. i. 1.*

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SUCH is the opening verse of the New Testament of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. As the heading, or title, of what is to follow, it calls to mind the name of the first book of the Old Testament,—the Book of Genesis,—for in the Greek tongue the words are precisely similar, and were the translation of the words in both cases uniform we should read, The Book of the Genesis of Jesus Christ; or, on the other hand, we should call the first book of Moses, the Book of the Generations. Indeed, in the second chapter of this book, where the history of the creation

is briefly summed up, we read, "These are the generations of the heavens and of the earth when they were created, in the day that the Lord God made the earth and the heavens."

Thus are our minds called by the very opening words of our Lord's gospel to the contemplation of the Eternal God, of Him who is the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End, the First and the Last, the Son of David, the Son of Abraham! We strive in vain to follow in thought these words, leading far, far back into the dim realms of antiquity. The book of the genesis of Jesus Christ! We pause in silent adoration before the Infinite and the Eternal, to whom a thousand years are but as yesterday when it is past, and as a watch in the night. We seem to hear, borne along through ages and ages, the heavenly voice, "In the Beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God"!

The history of the going forth of our Lord's

Humanity, which is contained in this book of the generation of Jesus Christ, will not be an unfitting theme for the Christian's contemplation at the beginning of the new year, when once more the returning sun calls to our minds the dawn of a new creation, a new birth, or regeneration of all things living, and while the remembrance is yet fresh in the mind, of the birth in this world of the same Lord and Saviour, the only True God and Eternal Life. In this Divine and solemn doctrine, couched in the mysterious symbol of a human genealogy, and revealed from heaven by the Lord alone, may we not greet with understanding, and with joy of heart, the light of a new heaven and a new earth,—the everlasting light which, as the glory of God, shineth in his Holy Jerusalem!

“The Book of the Genesis, or Generation of Jesus Christ,”—that this cannot have reference to a physical birth is evident from the passage already quoted from Genesis, wherein

mention is made of the generations of the heavens and the earth, and also from the fact that our Lord's genealogy is not human, but Divine, as is expressly declared in the words which the Angel Gabriel spoke to Mary, saying, "The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee; therefore, also, *that holy thing* which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God." If, then, it be not a physical or natural generation here referred to, it must, unless this chapter is wholly meaningless, be a spiritual generation. And here we have abundantly confirmed the Church's doctrine of the spiritual sense of the word. For it is alone according to this spiritual sense contained in the literal sense that the letter of this passage of the Word can in any wise be understood; since not only the declaration in the first verse, that Jesus Christ is the son of David, is in direct contradiction, when literally understood, to those passages which declare Him to be the Son of

God, but there are also many other difficulties, particularly the omission of many names in the genealogical ladder, in which the student of the mere letter is unavoidably involved. And it may be remarked here, that if any portion of the whole Word of God is to be chosen as a standard or example of its historical accuracy, and as a criterion whereby to determine the nature of its contents, surely all will agree that none other can more entirely serve this end than the very words which describe the genesis, origin, or birth of our Lord Jesus Christ; namely, the first chapter of Matthew. Here the records of the Old Testament are summed up into a brief opening passage of the New. The line of family names, reaching back to the time of Abraham, is here recorded, with certain omissions, as the *Book of the Generation of Jesus Christ*. And yet Jesus Christ was the son of no man, but was conceived by the Holy Ghost, and born of the Virgin Mary before yet Joseph her husband knew her. Surely



the connection between the history of the Old Testament and that of the New must lie deeper than in the mere letter. For if we hold to the letter alone, we have no more reason for calling Jesus Christ the son of David, of the seed of Abraham, than had the disbelieving Jews of his time for calling Him the son of Joseph, the carpenter of Nazareth. Naturally speaking, our Lord is not David's son; for both naturally and spiritually He is the Son of God, and herein He differs from all others born of woman,—herein lies his Eternal and Adorable Divinity. But spiritually speaking, He is the son of David and of Abraham. Here, too, is to be observed the sublime and holy coincidence of the Divine and human, the spiritual and the literal, presented to us in the arrangement of God's Word. Throughout the whole Word, with rare, and perhaps this only exception, the literal sense stands apart from and independent, as it were, of the spiritual sense, and may be viewed and studied in its own purely external char-



acter. And this is because of the three discrete degrees of all order and creation,—the celestial, the spiritual, and the natural.

Generally speaking, not only in the works of God's natural creation, but also in the literal or natural sense of his Word, we see but the lowest degree without recognizing in it anything of the higher and interior degrees. But when our Lord came into the world to assume our humanity, to clothe Himself with our flesh, and thus to bring down into the lowest degree of man his own Divine Essence, and to reveal Himself to the world as Immanuel, God with us, these higher and internal degrees could no longer remain wholly concealed, even from man. Being brought forth and revealed by the Lord in the natural or literal plane, they must break forth in their own light and splendor upon the world, and remain before men evermore the imperishable monuments of the Incarnate Word. Now, just such a breaking forth or revelation of the internal or spiritual

degree in the literal or natural is displayed in this opening verse of the Lord's new Gospel, which proclaims the central and crowning event of all history,—the Birth of Jesus Christ. For here, if the Divine Word is seen and recognized at all, it must be in its spiritual, and not in its natural sense. The whole matter of the acceptance of the Bible as the Book of truth rests, we may say, on this point. If it is to be interpreted only according to its letter, then is it not true, but contradictory and meaningless; if it be the true book, and Divine in its origin, it must be understood and interpreted according to an internal and spiritual sense. Up to this time, throughout all the history of the Old Covenant, the literal or merely representative sense could be understood and believed in its own character. The history of the creation, the Ten Commandments, the warnings and promises of the prophets, could all be received, blindly, perhaps, and not very intelligently, but still as generally consistent and harmonious, even in

their literal sense alone. But this was at an end when the new Gospel came, and the natural degree of truth no longer served to hide entirely the degrees within it, but rather to reveal the Highest, even the Divine, so that "*all flesh should see the Salvation of God!*" The story of Abraham and his descendants, even to Joseph, might have been understood in the natural sense alone, without any knowledge of the spiritual reference to the Lord contained therein. Not so when our Lord Himself was born of Mary, while she yet knew not a man, and was called the Son of God. Then we could no longer say with literal truth that Jesus Christ is Joseph's son, nor David's son, nor Abraham's. Then the natural veil is lifted, and our eyes fall upon the Holy of Holies within, and behold there our transfigured Lord, his garments white as the light, his face shining as the sun! And out of the cloud a voice cometh, saying, "This is my beloved Son; hear ye Him!"

The miracles which our Lord performed may also be regarded as the manifestation of the higher degrees in the lowest degree of nature. The marvelous healing of the sick, turning water into wine, multiplying a thousand-fold the few loaves of bread, and raising the dead to life, what are these works but the manifest presence of certain spiritual and celestial powers in the natural world, consequent upon our Lord's assuming the humanity and living as a man upon our earth?

Having thus seen how that the manifestation of God to the world, or of the Divinity in the Humanity, necessitates, at the same time, a recognition of the Scriptures as true in a higher and Diviner sense than that of merely literal history, let us now consider for a moment what are spiritual generations, and what is the spiritual genealogy here recorded. What spiritual generation is we already know from the Word itself. To be born again is to be born of the Spirit. A new birth is a spiritual birth, as our



Lord Himself teacheth us. "Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh; that which is born of the Spirit is spirit." A spiritual birth must be a production of those things which are spiritual; and these may be summed up as constituting the voluntary and the intellectual parts of the mind. The generations recorded in the Word all have the spiritual significance of the production of some new state of goodness, in the will, and of truth, in the intellect, or of their opposites. And the "book of the generations of Jesus Christ" can mean, therefore, only the "Divine Word, treating, throughout, of the spiritual productions of faith and love derived from the Lord." Of these spiritual productions we are afforded, in the *Arcana Cœlestia* of Swedenborg, numerous examples, in the explanation there given of the internal sense of the Book of Genesis.

We know that Abraham represents the

Lord's Celestial, or Divine Essence; that by Isaac's birth is represented the production of the Divine Rational plane in the Lord's mind when He assumed the humanity; and the birth of Jacob, Isaac's son, we know to signify the production of the Divine Natural plane, through the rational or spiritual, and from the inmost essential Divinity. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob represent the three Degrees of the Lord's Nature,—the celestial, the spiritual, the natural. And it is said, in Matthew, that Jesus Christ is the son of David, the son of Abraham, because Abraham represents that essential Divinity which alone is the Father of our Lord, and because David, like Isaac, represents the spiritual degree, which is next to the celestial, and the medium between the celestial and the natural degree; which natural degree our Lord Himself represents in his assumed humanity, and as the Son of man. In this short verse, then, we have summed up the entire contents of the following sixteen verses,



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or the names of the descendants of Abraham, down to Joseph, the husband of Mary; not to say of the entire Word itself.

For in a certain sense we may regard the Word as treating only of the production of these three degrees of faith and charity in the natural, spiritual, and celestial mind, represented by Jesus Christ, David, and Abraham. Thus, the first verse seems to only have its lesson repeated in the fifteen verses which follow it. But there is this important difference in the two genealogies,—the first, beginning with Jesus Christ, ends with Abraham; the other, beginning with Abraham, ends with Joseph, the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus, who is called Christ. Here we have the ascending and the descending series. In the one account, the descent of the celestial into the natural; and in the other, the progression from the natural degree up to the celestial,—thus fulfilling the words of our Lord Himself, “*No man hath ascended into heaven but He that*

*came down from heaven, even the Son of man, which is in heaven.*” “And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man” (or He that came down from heaven) “be lifted up.” Such is likewise the meaning of that mystic vision which Jacob saw in his dream, of a ladder reaching up to heaven, on which angels were ascending and descending. Thus, in truth, does the Divine Truth descend into our minds from the Divine Love, through the spiritual into the natural plane, that there, taking on the forms of knowledge and sense, and being engrafted into our mere earthly life, it may glorify and transform them into its own spiritual beauty, and thus lead them up the shining ladder to heaven once more.

But we should bear in mind that the long list of names contained in the fifteen verses which follow the verse quoted are not without their holy meaning,—a meaning which, doubtless, the angels of heaven comprehend, however feebly we may do so. All names in the

Scriptures mean spiritual qualities or attributes. We have seen what is the spiritual significance of Abraham, of David or Isaac, and of Jacob,—namely, that they represent in the Lord the three planes of his mind into which the Divinity of the Father descended in assuming our human nature. But of all the names which remain, representing all the possible qualities and variations of spiritual states of which our nature is capable, and which were passed through by the Lord in the process of glorifying his Humanity, of all these we can know and understand but little. Let us, then, read the concluding verse of this book of the generation of Jesus Christ; “So all the generations from Abraham to David are fourteen generations; and from David until the carrying away into Babylon are fourteen generations; and from the carrying away into Babylon unto Christ are fourteen generations.” Herein is contained a wonderful lesson in spiritual things which we can but glance at here. It is a history

of a decline, a degeneracy, or fall of man from a celestial into a natural state of life; through which decline the Lord, in his redeeming love, follows after the wandering soul,—goes out and seeks the lost sheep! The whole genealogy is divided into three periods of fourteen generations each. The number fourteen, being *seven added to itself*, signifies the holiness of the union of goodness and truth, in their descent into the degree of the Lord's mind, represented by the succeeding generations. There being *three* of such holy and perfect periods, signifies that the series is complete, that the progression is accomplished through all the three degrees of our Lord's nature, and thus that the Lord's Divinity is fully incarnated in, and united to, his Humanity. The first or celestial degree includes the fourteen generations from Abraham to David. It is from David the King, representing the Lord as to his Divine Truth, that the spiritual period commences, and this ends with the carrying away into Babylon,—that is, the



destruction of the spiritual mind through the love of dominion. Then, in the natural and selfish will, begins the lowest period, which ends with Mary,—the humble virgin of Nazareth,—of whom was born Christ,—the Redeemer and Saviour of fallen and sinful man! But, with this descending scale, we must close our study of the sacred record. The glorious ascent heavenward is described in all that follows in the gospels. Let this be the Christian's guide and companion henceforth. Let him begin with the new year a new spiritual genealogy which shall record his constant regeneration of the Holy Spirit of God: and so let him bring down into the lowest and most external plane of his life the heavenly truths which the Divine Love begets in his mind, that, like the Son of man, he may be lifted up, and attain at last to the blessed land which God hath promised to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, and to their seed forever.

### III.

#### The Sword in Mary's Soul; or, the Divine Judgments in the Church.

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*Yea, a sword shall pierce through thy own soul also, that  
the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed.*—St. Luke  
ii. 35.

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THESE words were spoken to Mary, the mother of the Lord, by the aged Simeon, a just and devout man, who had waited for consolation in Israel. It had been revealed to him by the Holy Ghost that ere his death he should behold the Lord's Christ. And so it came true, that he was led by the Holy Spirit to go into the temple at Jerusalem at the same time that Joseph and Mary brought in the child Jesus to do for Him after the custom of the law. The requisite forty days had elapsed since the birth of her child, and Mary



had come to present Him to the Lord, and also to offer the humble sacrifice of a pair of turtle-doves, or two young pigeons. It is not unlikely that there were many worshipers there, going and coming in the temple, and few would notice this humble company,—the poor man and woman bringing in their little infant, up from the rural town of Bethlehem. And we can easily believe that Joseph and Mary marveled, indeed, when they saw this aged man, Simeon, come forward and take their Child up in his arms, and bless God, and say, “Lord, now lettest Thou thy servant depart in peace: for mine eyes have seen thy salvation, which Thou hast prepared before the face of all people; a light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel!” And then the old man turns and blesses them, and says to Mary, “Behold, this Child is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel; and for a sign which shall be spoken against; *yea, a sword shall pierce through thy own soul also,*

*that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed!"*

Words strange and wonderful,—to Mary that heard them then, to all in Christian lands who have for hundreds of years heard them repeated, and feel that here was the Holy Ghost speaking and prophesying of things deeper than for the wisdom of man to search out or to foresee!

“Yea, a sword shall pierce through thy own soul also, that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed.”

Simeon spake not from himself, but from the Divine Light which shone in his mind by the mercy of that God who had rewarded his patient and faithful waiting by revealing to him at last the Anointed,—the Messiah that was come to save the world. Whether Simeon himself knew all the deep meaning of those solemn words spoken to Mary at that time, it is not needful to inquire. They were uttered in a state of Divine illumination; they

contain a prophecy of Divine Truth concerning our Incarnate Lord, and not the foreseeing of any man. And the prophecy has been fulfilled, and is being fulfilled wherever the Incarnate Word, the Lord's Christ, has been proclaimed; wherever before the eyes of a lost and dying world has been lifted up that "sign which shall be spoken against!"

I have seen, as probably have many of my readers, certain pious pictures representing the Virgin Mary with her heart transfixed with daggers,—intended to embody the literal idea of Simeon's prophecy, and to represent to us the sorrows which she, as the mother of the Lord, endured in beholding the suffering, and, at last, the crucifixion of our Saviour. It was natural that men, seeing only the letter of God's Word, should thus interpret and contemplate this prophecy. But such is not the idea which is here presented to the spiritual understanding of the Church. Here is a prophecy far deeper and wider than of any mere per-

sonal or temporary significance. The words spoken by the Holy Ghost, through Simeon, were not spoken to Mary as a single individual, but as representing the Mary of all the ages to come, the Church as to her affection of truth and goodness, wherein she conceives the Word of God and bears a man-child,—a child born of water and of the Spirit for the salvation of the world. Mary is the Church of the Lord upon earth. Her sorrows, her trials, are the sorrows and trials of the Church, both in general and in each particular soul. And the daggers which pierce her soul are those which, from that day to this, and never more than at this day, have pierced, and are piercing, the inner spiritual being of the Church, to the end that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed and the judgment of the Lord be executed in the earth.

It is said that Simeon “blessed them, and said unto Mary his mother, ‘this child is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel.’”

Few have known or duly reflected on the fact that when God came to save the world by being born a man on our earth, He came as the Word,—that is, as the Truth. Many speak and treat of the Lord's coming much as if nothing were said in the gospels as to how He came or what He came for ; all their thoughts seem to be centred on the death He died, and their only question to be what He died for,—as if this were or could be anything apart from the same Divine purpose which had ordered his birth and his life in this world, with all his Divine teachings and miraculous deeds of mercy. It is true that Christ our Lord died to save sinners, but just as true that He was born and lived here on earth to save sinners. And the Word tells us how and why He was thus born and lived and died, and sets forth the true “mystery of godliness” and the true “plan of salvation” in far other language than that which men have invented in their perplexed and often misleading doctrines.



It was the Word—that is, the Divine Truth—which took on our humanity, to purify and glorify it, and make it, in the person of JESUS CHRIST, a Divine Humanity, in which the indwelling Divinity—the eternal Jehovah—might be brought forth to view, and might reach down to men in their lowest estates, and through which Divine Humanity man might have visible and conscious access to the one only living and true God. The Word, or the Divine Truth, is the sanctuary or holy structure of the mind which must be prepared before the Lord in his Divine Love—which is the Father Himself—can come in. The Word, the Divine Truth, is also the light of the world. It is the true, the saving light to men's souls, because in this Word was Life,—*i.e.* the eternal Deity, the Source of all Life and Being,—*and this Life is the light of men.* For all light comes from heat, and the Divine Truth, Wisdom, or Word, is but the shining of this Divine Love—the all-creating Warmth—itsself. This Divine Fire of



the eternal Father's Love is the inmost ESSE of all Being, from which alone everything celestial, spiritual, natural, and material has been created and made.

The Word, conceived in Mary by the Holy Ghost,—that is, by the Divine Proceeding or Operation,—and born into our world a man-child, has a Father and a mother,—a Father, after his Divine nature; a mother, after his human nature. The Father of the Lord is none other than his own Divinity, which is his inward soul,—the indivisible, eternal, omnipresent, omniscient God. The mother of the Lord is Mary; she is called his mother by the evangelists throughout their gospels, *but not by our Lord Himself!* Yea, she is a mother, not of Him as Divine, but of that part of Him which was human, and which He temporarily put on at his birth into the world, as a man puts on his armor when he goes out to war. The conflict over, the armor is put off, the weapons laid aside. Our Lord's glorification accomplished,

—his Humanity made truly Divine and united, like body to soul, to the eternal Divinity of the Father dwelling in Him,—He puts off all the merely infirm, the mortal, human, all that He had derived from the human mother Mary, and He is no more, in any sense, the son of Mary. He is wholly Divine, the God and Lord of all angels and men, the God whom Mary in heaven worships with all her fellow-beings there; beside whom there is no God, no Saviour, and out of whom there is neither Light nor Life for the soul of any creature.

And the Mary of all ages is, as I have said, the Church, or that state of the human mind, as to its affection of truth and goodness, which, moved and animated by the Holy Spirit of the Lord, receives his Word into the ground of a good and honest heart, and bringeth forth its fruit in patience. The Word of God comes down not again in the Divine Person of God made visible, but in a spiritual and invisible manner, and seeks to be made flesh in the

hearts and the lives of men, and through them to be the salvation of the world. Yea, the Lord Himself, in his Divine Humanity, is ever seeking entrance to the souls of men, that He may pour his saving Life and his unspeakable blessings down in a great stream of mercy and love upon our race and the earth which He has given for our abode. But He comes to us now, as He even came in times past, as the Word,—the Truth. It is by water and the Spirit that we may be born anew as sons of God, and the water is the truth of faith, and the Spirit is the Life from God which flows down into our every effort to live according to the truth of our faith.

Blessed were Mary and Joseph, because they represented the Church, which has received the Word of God and clothed it with a living form, a visible body, in the deeds of a righteous and merciful life. Blessed is every man, woman, and child to whom the Word of God, or even a single Truth thereof, has come as a Saviour

descended from heaven seeking a body or lowest form of activity in the deeds of his or her earthly life. But not to bless and give thanks only does Simeon speak. The prophetic voice of the Holy Spirit has its words of warning—of solemn admonition as well—to utter to the Mary of all the ages at the joyful moment of the Incarnation of the Divine Word. The Word of God, God's own Truth, set up in the face of human desire and human thought,—this is for a sign to be spoken against! Natural selfishness and the reason of the carnal sense will not readily abandon their thrones for this heavenly King. The angels may sing joy to the world, glory in heaven, peace on earth; but He who is come to save the world, to be the Word of God acting Himself out in the life of our flesh, He knows that He is not come, first of all, to bring peace, but a sword. First the combat, then the victory, and the long-enduring reign of peace and heavenly joy. First to drive out error and sin; first to

fight with corruptions of heart and mind; to root out old habits of evil desire, evil thought, evil speech, and evil act; to put down Satan, with all his filthy and hateful brood, under our feet; and then, to let us taste the sweet and heavenly delights of peace and righteousness. This is the warfare which God's truth, revealed to the world in Jesus Christ, was to wage in the hearts of men for ages to come; the warfare of truth with error, of the holy lessons of faith and commandments of religion with all the opposing prejudices, persuasions, excuses, and reasonings which the love of evil could beget out of its own infernal bosom. And as all those to whom the truth of God's Word comes constitute the Church of the Lord in an external sense, and as these are they who are to be brought into temptation-combats by the Incarnate Word,—therefore it is said to Mary, “Yea, a sword shall pierce through thy own soul also, that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed.” Mary is



the Church of the Lord on earth; the sword that pierces her soul is the Truth of God's Word, which searches the inmost spiritual life of the Church, revealing the thoughts of every heart, whether it be for God or against God, and thus executing the Divine judgments upon earth. So does God's Word come into our souls not to bring peace, but a sword. Yea, it is the sword that pierces our own soul through. For there is nothing in the life of him to whom the Word of God has found even the smallest entrance which this keen and searching blade will not pierce through. The light is there; the creatures of darkness may not flee away; they must stand still and bear the scrutiny of this awful Searcher of the hearts and reins!

Such is the Divine method of judging and of saving a fallen world. It is by the Word or the Truth coming into the heart of man, cutting him through like a dagger, to the inmost consciousness, revealing his thoughts and his desires and aims, whether they be

good or evil, and enabling him in freedom to accept or reject his salvation, in either admitting the Divine Truth to reign in him as his true Lord and King, or closing the heart against it in the voluntary and deliberate commission of sin.

And that a man may know his sins, the Light breaks in upon him, revealing the thoughts of his heart. How can a man know what is wrong except by knowing what is right? and how can he know that a thing is right except he know that it is commanded by that God who alone is Good and True, and who governs from perfect Love and Wisdom? The Word of God brings to man this light; and when his thoughts stand revealed in this light, then is the Sword piercing through his soul, and God Himself is come to judge the earth in him!

How long and how mysteriously have men talked of the Judgment to come, and of the great day when the hearts of all shall be

opened in the sight of God and the angels! But will they not learn that *the Judgment-day is come*; that it is here, now, wherever his Word is preached and read and thought of by man? When a Truth of the Word enters a man's thoughts in the moment of decision between a right and a wrong act, then are the thoughts of his heart revealed before God. Whenever a man discovers his sins committed, and, bemoaning his weakness, and yet hoping in the Lord, he resolves henceforth to more carefully resist the evil which is his besetting sin, then is *the child Jesus set for that man's fall and rising again!* When our sinful desires rebel against that which our faith teaches, and the Word of God becomes offensive and its counsels obnoxious to us, then is revealed to our eyes that *sign which shall be spoken against*. And when, in reflecting on the life we lead, we feel conscious of the long conflict between right and wrong; between the heavenly and the earthly motives at work in our

souls; when we trace the operation of the Lord's Holy Spirit, striving through his Word and the Church to lift our life to heavenly aims; and when we behold, on the other hand, the cunning and soft seductions whereby, through the avenues of the world and its pleasures, the powers of evil are drawing us away to number us with their own;—then, and in the oft-repeated crisis of doubt, of struggle, of spiritual combat, the *sword pierces through our own souls also, that the thoughts of our hearts may be revealed!*

So does the woman Mary, her heart pierced with a sword, still stand before us, the true image of the Lord's Church upon earth in her time of temptation, of combat, and of Divine judgment!

We neither may, nor should we hope to escape that sword which will cleave our life in two, showing what in us belongs to God and what to the devil. But we should ever pray that we may have strength given us from the

Lord, when we know what is from Him, to hold fast to it, that He in whose sight all the thoughts of our hearts are constantly revealed may see some principle of his Blessed Word taking form in our actual life, and becoming every new day and every new year more really, more truly, more powerfully to us a Word of Salvation and of Eternal Life.



#### IV.

### The Mother of Jesus at Cana; or, Humility and Obedience the Receptacles of the Lord's Regener- ating Grace.

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*And the third day there was a marriage in Cana of Galilee; and the mother of Jesus was there.—St. John ii. 1.*

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THE history of our Lord's first miracle is well known wherever the Holy Gospel has been preached. The water changed to wine has for ages been in the minds of Christians a sublime but mysterious symbol of the glory of our Saviour's Divinity as first manifested forth to man. But there are other lessons afforded in this sacred narrative for the Church's edification than that of the simple act alone of changing the water into wine. For those who search the Scriptures to find therein eternal life it is not the miracle only that will be full

of Divine instruction: every recorded incident and circumstance attending the miracle equally testifies of the Lord. Thus, while we may know for a fact that our Saviour wrought somewhere and at some time and amid certain company a great miracle; yet we shall see comparatively little of the great significance of that miracle, of its deep Divine intent, except we consider as well that it was in *Can.a of Galilee* that it was done; that it was *on the third day, at a marriage-feast*, and that the *mother of Jesus was there*. That this is the case is because the Holy Bible is Divinely inspired, and thus everywhere full of spiritual meaning and instruction. Strictly speaking, nothing in the whole world of events occurs by chance, but the Divine Providence rules and controls all things, from the minutest to the most extraordinary. How manifestly must this be the case in regard to every act of our Saviour's life upon earth, which was throughout only the acting forth of the Divine Wis-

dom in word and work! and how inevitably so in that one authentic and Divinely-inspired history of his Life presented to us in the Holy Gospel! Not a feature, then, of this narrative of the miracle at Cana is without its heavenly meaning and Divine teaching.

How many subjects are here presented for our thoughtful study! How many lessons may the Church learn from year to year, from age to age, yea, to all eternity, in contemplating this first act of the Lord wherein He manifested forth his Divine glory to men! We may have often studied the narrative ourselves, or heard it expounded in one part or another; we may remember now more than one holy lesson it has revealed to us in times past; we may recall to mind what the miracle itself is in spiritual reality,—namely, the giving of *internal* in place of *external* truth, the establishment of the *spiritual* Church with those who were in a *natural* state of obedience and outward charity. We may remember why there was set *six*

water-pots of stone,—namely, because they represent the six periods, or work-days, as it were, of our purification from sin by obedience to the laws of morality. Why, too, these vessels of stone must be filled with water, because we must obey these laws out of regard to their Divine authority,—that is, as filled with the Divine Truth, and not as coming from man's wisdom and prudence. We may then see, once more, why this is indeed the first miracle which our Saviour wrought before men, and why the disciples believed in Him there,—namely, because the first step by which a man can acquire any real faith in the Lord, or perceive in any degree the glory of his Divine Love and Wisdom, is his obeying externally from religious motives the laws of pious and moral living. This faithful obedience will assuredly result in an internal knowledge and love of the truth for its own sake, and thus religion will become a thing of the heart and of the life. And the Divine Truth thus received

into the affections of the will is what is meant by the Divine Glory manifested forth to the believing disciple.

From so many fruitful topics of reflection let us now turn back to the beginning of the narrative and be content to dwell for the present on the simple statement there made, that the mother of Jesus was present at the wedding.

Knowing that in general it is the birth of an inward, spiritual religion that is described by the entire narrative, a proper understanding of this initiatory statement will enable us to see more clearly what is that condition in which we must all be in order to have the same miracle spiritually wrought in us. Cana, in Galilee of the Gentiles, is the abode of those in all ages and lands who are in little knowledge of spiritual truth and religion, but who are in the endeavor to live in some measure, at least, according to their knowledge of their duty, and from motives of obedience to a Divine Being and of charity towards their fellow-men. The mar-



riage at Cana is none other than that heavenly union between the Lord and the Church as it exists among these simple-minded, sincere, and well-disposed persons. It is the establishment among such willing, obedient hearts, who possess but little knowledge of spiritual and Divine things, it may be, but who, nevertheless, from their affection for whatever appears to them as truth, receive gladly the truth itself when presented to them; it is the establishment, among this kind of men, of a true and spiritual Church,—a true internal bond between God and their lives,—that is representatively set forth in the marriage at Cana of Galilee. And, as we read, “the mother of Jesus was there.”

Now, it was to act no unimportant part in this event that the mother of our Lord was present; and yet no other mark of distinction or honor is paid her than that she is specially mentioned as being among the wedding-guests. Behold, on the other hand, how humble, how

retiring, how reverently obedient is that behavior which she manifests before her adorable Lord! Hers is the homely duty to say to the Master, as the wine failed, "They have no wine;" to hear in meekness his reply, "Woman, what have I to do with thee? mine hour is not yet come;" and in the spirit of unquestioning obedience to place the servants of the household at the Saviour's command, saying to them, "Whatsoever he saith unto you, do it."

Who can fail to perceive in this portrayal of conduct what qualities of Christian character are specially figured forth in Mary, the mother of Jesus, at the marriage in Cana? In the first place, as a woman, she is a type of all affection for what is good, and as a mother, she represents the Church as existing with those in whom this affection is alive, but who, as Galileans, are in ignorance of spiritual and Divine things. Secondly, we recognize in her the pattern of quiet, patient, implicit obedience, the surrender of not only the selfish will and

power, but of the private judgment also, to the Lord. For in her conduct we see no petulant asking of a miracle, but the mere confession of a want; we see no complaining that the Divine assistance is delayed, but simply the careful preparation, that everything may be in order and readiness when it shall be the Lord's good pleasure to act, and that every intention on the Lord's part shall meet with ready and cheerful obedience in those who served Him. Obedience and humility! How do these lowly but heavenly virtues shine forth in the conduct of the mother of Jesus as here portrayed!

Let us dwell for a moment on that answer which the Lord made to her, and the part which she took on hearing it. When she says they have no wine, the Lord replies, "Woman, what have I to do with thee? mine hour is not yet come." These are strange and seemingly harsh words. He does not even call her "mother," but "woman"! Why is such an

answer given to her simple remark that they have no wine? Now, we well know that abrupt and harsh as these, our Saviour's, words may sound to the ear, they do yet imply nothing of like nature in Him who spoke them. His own infinite love and more than human wisdom prompted these words. Like the similar words spoken to Mary and Joseph when they found Him in the Temple discoursing with the Doctors, "How is it that ye sought me?" these must also be regarded as the utterances of the Divine Truth in its own character; as elevated out of the plane of merely local and personal relations and considerations. These words, "Woman, what have I to do with thee? mine hour is not yet come," cannot, therefore, be understood at all when viewed in their merely literal or natural sense. We must penetrate into the region of pure spiritual truth if we would arrive at their real meaning. Thus, the Saviour calls her not mother, for He is speaking in his Divine char-

acter, in that Divine Humanity which owed nothing to her, but was wholly the Son of God. He calls her "woman," because He addresses her as the type of all affection for what is good and holy; but He says to her, "What have I to do with thee? mine hour is not yet come,"—meaning that that spiritual wine, which is the interior truth of genuine religious faith, cannot be given by Him, immediately, even to those of good and pious affections, but only in the degree that they put away their evils, according to the truths of external righteousness which they already possess. "His hour is not yet come," because the six water-pots of stone set for the purification of the Jews are not yet filled with water. The outer man is not yet purified: the desire for a good life has not yet put to use all those plain, practical precepts of external religion which even the Gentiles of Galilee do in some form possess. In no other wise could the request for wine be answered. Spiritual truth



could not be given except through natural external truth already known and put to use. The wine could not be created immediately, but the water must first be brought and the vessels filled, and then the wine would not be wanting. To be patient, to rely on the Lord, to wait his good time,—this is the practical teaching of the words addressed to Mary. And what does she do? She saith to the servants, “Whatsoever He saith unto you, do it,”—that is, she places all her powers at his command, and, for the time, seeks no other means of supplying her needs but simply to obey. She asks no further question,—it is sufficient to know that the hour is not yet come, and she sets herself about the plain duty of the present to patiently obey what He shall command, and to await his holy pleasure.

With this view of her conduct before our eyes, we shall surely now the better perceive the deep significance of these few words at the beginning of the narrative, “And the mother

of Jesus was there.” For the holy example of her behavior and its many goodly lessons form an essential part of the Divine instruction afforded by the miracle throughout. As remarked above, it is not all to know simply that water was changed to wine; we must know, as well, where the miracle was performed, and in whose presence. So now we see that interior and spiritual religion, signified by the wine, cannot be given to us all immediately, nor without regard to the present condition of our hearts and lives. We see that this Divine work—the redemption of man, his regeneration out of natural into spiritual life—must be wrought in that state of his mind typified by the marriage-feast at Cana of Galilee, and that essential to this work is the presence of those holy qualities here represented by the “mother of Jesus.”

But where is the spiritual Galilee of the Gentiles? It is, as said above, wherever in the wide world there is a mind whose thoughts and

whose affections are mainly set upon natural and worldly objects. It is not the abode of the wicked and irreligious exclusively, but rather of all who have not risen out of the obscurities and the delusions of the natural and earthly life into the true and everlasting light of spiritual knowledge and religious faith. Now, the marriage at Cana of Galilee is the sealing of a sacred covenant between the souls of men in this state and their Creator. It is establishing the Church as the kingdom of the Lord in the hearts of these as yet natural-minded men. It matters not whether it be in heathen, in Christian, or in Jewish lands, the real Galilee is everywhere the same region of spiritual darkness,—the state of the unregenerate man. It is here that the first miracle must be wrought, that the first step must be taken in the religious life. It is idle to think that only in some lofty realm of spiritual illumination and enthusiasm man can set out on the path that will lead up to heaven. There is no

other place to start from than the actual situation we are in! The sick man does not wait until he is whole and then send for his physician. It is the *People that sat in darkness that have seen a great light, and they that sat in the valley of the shadow of death, upon them hath the light shined.* And the Church, or the Lord's marriage-covenant, finds its initiament not necessarily in their knowledge of true doctrine or their perception of spiritual and Divine things in their true character, but rather in their willingness to live according to the principles of their religion, whatever it be, and to put to practice whatever they take to be the truth. In a word, it rests primarily on the *affection of good.* In this sense the Jews were themselves Gentiles when viewed in relation to Christianity; for, though they had no knowledge of a spiritual church or religion, still, they held in reverence the letter of the law, and many of them obeyed it from religious motives. So is the Gentile, or Galilean Church at this



day established with all who, in whatever Christian sect, even though their minds are still darkened with fables of doctrine, do yet reverence a Divine Being and from *religious motives* strive to live according to their faith. And in this Galilean Church there is to be done the Divine work of giving light for darkness, a true religious faith and love, with all their substantial and enduring joys, for the outer shell of ceremonious observance, of self-imposed discipline, of a rigid and often irksome obedience to the external rules of piety and morality. And how shall this work be done? What is to elevate this great multitude of souls, hardly capable of an intelligent thought about God, heaven, hell, the spiritual world, the influence of these upon man's soul; who know still less about the interior structure of their own being, of the way in which evil habits grow and become strong, or of that in which they can be cast off and good ones implanted in their stead; who perceive nothing



of the connection of one evil with another, and know not the consequence of sinful acts apart from the temporal punishment which they incur at men's hands?—what shall elevate these souls into the light of true religion and a reasonable faith? What shall teach them a knowledge of themselves and reveal to them the glory of their Lord? How shall they ever make known their wants to God, knowing them not themselves? Who shall say to the Lord, “They have no wine,” and in patience, self-possession, and heavenly trust dispose all things so that they may best accomplish the Lord's bidding? Surely here is the needful office of that humility and obedience which is so clearly typified by the mother of Jesus at the marriage in Cana. The desire to live a good life, accompanied with a habit of obedience and humility, a readiness to do what our religion requires, and to leave our future states and their needs in the hands of Providence,—such is a sure road of progress in the

life of true religion. No one even in Gentile darkness is without sufficient light to guide him at least one step forward. There are the Ten Commandments, the true law of holiness, which the most external and natural mind can at least in outward conduct obey ; there is the Church with her holy instructions, her Divine ordinances, the very avenues of heavenly grace and light into the souls of men ; there are the outward forms of worship, of piety, of charity, of self-discipline ;—all these, the externals of religion, are within reach of the most natural-minded, the most spiritually-ignorant of men. And now if there be the true desire to lead a holy life, a genuine affection for what is good, and a willingness to shun the evils of the natural and selfish life as they appear, let the example of Mary, the mother of Jesus, be not forgotten. Rest content with the obedient pursuance of these plain, practical, external duties, and neither murmur nor rebel if the Lord's time is long in coming ! See that in

this low, natural plane of our life, where all our religion must make its beginning, we have really put everything in orderly subjection to the Lord! Have we practically learned to trust in the Lord as our heavenly Father, to reverence Him in our conversation, to pray to Him in words, to kneel down before Him? Have we accepted his Holy Word as our spiritual counsel and guide? Have we disciplined our unruly and rebellious natural will into the habit of a regular and pious observance of the holy services of the Church? Have we grown yet to that measure of Christian courage that we dare in word, gesture, and act to confess Christ before men?

Then have we followed that good example. The servants are ready to do the Lord's will; the stone vessels set for our purification, these acts of external obedience, are filled to the brim; and the water is ready to be made wine.

But how many are ready to call that an idle and vain show of religion which consists in

outward, self-compelled obedience rather than in the voluntary and spontaneous expression of the heart's desire! How many are too willing to regard with a kind of contempt a pious and reverential behavior toward the things of the Church, saying that righteousness and piety must be cultivated rather in the heart than in outward gesture, and that these external acts are but a poor substitute for a truly reformed and spiritual life! But is not this like complaining that the Saviour does not furnish wine at once, instead of ordering water to be brought and the six stone vessels filled to the brim? Not so did the mother of Jesus; but turned rather to the servants and said, "Whatsoever He saith unto you, do it." It is true, indeed, that the externals of religion, morality, piety, and good works, are far different from that substantial, heaven-descended life of the soul,—true faith and true charity. But they are different only as lower and higher planes of the same life of holi-



ness. Nor are the former cast aside as vain and worthless by those who have arrived at a more interior and spiritual enjoyment of religion. On the contrary, they are filled through and through with all the zeal and earnestness of the soul's new life. For we do not read that the water with which these six vessels were filled was ever poured out, as no longer of use. That very water was itself made wine, and out of these same vessels was the precious draught made and borne to the governor of the feast!

So may it be with all who are not ashamed to openly acknowledge the Lord before man, to worship Him with the lips, and to make his Holy Word the rule of their conversation in the world; who, while they make no pretension to great spirituality of mind nor clamor contentiously for the wine of spiritual truth, do yet, with humility and sincerity, strive to bring their natural and carnal man into some degree of orderly subjection to the holy stat-



utes and commandments of the Lord. And when we have faithfully and obediently done our part, the Lord in his own hour will do his. He will reward our obedience with those holy affections whose delight is in the law of the Lord; He will make our religion no longer self-imposed restraint, but a willing marriage-covenant between our souls and heaven; and will call us, admitted into the freedom of a genuine spiritual faith, no longer servants, but friends.

V.

Then that which is worse; or, *Spiritual Drunkenness.*

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*Every man at the beginning doth set forth good wine; and when men have well drunk, then that which is worse: but thou hast kept the good wine until now.—St. John ii. 10.*

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“**B**UT afterward, that which is worse!”  
Stern law of retribution for every indulgence which, beginning in what is innocent and good, because allied to a good and healthful purpose, more and more leads to the indulgence for its own sake, and so, perverted from its rightful end, becomes itself an evil, fitting a man ever more and more for, afterward, that which is worse!

The holy use and significance of wine as the symbol of the Divine Truth derived from our Lord's Divine Good, consequently, as the interior spiritual truth which nourishes the life

of the Church, this is the main subject of the miracle at Cana. But the misuse or the perversion of wine,—the abuse and profanation of God's precious gifts to man,—whether physical or spiritual, are also pointed out in the above words.

“When men have well drunk, then that which is worse.” The governor of that marriage-feast in Galilee, when he has tasted the water that by the Divine miracle was made wine, calls the bridegroom to him, as if supposing that the wine was of his furnishing, and courteously praises him for its excellent quality, saying, “Every man at the beginning doth set forth good wine; and when men have well drunk, then that which is worse: but thou hast kept the good wine until now.”

It would seem that the marriage-supper was at an end, the feasting and rejoicing coming to its close, and that the “good wine” was offered as a more choice and excellent viand wherewith to crown the feast. Such, indeed, is it to

all who shall come to that marriage-supper of the Lamb,—that spiritual communion with the Lord which constitutes the blessedness of the regenerate life.

After the supper, the cup; after the marriage, the offering of the good wine,—made so by the Lord's own Divine gift and operation, but through our humble obedience and our co-operation as the only means. For the water, which must first be brought, is the natural truth, which appeals and applies to our natural outward life and its duties here, where we must begin our reformation. The wine is the same external truth and external religion turned by the inflowing of God's Holy Spirit into interior and spiritual truth, in the degree that we have applied our knowledge of truth to the good of life, and thus filled all the holy vessels set for our purification with our obedience in shunning evil as sin. And this applying our knowledge of truth to the good of life; this uniting of our faith with charity,—this

is the heavenly marriage which takes place in the soul of the regenerate, and which makes man, born on earth into hereditary evil and suffering, to be like unto the angels and the children of the resurrection. For him the good wine is kept till the last.

When we say this takes place in the religious life of a man, we mean that it is what takes place in the Church. For the Church is in man. It consists of whatever union there is, in a man, of the faith of his understanding, with the good affections of his will. And so to crown this heavenly union of the two great principles which make up all spiritual, heavenly life,—at which blessed union the Lord, our Saviour and Regenerator, Jesus Christ, is always spiritually present,—the cup of wine is offered at the last. For this is the appropriation from the Lord Himself, the heavenly Bridegroom, of the fullness of all spiritual nourishment and benediction,—the water turned to wine,—the “good wine,” “kept until now”!



Different is it with those who receive the gifts of God only to pervert, misuse, and profane them, and this whether it be in natural goods or in spiritual goods. The wine which is here mentioned has chiefly a reference to truth, conjoined to the good of life; but the principle holds true of any endowment of our nature whereby our Creator has made us capable of attaining to an immortal and angelic life. All natural gifts, or faculties and propensities, were, as they came from our Creator's designing hand, good, orderly, and healthful. Behold, He looked upon everything that He had made, and it was very good! So is there nothing belonging to our natural life which was not, in the purpose of its Divine Maker, good, holy, pure, and healthful. So at the beginning did our heavenly Father set forth that which was good for us to use and enjoy. Every appetite of the body, every organ and every sense, and so likewise every emotion and passion of the will, every thought, desire,

and impulse of the mind, every longing after intellectual exercise and acquisition,—all these were adapted to the precious and delightful *good* to which they were intended to minister.

Now, when any of these natural appetites, passions, or faculties, whether bodily or mental, is separated from its original and divinely-appointed use, and is indulged for its own sake, without regard to its proper use, there begins that which is akin to drunkenness, and the person so doing begins his miserable downward way of preparing himself ever more and more for “afterwards that which is worse”: “When men have drunken, then that which is worse.” Yes, this is the fearful and wretched result of every indulgence of natural appetite or desire or taste or passion without a view to some worthy use and benefit. Drunkenness itself illustrates most forcibly the rule. It is not the drinking or the eating of this or that that condemns a man. But when a man cultivates a taste for intoxicating drinks from merely a

bodily appetite, and goes on, subjecting his mind, and his body itself, at length, to the wild control of this single lust, then, when he drinks, it is to no use, either bodily or mental, but solely to the abuse and the degradation of his whole nature. The appetite, separated from its own orderly purpose, becomes itself the avenue of a thousand evils. Disease of mind and body, and misery to himself and others about him, follow on to make up "that which is worse,"—the sequel to his having ceased to be contented with the "good wine set forth at the first." The great law of use is that which determines all right or wrong indulgence; and use means the applying of everything, in bodily appetites or mental tastes and faculties, to its *own good*; and that alone is its *good* which makes this appetite or faculty serve the soul in its high and immortal purposes. The question with every man should be, For what are the appetites which I indulge, or the habits of the life I lead, preparing me? For that which is better, or

that which is worse? There comes for all of us a great afterwards,—a long “hereafter;” and for this, whether we know it or think of it or not, we are preparing in every minutia of our daily life and habits. Oh, miserable “afterwards” to those who have used this life only to become “well drunken,” to pamper and feed the body and put into the rein of its lusts the whole guiding and ruling of the life here! Miserable hereafter to those who come into the future world with body and soul diseased, corrupted, spoiled for any healthy, orderly, angelic life, and fitted only, having offended in all their members, to have both body and soul cast into hell!

There is a spiritual drunkenness as well as a physical; and the one is like the other in its causes, and only worse in its consequences. The Bible speaks very frequently of this spiritual drunkenness when describing the Church in its decline, as “drunk with the wine of fornication,” as being “drunken, but not with

wine." This drunkenness is likewise an abuse of that which is first set forth to the soul as "good wine." The good wine is the truth which God gives us united to the good of life; but when we separate truth from its good, then the heavenly marriage-bond is broken, and we drink the wine of fornication. Truth separated from good, in our first learning its Divine lessons; may lead us ever nearer to good, and become at length like water changed to wine when the marriage of faith and charity, or good and truth, takes place in the life we lead. But truth once conjoined to good and afterwards torn asunder from its holy spouse in the heart and used for the selfish purposes of human pride, glory, or gain, invariably turns and corrupts itself into falsity; it becomes like soured and noxious and debasing drinks,—grateful only to a disordered appetite,—no longer serving, but only injuring, the soul that seeks it.

When we thus speak of truth and good



being separated in the Church in a man's soul, it seems like talking of abstractions ; but it is not so. Sad to-day is the spectacle of unhappy, diseased, shattered minds, which, not content with taking the holy truths of the Lord revealed to his Church in the Word, and especially in the heavenly doctrines of the spiritual sense, as simply the means of living a life of real usefulness and holiness, have sought rather to investigate and reason about them from the plane of merely natural sense and science, and to build out of them some monument which may glorify their own natural pride, or in some way distinguish themselves and gain for them the favor, the applause, and the rewards of men. God gave his Word and all his truth for the salvation of souls. This is its good,—its use. All trifling, speculating, theorizing, yea, all reasoning, about Divine truths, which does not look to this end, and in humility and worship labor to this good, is but being well drunken ; it is but perverting and

abusing the good wine, so that men are made worse and not better for their acquaintance with the precious gifts of the Lord.

Our reason may be likened to the thirst of the body. For we love to reason, to acquire a knowledge of things, and think over the knowledge and compare and analyze and discuss and pass judgment. In many this reasoning faculty becomes cultivated to a kind of passion; and here is where the danger comes in of drinking overmuch,—of loving to reason for the mere sake of reasoning and disputing, and not at all with a view to a calm, peaceful security and confidence of soul, such as those alone enjoy whose “hearts are fixed, trusting in the Lord.” For reason, like the bodily appetite, may be abused, in being indulged in from mere natural impulse or taste rather than with a view to a spiritual use, whether it be to the individual or to society. Reason that looks to the acquiring of Divine truth for the purpose of the soul’s salvation, or to the uniting

this truth with the life, first by driving out the evils it reveals and condemns, then by doing the good it teaches, all such reason is good and healthy. But it begins by looking to the Lord in desire, if not in conscious act, for the light in which it shall exercise itself. In other words, this true and healthy reason *begins by seeking truth, not inventing it.* Far different is it with the reason that shuns all truth of Revelation because this implies a Divine government and authority to which obedience is a duty, and leaves no room for tampering and parleying. Such a reason is of the body and of the world only; it feeds on the ideas which come to it through its bodily senses; it never looks within; the voice of the soul, the whisper of conscience, the motives of God's Holy Spirit, the Holy Word of God, which encompassed with its great cloud of witnesses comes down from its celestial spheres to be a pillar of cloud and fire to lead us to heaven; all this is signed away by this

carnal, reasoning appetite, as belonging to religion, the outward superstition of a puerile, by-gone age, while with busy fingers, out of the clay of earth, it moulds to itself its own sensual god, and then asks man's senses if it be not the better god to worship and the more rational and positive authority to obey. Such is the perverted use of the reason, and the corruption of the good wine of the Divine Truth revealed to us from our Father and King and Saviour in heaven. Such a separation of truth from the practical uses of the good life is what may be termed Spiritual Drunkenness. Those who use the truths of Revelation and of the Church only to magnify themselves, or to exalt themselves above the Divine Giver, these are the drunken ones who, no longer receptive of the good wine, become fit only for, afterwards, that which is worse.

Note what Swedenborg says on this subject (Gen. ch. ix., verse 21), where he speaks of the Drunkenness of Noah :

“ They are called drunkards, in the Word, who believe nothing but what they comprehend, and for this purpose inquire into the mysteries of faith; and because this is done by means of sensual, or scientific, or philosophical things, according to the quality of the man, he cannot do otherwise than sink into errors. The thought of man is merely terrestrial, corporeal, and material, because it is from terrestrial, corporeal, and material things which are continually cleaving thereto, and in which the ideas of his thoughts are founded and terminated. Wherefore to think and reason from these things concerning things Divine is to bring oneself into errors and perversions, *and it is as impossible for a man thence to obtain faith* as for a camel to go through the eye of a needle! The error and insanity which result from this practice are called in the Word drunkenness; yea, souls or spirits in the other life who argue about the truths of faith, and against them even come to resemble



drunkards and behave in like manner.”—*Arcana Cœlestia*, 1072.

The Lord, the Father of us all, the Husband and Bridegroom of his Church, offers to us all the good wine,—the Divine Truths of his own Divine good: He, for none else than He can offer it; and in his own Word and Revealed Doctrine, for in the Word only, which was with God in the Beginning, and was and ever is God, is God made flesh to dwell among us! In these holy and saving truths of our Divine Religion does the Lord and Saviour tender to men the cup of salvation,—the “good wine kept until now!” May our taking and drinking it be not to our condemnation!

V I.

The Girded Servant; or, the Subordination of the  
Sensual.

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*Gird thyself, and serve me, till I have eaten and drunken.*

—St. Luke xvii. 8.

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IT is good for a man to be sometimes plainly spoken to. Whatever damage is incurred to delicate sensibility, to private opinion, to ease, convenience, and even the conventional forms of civility and kindness, the sacrifice is often more than counterbalanced by the rare service of plain speech. To such an extent has the art of feigning become the art of being courteous and polite, that mankind, not only in costume but in deportment as well, are clothed after one pattern, which as little corresponds to the various individual characters hidden beneath as the gorgeous robes which

the stage-player wears at evening resemble the plain garb in which he eats his breakfast in the morning.

The shell which thus hides and protects the actual internal qualities of men it is important, sometimes, to break through. The external and artificial manner is an admirable railway, by which to make swift journeys over the ups and downs of a worldly career; but he who would make true friends, learn the beauties and the defects of the wayside scene, and whose object is not so much to get to the journey's end as to gather up rich treasures along the route, he must take a slower conveyance, and subject himself to accidents and delays. He must be willing at times to drop his own mask, and he must demand it of his friends that they drop theirs. Plain speech is what does this needful work.

If such be the case among men, how much more truly is it so with each man and his own soul! For the mannerism which prevails in

and fashions the intercourse of men in the world is hardly more affected, artificial, and deceptive than that which we all wear in our own private estimation,—that is to say, which our external or natural man puts on in face of the internal man, and of Him who gives to the internal man the spirit of judgment and understanding. For most men are as punctilious in their gentle courtesies toward themselves as toward their neighbor; and many a person holds, it is to be feared, in much greater abhorrence a breach of etiquette between his inner and his outer man than any committed in social circles. The conscience is at best an intruder, and if always masked, will die for want of liberty and exercise; and the body, in its easy, well-to-do repose, must take warning when no longer that inner voice speaks plain words and fearlessly.

What a sad and dreary world would this be were the conventionalities of polite and fashionable intercourse all that we could enjoy in friend and neighbor! So dreary, so miserable,

is the life of him who wears ever before his own conscience, his better, purer nature, the deceitful mask of a perverted, world-serving reason, and who, in his own eyes, arrays his actual vices and defects with the fair garments of innocence and beauty!

So is it a good thing for a man to be plainly spoken to, and for him to use plain words with himself. He corrects his mistakes more easily, sees more clearly his errors and short-comings, forms truer ideas, and knows better what to expect of the world around him, when he is not afraid to lay bare his own actual character before the searching eye of his conscience.

Such plain words are those we have quoted above, "Gird thyself, and serve me, till I have eaten and drunken." They are words of authority and command,—the words of a master to his servant.

"Which of you," saith our Lord, to his disciples, "having a servant plowing or feeding cattle, will say unto him by and by, when he is



come from the field, Go and sit down to meat? And will not rather say unto him, Make ready wherewith I may sup, and gird thyself, and serve me, till I have eaten and drunken; and afterward thou shalt eat and drink? Doth he thank that servant because he did the things that were commanded him? I trow not. So likewise ye, when ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants: we have done that which was our duty to do."

Here is a plain picture of religious duty profitable for all to contemplate, but chiefly so for those who would relieve the life of religion in this world from all burdensome obligations and restraints, and who would really make it to be one with our easy and careless pursuit of the world's pleasures and goods, only wearing Sunday garments, and putting on sober and pious looks now and then, like as we see some persons affected at hearing solemn music. They cannot help being affected by it, but at

the same time they have to admit *that they do not like it.*

The language here represented as being used by the human master to his servant belongs even more properly to the one Divine Master of us all. For that the relation between master and servant refers to that of the Lord and his disciples is evident from the following verse, where the disciples are taught to say, "We are unprofitable servants." It is the Lord, then, that addresses to us this stern and commanding language, "Gird thyself, and serve me, until I have eaten and drunken." But it is the Lord speaking through our interior and better nature, and addressing the lower carnal man with its various affections and thoughts. For the Lord is not a visible master whom we can wait upon with natural food and drink, but is rather the Holy Spirit, the Divine Truth dwelling within our hearts, and demanding our ready obedience and devoted service. It is, therefore, the spiritual man born of God, and

speaking with the wisdom and authority of God's Word of Truth, that thus commands the natural man to be girded and to serve.

This servant—the natural or carnal man, as subordinate to the spiritual man,—that is, as subordinate to the Lord, for it is only from the Lord that the spiritual man has either power or authority—is represented in the parable as a plower of the field, or a feeder of cattle. That is what our natures are when viewed with reference to interior qualities and operations. We are either plowers of the field or feeders of cattle or both at once. This is the natural constitution of our minds. The field which our Lord speaks of, we already know from his Word, is the world where his seed, the Divine Truth, is sown. The field is the mind of man, as destined to receive this seed. It is, therefore, the intellect or understanding, for it is here that man receives the truth; the plower of the field is he that cultivates this faculty of the mind,—that makes it ready for the recep-

tion of the seed ; he who becomes learned and skilled in all sorts of intellectual pursuits, and thus capable of becoming truly wise when he shall have access to the Divine Word, the source of all Truth. And the feeder of cattle is evidently he who cultivates rather the affections, in whose nature the emotional and voluntary is more prominent than the intellectual part. For cattle, when referred to in the Holy Scriptures, are representatives of the natural affections. By the servant, therefore, who is a *plowman*, or a *feeder of cattle*, we have represented to us the natural man, with his various mental possessions and capacities, both intellectual and voluntary.

This servant is represented as coming in from the field, and these words bring a familiar picture before the mind's eye. We naturally think of the close of a long day of toil, and of the refreshing repast and grateful repose that evening promises. The plowman leaves his furrows, the herdsman drives his charge into

the fold for the night, and the faithful laborers come home to report to their master of their work, to receive his approval, and to prepare for another day's task. Now, this coming in from the field represents to us that state of a man's life when with diligence and zeal he has enriched his mind with many knowledges, and has developed within him many good natural affections; he has become, shall we say, learned,—a wise observer, a skillful reasoner, an able critic, a man of general and thorough mental culture? Or, on the other hand, he may have cultivated within him the most attractive and genial traits of heart; he may be generous in will and deed, magnanimous, courageous, a man who can love deeply and truly, and who cannot fail to be loved by others. Such may that servant be who comes in from his day of faithful labor in the field. He is still altogether a natural—that is, an unregenerate—man. These fine mental traits and abilities are inherited, or he has acquired them with great



diligence for purely natural, that is, for selfish and worldly, ends. The servant coming from the field,—a noble and imposing sight! So comes the youthful student from his successfully-ended college course; so comes the hero, laurel-crowned, from the long and bravely-fought campaign; so comes the merchant, rich with the gains of many anxious years, and ready to enter upon a life of quiet and leisure; so comes every one, man and woman, of whatever calling or standing, who, having completed some course of arduous discipline, labor, and general self-development, thinks to himself, now, in the pleasant evening-time, to reap the reward, to enjoy the sweet rest, to pursue during the remainder of life those pleasures and gratifications which all these rare and laboriously-acquired faculties seem to promise. The mind shall now delight in its learning; all the wealth of the world of letters lies at its feet; it shall taste the rarest viands, and rejoice in its well-earned and proud estate. And

the heart—has not this, too, learned the rare pleasure of loving and being loved? Has it not, too, learned the art of making others happy by words or deeds of kindness, and learned, better still, the art of making itself happy by the exercise of those qualities which men love to reward with admiration and praise? So the servant comes in from the field. Weary with his labors, he is ready to be waited on and tenderly treated. Thus, having acquired all these natural good gifts, the man without religion wants to be made happy in their enjoyment. He expects that, somehow, the world will make itself obliged to serve him; that true and satisfying pleasure is now at his command; that his own mental ability and his qualities of heart will insure him, in spite of any moral conditions or more interior and hidden considerations, that lifelong feast of good things which he would have crown his laborious day with its calm, long-lingering hours of evening repose.

But when the servant thus comes in from the field, what is the reception that awaits him? "Will his master," saith our Lord, "say to him, Go and sit down to meat? Will he not rather say to him, Make ready wherewith I may sup, and gird thyself, and serve me, until I have eaten and drunken: and afterward thou shalt eat and drink!"

"Gird thyself, and serve me!" this is the plain speech of the master to the servant. So must our spiritual man address that lower nature, enriched by all the goods which earthly toil and culture can afford. It is a plain, hard word; but he that does not use it is not longer a true master of himself; no longer represents in his spiritual part the Master in heaven, in whose name he should rule. It is hard to say to that mind and heart so richly endowed with natural gifts,—with fine talents, with great worldly knowledge, with noble and winning affections,—"Gird thyself, and serve me!" It is hard to place that proud and self-satisfied

outer man, which has come from the field with the sweat of toil and the laurel of this world's fame on the brow, in the rank of a servant, and make it do the bidding of the still, small voice within.

“Gird thyself, and serve me!” Is this, then, the reward of all this labor? Is it for this that we have become learned; that our intellects have become so proudly fashioned; that our hearts are gifted with such admirable traits; that we have arrived at that stage of mental and moral culture that we can challenge the world's esteem and love,—is it for this only that we must gird ourselves for new labor, and humbly serve that inner, spiritual man, and prize its secret, silent approbation more than all the plaudits and flattery of the admiring world? Are we then,—with all our rare talents and lovable traits of character,—nothing after all but a plower of the field and a feeder of cattle? With all that we can do in acquiring natural knowledge and cultivating the natural

affections, have we no real rest, no true delight in store for us, until we have girded ourselves anew and serve with humility that stern and unrelenting master,—the spiritual man within us?

Such is indeed the case. With all that nature can do in enriching and beautifying mind and heart, thou art but a plower of the field and a feeder of cattle! Such is the plain speech of the gospel. “Gird thyself, and serve me,” must be the word of every true Christian to that external and carnal nature which he bears about with him and which the world has done so much to enrich and adorn. It is the command of religion to nature, of the spirit to the flesh, of God to his creatures,—“Gird thyself, and serve me!” Do not think to sit down and eat of thy natural earnings while yet the spirit within remains unfed. Presume not to count on the true enjoyment of any natural gift or worldly treasure until first it has been consecrated to the service of God; until first



it has been applied in some way to the nourishment of the soul's higher life within ; until it has first served the spiritual man as its master. It is for this higher life, this truer and more lasting enjoyment, that all these outward gifts and capacities are given to man. "Thou madest him," saith the Psalmist, "to have dominion over the works of thy hands ; *thou hast put all things under his feet* ; all sheep and oxen, yea, and the beasts of the field, the fowl of the air, the fish of the sea, and whatsoever passeth through the paths of the seas!" Not only is all nature made to serve man's bodily wants and pleasure, but even this body, and all its capacities for delights and for noble and beautiful deeds, was made and given to serve the soul. In the soul, in the spiritual man, the Lord Himself makes his dwelling-place, and there by his Holy Spirit rules, the one blessed Master and King of all worlds. It is his voice that says to this whole wide and glorious realm of nature, "Gird thyself, and

serve me!" It is the voice of his Divine Word speaking in our consciences that quells the proud pretensions and hopes of the flesh with the stern command, "Gird thyself, and serve me!"

And what is it for the carnal or natural man to gird himself and serve the spirit? It is to compel himself to obey the laws of holy and righteous living. It is to put the strong girdle of true principles, of firm resolution, and unyielding discipline about all the unruly and loose-going thoughts, desires, and purposes of the heart. It is to bring the flesh into subordination to the spirit, and to make every natural gift and acquirement subservient to a religious, that is, a charitable, useful, and holy life. Until this is done there is no true rest, no real enjoyment of all this world's goods; until the lower nature is first brought into order and subjection to the spirit within; until its every faculty and possession has been offered as a holy sacrifice upon God's table, and the purpose

of life has been made first of all to serve Him, as the true and lawful Master, and to give Him the merit and praise for all that we may acquire or achieve of goodness and wisdom; until this is done, we need hope for no evening rest in the peaceful household where God's true servants dwell; we need count on no place at that blessed table where the Lord feeds, with the bread of heaven, those that hunger after righteousness. We may return to our furrows and our herds unrefreshed, while those servants who were willing first to serve their Master, afterwards sit down themselves and enjoy, in heavenly contentment, their eternal reward.

There seems to be in our day no more favorite theme with popular writers than the excellence of nature and of man's natural gifts. Upon these are lavished a thousand terms of delight and admiration, while the interior and invisible world of the spirit,—that is, of those holy and Divine things which inhabit a plane

wholly above and distinct from that of all natural thought and feeling,—this spiritual part of man is treated with indifference, and often with an ill-concealed contempt. The servant has become indeed higher than his lord. It is an offense to polite ears to hint that the man whom all the world admires for his great learning and splendid intellectual talents, when he hath said in his heart, “There is no God,” is a fool! It seems rude to gentle natures to declare that the large-hearted, generous, easy-going man who has so many friends, so few cares, who makes light of occasional vices, and jests about religion, and yet is so kind, so gentle, so courteous, so popular, in a word, to say that he is spiritually but a feeder of cattle, that his whole life is devoted to purely selfish and sensual pursuits; yea, that he is, to use the Psalmist’s phrase, “But as a beast before God!”

Let, then, him who has the courage to profess before the world the name of Christian,

that he is a follower, a servant, a soldier of Christ the Lord; let him also have courage to say to his proud and merely natural man, "Gird thyself, and serve me." Let him regard with just disdain those courtiers of the flesh, those flatterers of nature's unsanctified gifts, those lauders of human greatness and virtue. Let him, in the consciousness of the true worth and dignity of his spiritual man, repel the advances of this lower nature, puffed up by the world's flatteries, with the significant word, "After me!"

And let him recognize his own spiritual mastery as only the stewardship to a higher Lord, even Christ, that as he orders the flesh into subservience to the spirit, so may he in both spirit and flesh serve God faithfully, and be admitted at length to that blessed feast at which all the servants of God shall sit down in the kingdom of heaven.



## VII.

### The Blind restored to Sight; or, the True Character of Christian Evidence.

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*One thing I know, that, whereas I was blind, now I see.—*

St. John ix. 25.

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EVERY revelation of spiritual truth is a new light sent into the world from Him who in heaven shines as a Sun before the eyes of the angels.

The Truth, verily, shines in our minds ; it is our sunlight there ; and ignorance and denial of the Truth is dimness and darkness in the soul. Now, as a man cannot see when in utter darkness, so is a man mentally blind when in ignorance, or in a state of denying the Truth, since then no spiritual light, which is Truth, enters into the understanding, the understanding being to the mind what the eye is to the body.

We see, therefore, what is meant by our Lord's miraculous curing of the blind. That the external cures are a parable or symbol of what our Saviour was at the same time and is ever doing for us inwardly, by the influence of his Holy Spirit and his Word, need only be stated to be clearly seen. Every one understands that by the blind are meant not only those who cannot see the things of nature around them, but also those who cannot see other things as real and substantial. They who cannot see that there is a God; that He is our Lord Jesus Christ; that his Holy Word is inspired throughout, being full of heavenly meaning and Divine power; that the Church is holy, and to be loved and revered; that to do right is better than to do wrong; that to lose our selfish, unholy life is really to gain the life everlasting; that the real man is not the fleshly body, but the soul and its spiritual body, which lives in these earthly bodies now, but which will one day cast aside this earthly

body and live thenceforth in the spiritual world in its own immortal strength and substance; that the spiritual world is as real as this, and is unseen by us only so long as we are clothed with a body of earthly matter; that the spiritual world is inhabited forever by those who have left this world, some of whom are happy in heaven, others of whom are unhappy in hell; they who cannot see these and similar things, who do not understand them, are those who, in the Scriptures, are called blind. These facts are all plainly visible to the mind of a believing man, and yet invisible to him who is mentally blind,—that is, to whom the light of these revealed truths has never come, or who, if the light has come, has rejected it.

It matters not when and where our blessed Lord and Light once performed the outward miracle of restoring sight to the blind; we know that He did it, and we know that He desired that men should in all times believe Him to be able to do it, and should look to Him

alone as the giver of sight and of all natural and spiritual blessings. He could at this day cure the eyes of all the blind, and He would do it, we may be assured, if, in his all-seeing Providence and Wisdom, men would thereby be permanently the better off. But the Lord has permitted physical blindness for some merciful end, and with many, nay, with all, we may safely say the end is that they may be able better to see spiritual things and be filled with greater spiritual light. And this is undoubtedly the greater blessing of the two. For, pleasant as it is and desirable to all to see the things of this world, the faces of friends, the beautiful scenes of nature and the way to pursue our natural industry, still, this sight lasts but a few years at most, and then all natural vision fades from the eye and the body lies cold and useless in the grave. And suppose, now, the soul of him who has enjoyed his natural eyesight in this world, and has seen all the beautiful things this world can display, goes

forth in his spiritual body into the eternal world beyond the grave, and there finds that he is blind; that the fair scenes of heaven, of angelic society, the beautiful Paradise of which he had often read, that these are all darkness to him, that his eyes are forever closed to that which those blessed spirits see who have in this world been careful, while they had the light of Divine Truth, to walk in it, lest darkness should come upon them! It surely were better to be physically blind for a few years here, if this shall in any way secure to us the bright and endless vision of the immortal world; and, since the providence of God looks always to eternal ends, physical blindness must, in this providence, be permitted with a view to the eternal good and happiness of him who is thus afflicted.

The same rule holds good in regard to all other bodily diseases which our Lord, although He might miraculously cure them this day if He would, still permits us to bear for the sake of the inward cure and final immortal health



of our souls. For He is ever spiritually healing our sicknesses and illuminating our blindness; and this by every possible means, since by making whole in his own truth and love He makes us to be angels, and to be capable of enjoying to eternity the happiness of heaven. This is what He would have us all enjoy; for this He would cure now in every one of us all sorts of blindness and sickness and infirmity of soul, and He will do this for us if we do not oppose ourselves to his Divine and most merciful efforts.

There are two kinds of spiritual blindness, just as there are two kinds of physical blindness. There are some men spiritually blind from their birth, and others who have been made blind. Now, those who are blind from their birth—and it is this class that is represented by him whom the Lord healed—are those who are blind from ignorance of spiritual truth. They have never learned about spiritual things and the spiritual life, and are there-

fore blind. Their blindness is not the result of any actual sin of their own, but of their birth and circumstances in the world. But it is otherwise with those who have once seen the light of Truth, and afterward, by closing their minds to it, by denying or violating the Truth in their conduct, have actually made themselves blind. These are not only blind but guilty at the same time. Their blindness is the result of their evil living and evil doing. It is a true adage that "none are so blind as those who *will* not see," and with all of us very much at all times depends on our own will as to whether we will see certain things presented to our minds or not. Even many honest doubters, so called, are, probably, at the best, but indifferent doers of the Word of God; and we have Divine authority for believing that even in obtaining spiritual sight,—which is a faith in the things of revealed religion,—where there is a will there is a way; and what this way is our Lord shows us when He

says, To him that knocketh it shall be opened ; He that asketh shall receive : yea, he that doeth the works shall know of the doctrine whether it be true. And to the man that was born blind and came to have his sight given him, the Lord, having first anointed his eyes with clay, said, Go wash in the pool of Siloam.

And the spiritual meaning of this process of restoring sight is this : "The clay made of spittle on the ground" is reformation of life by truth learned in the literal sense of the Word. The ground is the Church where the Word of God is taught. The clay is the willing heart, ready to be formed by the influence of the Holy Spirit ; and the clay applied to the eye is the understanding illumined by the Truth of the Divine Word when man is in this willing and affirmative state. And when one has thus learned and applied to his life's conduct these plain Divine truths then he is being spiritually washed in the pool of Siloam, for this pool signifies also the precepts of the literal Scrip-

tures, and to be washed in it means to be cleansed from evils and falsities.

The process of giving sight to the blind, when described in the symbolic language of this miracle, seems a brief and very extraordinary one. And yet it is the same process that is quietly and invisibly going on now, day after day, week after week, year after year, in the minds of innumerable men and women on this earth. For we are all blind from our birth as to all the things relating to the spiritual world and the spiritual life, and only from the Word and its doctrines taught us in the Christian Church do we derive that which gives light to our understanding and enables us to see anything beyond the natural life. Without the Revealed Word we should know nothing of God, of heaven and hell,—there would be no church and no religion. Without the Word of God we would have no pool wherein to wash our souls from the impurities of evil affections and of false and blinding thoughts.

But as a man grows up under the influences of Christian education and makes progress in a truly religious life, he finds that his spiritual sight is wonderfully opened. What once seemed to him dark and mysterious now stands out clear and well defined in the light of Truth. Spiritual things put on a form more and more real and tangible; the spiritual world becomes a real world to look forward to; spiritual motives become strong enough to assert themselves over against what is merely natural and animal. He realizes that Religion is something more than a mere name and form; that the life of the Church is more than mere ceremony or mere intellectual partisanship. In a word, the eye of the inner, the heavenly man, blind from its birth, is enabled to see!

Who has wrought this wondrous change, and how has it been wrought? What answer can be given other than that of the man who was cured? that He that is called Jesus has



anointed his eyes and said, Go wash in the pool of Siloam; and that he went out and washed and received sight. In other words, what account can be given of this change in man from being merely natural and selfish to being in some degree regenerate, than that having learned in his earliest life that Jesus Christ is God, and that whatever He has commanded us in the Holy Bible is to be obeyed, and whatever He has forbidden is to be shunned, this man has made this Divine Word the rule and standard by which to determine all questions of right and wrong, all things of faith and conscience? It is grown to be so habitual as hardly to be thought of as any self-imposed law or discipline. The instructions from the Word received at church and elsewhere form a part of his mental sustenance, and give continued renewal of spiritual purpose and strength. What is wrong is easily detected; evils in his life become more and more distinctly seen to be evils, and more and more

hateful to his purer mind. The fallacies of natural sense and reason discover themselves one by one, and the whole old fabric of foolish doubts and vain questionings totters and falls before the strong, steady rays of the Divine Truth.

Unseen and unfelt the hand of the Lord has passed over the eye of his soul, and left there the precious ointment. Unawares he has gone and washed in the pool of Siloam, and is come again, seeing.

This is what the Christian religion is doing for all who are willing to pursue this plain, even way of faithfully doing so much of the Divine Truth as is revealed to their knowledge. Such is the power of the Word of God sincerely believed and faithfully practiced in our daily life. Its power is a secret, hidden one; behind the simple literal precept which we, in a trying moment, faithfully recall and endeavor to perform, we see not what angel-hosts are engaged in our behalf. But such is

the communication between heaven and earth by means of the Word in its literal sense, that every effort on the part of man to obey this Word must be accompanied by spiritual power from above, which is in its origin none other than Divine,—a power which is not that of the whole heaven of angels only, but which is the power of Almighty God.

And what is here especially to be observed is the secret manner in which this power works in us, curing our minds of their blindness, and so enabling us to see what we could not see before.

We are taught that the Holy Spirit exerts its power in the inmost part of our souls. How it operates there is unknown to us; it is unknown to the angels; it is known only to the Lord. We see its effects in the life of a regenerate man; the process itself is hidden from all human knowledge. Like the man before us, we can tell what we have done on our part; but how this has effected the result we know

not. To the question, How opened He thine eyes? the man replied, That the Lord anointed him, and that he went to the pool and washed, and came seeing. He could not tell how clay from the ground put upon the eyes, and how washing in the pool, gave him sight, nor could we explain it, nor can any human wisdom. And so it is with us. We know that our Lord Jesus Christ has given us his Word, and told us to obey it; we know that in obeying this Holy Word of God we come to have a different mind from what we had before; we come to see and believe spiritual things of which, before, we were ignorant. How our external conduct, how our resisting of temptations, has brought this new heavenly light to our minds we cannot tell. We have in some degree cleansed our life of evil, and a new and better life has been born within us. We have gone, in obedience to the Divine command, to the great pool of Siloam, even the Word of God, and there have washed, and have come seeing!

This is all we know, and all the account we can give of the process.

And this much we do know. We see men made better, made nobler and spiritually wiser by leading a religious life according to the commandments given in the Word of God. Let unbelievers, let all those who make other schemes for the world's enlightenment and reformation, boast as they may; let them deny God's Word and church and religion; yea, let them slander it if they will; let them profane the holy name of our Lord; let them call our Christian religion an idle superstition; let them declare the Holy Bible to be a fiction and a fable; we can only reply with the man whose sight was given him, "One thing I know, that, whereas I was blind, now I see!"

The infinite wisdom of God is beyond our searching out. It is enough to know what it actually effects in our lives. The Christian life bears its own evidence, for him who has begun to live it, of its Divine Origin and Source. In



looking for the true God and Messiah, and for a saving religion, we need regard only the testimony to which our Lord referred John when he sent inquiries if it were He that should come, or should he look for another, namely, the testimony of that which we do see and hear, "The blind receive their sight."

Let him who has faithfully tried to keep God's Word in his daily life; to leave off evil practices; to shun all unkindness, injustice, impurity, and lying, in his daily intercourse with his neighbor and in the secret thoughts and intentions of the heart; who has been careful to think and speak of God and his Word and all Divine things reverently; who has read the Bible in the intention of making it the rule of his life; who has made it a point to keep holy the Sabbath-day, and to use every means at his command to spend it religiously, and in a way most profitable to his soul; who has been willing in all things to sacrifice worldly for spiritual motives, and the things of the body

for the things of the spirit,—let such an one look back over the past years of his life, and see out of what darkness he has come! Let him reflect on the many things that once seemed right and harmless, and that now reveal the deadly poison that lay in them! Let him compare his aims and his motives of life with those which once impelled him,—and he will know by his own living experience that whereas he was once blind, now he sees. And he will not long remain ignorant of the Power which has wrought this mysterious change in him. He will know it to be a Divine power, clothed in a Divine Word, and exerted through a true and Divine religion; and in Jesus Christ, who is Himself the Word incarnate and the Head and Author of that religion, he will recognize with joy his true and only God and Lord, in whom dwelleth bodily all the fullness of the Deity, who is both God and Man, the first and the last, who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.

## VIII.

### The Return Home; or, Individual Responsibility before God.

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*And every man went unto his own house.*—St. John vii. 53.

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WHEN our Lord was on earth few people there were who knew Him and received Him in his true Divine character, as God manifest in the flesh and descended to earth for the salvation of the human race.

There were frequent questionings and disputings about Him, his origin, his mission, and his teachings. Some thought Him to be a prophet sent of God; some thought Him to be the Messiah, the Anointed One, come to deliver the people of God. Others disputed this, because they supposed that He had come from Galilee, and the Scriptures declare that the Messiah must come from Bethlehem; not

knowing that in Bethlehem Jesus had indeed been born. And so "there was a division among the people because of Him, and some would have taken Him, but no man laid hands on Him." And on one occasion, when the chief priests were contending that Jesus, having come from Galilee, could be no true prophet, and ought to be given up to the law, while the officers, on the other hand, declared that the law could judge no man until it had at least heard him,—the dispute being ended, we read that "every man went unto his own house."

A little statement, seemingly very commonplace and unimportant. Yes! "And every man went unto his own house."

Is not this true to-day of those who hear of the Lord Jesus, who witness the various opinions and doctrines held by man concerning Him? who hear his own holy Words as they have come down to us in the gospel, and who must in their own minds decide whether they will henceforth be followers of the Lord Jesus,

or join with those who persecute and deny Him ?  
“And every man went unto his own house.”

Neither then, nor now, does the Lord compel any man to believe in Him and worship Him. We are all in freedom as to what we will think and do concerning Him who was born in humility in our flesh to become the Saviour of the world. Once three disciples, Peter, James, and John, saw the Lord transfigured in his Divine Glory ; they saw Him as He appears in heaven ; as the angels there see Him ; his face shining as the sun, his garment white as the light. It was God, and not man they saw there, and they hid their faces before the splendor of that august and holy Presence ! But not so did these men see the Lord, who disputed about Him, and questioned whether to follow Him or deliver Him up to the law. The Lord might have summoned about Him legions of angels to protect Him from their violence or to awe them with his Divine Majesty. But He had no interest in



having men to follow Him and worship Him as Divine, except as they did so willingly, from the heart. Gladly, indeed, would He have men give up all and follow Him; but they could only of their own will give up their selfish lusts, their earthly idols. The Lord would not take anything from them by violence. The Lord would have a man to compel himself; the Lord does not compel. And to compel one's self is an act of the highest freedom. It is an act of the will; it is a deciding which we will follow and obey, the Lord or the devil.

This is a decision which no one else makes for us; each one of us must make this decision for himself, and in his own heart. The will of man, the affections, and the persuasions of his heart, is his spiritual house. It is the house in which he abides as to his motives, his purposes, his desires, in the conduct of his daily life. Here in this spiritual house of the will every man decides whether or not Jesus is his God and Saviour. He has heard what the Church

says of Him, what the high-priest and the Pharisees dispute concerning Him, and now it is for him to decide, not from any outward compulsion, from no temporary excitement of the feelings, from no sudden fears, from no terrifying threats, but in the still privacy of his own heart, in the turning of his own affections to the Lord or to the world, toward heaven or toward hell, and in the formation of a permanent principle of life, good or evil, he is to decide whether he is for or against the Lord. It is a question that concerns himself and not another. It is a question which he and no other can decide. It is a question of his own inward life,—of that inner heart which God sees and reads, but which men know little of. It is a question of what is most intimate, most private, most real, most essentially his own.

“Am I a follower of the Lord Jesus Christ?”

Books, learning, disputes, reasonings, preachings are by. The man is returned into

his own heart, his soul's house. What witness does his life there, as known to none but himself and God, bear concerning his acknowledgment or rejection of Jesus the Saviour, the True God and Eternal Life?

“And every man went unto his own house.”

When we have been in church and heard the Lord's Word read and have been instructed from his holy doctrine concerning our religious duties, our duties to God and to our neighbor, then it is as true of us spiritually as literally, that “every man goes unto his own house.” We go to our homes one one way, another another, each to his own peculiar station, place, calling, and circumstances in life. No one person's home is just like that of another. Our homes are the nearest things to our hearts, and, as a general rule, they best portray our hearts. The outward visible home corresponds to the inward invisible home of the will. Not that the things themselves which a man has about him, the

creations of his wealth, the work of the architect or the upholsterer, always bespeak the heart, the kind of home within. Many a gorgeous, most beautiful, and cheerful palace shelters a man or woman whose soul's house is gloomier than a dungeon and foul with the damps of caverns; and as truly are there beneath humble roofs and amid plain walls many fair and heavenly mansions growing up in loving, Christian souls, bright with the sunshine of heaven, and adorned as with all beautiful and precious stones. In the spiritual world, indeed, in heaven and in hell, a man's house is always the picture of his heart and his inward life; for there the ruling love of a man shapes the outer world into conformity with itself. Here on earth it is not wholly so, although the principle holds true here, in some degree. For it is an accepted maxim that four walls do not make a home. That is, a man's home, or his "own house," consists not in the natural things he may chance to have accu-

mulated about him, the rich in abundance, the poor in scanty supply, but rather in the general sphere, the order, the sentiment, the kind of principle, in a word, that pervades everything in the house, that makes everything to be in some way expressive of the inward character and disposition of the inmates. How different does the same house look when another occupant has moved into it! We carry our homes with us; for we have the real soul's house, the spiritual house, within us, and this is what shapes to itself somehow the house we inhabit and makes it to become home to us. Now, what I would say is, that when, after the church service is over, we go "every man to his own house," we do really go to our own homes spiritually as well as literally. For in going back into the house we inhabit, into the family, into all the domestic and social relations which belong to us there, we go back into our ordinary inward state of life; we put on, so to speak, our every-day clothes; we are ourselves,



thinking, speaking, and willing in freedom, out of the spontaneous impulses of the heart. The holy state of worship which the external rites of the Church has brought upon us is now removed; we enter into our ordinary familiar moods and ways. And here are we to put to use what we have heard and learned in church concerning the Lord and our spiritual duties. Here if anywhere are we to determine whether or not we will lead the Christian life; whether we will try to put to practice the holy lessons we have learned, and so to take up our cross and follow the Lord in the regeneration.

It is the reverse of this in the judgments mostly sought for in the world. Men are more concerned about the opinion which is formed from their life out-of-doors than about what men think of their ways of living in the privacy of their homes and families. Respectability, not to say honesty, purity, and gentle manners, are often cultivated with great care for the opin-

ion of men in public and social life, and quite forgotten when men have returned to their own homes. This, indeed, should not be so, and that it is so shows how artificial and false our life is when shaped after the common worldly pattern. We need a higher standard to live by than "the way that other people do." God gives us the higher, better pattern in his Holy Word. It is here that we are taught to make clean the inside as well as the outside of the platter, and to act always in the holy fear of Him who seeth in secret.

Here it is most commonly about a man's public life and conduct,—his manners on the street, or in the office, or in the public worship, or in the social assembly,—that we hear opinions expressed, "Such an one is a gentleman; is so generous; so pure in spirit and thought, so considerate, so truthful, so unselfish!" Would the judgment be always the same were the door opened into that man's own house? Is it there under his own roof, and with those who are his

neighbors in the nearest and most important sense, that the man is just, true, gentle, and kind?

In the other world to which we are going this will, I say, all be reversed. Then it will be asked not alone what a man has spoken on the house-tops, but what he has whispered in the ear and in closets; not what a man's public life, but what a man's private life, has been; not what he did or said in the company of the man whose good opinion he courted, but what he did when he had "returned to his own house."

Unless, when we so have returned each one unto his own house, we there remember what we have heard, unless we try to practice the laws of heavenly life there amid the common duties and trials which make up our real week-day life, we are far from being the followers of the Lord. We are like those of whom the Lord says, "This people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me." Ah, what a solemn thought it is, that God has so ordained

the way of our regeneration that every man, on hearing the Word of Life, "shall go unto his own house!" that with every man lies the responsibility of saving or destroying his soul, and that this issue lies in the man's own private life, the life of his soul's home, the life of his ruling affections and principles of conduct! It is not enough that we be pious and zealous Christians in the house of God. The question is, What are we when "every man has gone unto his own house"? Is it possible that the soul is made fit for heaven at once because smitten with the terrors of hell as depicted by a zealous preacher, or warmed by the momentary enthusiasm of a multitude? Shall we think that the sensuous excitement produced by eloquent oratory or music, or any ecstasy of the mind under the influence of fear or persuasion or personal magnetism, is really a changing of the heart? the making over of the old life with its familiar besetting sins into a pure, heavenly, saintly life in an instant of time?

Ah! how is it when, after such a season of strained emotion and unnatural excitement, "every man has gone unto his own house"? How is it when the self-deluded convert, who shouted aloud the tidings of his salvation in the ears of the multitude the night before, wakes up in the morning to find himself no more in the "house of prayer," but in the house of his own old lusts and passions, his old worldly loves, his selfish, earthly aims; when he finds his heart and its affections the same as before, the same old temptations returning to him with renewed force, the same cunning plea of the devil in his ear, the same voice of flattery and sinful pleasure and unholy gain whispering to him from the world? Then, indeed, he knows that "every man has returned unto his own house."

Happy if, discovering his delusion, and seeing then the awful distinction between a temporary pious emotion and the religion of everyday-life,—the difference between acknowledging



the Lord and shouting his praises in the congregation and inwardly worshiping and obeying Him at home in his soul's own house,—happy if he be not discouraged! Happy if the evil spirit, seeking rest and finding none, return not into him with sevenfold power, and make the last state of that man to be worse than the first!

We would not hinder any sincere effort or means of rousing men to a sense of the perils of an evil, ungodly life,—of lifting their thoughts to heaven and to God; but we would that men were taught that the test of conversion is not in the momentary, transient emotions of the hour of prayer, but in the state of life which is entered upon when “every man has gone unto his own house.”

Some there are—alas, too many!—who hear sermons in church, and then go carrying its application, not every man to his own house, but to the house of his neighbor,—hearing for others, not themselves, and letting the stern judgments of the truth fall on the evils they

detect in others, rather than on the foes of their own household. Let every man, when the Lord has given him light, carry that light with him unto his own house; to cast thus the beam out of his own eye before he seeketh to cast the mote out of his brother's eye.

There draweth near to all of us the day and the hour when the Lord shall call us away from these temporary homes of earth and the natural body, and when in the resurrection and the judgment every man shall go unto his own house. Here in the world we have heard the Word of God; we have learned of the Lord our Saviour; we have been taught those Divine commandments which are the way of eternal life. Here it is in our power, by prayer, by looking to the Lord, by shunning our evils as sins, by faithfully fulfilling our duties, to acquire, through the Lord's ever-present help, a regenerated will, a heart impelled by heavenly motives and fit for the enjoyment of heavenly delights. Such a regenerated will is the soul's

home, which the good man carries with him into the other world; it is his mansion not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. In our Father's house, which is in heaven, are many such mansions; and may it be our endeavor here to be building for ourselves, by the practice of a holy Christian life, such spiritual homes! that it may be into these heavenly mansions that we may, by the Divine mercy, enter, in that day when "every man shall go unto his own house."

## IX.

### The Word of Life; or, How the Lord communicates Spiritual Life to Man.

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*The words that I speak\* unto you, they are spirit, and they are life.—St. John vi. 63.*

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OUR Lord, in speaking to his disciples about the bread of heaven, says, "Verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me hath everlasting life. I am that bread of life. Your fathers did eat manna in the wilderness, and are dead. This is the bread which cometh down from heaven, that a man may eat thereof, and not die. I am the living bread which came down from heaven: if any man eat of this bread, he shall live forever: and the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world."

Here our Lord most plainly tells us that there is such a thing as heavenly bread,—nourishment given to the souls of men,—which shall be to them eternal life, in like manner as food given to the body sustains the natural life. He says, moreover, that He Himself is that bread, that He is that bread of life, come down from heaven to give Himself to men for the life of the world; and, finally, to declare this truth in its most forcible and unmistakable form, He says, “The bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world.” “For my flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed. He that eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me, and I in him. He hath eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day.”

It is not surprising, then, that the Jews who heard our Lord say this, understanding his words only in a natural sense, exclaimed, in wonder, “How can this man give us his flesh to eat?” Nor even that the disciples, when



they had heard this, said, "This is an hard saying; who can hear it?"

Yes, it is an hard saying, if the Lord's words are like human words, having only a finite natural meaning. But not such are the words which God speaks. And Jesus, when He knew that his hearers were disturbed by this saying,—too hard for them to comprehend,—explains Himself in these simple and memorable words: "It is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing: the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life."

It is not, then, of natural flesh and blood that He has been speaking. Natural flesh or bodily food does not give life to the soul. The bread of heaven, the flesh and blood of the Lord Jesus, must be something spiritual if it is to quicken, to give eternal life, soul-life, to men. It must be the flesh and the blood of his Divine, and not of his natural, earthly body that He is speaking when He says, "He that eateth me, he shall live by me!"

The flesh of the Lord's Divine Body is the Good of his Divine Love: the blood of his Divine Body is the Truth of his Divine Wisdom,—Good and Truth from the Lord received into the soul are eternal life in man. The man who lives by the Lord, in receiving and appropriating in his soul and in his spiritual life the heavenly bread of Divine Good and Divine Truth, he has in him even now the everlasting life, and in this life he shall be raised up at the last day. This is what it is to dwell in the Lord and to have the Lord dwell in us. For this is conjunction of our life with the Lord. This bread of heaven—the good of love communicated to our affections, the good of wisdom communicated to our understanding from the Lord's Divine Humanity—this is the Spirit that quickeneth, that giveth immortal life.

But how does the Lord actually give us this spiritual food from Himself? How did He give it then? How does He give it now?

The words above quoted answer our question. The Lord has said that men receive their soul's life from Him; and He has said that this life is not got by eating natural food, such as the "fathers did eat in the wilderness and are dead," but that it is got by the Spirit; for the Spirit and not natural flesh is what gives life. And now He tells us how He gives us this Spirit and Life: "The words that I have spoken unto you, they are Spirit and they are Life."

The Lord's words themselves Spirit and Life! Here, then, is where men shall feed their souls; here is where men shall eat and drink spiritually of the Divine Body of the Lord. Here in the WORD OF GOD, in the words which the Lord speaks to men, which words are verily Spirit and Life,—here men shall verily find, and are enabled to take into their actual daily life, the Divine Good of Love, which is the Lord's flesh, and the Divine Truth of Wisdom, which is the Lord's blood. Here in the Holy Scriptures is the bread of heaven,

the flesh and blood of the Lord's Divine Humanity given from heaven, yea, from God Himself, for the life of the whole world. He that, from the Word of God, eateth of this bread, shall live forever, and God will raise him up at the last day. For the Divine Good imparted to men through the written Word of God is meat indeed, and the Divine Truth here imparted to men is drink indeed. Directly from this Word, from reading, loving, and obeying it themselves, or indirectly through the teaching and influence of others, all men to-day have whatever they have of spiritual life.

For the Word is God's revelation of Himself to men; through the Word God gives Himself to men; and in the Word men must eat and drink of the only food that can impart eternal life to the soul. By the Word we mean that Word which God has given us in the Holy Scriptures; we mean the Word not only in its language, but in its institutions, its ordinances, and especially in the holy Sacra-

ments. The Sacrament of the Lord's Supper is the Word *enacted*,—uttered in actions, and not in speech or thoughts merely. So in Baptism, and in all the ordinances of Christian worship, which are *enactments* of the Word, or the literal Word carried into act. These are still the Word, and as such have the Spirit and the Life of the Word in them. When we *read* in the Scriptures the Lord's Prayer, we receive the Word in our thoughts; when we *pray* in these words, the Word becomés more than a thought in our minds,—it becomes a form, an act. When we *read* of the Lord's institution of the Holy Supper, the Word is then in any mind a thought. When we actually *go forward and present ourselves at the Lord's table and take the bread and the wine bodily*, and thus *do* this holy rite of worship in remembrance of Him, and not merely read of it and think of it, the Word of God is thereby uttered or expressed in the most powerful manner possible.

But, besides uttering or enacting the Word,



translating it from speech to actions, as is done in all that may be comprehended under the term of preaching the gospel, which term includes all the external ordinances of worship,—besides thus *declaring* the Word of God, we are also commanded by the Lord to do it. “Blessed are they who hear the Word of God and *do* it.” The doing the Word is something quite different from performing its Divine ordinances. When we keep the Divine Commandments in our daily life, we *do* the Word of God,—we make it a principle of our life. The Word thus becomes a thing of life with us, not a momentary ceremony or act of external worship. Doing God’s Word in the daily life is actual religion; performing the ordinances of Divine worship as instituted in the Word is the means to this religion. Reading the Word is not doing it, and yet we must read the Word in order to do it. And the holy Sacraments, preaching, and other Divine ordinances to be practiced by men, are reading

the Word in actions, rather than in silent contemplation of the printed page. But, nevertheless, the Sacraments and all the rites of worship which instruct, influence, and help men in leading the religious life, these remain just as truly the *Word* of the Lord, since they are founded or instituted in the Word, and as such they are likewise the means of spiritual nourishment to the soul, for *they are Spirit and they are Life*. And from the Word in its written volume, or in the enactment of its sacred rites of worship, comes directly or indirectly all the spiritual sustenance which men in this world receive, and by which they can be regenerated and brought into the heavenly life.

There are indeed many people in Christian lands who do not see the Word of God nor hear it from year's end to year's end, who yet live under its sanctifying influences as felt in the moral and religious sense of society about them. It may be only in the sound of the church-bell, or the sight of the church-spire,

or the simple outline of the cross surmounting a church-gate or pinnacle, or the sacred picture on the wall or in the window, or the sight of a child praying, or the voice of a street-preacher, or the taking of an oath on the Holy Bible in the civil court; who can tell all the thousand voices by which the Word of God in a Christian land speaks to men in all conditions of life, and awakens in their minds that "thought of God" which is the first thing that opens heaven to their souls?

The Words of the Lord are Spirit and Life. Like the atmosphere which we cannot see, but which is full of mighty agencies for producing physical effects, so the Word of God in its spiritual outgoings in a Christian community pervades everything,—it influences opinion, feeling, behavior,—and makes itself felt by those who rarely or never think definitely of its existence. So little do men know of the Spirit of God's Word, whence it cometh and whither it goeth, that learned men, living in

the light of Divine Truth, write treatises on immortality, God, the soul, and spiritual life,—about which they would know nothing at all except for a primitive Revelation from God,—and yet declare that the light is all their own, human light, that of merely human reason and intelligence, and that whatever of God is known at all has been found out by their reasonings, and not by Divine communication! Spiritual Light and Life all comes from God alone to men, just as all natural light and life comes from the sun of our universe, and it is the Word of God which is Truth Divine, or God Himself in the Word which gives spiritual light to the world. *God is the Light of the world.* And the Spirit of life goes out from his Word, like light from the sun, through the social and moral atmosphere of society. But for this there would be no such thing among men as a sense of justice, of mercy, of right, of duty, of conscience, of faith, or the hope of immortality.

Again, there are whole nations, the heathen nations, as they are called, who have not the written Word, and who yet have religion, who worship a Deity, who have a Divine law of right and wrong. Whence do they have these ideas of the Divine, the good, and the true? From themselves,—their own thinking out? From their perverted religion of mythology and idolatry? No! So far as they have a single ray of Divine Truth, so far as they have the Truth at all, they have it from the Word of God. And how do these heathen nations have the light of the Word? How can they, too, live by its Spirit and its Life, and so inherit the life eternal? They have the Spirit and Life of the Word in two ways.

*First*, outwardly; by tradition, which has preserved in their religions something of the primitive Word or revelation which God made to man in his Golden Age of innocence, symbolically described by the Garden of Eden, and referred to in the sacred traditions of all



nations that have a literature and a history,—that holy celestial Church on earth wherein God “talked with man.” The Truth then given to mankind has still been preserved, in broken fragments, it may be, but still in some measure, even among the heathen, the idolatrous. It is from this gleam of light from the primitive Word that they know that there is a Deity, and that there is a law of right and wrong. They have also, some of them, the light of the Word through their fellowship with those Christian nations which have the written Word, through their outward commercial relations, and their knowledge of the world’s history.

But there is, *secondly*, an inward way by which the Spirit and Life of the Word of God reaches and quickens these heathen nations. It is through the spiritual communion of earth with heaven, of human beings here with good spirits and angels there. The Word which we have here on earth in the letter exists with the angels in heaven in Spirit and in Life, and

its spiritual meat and drink is given everywhere to the souls of men by the ministries of angels, and by direct inflowing from the Lord, the Divine Word Himself, according to the various capacities of men to receive it and live by it. The Spirit of the Word of God is like the sunshine, which embraces the whole earth in its warm, life-giving rays. As Divine Life flows down and becomes our natural life through the visible sun of our universe, so the Divine Word flows spiritually down to enlighten the whole world through our visible and literal written Bible. As the whole body lives from the blood sent pulsating to every minutest fibre from the central heart and lungs, so the whole race of man on earth lives spiritually from the Spirit and Life emanating from the Lord's written Word on earth, and from the Church where it is known, received, and applied to the life. We may not, indeed, understand how this is accomplished, but it is enough to know that it is God's wisdom and

God's love that accomplishes it, and "his ways are past finding out." The Words that God has spoken to us are Spirit and Life,—they are the soul's meat and drink. Spirit and Life are not confined to space or subject to material, visible agencies. We hear their sound of the Spirit in our written Word, but we know not whence it cometh or whither it goeth. The Spirit and Life of the Word are as wide and as infinite as God. *"Their sound is gone out into all the earth, and their words to the end of the world! There is no speech nor language where their voice is not heard!"*

There is one Word, one life-giving Spirit, one Saviour, one God, for all the earth, all people, all worlds. To us this life-giving Spirit is given clothed in the literal sense of our Holy Scriptures. It resides in it as the soul in the body of man. But even with man his soul's influence and life may extend where his body is not,—through miles of space, through ages of years! How much more with the Divine,

Infinite Spirit of Truth, which, while it is revealed in the body of our written Word, yet pervades all the heavens and the spiritual world everywhere, and gives to every man the spiritual sustenance his soul needs! The heathen nations, then, have the Word of God *outwardly* by remains of revealed Truth from the primitive Word handed down in their sacred traditions, and *inwardly* by the all-pervading, all-illuminating Spirit of God, the sole Light and Life of man.

But are there those in this day who, when told that the Words of God are verily Spirit and Life, and, therefore, that men must eat and drink of the Divine Good and Truth given to us men in the written volume of the Holy Bible if they will have eternal life,—are there those who will exclaim, with the Jews of old, “How can this man give us his flesh to eat?” How can this printed book give immortal food to the souls of men? and who murmur with the disciples that “this is an hard saying”?

Then it is because they know and believe not the Divinity of this Son of man. They know not that the Bible is Divine, that it is full of Divine Life, that it is the great medium by which heaven and earth, man and the Lord, may come into spiritual union, and by which the Lord may give us the flesh of his own Divine Humanity to eat. They think the Holy Bible is like any other book, merely a human composition, containing nothing deeper than what we see on the surface of the letter, containing only human, finite ideas and narrations that relate to the earth and natural visible things. Like the Jews, who regarded Jesus as only human like themselves, they exclaim, "How can this *man* give us his flesh to eat?" But if they knew that it is not man but God that dwells in the written Word,—God the Life-Giver, God the mighty Redeemer, God who, by his Word, created the heavens and the earth, and who now, by his Word, creates anew or regenerates the soul of man,—would



they then doubt that these spoken Words of God are verily Spirit and Life, and that in them the soul finds its meat and drink unto life everlasting?

God dwells in the Word which He has given to us men in human language, just as He dwells in the visible natural creation He has made. Trees and flowers, and sun and stars, are not God; they live only from Him, and are sustained every moment only by his inflowing Spirit. "*Thou sendest forth thy Spirit; they are created, and thou renewest the face of the whole earth.*" So the Bible, as a volume of paper and print, is not God; but the Truth, the Spirit that is in it, its meaning, its moral and spiritual power in the mind of man, this is Divine, this is God; for this is the Word that is ever with God and is God. The words that we utter are to our ears but sound, vibrations of air; but to the mind they are more than matter: they are thought, thus spirit, and in this sense ourselves. So in the higher Divine sense, God

through his Words, spoken not to our outward hearing, but to our hearts, gives to us of his infinite Spirit and Life. In his Word He gives us of his flesh to eat. Should we not indeed feed upon it with our souls, and be thankful?

We are very apt to fall short of the truth in thinking of the Word of God that it is "Spirit and Life," because it has an internal meaning or spiritual sense! This is, indeed, true, but not the whole truth. The Word of God not only *means*, when rightly interpreted, spiritual things, but it *is* Spirit and Life! It is Spirit and Life to every one who devoutly and affectionately reads it with a view to living by it, whether he knows anything of the spiritual sense or not. For by the Word, read affectionately by man, the Lord and the angels come into close union with him and with the Church on earth; and when the Lord is near his Life-Giving Spirit is near, and flows in hidden ways into the secret chambers of the

soul, and springs up there in fountains of everlasting life.

“The Words that I have spoken unto you, are spirit and are life.” “The Bread of God is He that cometh down from heaven to give life unto the world. I am that Bread of Life.”

So closely does our Lord connect in his teaching his own gifts of love and truth with the gift of the Word which He has spoken. He is the Bread of Life. His spoken words are Life. To his Word, then, we must come for our Bread of Life, for our soul’s meat and drink.

Let Christians remember this as a truth most deserving of constant application in their daily life. If we are seeking spiritual life, let us seek it there where God gives us the Bread of heaven,—the soul’s true food,—namely, in his spoken and written Word. Let us find our soul’s daily meat and drink in the devout reading every day of some portion, even though it be but a few verses, of this sacred

volume. Think not of the quantity to be read, nor be anxious in selecting what to read! Think only of yourself, as needing in your soul the Bread of Life, and of God, as present in his Holy Word, ready to give to every one that asketh. Little by little, as the body grows, the spirit fed on heavenly food will grow likewise. We may not see the immediate good, any great spiritual change in us on our commencing thus religiously to read the Word of God. But the Spirit of God worketh in secret and in silence. If we have gone to God's Word seeking Life, it will be given us,—given us in such measure as our understanding can admit its Truth and as our will can admit its Good. There may be purgings and cleansings necessary to remove the falsities of the evil heart, and, close to the sinful dispositions, the selfish desires of the natural life, the Word of God may seem to fall cold, hard, and lifeless. Be not deceived nor discouraged by this outward appearance. Imitate not the folly of

those who first deny that the Scriptures are Divine, and then complain that they derive no Divine light and comfort from their study; who ask only serpents and stones, and then grumble because they have not fish and bread given them! See that your heart still desires the Bread of heaven, and seeks it from the Lord in his Word. To the son that asketh a fish the heavenly Father will not give a serpent, nor a stone to him that asketh Bread.



X.

Not the Righteous, but Sinners called; or, the Church  
not an Assembly of perfected Men and Women.

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*I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.—*

St. Luke v. 32.

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IT is recorded in the Holy Gospel that our Lord once gave a great supper in his own house, and there were many present who had followed Him from the wayside and throughout the country where He had been journeying; there were doubtless the fishermen whom He had called from their nets, and many a one from the great multitude who had resorted unto Him at the seaside, and of those, too, most likely, who surrounded his house at Capernaum in such numbers that they could not bring a certain man sick of the palsy to Him by the door, but were obliged to lift up the

bed over the people's heads and lower it down through the roof; and Levi we know was there, whom He had just called from the receipt of custom, and, not unlikely, many a poor man and woman who had been blind and now saw, or lame and now walked, or covered with the loathsome leprosy and was now clean and whole again; and all these, we can imagine, with mingled feelings of wonder and joy stood by at that feast and had some little consciousness within them of the real character of Him who was in their midst. For there were many there, says the account as we read it in St. Mark's Gospel, and publicans and sinners, and they sat with Jesus and his disciples.

Thus, "in his own house," our Lord did sit at meat with publicans and sinners, and they were many, and they followed Him.

There is more meaning, more stirring pathos, in this little verse than in all the eulogies on the Divine Compassion ever uttered by human lips. With our finite vision, our poor

natural notions, we can derive but little light from this sublime passage wherein is portrayed, like a picture of the heavens and earth in the retina of the eye, the entire story of our Lord's Incarnation and Glorification. But this little ray of light comes to us from the spiritual glory that burns beneath the letter,—that the house in which our Lord dwells means the doctrine which He believed and taught; and this doctrine is, "Love one another as I have loved you;" and all who received this doctrine and fed their souls upon it did really sit at meat with Him in his house: and such *were* his followers. Now, the righteous scribes and Pharisees stood without or walked by, doubtless, avoiding all contact with such vulgar company, and while pretending a kind of respect for the Lord, inquired of his disciples about this supper: "How is it that He eateth and drinketh with publicans and sinners?"

O Pharisee, keep your clean robes intact!  
Venture not too near this plebeian throng!

Leave the humble house where the poor, the lame, halt, blind, and leprous, only lately made to know the common joys of life,—where the abandoned outcast, the homeless, the hopeless but of yesterday now sit at the feet of their healer, their consoler, and ask not for lordlier or more stately company than this poor motley crowd, with Jesus in its midst! Go up to your own high places, Pharisee and publican, and think upon this new word which the Master sends to you in answer to your inquiry, “I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance”!

And so let these words come home to Christian hearts, and with so much of their Divine meaning as we shall be enabled to discover, remembering that in the sight of God no man living is justified; and taking care lest, vainly numbering ourselves among the righteous, we become deaf to that call to repentance which it was for publicans and sinners alone to hear.

That was, indeed, a new word in those times, "to call sinners to repentance." For the *righteous* every promise had been made, every offer held out, every hope encouraged; but to call the sinner to repentance, this had not belonged to the religious system of the Jews. And who were these righteous? They were the Pharisees and scribes,—those scrupulous observers of the law; those men well versed in the religious books, to whom every minute rite and ceremony of the Jewish ritual was familiar; those who made long prayers and wore sad countenances and looked for the worldly prosperity, the earthly re-establishment, of the Israelitish kingdom. The heaven of the Pharisee, or, rather, his conception of the kingdom of God on earth, was not broad; a petty community of strict ritualists, externally supporting the ancient observances of the Jewish Church, this would suffice for the Messiah of the nations; the poor, the humble, the ignorant, and the Gentiles, they were of little account in the



Pharisee's reckoning. And yet, behold Jesus, the Messiah, sitting at meat with publicans and sinners !

The publicans were a low and hated class of the people, whose occupation was collecting the taxes under their Roman masters ; and the sinners, they were, doubtless, very much the same class of beings as those persons nowadays who are spoken of by that name. At least, the term did not include the Pharisee and the scribe ; no more in our day does the name sinner often fall upon the pious out-door Christian of respectable position. But, however this may be, we know simply that while that "righteous" Pharisee walked by in scorn, our Lord did sit at meat in his own house with publicans and sinners.

Now, there was a deep and solemn meaning in that reply of his to the Pharisee's inquiry, "How is it that thy master eateth and drinketh with publicans and sinners?" "I am not come," is the Divine response, "to call the righteous,

but sinners to repentance." It is evident enough that the Pharisee was not, indeed, righteous ; but that he is called so here because he seemed so to himself. If there had been true righteousness in the Jewish Church, as represented by this its ruling class, then the end of that Church had not come, it had not been necessary for Christ, the Messiah, to come at that time to save the world. But the fact was far otherwise. The race of mankind was perishing in evil, because the Church was dead. All men were alike sinners ; all were alike swept down under the tyrannous rule of the prince of this world.

"None calleth for justice, nor any pleadeth for truth ; they trust in vanity and speak lies.

"Judgment is turned away backward ; justice standeth afar off ; for truth is fallen in the street, and equity cannot enter."

So describes the prophet the state of the Church at that day, when the clean and dainty Pharisee was to ask of the Saviour of the

world, "How is it that he eateth with publicans and sinners?" Thus, we see that when our Lord spoke of the righteous whom He came not to call, although He referred to the self-righteous Pharisee, yet He by no means would teach that Pharisee, or those like him, that he was not alike in need of repentance. No; the truth is, the Pharisee was not called by the Saviour to repentance, simply because he would not hear; the wall of his vain conceit, his foolishly-imagined righteousness, which consisted, as he believed, in external observance, while the heart was corrupt with evil within, this kept every cry of warning, every call to repentance, from his ear. When he went to the temple to pray, he could not fall down, smite upon his breast, and say, "God be merciful to me a sinner;" but rather he thanked God that he was not as other men are, and set forth a fair account of his fasting twice in the week, of his giving tithes of all that he possessed, and so on

through the roll of his virtues. Such men have their reward, saith our Saviour, when speaking of their external religion; but what a poor, petty, shallow reward is that,—the glory of men, a proud name in the world, and the tyrant of self in the heart, with all his lusts and deceits, to rule and reign there forever and forever!

Now, how is it with those poor publicans and sinners who sat at meat in the Lord's house with Him and were his followers? These were even the class whom Jesus Christ came into the world to call to repentance; not that they needed repentance more, not that they needed it less, than other men who bore fairer titles, but because being known, denounced, shunned as publicans and sinners, they were willing to appear, or were obliged to appear, to the world what they were, and thus really appeared to themselves in the true light of their own wretchedness. For the opinion of the world, and especially its evil

opinion, is often a mirror in which we may see reflected a much truer picture of ourselves than we are wont to find when looking at our hearts through the medium of our own opinion only. These publicans were doubtless well represented by that one of their number who, when he went up to pray, dared not look up to God; so vile and degraded a being he really felt himself to be, he could only smite upon his breast, and cry out, "God be merciful to me a sinner!" And the others of that motley assembly, they had been afflicted with many troubles, were a poor troop of vagabonds, but they had found a man who spoke not as the scribes, but with authority, who healed their diseases as well as blessed them; who taught them how to pray to their Father in heaven; who told them what was forgiveness, what was mutual love, what was the treasure worth seeking after, and how they could become children of God and come into his kingdom. Now, these poor people were not better than



others in their hearts and lives, perhaps, but they were willing to hear, to be instructed, to be commanded by the Living Incarnate Word of God in their midst; and listening to Him and receiving into their minds his instruction, they were indeed his followers, although the journey of the cross, their life of regeneration, had hardly begun. But such did our blessed Lord call to repentance, for *such* had ears to hear, and the call fell not upon them unheeded.

And what does it mean when Christ saith to men to-day, as He did to them of old, "I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance." Shall we imagine that before Him there are righteous men and others who are sinful men, and that the righteous are saved in any case and only the sinners need to repent? That is the falsity of a dead Church, a Church that has ceased to be the presence of God as the Divine Truth on earth. There is none good but one, that is God. Before God there

are no men more or less righteous of themselves than others. He beholds the hearts of men only as they are more or less open to and ready to receive true righteousness from Him. The true and living Church of God must speak to men in the very words of its Divine Master, whose messenger, indeed, is the Church: "I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance." Let no man too readily class himself with the righteous; so far as he does he stops his ear against that call to repentance which all need alike to hear. He only who feels that he is a sinner can repent. Of what can that man repent who thinks there is nothing but righteousness in him? No; first we must become in our own eyes publicans and sinners; then we shall hear the Lord's call to repentance, and happily, by God's grace, come and sit at meat with Him in his own house! All men are not indeed alike sinful; some are more righteous men than others; but these are not so of themselves, but of God. The

righteousness that is in them is God's righteousness, and they, only, need not repentance who, while they know that their evils are held in check, and the good things of heaven given into their hearts, yet remember that these good things belong to God and not to themselves, and that it is only by the Divine power that their evils are held in subjection and do not rouse themselves again and overcome them. So far as a man regards himself as separated from, or not dependent upon God, he must behold in himself a sinner: surely a sinner who may be called to repentance, and come to the Lord's house to sit at meat with Him, if he feels, together with his sins, a sorrow for it and a desire to be united to the Lord, rather than to continue in this dreary absence of a wicked heart; but doubly a sinner and deaf to the Saviour's call if so be he thinks whatever of righteousness is in him to be his own, and thus turns the light that is in him into darkness; thanking God that he is not as other

men, and thinking to himself what reward his righteousness is meriting. This man is robbing God: surely his righteousness is as filthy rags; the publicans and harlots go into the kingdom of God before him.

There is no greater danger to those who are members of religious organizations than this: that having united themselves externally to the Church and taken the name of church-member, they unthinkingly class themselves among the righteous, and believe henceforward that the call of the Lord to repentance is addressed only to those sinners who are without the Church. There is no more fatal and unjust distinction in the world than a distinction thus drawn,—namely, that the Church is for the righteous, for those who have no need of repentance, and that those outside the Church are the sinners who need to repent. The error is as fatal to the one class as to the other. Those in the Church are liable to the awful mistake and sin of thinking their salva-

tion is accomplished, that their faith alone, their acceptance of doctrine, their subscribing to articles of belief,—that this places them among the righteous; and those without, feeling, yea, having it impressed upon them that the Church is not for sinners, but for the righteous only, conclude that they have no place there. The Messiah is not for them, but for the clean Pharisee; they dare not lift their eyes unto heaven, but can only smite upon their breasts in their wretchedness and implore God's mercy on them; while they in the Church, they can stand up and thank God that they are such righteous, just, and pious men.

Let us have done with this false and ruinous distinction. What is the church militant, the Church on earth, but the messenger of that same Lord and Saviour who sat at meat with publicans and sinners? Whom else does the Church call to repentance but sinners? With whom else has the church to do but with sinners? As for the righteous, if there are



those within the Church who believe that their faith in Church doctrine alone is righteousness, they are like the Pharisees, straining at a gnat and swallowing a camel. They are so much death in the living body of the Church.

Like the Saviour of old, does the Church now come to all classes alike. And if the self-righteous are offended in it, because it commands repentance and actual endeavor to subjugate the evils within, and thus to become fit vessels of God's righteousness, still, the Church is not ashamed to call under its own roof the publicans and sinners. Did Christ say to the multitude, "Not yet, good people; wait awhile; when you have become clean and learned, like the Pharisees and the scribes, then you may come in and eat with me and learn of my doctrine"? Such was not the Saviour's word to the poor outcast dregs of the people; but hear rather what He did say: "Come unto me all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest; take my yoke

upon you, and learn of me, for I am meek and lowly in heart, and ye shall find rest to your souls!"

Shall the Church in our day assume the character of a closed fold, wherein only the righteous—the regenerate—sit at meat with the Lord? Shall it not rather be that same house of the Lord,—his own house, whose door was open to all, however low and sinful and frowned upon and despised, who yet, if simply they desire to be followers of Him, may come in and sit at the Lord's table with his disciples, feeling their sinfulness, and not their worthiness; conscious of their unsightliness in God's sight, and not of their fair looks? *Feeling their sinfulness*, I say! and no man can feel his sinfulness whose soul has not once been pierced through with the awful probe of God's Word, revealing to him, at least, one sin out of the host that are there! Shall the Church say, "Wait until you are better; wait until you know the doctrines of our faith thoroughly;

wait until you can thank God that you are not as other men are, and then come into the Temple"? Or shall it simply ask, as did its Divine Master of those who wished to be healed of the very sins and evils in which they find themselves immersed, "Wilt thou be made whole? If so, follow me, immediately, just as you are, leaving your nets, or your seat at the receipt of custom, or whatever your occupation be! Come into this the Lord's own house! Come, burdened with your evils and all your spiritual infirmities! Come as you are, but come wishing to be what you are not! Come wishing to be healed, to be cleansed, to be made better! Come and learn of the true way to health and peace under the Lord's roof, not standing without. Here, in this open house, whenever you will come earnestly desiring to follow Him, you may sit at meat with Jesus and his disciples! The truths of God's Word are open to you,—the plain, simple doctrines of the Church teaching the way of repentance and regener-

ation ; this is the house into which you are to enter as sinners and publicans ; and here, by actually learning to love and to rule your everyday life by these truths and instructions, you do verily sit at meat with your Lord” ?

## XI.

### The Stranger at the Door; a Meditation for Christmas-Time.

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*I was a stranger, and ye took me in.*—St. Matt. xxv. 35.

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THESE are the words spoken by our Lord to the righteous in the day of judgment.

And the righteous answer, saying, “When saw we Thee a stranger, and took Thee in?”

And the King replies, “Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.”

At this season, when the Christian world is celebrating the nativity of our Saviour, our thoughts are directed to our LORD JESUS CHRIST at that time when He came literally and personally a stranger into this our natural world.

Verily, in that day He was a stranger. Did the world receive Him? “He was in the



world, and the world was made by Him, and the world knew Him not. He came unto his own, and his own received Him not."

The stranger-child, born of a humble woman from far-off Galilee,—did the people of that Judean town take Him in to the shelter of their houses?

No! Mary, the Virgin - mother, wrapped Him "in swaddling-clothes, and laid Him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn."

A stranger, indeed, in the world was Christ the Messiah. Long-expected, heralded by the prophets of centuries; yet, at his coming, unrecognized, unknown,—the world's doors shut against Him!

Yet it has not been ever so. Even in those days there were some hearts ready to receive Him. Some simple shepherds from the fields came with joy to behold, lying in an humble manger, the child who was to be the Saviour,—Christ the Lord. And the wise men of the

East hastened to fall down before Him and offer Him their gifts and their worship; and some aged and devout souls, who had waited in faith for the consolation of Israel, blessed God when they saw the child Jesus, and uttered, in pious gratitude, "Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, for mine eyes have seen thy salvation."

And there were the disciples and the apostles and the faithful women who followed our Lord in the world, who loved to receive Him into their humble homes, and to hear his words and to minister to his wants.

But these are not all who, when the Lord was a stranger, have taken Him in.

No; to the great company of the righteous ones who in the day of judgment stand at the King's right hand, the Lord says, "I was a stranger, and ye took me in."

And these righteous ones were not alone those who had lived on earth in our Saviour's times, but were those gathered out of every

nation and age and country, who, in extending this act of mercy to the least of their brethren, had done it unto the Lord.

There is a way, then, of receiving the Lord who comes to us as a stranger other than the literal housing of Him as a man in the natural world. He represents Himself to us, indeed, in his Word as ever, even now, standing at the door and knocking, waiting for us to take Him in. And if any man open the door, He says, "I will come in unto Him, and sup with Him, and He with me."

The Lord Jesus is in heaven, whither He ascended after his resurrection; and yet He is close to us here on earth. He who made the world and is the sole God and Lord of heaven and earth is yet to-day in the world, and the world knows Him not. "There standeth one among us whom we know not,"—now as in the days of John the Baptist. He it is who alone baptizeth our hearts with his Holy Spirit of Truth and with the fire of Divine Love.

And because we know Him not, because we think of God as dwelling afar off in heaven and not near to us on earth, because we know not of his Divine Humanity, which embraces all men and is near to all, therefore is this present Christ a stranger to us. We look up to God when we offer our prayers to "Our Father who art in the heavens,"—we do not see Him in doing the common deeds of our daily life; and yet if we are leading the life of regeneration, the Lord is as near us in our everyday working as in our formal prayers at stated times. It is right for us to think of our Lord as in heaven enthroned in glory and surrounded with everything of beauty and majesty which our feeble finite minds can conceive of. It is not a reproach to the righteous that they ask the King in ignorance, "When saw we Thee a stranger, and took Thee in?" The Lord does not prize their ministry less because it was done unto Him unawares. They worshiped and prayed to the Lord in heaven as far above



and beyond the sphere of their earthly business, while yet in the fear of God and out of love to Him they tried to live faithfully and well with their fellow-men. It was for the Lord Jesus—the Infinite, the Omnipresent, the All-seeing—to behold the inward character of their deeds, and to know that they were done verily unto Himself when done unto the least of his brethren on earth. The Stranger is one whom we know not. If we knew Him, He would be no stranger. It is so with every one to-day in his immediate personal relation with the Lord Jesus. He is the stranger at the door. It is for us to open unto Him, or to keep the door closed. If we take this Stranger in, we shall not behold in Him at once the Lord in his heavenly glory and Divine majesty. We shall not see anything Divine in Him, nor shall we see any beauty that we should desire Him. He shall have, it may well be, “neither form nor comeliness” in our sight. But we shall see something human; the something that lies at



the roots of our human life; something on which the very heavens rest; something that shall make us sensible one day, if not of the Divinity, then of the Divine Humanity, of the Infinite One, and which will make plain to us what the apostle means when he calls the Church the Body of Christ.

Thus the Lord, the Infinite Divine One, comes to us now a stranger, disguised under the cloak of our common humanity, that we may in freedom, without compulsion, learn to love and to serve Him in learning to love and serve our fellow-man. He comes in the form of the common practical precepts of the Divine Word,—the laws of charitable and righteous living,—man with his fellow-man, here on earth. No duty so commonplace or mean in the eyes of men; no impulse to good; no gentle act or expression of affection or pity or compassion; no word of forgiveness and reconciliation; no withholding from an evil or blasphemous word, or from an uncharitable

opinion or utterance ; no little wayside word, or deed of encouragement, or help, or consolation ; nay, finally, no trustful and prayerful act of resignation, wherein we accept cheerfully from God the lowly, toilsome way of patient endurance which He has laid before our feet ; —but, in so doing, the Lord Jesus has come to us a stranger, and we have taken Him in. So does the Lord desire to be taken into our hearts, freely, willingly, we opening the door not in awe and fear, but gladly and warmly, as to receive an humble guest who has no claim on us but that of the brotherhood of all in the love of God !

That there is something peculiarly sacred in the rites of hospitality has been acknowledged for ages in the usages of almost all the known nations of the earth. To have eaten at one's table, to have been sheltered under his roof, has been regarded as a sort of solemn pledge of peace and mutual protection. Whence this sacredness of hospitality, or the receiving of

strangers, had its origin it is not important here to inquire ; but no one can fail to see that to a Christian mind there must be a deep religious significance attaching to it. Our Lord has said that whosoever so befriends or takes in the stranger renders this service of mercy to Himself. In the literal statement there is doubtless meant only this, that in acting charitably and mercifully to all our fellow-men, because they are brethren of the Lord,—that is, the objects of his love, and of our love, so far as we love the Lord,—we are really doing God's will ; we are reciprocating God's love and kindness to us, we are serving the Lord in the way most pleasing to Him. This duty is specially required of us toward strangers, because it calls into activity an unselfish regard for all men as brethren ; it calls for a spirit of universal kindness, confidence, and charity toward our neighbor. The stranger is not one to whom we do good expecting good in return ; we do not befriend him because of his dignity,

or wealth, or power, or anything that can reflect a benefit on us. We take him in simply as a fellow-man, as one whom God has made and whom God loves, and whom God would have us love and treat with kindness if we love Him truly. Surely, in the befriending of strangers there is something sacred, something that appeals to the noblest sentiment of humanity, something into which heaven and the love of God flows down with mighty power. But above the natural duties of hospitality (which word may always recall to us this its sacred association when we remember its derivation from *hospes*, meaning the stranger) there is the spiritual act of hospitality, or receiving as a stranger one of the least of the Lord's brethren. The Lord's brethren are in the widest sense our neighbor, and this means all to whom we can do good. The neighbor, the brethren whom we are to serve and love, is therefore the *good* in our neighbor, or in any person or thing for which we



can act. When we seek the good of our neighbor, personally; when we seek the good of the Church, or of the country, then are we truly serving the Lord and loving Him. For the Lord is present in his own goodness, and there is no one good but God,—that is, all goodness is from Him. Spiritual hospitality, then, or the spiritually taking in of the stranger, consists in our befriending and helping, and unselfishly devoting ourselves to that which is good; not simply to that which we like or prefer, or consider good in our natural hearts,—for these things are no strangers, but our old intimates,—but to the good which comes from heaven, which is contained in every precept of our religion, which may be sought out and kindly fostered by us in our fellow-man, and which comes to us, a stranger, and is the Lord Himself in his Divine Humanity coming to us in the humble guise of our earthly duties toward ourselves and one another. It is the Lord's heavenly good that



lies concealed in every act of true piety, charity, and resistance of evil. And this heavenly good is the brother whom we are to take in to our hearts as a stranger. And if we do so, we shall learn in the day of judgment that we have been loving and serving the Lord Himself, who is the Only Good, and the source of all goodness.

To take into our houses the brethren, yea, to receive the Lord Himself when a stranger, is, then, to receive his good into our hearts and lives. This his goodness comes, as I have said, always as a stranger, for it is that which our natural heart at first neither knows nor loves. He is no old friend, no powerful benefactor, no acquaintance seemingly profitable to cultivate with anything worldly in view. No! the unselfish motive, the desire to do our simple duty in the sight of God, the resolution to deny self, the exercise of the heavenly virtues of patience and forgiveness, the willingness to cease from some evil thing in our life,—this

comes not at first with the familiar smile of a friend to be greeted and ushered in with joy. No! As a stranger do these heavenly motives of goodness come down and stand knocking at our hearts' doors. Who will take them in? Ah! who will open the door to this Divine Guest,—the Stranger to the sinful household He has come to save,—the Lord of heaven present in the garb of earthly humility? Who will open to Him, that He may come in and sup with us and we with Him?

“O how shall I receive thee,  
How greet thee, Lord, aright!  
All nations long to see thee,  
My hope, my heart's delight!

“O, kindle, Lord, most holy,  
The lamp within my breast,  
To do, in spirit lowly,  
All that may please thee best.”

## XII.

### The Unknown Hour; or, How rightly to Prepare to Die.

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*Lest coming suddenly He find you sleeping—St. Mark xiii. 36.*

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THERE is one central moment of our existence to which all our life in this world tends, and from which takes its beginning our endless life in the world to come. This is the hour of death,—that hour when we shall for ever lay aside this mortal body and go forth in our substantial spiritual body to inhabit for evermore the spiritual world. This change of abode from the material to the spiritual world is the greatest outward change that can befall us, for it involves a change of everything outside of ourselves; and all that remains unchanged, in that event, is that which is within ourselves. This is, indeed, not changed by the

event of death, really, although even in this, the inward self, there will be an apparent change; for in death we shall come more truly to know the character and the life that is within us than we have known it while living in this world.

But great as is this event of death, and wonderful as is the change of abode and all external circumstance wrought by it, there is another fact connected with it which is of far more immediate and urgent importance. For although the event of death does not itself produce a change in us, yet it does so change our outward condition that what we are at the hour of dying, that we must ever remain as to the essential and distinguishing character of our life. Here on earth it is otherwise. Here, from being evil, our lives may be made good; but not so when we come into the other world. For through all the changes we undergo in this life, our character is forming itself into either a heavenly or an infernal image; we are,

in the unseen depths of the inner life, either growing to be an angel or a devil; and, after we die, the character thus formed is not again changed.

This event, which calls us out of this world into the spiritual world, is, therefore, followed very shortly by another event, which is the determination of what character we are, whether good or evil, heavenly or infernal, and the allotment to us of an eternal abode in heaven or in hell. This event is called the Judgment, and it is for every soul that passes into the other world that last judgment of which we are warned in the Holy Word.

The judgment, as we read about it in the gospels, is always accompanied by the Coming of the Lord as the Son of Man, or as the Word of God. The Lord is described as coming in the glory of the Father, with all the holy angels; as coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory; and also, in another place, as coming forth from the



opened heavens, riding upon a White Horse, in righteousness to judge and make war. These expressions are all symbolic, like those other parables of the kingdom of heaven which our Lord spake, and they describe both the general judgment which is executed in the spiritual world when a Church or Divine dispensation is at an end, and the Lord comes, in his Divine Truth, to restore it anew; and, also, the particular judgment which the soul of every one undergoes when his natural life is ended and he enters the spiritual world and into the more immediate presence of God.

But when the soul is judged after death, it does not suffer any sudden and startling change; it is not called at once into a state entirely new and strange either of unhappiness or of bliss; neither does the Divine Judge regard the soul with anger, nor determine its future lot in any other wise than the soul has already determined it for itself. But this decision shall now be made known; this real

character of the soul shall now be revealed; that which was here concealed and misrepresented is there brought into the light. For there is nothing covered in our present life which shall not be then revealed, nor anything hid that shall not then be known; and that which here has been spoken in darkness shall be heard in the light; and that which we have uttered in the ear in closets shall be proclaimed upon the house-tops.

The judgment, therefore, consists essentially in a true revelation of the inner and actual character of man; and as this can be discerned only by the eye of the All-seeing, therefore it is said that God is the judge; and as it is discerned only in the light of the Divine Truth itself,—for in this light alone can all that is good and true be distinguished from what is evil and false,—therefore it is said by our Lord, “The Words that I have spoken unto you, the same shall judge you in the last day.” Therefore, again, when the Lord is represented

in the Revelation as coming in righteousness to judge and make war, his name is there called *THE WORD OF GOD*. Thus we shall be truly judged according to our deeds, and in the presence and sight of God; and that which shall judge us and determine truly and finally our real character and our fitness for association with angels in heaven or with the evil spirits in hell is the Divine Truth itself, called in the Bible the *WORD*, and also the Son of Man.

“Lest coming suddenly He find you sleeping.” We understand now what is here meant by the Lord’s coming,—that it refers to our own coming into his presence when death shall admit us into the spiritual world, and when our characters shall be plainly disclosed in the light of the Divine Truth. The Lord is always present with every one of us, and He sees and knows constantly what goes on within us as well as without us. But to us, because unseen, He seems far away; and because of the

darkness of our minds and the deceitful appearances which surround us in this world, we cannot truly know ourselves; nor so long as we remain in this world is our character entirely fixed. When death calls us into the spiritual world, then we come into the light of God's holy presence; outward appearances and delusions and all hypocrisies are cast off. We know ourselves then as we have not known or felt before, to be in the presence of the all-seeing God and Judge. Therefore this solemn moment is described in the Bible as the coming of the Lord.

And now, two important points of the Divine instruction concerning this event are to be noted. One is, that the Lord shall come suddenly,—that is, unawares; and, secondly, the solemn warning that, when He comes, we be not found sleeping. In other words, the practical truth urged upon us here is, that, although we are ignorant of the hour of our death, yet we should always be prepared for it.



The event of death and the coming of the Lord here referred to are identical, when the meaning of these words is applied to us individually, and not collectively. And the sudden coming of the Lord refers to our ignorance of the hour when we shall be called away: "For the Son of Man cometh at the hour when ye think not"; and the word suddenly here means also unawares. It refers to our ignorance, not only of the time of our death, but of the real condition of our souls; for by hour is spiritually meant the state or condition in which we are.

The Lord commands us, therefore, to be always watching for Him, and yet suffers us not to know when He shall come. He requires of us always to be prepared to be called at death into his presence to the judgment, and yet has made it impossible for us to know whether we have a longer or a shorter time to live; whether we shall be called to our account in a few hours, on the morrow, or after



many years. Likewise, we know not the exact state of our own souls, so great and so incessant is the conflict in us between opposing motives and principles; we know not, indeed, whether ours be the spiritual state called the evening or the morning or the early dawn. All we know is that our Lord is our master, who has intrusted in this earthly life to every man his work, and seemingly gone away; and that at an hour we know not He will return; and that He has commanded the porter to watch for his coming, lest, coming suddenly, He find us sleeping.

It is plain that if we knew, each one of us, the hour in which would end our earthly life, we would not be constantly on the watch, but would, very likely, consider our allotted period of earthly life as our own to use in the way that should please us best, while we would defer all preparation for the life to come until the last hour, vainly imagining that it would not then be too late. It would be in every way a

disadvantage were we to know beforehand when we are to die. The sure knowledge of our early death would deprive our life here of all enterprise and healthy interest in the world around us ; while the same knowledge of a long life would, as I have said, take away many a preventive to sinful indulgence which the fear of death now affords, and imperil our future welfare by allowing us to foster too exclusively our worldly and carnal affections. Moreover, if we knew that hour, we should all be governed more or less by fear and by hope of reward merely, and thus a constraint would be put upon our freedom, and this life on earth would not answer its appointed end,—namely, of developing our characters while we are in freedom to choose between good and evil.

But, although the hour of our death is thus hidden from us, we are none the less warned of its sure approach, and commanded to watch, lest, coming suddenly, the Master find us sleeping. The difference between the watchful state

and the sleeping state is the difference between the natural and the spiritual life. To be watchful does not mean merely to be thinking of death, and whether it will come to-day or to-morrow. Nothing is more hurtful to our mental health than a morbid dwelling on the thought of death; and that we might not make this a fixed, definite object of our contemplation would seem to be one cause why, in the Divine Providence, it is so carefully concealed from our knowledge until it is close at hand. The Lord wishes that we shall think of Him, labor for Him, and struggle manfully against our evils just when we are in our fullest vigor and best health. "Remember thy Creator in the days of thy youth" is the wise precept of the ancient sage. It is then we are in our fullest freedom, and no craven fear drives us reluctant to repentance, but we walk joyfully and bravely in the path of the Lord's commandments, not only seeking the kingdom of heaven of our own choice, but seeking it here

on earth as far as a holy and useful life will enable us to know its blessedness. But if to be watchful is not to be always thinking of death, what is it? The Lord says that the master gave to every man his work, and commanded the porter to watch. Now, the porter is not to watch idly for the return of the master only, but to watch well the household left in his charge and all the precious goods. So we are to watch over those things committed to us, and see that we keep our soul's household holy and clean and fit to be presented before the Lord when He shall come. The servants of the household are the knowledges of goodness and truth which the Lord gives to all who learn of Him in his Word, and the watchful porter and guard is our capacity to perceive these holy and true things and to preserve them from injury. But the evil things which tempt us from within, and which surround us in this outer world, these are what will surely destroy all those sacred treasures committed



to our care if we are not ever on the alert; the lusts of worldly and selfish affection, and all the fallacies and falsities of a carnal reason,—these, like the moth and rust, will corrupt the goodness and truth which the Lord has committed to our care, and, like the thief, will surely break through and steal. It is against these that we are to watch, and watch without ceasing. We are to be ever on our guard against every affection, thought, motive, or desire which will do violence to one of the holy and heavenly knowledges of truth which the Lord has put into our minds. We are thus ever to be awake; to keep our minds open to heavenly light; to never suffer our spirits to become heavy and sluggish, through the weakness of the flesh, and our discernment to be dull and slow to distinguish the right from the wrong, the pure from the impure, the just from the unjust, the holy from the profane.

The life merely natural, or merely of the bodily senses and their evidences, is a sleep;



for in it we neither know anything of our spiritual nature nor of the spiritual world in which we live; we know nothing of the life to come; we know no life other than that of the body. And, further, we are, in the merely natural life, wholly idle and dormant as to our spirits; we are cultivating no spiritual knowledges or motives; we are forming no heavenly affections; we are not even so far awake as to see our own gross evils and errors, and we are too sluggish and burdened with mere earthly and corporeal concerns to lift a hand against them should we ever by some stray gleam of light recognize these foul invaders in their true characters. Such is the condition of those who are found sleeping when the Lord comes. The hereditary evils of their nature have taken strong hold on them as on all; and they, indifferent to all the warnings of God's Word, have given themselves up to the slumber of sensual ease and of uncontrolled self-love, until their minds have become wholly

despoiled of the holy truths of faith, and germs of heavenly affections once planted there, and in darkness and desolation these await the Master's coming.

Let us be ever on the watch; not against death, for that shall truly come as a good angel sent direct from the merciful Lord to lead us to our eternal home, but against all those evil invaders who in many wiles and snares are constantly surrounding our habitation and laying wait for our souls. Aware of the frailty of our hearts, of our constant need of the Divine aid and guidance, let not our souls give over their watch for a moment, but be ever awake, walking in the light, and praying that we enter not into temptation. So the Lord, though He come suddenly, shall yet not find us sleeping, and we, having done each one his work, shall be ready to enter into our rest and our reward.

The practical result of our meditation on the subject before us is, that we are left in

ignorance of the hour of our death in order that we may *the better prepare for it* and for the judgment that accompanies it. Our preparation consists not in dwelling anxiously on the event itself, since that is in every sense a blessing, and we know that it will come just at that time when it is best for us to die; but our true preparation is in being ever awake and on the watch against the deadening influence of carnal and earthly things upon our souls, since there is no more cunning and no dearer pursuit for evil spirits than to be lulling our souls into that indifference and forgetfulness regarding the holy things of faith and religion, that will at length strip us of all our defenders and leave us forever the slaves of their sinful enticements. And the way to wake and watch is, to keep ever in mind the truths of the Divine Word, and to order our daily lives in accordance therewith. This it is to have our loins girded and our lights burning, and to be like servants who wait for

their true and everlasting Lord. *Blessed are those servants whom the Lord, when He cometh, shall find watching; and if He shall come in the second watch or come in the third watch and find them so, blessed are those servants!*

THE END.









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