Alexander Maclaren

Expositions of Holy Scripture-Psalms

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EXPOSITIONS OF HOLY SCRIPTURE

PSALMS

by

ALEXANDER MACLAREN, D. D., Litt. D.

VOLUME I: PSALMS *I to XLIX*

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BLESSEDNESS AND PRAISE

> 'Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful. 2. But his delight is in the law of the Lord.' — PSALM i. 1, 2.

> 'Let every thing that hath breath praise the Lord. Praise ye the
> Lord.'—PSALM cl. 6.

The Psalter is the echo in devout hearts of the other portions of divine revelation. There are in it, indeed, further disclosures of God's mind and purposes, but its especial characteristic is—the reflection of the light of God from brightened faces and believing hearts. As we hold it to be inspired, we

cannot simply say that it is man's response to God's voice. But if the rest of Scripture may be called the speech of the Spirit of God *to* men, this book is the answer of the Spirit of God *in* men.

These two verses which I venture to lay side by side present in a very remarkable way this characteristic. It is not by accident that they stand where they do, the first and last verses of the whole collection, enclosing all, as it were, within a golden ring, and bending round to meet each other. They are the summing up of the whole purpose and issue of God's revelation to men.

The first and second psalms echo the two main portions of the old revelation—the Law and the Prophets. The first of them is taken up with the celebration of the blessedness and fruitful, stable being of the man who loves the Law of the Lord, as contrasted with the rootless and barren life of the ungodly, who is like the chaff. The second is occupied with the contemplation of the divine 'decree' by which the coming King is set in God's 'holy hill of Zion,' and of the blessedness of 'all they who put their trust in Him,' as contrasted with the swift destruction that shall fall on the vain imaginations of the rebellious heathen and banded kings of earth.

The words of our first text, then, may well stand at the beginning of the Psalter. They express the great purpose for which God has given His Law. They are

the witness of human experience to the substantial, though partial, accomplishment of that purpose. They rise in buoyant triumph over that which is painful and apparently opposed to it; and in spite of sorrow and sin, proclaim the blessedness of the life which is rooted in the Law of the Lord.

The last words of the book are as significant as its first. The closing psalms are one long call to praise—they probably date from the time of the restoration under Ezra and Nehemiah, when, as we know, 'the service of song' was carefully re-established, and the harps which had hung silent upon the willows by the rivers of Babylon woke again their ancient melodies. These psalms climb higher and higher in their rapturous call to all creatures, animate and inanimate, on earth and in heaven, to praise Him. The golden waves of music and song pour out ever faster and fuller. At last we hear this invocation to every instrument of music to praise Him, responded to, as we may suppose, by each, in turn as summoned, adding its tributary notes to the broadening river of harmony—until all, with gathered might of glad sound blended with the crash of many voices, unite in the final words, 'Let every thing that hath breath praise the Lord. Praise ye the Lord.'

I. We have here a twofold declaration of God's great purpose in all His self-revelation, and especially in the Gospel of His Son.

Our first text may be translated as a joyful exclamation, 'Oh! the blessedness of the man—whose delight is in the law of the Lord.' Our second is an invocation or a command. The one then expresses the purpose which God secures by His gift of the Law; the other the purpose which He summons us to fulfil by the tribute of our hearts and songs—man's happiness and God's glory.

His purpose is Man's blessedness.

That is but another way of saying, God is love. For love, as we know it, is eminently the desire for the happiness of the person on whom it is fixed. And unless the love of God be like ours, however it may transcend it, there is no revelation of Him to our hearts at all. If He be love, then He 'delights in the prosperity' of His children.

And that purpose runs through all His acts. For perfect love is all-pervasive, and even with us men, it rules the whole being; nor does he love at all who seeks the welfare of the heart he clings to by fits and starts, by some of his acts and not by others. When God comes forth from the unvisioned light, which is thick darkness, of His own eternal, self-adequate Being, and flashes into energy in Creation, Providence, or Grace, the Law of His Working and His Purpose are one, in all regions. The unity of the divine acts depends on this—that all flow from one deep source, and all move to one mighty end. Standing on the height to which His own

declarations of His own nature lift our feebleness, we can see how the 'river of God that waters the garden' and 'parts' into many 'heads,' gushes from one fountain. One of the psalms puts what people call the 'philosophy' of creation and of providence very clearly, in accordance with this thought—that the love of God is the source, and the blessedness of man the end, of all His work: 'To Him that made great lights; for His mercy endureth for ever. To Him that slew mighty kings; for His mercy endureth for ever.'

Creation, then, is the effluence of the loving heart of God. Though the sacred characters be but partially legible to us now, what He wrote, on stars and flowers, on the infinitely great and the infinitely small, on the infinitely near and the infinitely far off, with His creating hand, was the one inscription—God is love. And as in nature, so in providence. The origination, and the support, and the direction of all things, are the works and the heralds of the same love. It is printed in starry letters on the sky. It is graven on the rocks, and breathed by the flowers. It is spoken as a dark saying even by sorrow and pain. The mysteries of destructive and crushing providences have come from the same source. And he who can see with the Psalmist the ever-during mercy of the Lord, as the reason of creation and of judgments, has in his hands the golden key which opens all the locks in the palace chambers of the great King. He only hath penetrated to the secret of things material, and stands in the light at the centre,

who understands that all comes from the one source —God's endless desire for the blessedness of His creatures.

But while all God's works do thus praise Him by testifying that He seeks to bless His creatures, the loftiest example of that desire is, of course, found in His revelation of Himself to men's hearts and consciences, to men's spirits and wills. That mightiest act of love, beginning in the long-past generations, has culminated in Him in whom 'dwelleth the whole fulness of the Godhead bodily,' and in whose work is all the love—the perfect, inconceivable, patient, omnipotent love of our redeeming God.

And then, remember that this is not inconsistent with or contradicted by the sterner aspects of that revelation, which cannot be denied, and ought not to be minimised or softened. *Here*, on the right hand, are the flowery slopes of the Mount of Blessing; *there*, on the left, the barren, stern, thunder-riven, lightning-splintered pinnacles of the Mount of Cursing. Every clear note of benediction hath its low minor of imprecation from the other side. Between the two, overhung by the hopes of the one, and frowned upon and dominated by the threatenings of the other, is pitched the little camp of our human life, and the path of our pilgrimage runs in the trough of the valley between. And yet—might we not go a step farther, and say that above the parted summits stretches the one overarching blue, uniting them both, and their roots deep down below the

surface interlace and twine together? That is to say, the threatenings and rebukes, the acts of retributive judgment, which are contained in the revelation of God, are no limitation nor disturbance of the clear and happy faith that all which we behold is full of blessing, and that all comes from the Father's hand. They are the garb in which His Love needs to array itself when it comes in contact with man's sin and man's evil. The love of God appears no less when it teaches us in grave sad tones that 'the wages of sin is death,' than when it proclaims that 'the gift of God is eternal life.'

Love threatens that it may never have to execute its threats. Love warns that we may be wise in time. Love prophesies that its sad forebodings may not be fulfilled. And love smites with lighter strokes of premonitory chastisements, that we may never need to feel the whips of scorpions.

Remember, too, that these sterner aspects both of Law and of Gospel point this lesson—that we shall very much misunderstand God's purpose if we suppose it to be blessedness for us men *anyhow*, irrespective altogether of character. Some people seem to think that God loves us so much, as they would say—so little, so ignobly, as I would say—as that He only desires us to be happy. They seem to think that the divine love is tarnished unless it provides for men's felicity, whether they are God-loving and God-like or no. Thus the solemn and majestic love of the Father in heaven is to be brought

down to a weak good nature, which only desires that the child shall cease crying and be happy, and does not mind by what means that end is reached. God's purpose *is* blessedness; but, as this very text tells us, not blessedness anyhow, but one which will not and cannot be given by God to those who walk in the way of sinners. His love desires that we should be holy, and 'followers of God as dear children'—and the blessedness which it bestows comes from pardon and growing fellowship with Him. It can no more fall on rebellious hearts than the pure crystals of the snow can lie and sparkle on the hot, black cone of a volcano.

The other text that I have read sets forth another view of God's purpose. God seeks our praise. The glory of God is the end of all the divine actions. Now, that is a statement which no doubt is irrefragable, and a plain deduction from the very conception of an infinite Being. But it may be held in such connections, and spoken with such erroneous application, and so divorced from other truths, that instead of being what it is in the Bible, good news, it shall become a curse and a lie. It may be so understood as to describe not our Father in heaven, but an almighty devil! But, when the thought that God's purpose in all His acts is His own glory, is firmly united with that other, that His purpose in all His acts is our blessing, then we begin to understand how full of joy it may be for us. His glory is sought by Him in the manifestation of His loving heart,

mirrored in our illuminated and gladdened hearts. Such a glory is not unworthy of infinite love. It has nothing in common with the ambitious and hungry greed of men for reputation or self-display. That desire is altogether ignoble and selfish when it is found in human hearts; and it would be none the less ignoble and selfish if it were magnified into infinitude, and transferred to the divine. But to say that God's glory is His great end, is surely but another way of saying that He is love. The love that seeks to bless us desires, as all love does, that it should be known for what it is, that it should be recognised in our glad hearts, and smiled back again from our brightened faces. God desires that we should know Him, and so have Eternal Life; He desires that knowing Him, we should love Him, and loving should praise, and so should glorify Him. He desires that there should be an interchange of love bestowing and love receiving, of gifts showered down and of praise ascending, of fire falling from the heavens and sweet incense, from grateful hearts, going up in fragrant clouds acceptable unto God. It is a sign of a Fatherly heart that He '*seeketh* such to worship Him'. He desires to be glorified by our praise, because He loves us so much. He commences with an offer, He advances to a command. He gives first, and then (not till then) He comes seeking fruit from the 'trees' which are 'the planting of the Lord, that He might be glorified.' His plea is not 'the vineyard belongs to Me, and I have a right to its fruits,' but 'what could have been done more to My

vineyard, that I have not done in it?—judge between Me and My vineyard.' First, He showers down blessings; then, He looks for the revenue of praise!

II. We may also take these passages as giving us a twofold expression of the actual effects of God's revelation, especially in the Gospel, even here upon earth.

The one text is the joyful exclamation built upon experience and observation. The other is a call which is answered in some measure even by voices that are often dumb in unthankfulness, often broken by sobs, often murmuring in penitence.

God does actually, though not completely, make men blessed here. Our text sums up the experience of all the devout hearts and lives whose emotions are expressed in the Psalms. He who wrote this psalm would preface the whole book by words into which the spirit of the book is distilled. It will have much to say of sorrow and pain. It will touch many a low note of wailing and of grief. There will be complaints and penitence, and sighs almost of despair before it closes. But this which he puts first is the note of the whole. So it is in our histories. They will run through many a dark and desert place. We shall have bitterness and trials in abundance, there will be many an hour of sadness caused by my own evil, and many a hard struggle with it. But high above all these mists and clouds will rise the hope that seeks the skies, and deep beneath all the surface agitations

of storms and currents there will be the unmoved stillness of the central ocean of peace in our hearts. In the 'valley of weeping' we may still be 'blessed' if 'the ways' are in our hearts, and if we make of the very tears 'a well,' drawing refreshment from the very trials. With all its sorrows and pains, its fightings and fears, its tribulations in the world, and its chastenings from a Father's hand, the life of a Christian is a happy life, and 'the joy of the Lord' remains with His servants.

More than twenty centuries have passed since that psalm was written. As many stretched dim behind the Psalmist as he sang. He was gathering up in one sentence the spirit of the past, and confirming it by his own life's history. And has any one that has lived since then stood up and said—'Behold! I have found it otherwise. I have waited on God, and He has not heard my cry. I have served Him, and that for nought. I have trusted in Him, and been disappointed. I have sought His face—in vain. And I say, from my own experience, that the man who trusts in Him is *not* blessed'? Not one, thank God! The history of the past, so far as this matter is concerned, may be put in one sentence 'They looked unto Him and were lightened, and their faces were not ashamed,' and as for the present, are there not some of us who can say, 'This poor man cried, and the Lord heard him, and saved him out of all his troubles'?

Brethren! make the experiment for yourselves. Test

this experience by your own simple affiance and living trust in Jesus Christ. We have the experience of all generations to encourage us. What has blessed them is enough for you and me. Like the meal and the oil, which were the Prophet's resource in famine, yesterday's supply does not diminish to-morrow's store. We, too, may have all that gladdened the hearts and stayed the spirits of the saints of old. 'Oh! taste and see that God is good.' 'Blessed is the man that trusteth in Him.'

So, too, God's gift produces man's praise.

What is it that He desires from us? Nothing but our thankful recognition and reception of His benefits. We honour God by taking the full cup of salvation which He commends to our lips, and by calling, while we drink, upon the name of the Lord. Our true response to His Word, which is essentially a proffer of blessing to us, is to open our hearts to receive, and, receiving, to render grateful acknowledgment. The echo of love which gives and forgives, is love which accepts and thanks. We have but to lift up our empty and impure hands, opened wide to receive the gift which He lays in them—and though they be empty and impure, yet 'the lifting up of our hands' is 'as the evening sacrifice'; our sense of need stands in the place of all offerings. The stained thankfulness of our poor hearts is accepted by Him who inhabits the praises of eternity, and yet delights in the praises of Israel. He bends from heaven to give, and all He asks is that we should take. He only seeks our

thankfulness—but He does seek it. And wherever His grace is discerned, and His love is welcomed, there praise breaks forth, as surely as streams pour from the cave of the glacier when the sun of summer melts it, or earth answers the touch of spring with flowers.

And that effect is produced, notwithstanding all the complaints and sighs and tears which sometimes choke our praise. It *is* produced even while these last; the psalms of thanksgiving are not all reserved for the end of the book. But even in those which read like the very sobs of a broken heart, there is ever present some tone of grateful acknowledgment of God's mercy. He sends us sorrow, and He wills that we should weep—but they should be tears like David's, who, at the lowest point of his fortunes, when he plaintively besought God, 'Put Thou my tears into Thy bottle'—could say in the same breath, 'Thy vows are upon me, O God: I will render praises unto Thee.' God works on our souls that we may have the consciousness of sin, and He wills that we should come with broken and contrite hearts, and like the king of Israel wail out our confessions and supplications—'Have mercy upon me, O God! according to Thy loving-kindness.' But, like him, we should even in our lowliest abasement, when our hearts are bruised, be able to say along with our contrition, 'Open Thou my lips, and my mouth shall show forth Thy praise.' Our sorrows are never so great that they hide our mercies. The sky is never so covered with clouds that neither sun nor stars appear

for many days. And in every Christian heart the low tones of lamentation and confession are blended with grateful praise. So it is even in the darkest moments, whilst the blast of misfortune and misery is as a storm against the wall.

But a brighter hope even for our life here rises from these words, if we think of the place which they hold in the whole book. They are the last words. Whatever other notes have been sounded in its course, all ends in this. The winter's day has had its melancholy grey sky, with many a bitter dash of snow and rain—but it has stormed itself out, and at eventide, a rent in the clouds reveals the sun, and it closes in peaceful clearness of light.

The note of gladness heard at the beginning, 'Oh! the blessedness of the man that delights in the law of the Lord,' holds on persistently, like a subdued and almost bewildered undercurrent of sweet sound amid all the movements of some colossal symphony, through tears and sobs, confession and complaint, and it springs up at the close triumphant, like the ruddy spires of a flame long smothered, and swells and broadens, and draws all the intricate harmonies into its own rushing tide. Some of you remember the great musical work which has these very words for its theme. It begins with the call, 'All that hath life and breath, praise ye the Lord,' and although the gladness saddens into the plaintive cry of a soul sick with hope deferred, 'Will the night soon pass?' yet, ere the close, all discords are reconciled, and at last,

with assurance firmer for the experience of passing sorrows, loud as the voice of many waters and sweet as harpers harping with their harps, the joyful invocation peals forth again, and all ends, as it does in a Christian man's life, and as it does in this book, with 'Praise ye the Lord.'

III. We have here also a twofold prophecy of the perfection of Heaven.

Whilst it is true that both of these purposes are accomplished here and now, it is also true that their accomplishment is but partial, and that therefore for their fulfilment we have to lift our eyes beyond this world of imperfect faith, of incomplete blessedness, of interrupted praise. Whether the Psalmist looked forward thus we do not know. But for us, the very shortcomings of our joys and of our songs are prophetic of the perfect and perpetual rapture of the one, and the perfect and perpetual music of the other. We know that He who has given us so much will not stay His hand until He has perfected that which concerns us. We know that He who has taught our dumb hearts to magnify His name will not cease till 'out of the lips of babes and sucklings, He has perfected praise.' We know that the pilgrims in whose hearts are the ways are blessed, and we are sure that a fuller blessedness must belong to those who have reached the journey's end.

And so these words give us a twofold aspect of that future on which our longing hopes may well fix.

It is the perfection of man's blessedness. Then the joyous exclamation of our first text, which we have often had to strive hard not to disbelieve, will be no more a truth of faith but a truth of experience. Here we have had to trust that it was so, even when we could scarce cleave to the confidence. There, memory will look back on our wanderings through this great wilderness, and, enlightened by the issue of them all, will speak only of Mercy and Goodness as our angel guides all our lives. The end will crown the work. Pure unmingled consciousness of bliss will fill all hearts, and break into the old exclamation, which we had sometimes to stifle sobs ere we could speak on earth. When He says, 'Come in! ye blessed of My Father,' all our tears and fears, and pains and sins, will be forgotten, and we shall but have to say, in wonder and joy, 'Blessed are they that dwell in Thy house; they will be still praising Thee.'

It is the perfection of God's praise. We may possibly venture to see in these wonderful words of our text a dim and far-off hint of a possibility that seems to be pointed at in many parts of Scripture—that the blessings of Christ's mighty work shall, in some measure and manner, pass through man to his dwelling-place and its creatures. Dark shadows of evil—the mystery of pain and sorrow—lie over earth and all its tribes. 'We look for new heavens and a new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness.' And the statements of Scripture which represent creation as suffering by man's sin, and participant in its degree

in man's redemption, seem too emphatic and precise, as well as too frequent, and in too didactic connections, to be lightly brushed aside as poetic imagery. May it not be that man's transgression

'Broke the fair music that all creatures made
To their great Lord, whose love their motion swayed,'

and that man's restoration may, indeed, bring back all that hath life and breath to a harmonious blessedness—according to the deep and enigmatical words, which declare that 'the creature itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the liberty of the glory of the children of God'? Be that as it may, at all events our second text opens to us the gates of the heavenly temple, and shows us there the saintly ranks and angel companies gathered in the city whose walls are salvation and its gates praise. They harmonise with that other later vision of heaven which the Seer in Patmos beheld, not only in setting before us worship as the glad work of all who are there, but in teaching the connection between the praises of men, and the answering hymns of angels. The harps of heaven are hushed to hear *their* praise who can sing, 'Thou hast redeemed us to God by Thy blood,' and, in answer to that hymn of thanksgiving for unexampled deliverance and resorting grace, the angels around the throne break forth into new songs to the Lamb that was slain—while still wider spread the broadening circles of harmonious praise, till at last 'every creature which

is in heaven, and on the earth, and under the earth, and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them,' join in the mighty hymn of 'Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, unto Him that sitteth upon the throne, and to the Lamb for ever and ever.' Then the rapturous exclamation from human souls redeemed, —'Oh! the blessedness of the men whom Thou hast loved and saved,' shall be answered by choral praise from everything that hath breath.

And are you dumb, my friend, in these universal bursts of praise? Is that because you have not chosen to take the universal blessing which God gives? You have nothing to do but to receive the things that are freely given to you of God—the forgiveness, the cleansing, the life, that come from Christ by faith. Take them, and call upon the name of the Lord, And can you refuse His gifts and withhold your praise? You can be eloquent in thanks to those who do you kindnesses, and in praise of those whom you admire and love, but your best Friend receives none of your gratitude and none of your praise. Ignoble silence and dull unthankfulness—with these you requite your Saviour! 'I tell you that, if these should hold their peace, the stones would immediately cry out!'

A STAIRCASE OF THREE STEPS

> 'All those that put their trust in Thee … them also that love Thy name … the righteous.'—PSALM v. 11, 12.

I have ventured to isolate these three clauses from their context, because, if taken in their sequence, they are very significant of the true path by which men draw nigh to God and become righteous. They are all three designations of the same people, but regarded under different aspects and at different stages. There is a distinct order in them, and whether the Psalmist was fully conscious of it or not, he was anticipating and stating, with wonderful distinctness, the Christian sequence—faith, love, righteousness.

These three are the three flights of stairs, as it were, which lead men up to God and to perfection, or if you like to take another metaphor, meaning the same thing, they are respectively the root, the stalk, and the fruit of religion. 'They that put their trust in Thee … them also that love Thy Name … the righteous.'

I. So, then, the first thought here is that the foundation of all is trust.

Now, the word that is employed here is very significant. In its literal force it really means to 'flee to a refuge.' And that the literal signification has not altogether been lost in the spiritual and metaphorical use of it, as a term expressive of religious experience, is quite plain from many of the cases in which it

occurs. Let me just repeat one of them to you. 'Be merciful unto me, O God, be merciful to me, for my soul trusteth in Thee; yea, in the shadow of Thy wings will I make my refuge.' There the picture that is in the words is distinctly before the Psalmist's mind, and he is thinking not only of the act of mind and heart by which he casts himself in confidence upon God, but upon that which represents it in symbol, the act by which a man flees into some hiding-place. The psalm is said in the superscription to have been written when David hid in a cave from his persecutor. Though no weight be given to that statement, it suggests the impression made by the psalm. In imagination we can see the rough sides of the cavern that sheltered him arching over the fugitive, like the wings of some great bird, and just as he has fled thither with eager feet and is safely hidden from his pursuers there, so he has betaken himself to the everlasting Rock, in the cleft of which he is at rest and secure. To trust in God is neither more nor less than to flee to Him for refuge, and there to be at peace. The same presence of the original metaphor, colouring the same religious thought, is found in the beautiful words with which Boaz welcomes Ruth, when he prays for her that the God of Israel may reward her, 'under the shadow of whose wings thou hast come to trust.'

So, as a man in peril runs into a hiding-place or fortress, as the chickens beneath the outspread wing of the mother bird nestle close in the warm feathers

and are safe and well, the soul that trusts takes its flight straight to God, and in Him reposes and is secure.

Now, it seems to me that such a figure as that is worth tons of theological lectures about the true nature of faith, and that it tells us, by means of a picture that says a great deal more than many a treatise, that faith is something very different from a cold-blooded act of believing in the truth of certain propositions; that it is the flight of the soul—knowing itself to be in peril, and naked, and unarmed—into the strong Fortress.

What is it that keeps a man safe when he thus has around him the walls of some citadel? Is it himself, is it the act by which he took refuge, or is it the battlements behind which he crouches? So in faith—which is more than a process of a man's understanding, and is not merely the saying, 'Yes, I believe all that is in the Bible is true; at any rate, it is not for me to contradict it,' but is the running of the man, when he knows himself to be in danger, into the very arms of God—it is not the running that makes him safe, but it is the arms to which he runs.

If we would only lay to heart that the very essence of religion lies in this 'flight of the lonely soul to the only God,' we should understand better than we do what He asks from us in order that He may defend us, and how blessed and certain His defence is. So let us clear our minds from the thought that anything is

worth calling trust which is not thus taking refuge in God Himself.

Now, I need not remind you, I suppose, that all this is just as true about us as it was about David, and that the emotion or the act of his will and heart which he expresses in these words of my text is neither more nor less than the Christian act of faith. There is no difference except a difference of development; there is no difference between the road to God marked out in the Psalms, and the road to God laid down in the Gospels. The Psalmist who said, 'Trust ye in the Lord for ever,' and the Apostle who said, 'Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved,' were preaching identically the same doctrine. One of them could speak more fully than the other could of the Person on whom trust was to be rested, but the trust itself was the same, and the Person on whom it rested was the same, though His Name of old was Jehovah, and His Name to-day is 'Immanuel, God with us.'

Nor need I do more than point out how the context of the words that I have ventured to detach from their surroundings is instructive: 'Let all those that put their trust in Thee rejoice because Thou defendest them.' The word for defending there continues the metaphor that lies in the word for 'trust,' for it means literally to cover over and so to protect. Thus, when a man runs to God for His refuge, God

'Covers his defenceless head
With the shadow of His wings.'

And the joy of trust is, first, that it brings round me the whole omnipotence of God for my defence, and the whole tenderness of God for my consolation, and next, that in the very exercise of trust in such defence, so fortified and vindicated by experience, there is great reward. All who thus flee into the refuge shall find refuge whither they flee, and shall be glad.

II. Then the next thought of my texts, which I do not force into them, but which results, as it seems to me, distinctly from the order in which they occur in the context, is that love follows trust.

'All those that put their trust in Thee—they also that love Thee.' If I am to love God, I must be quite sure that God loves me. My love can never be anything else than an answer to His. It can only be secondary and derived, or I would rather say reflected and flashed back from His. And so, very significantly, the Psalmist says, 'Those that love Thy Name,' meaning by 'Name,' as is always meant by it, the revealed character of God. If I am to love God, He must not hide in the darkness behind His infinity, but must come out and give me something about Him that I know. The three letters G O D mean nothing, and there is no power in them to stir a man's heart. It must be the knowledge of the acts of God that brings men to love Him. And there is no

way of getting that knowledge but through the faith which, as I said, must precede love. For faith realises the fact that God loves. 'We have known and believed the love that God hath to us.' The first step is to grasp the great truth of the loving God, and through that truth to grasp the God that loves. And then, and not till then, does there spring up in a man's heart love towards Him. But it is only the faith that is set on Him who hath declared the Father unto us that gives us for our very own the grasp of the facts, which facts are the only possible fuel that can kindle love in a human heart. 'We love Him because He first loved us,' and we shall never know that He loves us unless we come to the knowledge through the road of faith. So John himself tells us when he says, in the words that I have already quoted, 'We have known and believed.' He puts the foundation last, 'We have known,' because 'we have believed' 'the love that God hath to us.'

And so faith is the only possible means by which any of us can ever experience, as well as realise, the love that kindles ours. It is the possession of the fact of redemption for my very own and of the blessings which accompany it, and that alone, that binds a man to God in the bonds of love that cannot be broken, and that subdues and unites all vagrant emotions, affections, and desires in the mighty tide of a love that ever sets towards Him. As surely as the silvery moon in the sky draws after it the heaped waters of the ocean all round the world, so God's

love draws ours. They that believe contemplate, and they that believe experience the effects of that divine love, which must be experienced ere our answering love can be flashed back to heaven.

Students of acoustics tell us that if you have two stringed instruments in adjacent apartments, tuned to the same pitch, a note sounded on one of them will be feebly vibrated upon the other as soon as the waves of sound have reached the sensitive string. In like manner a man's heart gives off a faint, but musical, little tinkle of answering love to God when the deep note of God's love to him, struck on the chords of heaven up yonder, reaches his poor heart.

Love follows trust. So, brethren, if we desire to be warmed, let us get into the sunshine and abide there. If we desire to have our hearts filled with love to God, do not let us waste our time in trying to pump up artificial emotions or to persuade ourselves that we love Him better than we do, but let us fix our thoughts and fasten our refuge-seeking trust on Him, and then that shall kindle ours.

III. Lastly, righteousness follows trust and love.

The last description here of the man who begins as a believer and then advances to being a lover is *righteous*. That is the evangelical order. That is the great blessing and beauty of Christianity, that it goes an altogether different way to work to make men good from that which any other system has ever

dreamed of. It says, first of all, trust, and that will create love and that will ensure obedience. Faith leads to righteousness because, in the very act of trusting God, I come out of myself, and going out of myself and ceasing from all self-admiration and self-dependence and self-centred life is the beginning of all good and has in it the germ of all righteousness, even as to live for self is the mother tincture out of which we can make all sins.

And faith leads to righteousness in another way. Open the heart and Christ comes in. Trust Him and He fills our poor nature with 'the law of the Spirit of life that was in Christ Jesus,' and that 'makes me free from the law of sin and death.' Righteousness, meaning thereby just what irreligious men mean by it—viz. good living, plain obedience to the ordinary recognised dictates of morality, going straight—that is most surely attained when we cease from our own works and say to Jesus Christ, 'Lord, I cannot walk in the narrow path. Do Thou Thyself come to me and fill my heart and keep my feet.' They that trust and love are 'found in Him, not having their own righteousness, but that which is of God by faith.'

And love leads to righteousness because it brings the one motive into play in our hearts which turns duty into delight, toil into joy, and makes us love better to do what will please our beloved Lover than anything besides. Why did Jesus Christ say,'My yoke is easy and My burden is light'? Was it because He diminished the weight of duties or laid down an

easier slipshod morality than had been enjoined before? No! He intensified it all, and His Commandment is far harder to flesh and blood than any commandments that were ever given. But for all that, the yoke that He lays upon our necks is, if I may so say, padded with velvet; and the burden that we have to draw behind us is laid upon wheels that will turn so easily that the load is diminished, inasmuch as for Duty He substitutes Himself and says to us, 'If ye love Me, keep My Commandments.'

So, dear brethren! here is a very easily applied, and a very far-reaching test for us who call ourselves Christians: Does our love and does our trust culminate in practical righteousness? We are all tempted to make too much of the emotions of the religious life, and too little of its persistent, dogged obedience. We are all too apt to think that a Christian is a man that believes in Jesus Christ. 'Justification by faith alone without the works of the law' used to be the watchword of the Evangelical Church. It might be so held as to be either a blessed truth or a great error, and many of us make it an error instead of a blessing.

On the other hand, there is only one way by which righteousness can be attained, and that is: first by faith and then by love. Here are three steps: 'we have known and believed the love that God hath to us'; that is the broad, bottom step. And above it 'we love Him because He first loved us,' that is the central one. And on the top of all, 'herein is our love made

perfect that we keep His Commandments.' They that trust are they also who love Thy Name, and they who trust through love are, and only they are, the righteous.

ONE SAYING FROM THREE MEN

'The wicked hath said in his heart, I shall not be moved.'
—PSALM x. 6.

'Because He is at my right hand, I shall not be moved.'
—PSALM xvi. 8.

'And in my prosperity I said, I shall never be moved.'
—PSALM xxx. 6.

How differently the same things sound when said by different men! Here are three people giving utterance to almost the same sentiment of confidence. A wicked man says it, and it is insane presumption and defiance. A good man says it, having been lulled into false security by easy times, and it is a mistake that needs chastisement. A

humble believing soul says it, and it is the expression of a certain and blessed truth. 'The wicked saith in his heart, I shall not be moved.' A good man, led astray by his prosperity, said, 'I shall not be moved,' and the last of the three put a little clause in which makes all the difference, '*because He is at my right hand*, I shall never be moved.' So, then, we have the mad arrogance of godless confidence, the mistake of a good man that needs correction, and the warranted confidence of a believing soul.

I. The mad arrogance of godless confidence.

The 'wicked' man, in the psalm from which our first text comes, said a good many wrong things 'in his heart.' The tacit assumptions on which a life is based, though they may never come to consciousness, and still less to utterance, are the really important things. I dare say this 'wicked man' was a good Jew with his lips, and said his prayers all properly, but in his heart he had two working beliefs. One is thus expressed: 'As for all his enemies, he puffeth at them. He hath said in his heart, I shall not be moved.' The other is put into words thus: 'He hath said in his heart, God hath forgotten, He hideth His face. He will never see it.'

That is to say, the only explanation of a godless life, unless the man is an idiot, is that there lie beneath it, as formative principles and unspoken assumptions, guiding and shaping it, one or both of these two thoughts: either 'There is no God,' or 'He

does not care what I do, and I am safe to go on for evermore in the present fashion.' It might seem as if a man with the facts of human life before him, could not, even in the insanest arrogance, say, 'I shall not be moved, for I shall never be in adversity.' But we have an awful power—and the fact that we exercise, and choose to exercise, it is one of the strange riddles of our enigmatical existence and characters—of ignoring unwelcome facts, and going cheerily on as though we had annihilated them, because we do not reflect upon them. So this man, in the midst of a world in which there is no stay, and whilst he saw all round him the most startling and tragical instances of sudden change and complete collapse, stands quietly and says, 'Ah! *I* shall never be moved'; 'God doth not require it.'

That absurdity is the basis of every life that is not a life of consecration and devotion—so far as it has a basis of conviction at all. The 'wicked' man's true faith is this, absurd as it may sound when you drag it out into clear, distinct utterance, whatever may be his professions. I wonder if there are any of us whose life can only be acquitted of being utterly unreasonable and ridiculous by the assumption, 'I shall never be moved'?

Have you a lease of your goods? Do you think you are tenants at will or owners? Which? Is there any reason why any of us should escape, as some of us live as if we believed we should escape, the certain fate of all others? If there is not, what about the

sanity of the man whose whole life is built upon a blunder? He is convicted of the grossest folly, unless he be assured that either there is no God, or that He does not care one rush about what we do, and that consequently we are certain of a continuance in our present state.

Do you say in your heart, 'I shall never be moved'? Then you must be strong enough to resist every tempest that beats against you. Is that so? 'I shall never be moved'—then nothing that contributes to your well-being will ever slip from your grasp, but you will be able to hold it tight. Is that so? 'I shall never be moved'—then there is no grave waiting for you. Is that so? Unless these three assumptions be warranted, every godless man is making a hideous blunder, and his character is the sentence pronounced by the loving lips of Incarnate Truth on the rich man who thought that he had 'much goods laid up for many years,' and had only to be merry —'Thou fool! Thou fool!'

If an engineer builds a bridge across a river without due calculation of the force of the winds that blow down the gorge, the bridge will be at the bottom of the stream some stormy night, and the train piled on the fragments of it in hideous ruin. And with equal certainty the end of the first utterer of this speech can be calculated, and is foretold in the psalm, 'The Lord is King for ever and ever…. The godless are perished out of the land.'

II. We have in our second text the mistake of a good man who has been lulled into false confidence.

The Psalmist admits his error by the acknowledgment that he spoke 'in my prosperity'; or, as the word might be rendered, 'in my *security*.' This suggests to us the mistake into which even good men, lulled by the quiet continuance of peaceful days, are certain to fall, unless there be continual watchfulness exercised by them.

It is a very significant fact that the word which is translated in our Authorised Version 'prosperity' is often rendered 'security,' meaning thereby, not safety, but a belief that I am safe. A man who is prosperous, or at ease, is sure to drop into the notion that 'to-morrow will be as this day, and much more abundant,' unless he keeps up unslumbering watchfulness against the insidious illusion of permanence. If he yields to the temptation, in his foolish security, forgetting how fragile are its foundations, and what a host of enemies surround him threatening it, then there is nothing for it but that the merciful discipline, which this Psalmist goes on to tell us he had to pass through by reason of his fall, shall be brought to bear upon him. The writer gives us a page of his own autobiography. 'In my security I said, I shall never be moved.' 'Lord! by Thy favour Thou hast made my mountain to stand strong. Thou didst hide Thy face.' What about the security then? What about 'I shall never be moved' then? 'I was troubled. I cried to Thee, O Lord!'—and then it

was all right, his prayer was heard, and he was in 'security'—that is, safety—far more really when he was 'troubled' and sore beset than when he had been, as he fancied, sure of not being moved.

Long peace rusts the cannon, and is apt to make it unfit for war. Our lack of imagination, and our present sense of comfort and well-being, tend to make us fancy that we shall go on for ever in the quiet jog-trot of settled life without any very great calamities or changes. But there was once a village at the bottom of the crater of Vesuvius, and great trees, that had grown undisturbed there for a hundred years, and green pastures, and happy homes and flocks. And then, one day, a rumble and a rush, and what became of the village? It went up in smoke-clouds. The quiescence of the volcano is no sign of its extinction. And as surely as we live, so sure is it that there will come a 'to-morrow' to us all which shall *not* be as this day. No man has any right to calculate upon anything beyond the present moment, and there is no basis whatever, either for the philosophical assertion that the order of nature is fixed, and that therefore there are no miracles, or for the practical translation of the assertion into our daily lives, that we may reasonably expect to go on as we are without changes or calamities. There is no reason capable of being put into logical shape for believing that, because the sun has risen ever since the beginning of things, it will rise to-morrow, for there will come a to-morrow when it will *not* rise. In

like manner, the longest possession of our mercies is no reason for forgetting the precarious tenure on which we hold them all.

So, Christian men and women! let us try to keep vivid that consciousness which is so apt to get dull, that nothing continueth in one stay, and that we *shall* be moved, as far as the outward life and its circumstances are concerned. If we forget it, we shall need, and we shall get, the loving Fatherly discipline, which my second text tells us followed the false security of this good man. The sea is kept from putrefying by storms. Wine poured from vessel to vessel is purified thereby. It is an old truth and a wholesome one, to be always remembered, 'because they have no changes therefore they fear not God .'

III. Lastly, we have the same thing said by another man in another key. 'Because He is at my right hand, I shall not be moved.' The prelude to the assertion makes all the difference. Here is the warranted confidence of a simple faith.

The man who clasps God's hand, and has Him standing by his side, as his Ally, his Companion, his Guide, his Defence—that man does not need to fear change. For all the things which convict the arrogant or mistaken confidences of the other men as being insanity or a lapse from faith prove the confidence of the trustful soul to be the very perfection of reason and common sense.

We may be confident of our power to resist anything that can come against us, if He be at our side. The man that stands with his back against an oak-tree is held firm, not because of his own strength, but because of that on which he leans. There is a beautiful story of some heathen convert who said to a missionary's wife, who had felt faint and asked that she might lean for a space on her stronger arm, 'If you love me, lean hard.' That is what God says to us, 'If you love Me, lean hard.' And if you do, because He is at your right hand, you will not be moved. It is not insanity; it is not arrogance; it is simple faith, to look our enemies in the eyes, and to feel sure that they cannot touch us, 'Trust in Jehovah; so shall ye be established.' Rest on the Lord, and ye shall rest indeed.

In like manner the man who has God at his right hand may be sure of the unalterable continuance of all his proper good. Outward things may come or go, as it pleases Him, but that which makes the life of our life will never depart from us as long as He stands there. And whilst He is there, if only our hearts are knit to Him, we can say, 'My heart and my flesh faileth, but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever. I shall not be moved. Though all that can go goes, He abides; and in Him I have all riches.' Trust not in the uncertainty of outward good, but in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy.

The wicked man was defiantly arrogant, and the

forgetful good man was criminally self-confident, when they each said, 'I shall not be moved.' We are only taking up the privileges that belong to us if, exercising faith in Him, we venture to say, 'Take what Thou wilt; leave me Thyself; I have enough.' And the man who says, 'Because God is at my right hand, I shall not be moved,' has the right to anticipate an unbroken continuance of personal being, and an unchanged continuance of the very life of his life. That which breaks off all other lives abruptly is no breach in the continuity, either of the consciousness or of the avocations of a devout man. For, on the other side of the flood, he does what he does on this side, only more perfectly and more continually. 'He that doeth the will of God abideth for ever,' and it makes comparatively little difference to him whether his place be on this or on the other side of Jordan. We 'shall not be moved,' even when we change our station from earth to heaven, and the sublime fulfilment of the warranted confidence of the trustful soul comes when the 'to-morrow' of the skies is as the 'to-day' of earth, only 'much more abundant.'

MAN'S TRUE TREASURE IN GOD

> 'The Lord is the portion of mine inheritance and of my cup; Thou maintainest my lot. The lines are fallen unto me in pleasant places; yea, I have a goodly heritage.'—PSALM xvi. 5, 6.

We read, in the law which created the priesthood in Israel, that 'the Lord spake unto Aaron, Thou shalt have no inheritance in their land, neither shalt thou have any part among them. I am thy part and thine inheritance among the children of Israel' (Numbers xvii. 20). Now there is an evident allusion to that remarkable provision in this text. The Psalmist feels that in the deepest sense he has no possession amongst the men who have only possessions upon earth, but that God is the treasure which he grasps in a rapture of devotion and self-abandonment. The priest's duty is his choice. He will 'walk by faith and not by sight.'

Are not all Christians priests? and is not the very essence and innermost secret of the religious life this —that the heart turns away from earthly things and deliberately accepts God as its supreme good, and its only portion? These first words of my text contain the essence of all true religion.

The connection between the first clause and the others is closer than many readers perceive. The 'lot' which 'Thou maintainest,' the 'pleasant places,' the 'goodly heritage,' all carry on the metaphor, and all refer to God as Himself the portion of the heart that chooses and trusts Him. 'Thou maintainest my lot'—

He who is our inheritance also guards our inheritance, and whosoever has taken God for his possession has a possession as sure as God can make it. 'The lines are fallen to me in pleasant places; yea, I have a goodly heritage'—the heritage that is goodly is God Himself. When a man chooses God for his portion, then, and then only, is he satisfied —'satisfied with favour, and full of the goodness of the Lord.' Let me try to expand and enforce these thoughts, with the hope that we may catch something of their fervour and their glow.

I. The first thought, then, that comes out of the words before us is this: all true religion has its very heart in deliberately choosing God as my supreme good.

'The Lord is the portion of my inheritance and of my cup.' The two words which are translated in our version 'portion' and 'inheritance' are substantially synonymous. The latter of them is used continually in reference to the share of each individual, or family, or tribe in the partition of the land of Canaan. There is a distinct allusion, therefore, to that partition in the language of our text; and the two expressions, part or 'portion,' and 'inheritance,' are substantially identical, and really mean just the same as if the single expression had stood—'The Lord is my Portion.'

I may just notice in passing that these words are evidently alluded to in the New Testament, in the

Epistle to the Colossians, where Paul speaks of God 'having made us meet for our portion of the inheritance of the saints in light.'

And then the 'portion of my cup' is a somewhat strange expression. It is found in one of the other Psalms, with the meaning 'fortune,' or 'destiny,' or 'sum of circumstances which make up a man's life.' There may be, of course, an allusion to the metaphor of a feast here, and God may be set forth as 'the portion of my cup,' in the sense of being the refreshment and sustenance of a man's soul. But I should rather be disposed to consider that there is merely a prolongation of the earlier metaphor, and that the same thought as is contained in the figure of the 'inheritance' is expressed here (as in common conversation it is often expressed) by the word 'cup,' namely, 'that which makes up a man's portion in this life.' It is used with such a meaning in the well-known words, 'My cup runneth over,' and in another shape in 'The cup which My Father hath given Me, shall I not drink it?' It is the sum of circumstances which make up a man's 'fortune.' So the double metaphor presents the one thought of God as the true possession of the devout soul.

Now, how do we possess God? We possess things in one fashion and persons in another. The lowest and most imperfect form of possession is that by which a man simply keeps other people off material good, and asserts the right of disposal of it as he thinks proper. A blind man may have the finest

picture that ever was painted; he may call it his, that is to say, nobody else can sell it, but what good is it to him? A lunatic may own a library as big as the Bodleian, but what use is it to him? Does the man who collects the rents of a mountain-side, or the poet or painter to whom its cliffs and heather speak far-reaching thoughts, most truly possess it? The highest form of possession, even of things, is when they minister to our thought, to our emotion, to our moral and intellectual growth. We possess even them really, according as we know them and hold communion with them. But when we get up into the region of persons, we possess them in the measure in which we understand them, and sympathise with them, and love them. Knowledge, intercourse, sympathy, affection—these are the ways by which men can possess men, and spirits, spirits. A disciple who gets the thoughts of a great teacher into his mind, and has his whole being saturated by them, may be said to have made the teacher his own. A friend or a lover owns the heart that he or she loves, and which loves back again; and not otherwise do we possess God.

Such ownership must be, from its very nature, reciprocal. There must be the two sides to it. And so we read in the Bible, with equal frequency: the Lord is the inheritance of His people, and His people are the inheritance of the Lord. He possesses me, and I possess Him—with reverence be it spoken—by the very same tenure; for whoso loves God has Him, and

whom He loves He owns. There is deep and blessed mystery involved in this wonderful prerogative, that the loving, believing heart has God for its possession and indwelling Guest; and people are apt to brush such thoughts aside as mystical. But, like all true Christian mysticism, it is intensely practical.

We have God for ours, first, in the measure in which our minds are actively occupied with thoughts of Him. We have no merely mystical or emotional possession of God to preach. There is a real, adequate knowledge of Him in Jesus Christ. We know God, His character, His heart, His relations to us, His thoughts of good concerning us, sufficiently for all intellectual and for all practical purposes.

I wish to ask you a plain question: Do you ever think about Him? There is only one way of getting God for yours, and that is by bringing Him into your life by frequent meditation upon His sweetness, and upon the truths that you know about Him. There is no other way by which a spirit can possess a spirit, that is not cognisable by sense, except only by the way of thinking about him, to begin with. All else follows that. That is how you hold your dear ones when they go to the other side of the world. That is how you hold God, who dwells on the other side of the stars. There is no way to 'have' Him, but through the understanding accepting Him, and keeping firm hold of Him. Men and women that from Monday morning to Saturday night never think of His name—how do they possess God? And professing Christians

that never remember Him all the day long—what absurd hypocrisy it is for them to say that God is theirs!

Yours, and never in your mind! When your husband, or your wife, or your child, goes away from home for a week, do you forget them as utterly as you forget God? Do you have them in any sense if they never dwell in the 'study of your imagination,' and never fill your thoughts with sweetness and with light?

And so again when the heart turns to Him, and when all the faculties of our being, will, hope, and imagination, and all our affections and all our practical powers, when they all touch Him, each in its proper fashion, then and then only can we in any reasonable and true sense be said to possess God.

Thought, communion, sympathy, affection, moral likeness, practical obedience, these are the way—and not by mystical raptures only—by which, in simple prose fact, it is possible for the finite to grasp the infinite, and for a man to be the *owner* of God.

Now there is another consideration very necessary to be remembered, and that is that this possession of God involves, and is possible only by, a deliberate act of renunciation. The Levite's example, that is glanced at in my text, is always our law. You must have no part or inheritance amongst the sons of earth if God is to be your inheritance. Or, to put it

into plain words, there must be a giving up of the material and the created if there is to be a possession of the divine and the heavenly. There cannot be *two* supreme, any more than there can be two pole-stars, one in the north and the other in the south, to both of which a man can be steering. You cannot stand with

> 'One foot on land, and one on sea,
> To one thing constant never.'

If you are to have God as your supreme good, you must empty your heart of earth and worldly things, or your possession of Him will be all words, and imagination, and hypocrisy. Brethren! I wish to bring that message to your consciences to-day.

And what is this renunciation? There must be, first of all, a fixed, deliberate, intelligent conviction lying at the foundation of my life that God is best, and that He and He only is my true delight and desire. Then there must be built upon that intelligent conviction that God is best, the deliberate turning away of the heart from these material treasures. Then there must be the willingness to abandon the outward possession of them, if they come in between us and Him. Just as travellers in old days, that went out looking for treasures in the western hemisphere, were glad to empty their ships of their less precious cargo in order to load them with gold, you must get rid of the trifles, and fling these away if ever they so take up your heart that God has no room there. Or

rather, perhaps, if the love of God in any real measure, howsoever imperfectly, once gets into a man's soul, it will work there to expel and edge out the love and regard for earthly things. Just as when the chemist collects oxygen in a vessel filled with water, as it passes into the jar it drives out the water before it; the love of God, if it come into a man's heart in any real sense, in the measure in which it comes, will deliver him from the love of the world. But between the two there is warfare so internecine and endless that they cannot co-exist: and here, to-day, it is as true as ever it was that if you want to have God for your portion and your inheritance you must be content to have no inheritance amongst your brethren, nor part amongst the sons of earth.

Men and women! are you ready for that renunciation? Are you prepared to say, 'I know that the sweetness of Thy presence is the truest sweetness that I can taste; and lo! I give up all besides and my own self'?

'O God of good, the unfathomed Sea!
Who would not yield himself to Thee?'

And remember, that nothing less than these is Christianity—the conviction that the world is second and not first; that God is best, love is best, truth is best, knowledge of Him is best, likeness to Him is best, the willingness to surrender all if it come in

contest with His supreme sweetness. He that turns his back upon earth by reason of the drawing power of the glory that excelleth, is a Christian. The Christianity that only trusts to Christ for deliverance from the punishment of sin, and so makes religion a kind of fire insurance, is a very poor affair. We need the lesson pealed into our ears as much as any generation has ever done, 'Ye cannot serve God and mammon.' A man's real working religion consists in his loving God most and counting His love the sweetest of all things.

II. Now let me turn to the next point that is here, viz. that this possession is as sure as God can make it. 'Thou maintainest my lot.' Thou art Thyself both my heritage and the guardian of my heritage. He that possesses God, says the text, by implication, is lifted above all fear and chance of change.

The land, the partition of which amongst the tribes lies at the bottom of the allusive metaphor of my text, was given to them under the sanction of a supernatural defence; and the law of their continuance in it was that they should trust and serve the unseen King. It was He, according to the theocratic theory of the Old Testament, and not chariots and horses, their own arm and their own sword, that kept them safe, though the enemies on the north and the enemies on the south were big enough to swallow up the little kingdom at a mouthful.

And so, says the Psalmist allusively, in a similar manner, the Divine Power surrounds the man who chooses God for his heritage, and nothing shall take that heritage from him.

The lower forms of possession, by which men are called the owners of material goods, are imperfect, because they are all precarious and temporary. Nothing really belongs to a man if it can be taken from him. What we may lose we can scarcely be said to have. They *are* mine, they *were* yours, they *will be* somebody else's to-morrow. Whilst we have them we do not have them in any deep sense; we cannot retain them, they are not really ours at all. The only thing that is worth calling mine is something that so passes into and saturates the very substance of my soul that, like a piece of cloth dyed in the grain, as long as two threads hold together the tint will be there. That is how God gives us Himself, and nothing can take Him out of a man's soul. He, in the sweetness of His grace, bestows Himself upon man, and guards His own gift in the heart, which is Himself. He who dwells in God and God in him lives as in the inmost keep and citadel. The noise of battle may roar around the walls, but deep silence and peace are within. The storm may rage upon the coasts, but he who has God for his portion dwells in a quiet inland valley where tempests never come. No outer changes can touch our possession of God. They belong to another region altogether. Other goods may go, but this is held by a different tenure. The life

of a Christian is lived in two regions: in the one his life has its roots, and its branches extend to the other. In the one there may be whirling storms and branches may toss and snap, whilst in the other, to which the roots go down, may be peace. Root yourselves in God, making Him your truest treasure, and nothing can rob you of your wealth.

We here in this commercial community see many examples of great fortunes and great businesses melting away like yesterday's snow. And surely the certain alternations of 'booms' and bad times might preach to some of you this lesson: Set not your hearts on that which can pass, but make your treasure that which no man can take from you.

Then, too, there is the other thought. God will help us so that no temptations shall have power to make us rob *ourselves* of our treasure. None can take it from us but ourselves, but we are so weak and surrounded by temptations so strong that we need Him to aid us if we are not to be beguiled by our own treacherous hearts into parting with our highest good. A handful of feeble Jews were nothing against the gigantic might of Assyria, or against the compacted strength of civilised Egypt; but there they stood, on their rocky mountains, defended, not by their own strength, but by the might of a present God. And so, unfit to cope with the temptations round us as we are, if we cast ourselves upon His power and make Him our supreme delight, nothing shall be able to rob us of that possession and that

sweetness.

And there is just one last point that I would refer to here on this matter of our stable possession of God. It is very beautiful to observe that this psalm, which, in the language of my text, rises to the very height of spiritual and, in a good sense, mystical devotion, recognising God as the One Good for souls, is also one of the psalms which has the clearest utterance of the faith in immortality. Just after the words of my text we read these others, in which the Old Testament confidence in a life beyond the grave reaches its very climax: 'Thou wilt not leave my soul in Sheol, neither wilt Thou suffer Thine holy one to see corruption. Thou wilt show me the path of life; in Thy presence is fulness of joy; at Thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore.'

That connection teaches us that the measure in which a man feels his true possession of God here and now, is the measure in which his faith rises triumphant over the darkness of the grave, and grasps, with unfaltering confidence, the conviction of an immortal life. The more we know that God is our portion and our treasure, the more sure, and calmly sure, we shall be that a thing like death cannot touch a thing like that, that the mere physical fact is far too small and insignificant a fact to have any power in such a region as that; that death can no more affect a man's relation to God, whom he has learned to love and trust, than you can cut thought or feeling with a knife. The two belong to two different regions. Thus

we have here the Old Testament faith in immortality shaping itself out of the Old Testament enjoyment of communion with God, with a present God. And you will find the very same process of thought in that seventy-third psalm, which stands in some respects side by side with this one as attaining the height of mystical devotion, joined with a very clear utterance of the faith in immortality: 'Whom have I in heaven but Thee, and there is none upon earth that I desire beside Thee! Thou wilt guide me with Thy counsel, and afterwards receive me to glory.'

So Death himself cannot touch the heritage of the man whose heritage is the Lord. And his ministry is not to rob us of our treasures as he robs men of all treasures besides (for 'their glory shall not descend after them'), but to give us instead of the 'earnest of the inheritance'—the bit of turf by which we take possession of the estate—the broad land in all the amplitude of its sweep, into our perpetual possession. 'Thou maintainest my lot.' Neither death nor life 'shall separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.'

III. And then the last thought here is that he who thus elects to find his treasure and delight in God is satisfied with his choice. 'The lines'—the measuring-cord by which the estate was parted off and determined—'are fallen in pleasant places; yea!'—not as our Bible has it, merely 'I have a *goodly* heritage,' putting emphasis on the fact of possession, but—'the heritage is goodly to *me*,' putting emphasis on the

fact of subjective satisfaction with it.

I have no time to dwell upon the thoughts that spring from these words. Take them in the barest outline. No man that makes the worse choice of earth instead of God, ever, in the retrospect, said: 'I have a goodly heritage.' One of the later Roman Emperors, who was among the best of them, said, when he was dying: 'I have been everything, and it profits me nothing.' No creature can satisfy your whole nature. Portions of it may be fed with their appropriate satisfaction, but as long as we feed on the things of earth there will always be part of our being like an unfed tiger in a menagerie, growling for its prey, whilst its fellows are satisfied for the moment. You can no more give your heart rest and blessedness by pitching worldly things into it, than they could fill up Chat Moss, when they made the first Liverpool and Manchester Railway, by throwing in cartloads of earth. The bog swallowed them and was none the nearer being filled.

No man who takes the world for his portion ever said, 'The lines are fallen to me in pleasant places.' For the make of your soul as plainly cries out 'God!' as a fish's fins declare that the sea is its element, or a bird's wings mark it out as meant to soar. Man and God fit each other like the two halves of a tally. You will never get rest nor satisfaction, and you will never be able to look at the past with thankfulness, nor at the present with repose, nor into the future with hope, unless you can say, 'God is the strength of

my heart, and my portion for ever.' But oh! if you do, then you have a goodly heritage, a heritage of still satisfaction, a heritage which suits, and gratifies, and expands all the powers of a man's nature, and makes him ever capable of larger and larger possession of a God who ever gives more than we can receive, that the overplus may draw us to further desire, and the further desire may more fully be satisfied.

The one true, pure, abiding joy is to hold fellowship with God and to live in His love. The secret of all our unrest is the going out of our desires after earthly things. They fly forth from our hearts like Noah's raven, and nowhere amid all the weltering flood can find a resting-place. The secret of satisfied repose is to set our affections thoroughly on God. Then our wearied hearts, like Noah's dove returning to its rest, will fold their wings and nestle fast by the throne of God. 'All the happiness of this life,' said William Law, 'is but trying to quench thirst out of golden *empty* cups.' But if we will take the Lord for 'the portion of our cup,' we shall never thirst.

Let me beseech you to choose God in Christ for your supreme good and highest portion; and having chosen, to cleave to your choice. So shall you enter on possession of good that truly shall be yours, even 'that good part, which shall not be taken away from' you.

And, lastly, remember that if you would have God,

you must take Christ. He is the true Joshua, who puts us in possession of the inheritance. He brings God to you—to your knowledge, to your love, to your will. He brings you to God, making it possible for your poor sinful souls to enter His presence by His blood; and for your spirits to possess that divine Guest. 'He that hath the Son, hath the Father'; and if you trust your souls to Him who died for you, and cling to Him as your delight and your joy, you will find that both the Father and the Son come to you and make their home in you. Through Christ the Son you will receive power to become sons of God, and 'if children, then heirs, heirs of God,' because 'joint heirs with Christ.'

GOD WITH US, AND WE WITH GOD

'I have set the Lord always before me: because He is at my right hand, I shall not be moved.... 11. In Thy presence is fulness of joy; at Thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore.' — PSALM xvi. 8, 11.

There are, unquestionably, large tracts of the Old Testament in which the anticipation of immortality does not appear, and there are others in which its presence may be doubtful. But here there can be no hesitation, I think, as to the meaning of these words. If we regard them carefully, we shall not only see clearly the Psalmist's hope of immortal life, but shall discern the process by which he came to it, and almost his very act of grasping at it; for the first verse of our text is manifestly the foundation of the second; and the facts of the one are the basis of the hopes of the other. That is made plain by the 'therefore' which, in one of the intervening verses, links the concluding rapturous anticipations with the previous expressions.

If, then, we observe that here, in these two verses which I have read, there is a very remarkable parallelism, we shall get still more strikingly the connection between the devout life here and the perfecting of the same hereafter. Note how, even in our translation, the latter verse is largely an echo of the former, and how much more distinctly that is the case if we make a little variation in the rendering, which brings it closer to the original. 'I have set the Lord always *before me*,' says the one,—that is the present. 'In Thy *presence* is fulness of joy,' says the other,—that is the consequent future. And the two words, which are rendered in the one case 'before me' and in the other case 'in Thy presence,' are, though not identical, so precisely synonymous that

we may take them as meaning the same thing. So we might render 'I have set the Lord always before *my* face': 'Before *Thy* face is fulness of joy.' The other clause is, to an English reader, more obviously parallel: 'Because He is at *my right hand* I shall not be moved'—shall be steadied here. 'At *Thy right* hand are pleasures for evermore'—the steadfastness here merges into eternal delights hereafter.

So then, we have two conditions set before us, and the link between them made very plain. And I gather all that I have to say about these words into two statements. First, life here may be God's presence with us, to make us steadfast. And secondly, if so, life hereafter will be our presence with God to make us glad. That is the Psalmist's teaching, and I will try to enforce it.

I. First, then, life here may be God's presence with us, to make us steadfast.

Mark the Psalmist's language. 'I have set the Lord always *in front of* me—before my face.' Emphasis is placed on 'set' and 'always.' God is ever by our sides, but we may be very far away from Him, 'though He be not far off from every one of us,' and if we are to have Him blazing, clear and unobscured above and beyond all the mists and hubbub of earth, we shall need continual effort in order to keep Him in our sight. 'I have set the Lord'—He permits me to put out my hand, as it were, and station Him where I want Him, that I may always have Him in my sight, and be

able to look at Him and be calm and blessed.

You cannot do that, if you let the world, and wealth, and business, and anxieties, and ambitions, and cares, and sorrows, and duties, and family responsibilities, jostle and hustle Him out of your minds and hearts. You cannot do it if, like John Bunyan's man with the muckrake, you keep your eyes always down on the straw at your feet, and never lift them to the crown above. How many men in Manchester walk its streets from year's end to year's end, and never look up to the sky except to see whether they must take their umbrellas with them or not? And so all the magnificence and beauty of the daily heavens, and the nightly gemming of the empty places with perpetually burning stars, are lost to them! So, God is blazing there in front of us, but unless we set ourselves to it, we shall never see Him. You have to look, by a conscious effort, over and away from the things that are 'seen and temporal' if you want to see the things that are 'unseen and eternal.'

But if you disturb the whole tenor of your being by agitations and distractions and petty cares, or if you defile it by sensual and fleshly lusts, and animal propensities gratified, and poor, miserable, worldly ambitions and longings filling up your souls, then God can no more be visible before your face than the blessed sun can mirror himself in a storm-tossed sea or in a muddy puddle. The heart must be pure, and the heart must be still, and the mind must be

detached from earth, and glued to Heaven, and the glasses of the telescope must be sedulously cleansed from dust, if we are to be blessed with the vision of God continuously before our face.

Then note, still further, that if thus we have made God present with us, by realising the fact of His presence, when He comes, He comes with His hands full. 'I have set the Lord always before me,' says the Psalmist. And then he goes on to say, 'Because He is at my right hand.' Not only in front of you, then, David, to be looked at, but at your side! What for? What do we summon some one to come and stand beside us for? In order that from his presence there may come help and succour and courage and confidence. And so God comes to the right hand of the man who honestly endeavours through all the confusions and bustles of life to realise His sweet and calming presence. Where He comes He comes to help; not to be a spectator, but an ally in the warfare; and whoever sets the Lord before him will have the Lord at his right hand.

And then, note, still further, the steadfastness which God brings. I have spoken of the effort which brings God. I speak now of the steadfastness which He brings by His coming. The Psalmist's anticipation is a singularly modest one. 'Because He is at my right hand I shall'—What? Be triumphant? No! Escape sorrows? No! Have my life filled with serenity? No! 'I shall not be moved.' That is the best I can hope for. To be able to stand on the spot, with steadfast

convictions, with steadfast purposes, with steadfast actions—continuously in one direction; 'having overcome all, to stand'—that is as much as the best of us can desire or expect, in this poor struggling life of ours.

What a profound consciousness of inward weakness and of outward antagonism there breathes in that humble and modest hope, as being the loftiest result of the presence of Omnipotence for our aid: 'I shall not be moved'! When we think of our inner weakness, when we remember the fluctuations of our feelings and emotions, when we compare the ups and downs of our daily life, or when we think of the larger changes covering years, which affect all our outlooks, our thoughts, our plans; and how

'We all are changed by still degrees,
All but the basis of the soul,'

it is much to say, 'I shall not be moved.' And when we think of the obstacles that surround us, of the storms that dash against us, how we are swept by surges of emotion that wash away everything before their imperious onrush, or swayed by blasts of temptation that break down the strongest defences, or smitten by the shocks of change and sorrow that crush the firmest hearts, it is much to say, in the face of a world pressing upon us with the force of the wind in a cyclone, that our poor, feeble reed shall stand upright and 'not be moved' in the fiercest blast. 'What went ye out for to see?' 'A reed shaken with

the wind'—that is humanity. 'Behold! I have made thee an iron pillar and brazen walls, and they shall fight against thee, but they shall not prevail'—that is weak man, stiffened into uprightness, and rooted in steadfastness by the touch of the hand of a present God.

And, brother! there is nothing else that will stay a man's soul. The holdfast cannot be a part of the chain. It must be fastened to a fixed point. The anchor that is to keep the ship of your life from dragging and finding itself, when the morning breaks, a ghastly wreck upon the reef, must be outside of yourself, and the cable of it must be wrapped round the throne of God. The anchor of the soul, sure and steadfast, which will neither break nor drag, can only be firm when it 'enters into that within the veil.' God, and God only, can thus make us strong! So, dear friends, let us see to it that we fasten our aims and purposes, our faith and love, our submission and obedience, upon that mighty Helper who will be with us and make us strong, that we may 'stand fast in the Lord and in the power of His might.'

II. Now, secondly, notice how, if so, life hereafter will be our presence with God, to make us glad.

I have already pointed out briefly the connection between these two portions of my text, and I need only remark here that the link which holds them together is very obvious. If a man loves God, and trusts Him, and 'walks with Him,' after the fashion

described in our former verse, then there will spring up, irrepressible and unconquerable, a conviction in that man's soul that this sweet and strong communion, which makes so much of the blessedness of life, must last after death. Anything is conceivable rather than that a man who walks with God shall cease to be! Rather, when he 'is not' any more 'found' among men, it is only because 'God took him.' Thus the emotions and experiences of a truly devout soul are (apart from the great revelation in Jesus Christ which hath brought 'life and immortality to light') the best evidence and confirmation of the anticipation of immortal life. It cannot be, unless our whole intellectual faculties are to be put into utter confusion, that such an experience as that of the man who loves God, and tries to trust Him, and walk before Him, is destined to be brought to nothingness with the mere dissolution of this earthly frame. The greatness and the smallness, the achievements and the failures, of the religious life as we see it here, all bear upon their front the mark of imperfection, and in their imperfection prophesy and proclaim a future completion. Because it is so great in itself, and because, being so great, its developments and influence are so strangely and sadly checked, the faith that knits a man to Christ demands eternity for its duration, and infinitude for its perfection. Thus, he that says 'I have set the Lord always before me,' goes on to say, with an undeniable accuracy of inference, 'Therefore Thou wilt not leave my soul in the under world.' God is not going to forget the soul

that clave to Him, and anything is believable sooner than that.

Our texts not only assert this connection and base the confidence of immortality on the present experiences of the spirit that trusts in God, but also give the outline, at least, of the correspondences between the imperfections of the present and the perfectnesses of the future. And I cast this into two or three words before I close.

This is the first of them. If you will turn your faces to God, amidst all the flaunting splendours and vain shows and fleeting possessions of this present, His face will dawn on you yonder. We can say but little of what is meant by such a hope as that. But only this we can say, that there will be, as yet unimaginable, new wealths of revelation of the Father, and to match them, as yet unimaginable new inlets of apprehension and perception upon our parts, so that the sweetest, clearest, closest, most satisfying vision of God that has ever dawned on sad souls here, shall be but 'as in a glass darkly' compared with that face to face sight. We live away out on the far-off outskirts of the system where those great planets plough along their slow orbits, and turn their languid rotations at distances that imagination faints in contemplating, and the light and the heat and the life that reach them are infinitesimally small. We shall be shifted into the orb that is nearest the sun; and oh! what a rapture of light and life and heat will come to our amazed spirits: 'I have set the Lord

always before me.' Twilight though the light has been, I have tried to keep it. I shall be of the sons of light close to the Throne and shall see Thy face. I shall be satisfied when I wake out of this sleep of life into Thy likeness.

Then, again, if you will keep God at your right hand here, He will set you on His hereafter. Keep Him here for your Companion, for your Ally, for your Advocate, to breathe strength into you by the touch of His hand, as some feeble man, leaning upon a stronger arm, may be upheld. If you will do that, then the place where the favoured servants stand will be yours; the place where trusted counsellors stand will be yours; the place where the sheep stand will be yours; the place where the Shepherd sits will be yours; for He to whom it is said, 'Sit Thou at My right hand till I make Thine enemies Thy footstool,' says to us, 'Where I am there shall also My servant be.' Keep God by your sides, and you will be lifted to Christ's place at the right hand of the Majesty on high.

Lastly, if we let ourselves be stayed by God amidst the struggle and difficulty, we shall be gladdened by Him with perpetual joys. The emphasis of the last words of my text is rather on the adjectives than on the nouns—*full* joy, *eternal* pleasure. And how both characteristics contradict the experiences of earth, even the gladdest, which we fain would make permanent! For I suppose that no earthly joy is either central, reaching the deepest self, or circumferential, embracing the whole being of a man, but that only

God can so go into the depths of my soul as that from His throne there He can flood the whole of my nature with felicity and peace. In all other gladnesses there is always in the landscape one bit of sullen shadow somewhere or other, unparticipant of the light, while all around is blazing. And we need that He should come to make us blessed.

Joys here are no more lasting than they are complete. As one who only too sadly proved the truth of his own words, burning out his life before he was six-and-thirty, has said—

'Pleasures are like poppies spread,
You seize the flower, its bloom is shed!
Or like the snowflake in the river.
A moment white—then gone for ever.'

Oh! my friend, 'why do ye spend your money for that which is not bread?' The life of faith on earth is the beginning, and only the beginning, of that life of calm and complete felicity in the heavenly places.

I have shown you the ladder's foot, 'I have set the Lord always before me.' The top round reaches the throne of God, and whoever begins at the bottom, and holds fast the beginning of his confidence firm unto the end, for him the great promise of the Master will come true, and Christ's 'joy will remain in him and his joy shall be full.'

THE TWO AWAKINGS

'I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with Thy likeness.'
—PSALM xvii. 15.

'As a dream when one awaketh; so, O Lord, when Thou awakest, Thou
shalt despise their image.'—PSALM lxxiii. 20.

Both of these Psalms are occupied with that standing puzzle to Old Testament worthies—the good fortune of bad men, and the bad fortune of good ones. The former recounts the personal calamities of David, its author. The latter gives us the picture of the perplexity of Asaph its writer, when he 'saw the prosperity of the wicked.'

And as the problem in both is substantially the same, the solution also is the same. David and Asaph both point onwards to a period when this confusing distribution of earthly good shall have ceased, though the one regards that period chiefly in its bearing upon himself as the time when he shall see God and be at rest, while the other thinks of it rather with reference to the godless rich as the time of their destruction.

In the details of this common expectation, also, there is a remarkable parallelism. Both describe the

future to which they look as an awaking, and both connect with it, though in different ways and using different words, the metaphor of an image or likeness. In the one case, the future is conceived as the Psalmist's awaking, and losing all the vain show of this dreamland of life, while he is at rest in beholding the appearance, and perhaps in receiving the likeness, of the one enduring Substance, God. In the other, it is thought of as God's awaking, and putting to shame the fleeting shadow of well-being with which godless men befool themselves.

What this period of twofold awaking may be is a question on which good men and thoughtful students of Scripture differ. Without entering on the wide subject of the Jewish knowledge of a future state, it may be enough for the present purpose to say that the language of both these Psalms seems much too emphatic and high-pitched, to be fully satisfied by a reference to anything in this life. It certainly looks as if the great awaking which David puts in immediate contrast with the death of 'men of this world,' and which solaced his heart with the confident expectation of beholding God, of full satisfaction of all his being, and possibly even of wearing the divine likeness, pointed onwards, however dimly, to that 'within the veil.' And as for the other psalm, though the awaking of God is, no doubt, a Scriptural phrase for His ending of any period of probation and indulgence by an act of judgment, yet the strong words in which the context describes this awaking,

as the 'destruction' and the 'end' of the godless, make it most natural to take it as here referring to the final close of the probation of life. That conclusion appears to be strengthened by the contrast which in subsequent verses is drawn between this 'end' of the worldling, and the poet's hopes for himself of divine guidance in life, and afterwards of being taken (the same word as is used in the account of Enoch's translation) by God into His presence and glory—hopes whose exuberance it is hard to confine within the limits of any changes possible for earth.

The doctrine of a future state never assumed the same prominence, nor possessed the same clearness in Israel as with us. There are great tracts of the Old Testament where it does not appear at all. This very difficulty, about the strange disproportion between character and circumstances, shows that the belief had not the same place with them as with us. But it gradually emerged into comparative distinctness. Revelation is progressive, and the appropriation of revelation is progressive too. There is a history of God's self-manifestation, and there is a history of man's reception of the manifestation. It seems to me that in these two psalms, as in other places of Old Testament Scripture, we see inspired men in the very course of being taught by God, on occasion of their earthly sorrows, the clearer hopes which alone could sustain them. They stood not where we stand, to whom Christ has 'brought life and immortality to light'; but to their devout and perplexed souls, the

dim regions beyond were partially opened, and though they beheld there a great darkness, they also 'saw a great light.' They saw all this solid world fade and melt, and behind its vanishing splendours they saw the glory of the God whom they loved, in the midst of which they felt that there *must* be a place for them, where eternal realities should fill their vision, and a stable inheritance satisfy their hearts.

The period, then, to which both David and Asaph look, in these two verses, is the end of life. The words of both, taken in combination, open out a series of aspects of that period which carry weighty lessons, and to which we turn now.

I. The first of these is that to all men the end of Life is an awaking.

The representation of death most widely diffused among all nations is that it is a sleep. The reasons for that emblem are easily found. We always try to veil the terror and deformity of the ugly thing by the thin robe of language. As with reverential awe, so with fear and disgust, the tendency is to wrap their objects in the folds of metaphor. Men prefer not to name plainly their god or their dread, but find roundabout phrases for the one, and coaxing, flattering titles for the other. The furies and the fates of heathenism, the supernatural beings of modern superstition, must not be spoken of by their own appellations. The recoil of men's hearts from the thing is testified by the aversion of their languages to

the bald name—death. And the employment of this special euphemism of sleep is a wonderful witness to our weariness of life, and to its endless toil and trouble. Everywhere that has seemed to be a comforting and almost an attractive name, which has promised full rest from all the agitations of this changeful scene. The prosperous and the wretched alike have owned the fatigue of living, and been conscious of a soothing expectance which became almost a hope, as they thought of lying still at last with folded hands and shut eyes. The wearied workers have bent over their dead, and felt that they are blest in this at all events, that they rest from their labours; and as they saw them absolved from all their tasks, have sought to propitiate the power that had made this ease for them, as well as to express their sense of its merciful aspect, by calling it not death, but sleep.

But that emblem, true and sweet as it is, is but half the truth. Taken as the whole, as indeed men are ever tempted to take it, it is a cheerless lie. It is truth for the senses—'the foolish senses,' who 'crown' Death, as 'Omega,' the last, 'the Lord,' because '*they* find no *motion* in the dead.' Rest, cessation of consciousness of the outer world, and of action upon it, are set forth by the figure. But even the figure might teach us that the consciousness of life, and the vivid exercise of thought and feeling, are not denied by it. Death is sleep. Be it so. But does not that suggest the doubt—'in that sleep, what dreams may

come?' Do we not all know that, when the chains of slumber bind sense, and the disturbance of the outer world is hushed, there are faculties of our souls which work more strongly than in our waking hours? We are all poets, 'makers' in our sleep. Memory and imagination open their eyes when flesh closes it. We can live through years in the dreams of a night; so swiftly can spirit move when even partially freed from 'this muddy vesture of decay.' That very phrase, then, which at first sight seems the opposite of the representation of our text, in reality is preparatory to and confirmatory of it. That very representation which has lent itself to cheerless and heathenish thoughts of death as the cessation not only of toil but of activity, is the basis of the deeper and truer representation, the truth for the spirit, that death is an awaking. If, on the one hand, we have to say, as we anticipate the approaching end of life, 'The night cometh, when no man can work'; on the other the converse is true, 'The night is far spent; the day is at hand.'

We shall sleep. Yes; but we shall wake too. We shall wake just because we sleep. For flesh and all its weakness, and all its disturbing strength, and craving importunities—for the outer world, and all its dissipating garish shows, and all its sullen resistance to our hand—for weariness, and fevered activity and toil against the grain of our tastes, too great for our strength, disappointing in its results, the end is blessed, calm sleep. And precisely because it is so,

therefore for our true selves, for heart and mind, for powers that lie dormant in the lowest, and are not stirred into full action in the highest, souls; for all that universe of realities which encompass us undisclosed, and known only by faint murmurs which pierce through the opiate sleep of life, the end shall be an awaking.

The truth which corresponds to this metaphor, and which David felt when he said, 'I shall be satisfied when I awake,' is that the spirit, because emancipated from the body, shall spring into greater intensity of action, shall put forth powers that have been held down here and shall come into contact with an order of things which here it has but indirectly known. To our true selves and to God we shall wake. Here we are like men asleep in some chamber that looks towards the eastern sky. Morning by morning comes the sunrise, with the tender glory of its rosy light and blushing heavens, and the heavy eyes are closed to it all. Here and there some lighter sleeper, with thinner eyelids or face turned to the sun, is half conscious of a vague brightness, and feels the light, though he sees not the colours of the sky nor the forms of the filmy clouds. Such souls are our saints and prophets, but most of us sleep on unconscious. To us all the moment comes when we shall wake and see for ourselves the bright and terrible world which we have so often forgotten, and so often been tempted to think was itself a dream. Brethren, see to it that that awaking be for you the

beholding of what you have loved, the finding, in the sober certainty of waking bliss, of all the objects which have been your visions of delight in the sleep of earth.

This life of ours hides more than it reveals. The day shows the sky as solitary but for wandering clouds that cover its blue emptiness. But the night peoples its waste places with stars, and fills all its abysses with blazing glories. 'If light so much conceals, wherefore not life?' Let us hold fast by a deeper wisdom than is born of sense; and though men, nowadays, seem to be willing to go back to the 'eternal sleep' of the most unspiritual heathenism, and to cast away all that Christ has brought us concerning that world where He has been and whence He has returned, because positive science and the anatomist's scalpel preach no gospel of a future, let us try to feel as well as to believe that it is life, with all its stunted capacities and idle occupation with baseless fabrics, which is the sleep, and that for us all the end of it is—to awake.

II. The second principle contained in our text is that death is to some men the awaking of God.

'When Thou awakest, Thou shalt despise their image.' Closely rendered, the former clause would read simply 'in awaking,' without any specifying of the person, which is left to be gathered from the succeeding words. But there is no doubt that the English version fills the blank correctly by referring

the awaking to God.

The metaphor is not infrequent in the Old Testament, and, like many others applying to the divine nature, is saved from any possibility of misapprehension by the very boldness of its materialism. It has a well-marked and uniform meaning. God 'awakes' when He ends an epoch of probation and long-suffering mercy by an act or period of judgment. So far, then, as the mere expression is concerned, there may be nothing more meant here than the termination by a judicial act in this life, of the transient 'prosperity of the wicked.' Any divinely-sent catastrophe which casts the worldly rich man down from his slippery eminence would satisfy the words. But the emphatic context seems, as already pointed out, to require that they should be referred to that final crash which irrevocably separates him who has 'his portion in this life,' from all which he calls his 'goods.'

If so, then the whole period of earthly existence is regarded as the time of God's gracious forbearance and mercy; and the time of death is set forth as the instant when sterner elements of the divine dealings start into greater prominence. Life here is predominantly, though not exclusively, the field for the manifestation of patient love, not willing that any should perish. To the godless soul, immersed in material things, and blind to the light of God's wooing love, the transition to that other form of existence is likewise the transition to the field for the

manifestation of the retributive energy of God's righteousness. Here and now His judgment on the whole slumbers. The consequences of our deeds are inherited, indeed, in many a merciful sorrow, in many a paternal chastisement, in many a partial exemplification of the wages of sin as death. But the harvest is not fully grown nor ripened yet; it is not reaped in all its extent; the bitter bread is not baked and eaten as it will have to be. Nor are men's consciences so awakened that they connect the retribution, which does befall them, with its causes in their own actions, as closely as they will do when they are removed from the excitement of life and the deceit of its dreams. 'Sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily.' For the long years of our stay here, God's seeking love lingers round every one of us, yearning over us, besetting us behind and before, courting us with kindnesses, lavishing on us its treasures, seeking to win our poor love. It is sometimes said that this is a state of probation. But that phrase suggests far too cold an idea. God does not set us here as on a knife edge, with abysses on either side ready to swallow us if we stumble, while He stands apart watching for our halting, and unhelpful to our tottering feebleness. He compasses us with His love and its gifts, He draws us to Himself, and desires that we should stand. He offers all the help of His angels to hold us up. 'He will not suffer thy foot to be moved; He that keepeth thee will not slumber.' The judgment sleeps; the loving forbearance, the gracious aid wake. Shall we not

yield to His perpetual pleadings, and, moved by the mercies of God, let His conquering love thaw our cold hearts into streams of thankfulness and self-devotion?

But remember, that that predominantly merciful and long-suffering character of God's present dealing affords no guarantee that there will not come a time when His slumbering judgment will stir to waking. The same chapter which tells us that 'He is long-suffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance,' goes on immediately to repel the inference that therefore a period of which retribution shall be the characteristic is impossible, by the solemn declaration, '*But* the day of the Lord shall come as a thief in the night.' His character remains ever the same, the principles of His government are unalterable, but there may be variations in the prominence given in His acts, to the several principles of the one, and the various though harmonious phases of the other. The method may be changed, the purpose may remain unchanged. And the Bible, which is our only source of knowledge on the subject, tells us that the method *is* changed, in so far as to intensify the vigour of the operation of retributive justice after death, so that men who have been compassed with 'the loving-kindness of the Lord,' and who die leaving worldly things, and keeping worldly hearts, will have to confront 'the terror of the Lord.'

The alternation of epochs of tolerance and destruction is in accordance with the workings of God's providence here and now. For though the characteristic of that providence as we see it is merciful forbearance, yet we are not left without many a premonition of the mighty final 'day of the Lord.' For long years or centuries a nation or an institution goes on slowly departing from truth, forgetting the principles on which it rests, or the purposes for which it exists. Patiently God pleads with the evil-doers, lavishes gifts and warnings upon them. He holds back the inevitable avenging as long as restoration is yet possible—and *His* eye and heart see it to be possible long after men conclude that the corruption is hopeless. But at last comes a period when He says, 'I have long still holden My peace, and refrained Myself, now will I destroy'; and with a crash one more hoary iniquity disappears from the earth which it has burdened so long. For sixty times sixty slow, throbbing seconds, the silent hand creeps unnoticed round the dial and then, with whirr and clang, the bell rings out, and another hour of the world's secular day is gone. The billows of the thunder-cloud slowly gather into vague form, and slowly deepen in lurid tints, and slowly roll across the fainting blue; they touch—and then the fierce flash, like the swift hand on the palace-wall of Babylon, writes its message of destruction over all the heaven at once. We know enough from the history of men and nations since Sodom till to-day, to recognise it as God's plan to alternate long

patience and 'sudden destruction':—

'The mills of God grind slowly,
But they grind exceeding small';

and every such instance confirms the expectation of the coming of that great and terrible day of the Lord, whereof all epochs of convulsion and ruin, all falls of Jerusalem, and Roman empires, Reformations, and French Revolutions, and American wars, all private and personal calamities which come from private wrong-doing, are but feeble precursors. 'When Thou awakest, Thou wilt despise their image.'

Brethren, do we use aright this goodness of God which is the characteristic of the present? Are we ready for that judgment which is the mark of the future?

III. Death is the annihilation of the vain show of worldly life.

The word rendered *image* is properly shadow, and hence copy or likeness, and hence image. Here, however, the simpler meaning is the better. 'Thou shalt despise their shadow.' The men are shadows, and all their goods are not what they are called, their 'substance,' but their *shadow*, a mere appearance, not a reality. That show of good which seems but is not, is withered up by the light of the awaking God. What He despises cannot live.

So there are the two old commonplaces of

moralists set forth in these grand words—the unsatisfying character of all merely external delights and possessions, and also their transitory character. They are non-substantial and non-permanent.

Nothing that is without a man can make him rich or restful. The treasures which are kept in coffers are not real, but only those which are kept in the soul. Nothing which cannot enter into the substance of the life and character can satisfy us. That which we are makes us rich or poor, that which we own is a trifle.

There is no congruity between any outward thing and man's soul, of such a kind as that satisfaction can come from its possession. 'Cisterns that can hold no water,' 'that which is not bread,' 'husks that the swine did eat'—these are not exaggerated phrases for the good gifts which God gives for our delight, and which become profitless and delusive by our exclusive attachment to them. There is no need for exaggeration. These worldly possessions have a good in them, they contribute to ease and grace in life, they save from carking cares and mean anxieties, they add many a comfort and many a source of culture. But, after all, a true, lofty life may be lived with a very small modicum. There is no proportion between wealth and happiness, nor between wealth and nobleness. The fairest life that ever lived on earth was that of a poor Man, and with all its beauty it moved within the limits of narrow resources. The loveliest blossoms do not grow on plants that plunge their greedy roots into the fattest soil. A little light

earth in the crack of a hard rock will do. We need enough for the physical being to root itself in; we need no more.

Young men! especially you who are plunged into the busy life of our great commercial centres, and are tempted by everything you see, and by most that you hear, to believe that a prosperous trade and hard cash are the realities, and all else mist and dreams, fix this in your mind to begin life with—God is the reality, all else is shadow. Do not make it your ambition to get *on*, but to get *up*. 'Having food and raiment, let us be content.' Seek for your life's delight and treasure in thought, in truth, in pure affections, in moderate desires, in a spirit set on God. These are the realities of our possessions. As for all the rest, it is sham and show.

And while thus all without is unreal, it is also fleeting as the shadows of the flying clouds; and when God awakes, it disappears as they before the noonlight that clears the heavens. All things that are, are on condition of perpetual flux and change. The cloud-rack has the likeness of bastions and towers, but they are mist, not granite, and the wind is every moment sweeping away their outlines, till the phantom fortress topples into red ruin while we gaze. The tiniest stream eats out its little valley and rounds the pebble in its widening bed, rain washes down the soil, and frost cracks the cliffs above. So silently and yet mightily does the law of change work that to a meditative eye the solid earth seems almost molten

and fluid, and the everlasting mountains tremble to decay.

'Wilt thou set thine eyes upon that which is not?' Are we going to be such fools as to fix our hopes and efforts upon this fleeting order of things, which can give no delight more lasting than itself? Even whilst we are in it, it continueth not in one stay, and we are in it for such a little while! Then comes what our text calls God's awaking, and where is it all then? Gone like a ghost at cockcrow. Why! a drop of blood on your brain or a crumb of bread in your windpipe, and as far as you are concerned the outward heavens and earth 'pass away with a great' silence, as the impalpable shadows that sweep over some lone hillside.

'The glories of our birth and state
Are shadows, not substantial things;
There is no armour against fate,
Death lays his icy hand on kings.'

What an awaking to a worldly man that awaking of God will be! 'As when a hungry man dreameth, and behold he eateth, but he awaketh and his soul is empty.' He has thought he fed full, and was rich and safe, but in one moment he is dragged from it all, and finds himself a starving pauper, in an order of things for which he has made no provision. 'When he dieth, he shall carry nothing away.' Let us see to it that not in utter nakedness do we go hence, but clothed with that immortal robe, and rich in those

possessions that cannot be taken away from us, which they have who have lived on earth as heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ. Let us pierce, for the foundation of our life's house, beneath the shifting sands of time down to the Rock of Ages, and build there.

IV. Finally, death is for some men the annihilation of the vain shows in order to reveal the great reality.

'I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with Thy likeness.'

'Likeness' is properly 'form,' and is the same word which is employed in reference to Moses, who saw 'the similitude of the Lord.' If there be, as is most probable, an allusion to that ancient vision in these words, then the 'likeness' is not that conformity to the divine character which it is the goal of our hopes to possess, but the beholding of His self-manifestation. The parallelism of the verse also points to such an interpretation.

If so, then, we have here the blessed confidence that when all the baseless fabric of the dream of life has faded from our opening eyes, we shall see the face of our ever-loving God. Here the distracting whirl of earthly things obscures Him from even the devoutest souls, and His own mighty works which reveal do also conceal. In them is the hiding as well as the showing of His power. But there the veil which draped the perfect likeness, and gave but dim

hints through its heavy swathings of the outline of immortal beauty that lay beneath, shall fall away. No longer befooled by shadows, we shall possess the true substance; no longer bedazzled by shows, we shall behold the reality.

And seeing God we shall be satisfied. With all lesser joys the eye is not satisfied with seeing, but to look on Him will be enough. Enough for mind and heart, wearied and perplexed with partial knowledge and imperfect love; enough for eager desires, which thirst, after all draughts from other streams; enough for will, chafing against lower lords and yet longing for authoritative control; enough for all my being—to see God. Here we can rest after all wanderings, and say, 'I travel no further; here will I dwell for ever—*I shall be satisfied*.'

And may these dim hopes not suggest to us too some presentiment of the full Christian truth of assimilation dependent on vision, and of vision reciprocally dependent on likeness? 'We shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is,'—words which reach a height that David but partially discerned through the mist. This much he knew, that he should in some transcendent sense behold the manifested God; and this much more, that it must be 'in righteousness' that he should gaze upon that face. The condition of beholding the Holy One was holiness. We know that the condition of holiness is trust in Christ. And as we reckon up the rich treasure of our immortal hopes, our faith grows bold, and

pauses not even at the lofty certainty of God without us, known directly and adequately, but climbs to the higher assurance of God within us, flooding our darkness with His great light, and changing us into the perfect copies of His express Image, His only-begotten Son. 'I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with Thy likeness,' cries the prophet Psalmist. 'It is enough for the disciple that he be as his master,' responds the Christian hope.

Brethren! take heed that the process of dissipating the vain shows of earth be begun betimes in your souls. It must either be done by Faith, whose rod disenchants them into their native nothingness, and then it is blessed; or it must be done by death, whose mace smites them to dust, and then it is pure, irrevocable loss and woe. Look away from, or rather look through, things that are seen to the King eternal, invisible. Let your hearts seek Christ, and your souls cleave to Him. Then death will take away nothing from you that you would care to keep, but will bring you your true joy. It will but trample to fragments the 'dome of many-coloured glass' that 'stains the white radiance of eternity.' Looking forward calmly to that supreme hour, you will be able to say, 'I will both lay me down in peace and sleep, for Thou, Lord, only makest me dwell in safety.' Looking back upon it from beyond, and wondering to find how brief it was, and how close to Him whom you love it has brought you, your now immortal lips touched by the rising Sun of the

heavenly morning will thankfully exclaim, 'When I awake, I am still with Thee.'

SECRET FAULTS

'Who can understand his errors? cleanse Thou me from secret faults.'
PSALM xix. 12.

The contemplation of the 'perfect law, enlightening the eyes,' sends the Psalmist to his knees. He is appalled by his own shortcomings, and feels that, beside all those of which he is aware, there is a region, as yet unilluminated by that law, where evil things nestle and breed.

The Jewish ritual drew a broad distinction between inadvertent—whether involuntary or ignorant—and deliberate sins; providing atonement for the former, not for the latter. The word in my text rendered 'errors' is closely connected with that which in the Levitical system designates the former class of transgressions; and the connection between the two clauses of the text, as well as that with the subsequent verse, distinctly shows that the 'secret faults' of the one clause are substantially synonymous

with the 'errors' of the other.

They are, then, not sins hidden from men, whether because they have been done quietly in a corner, and remain undetected, or because they have only been in thought, never passing into act. Both of these pages are dark in every man's memory. Who is there that could reveal himself to men? who is there that could bear the sight of a naked soul? But the Psalmist is thinking of a still more solemn fact, that, beyond the range of conscience and consciousness, there are evils in us all. It may do us good to ponder his discovery that he had undiscovered sins, and to take for ours his prayer, 'Cleanse Thou me from secret faults.'

I. So I ask you to look with me, briefly, first, at the solemn fact here, that there are in every man sins of which the doer is unaware.

It is with our characters as with our faces. Few of us are familiar with our own appearance, and most of us, if we have looked at our portraits, have felt a little shock of surprise, and been ready to say to ourselves, 'Well! I did not know that I looked like that!' And the bulk even of good men are almost as much strangers to their inward physiognomy as to their outward. They see themselves in their looking-glasses every morning, although they 'go away and forget what manner of men' they were. But they do not see their true selves in the same fashion in any other mirror. It is the very characteristic of all evil

that it has a strange power of deceiving a man as to its real character; like the cuttle-fish, that squirts out a cloud of ink and so escapes in the darkness and the dirt. The more a man goes wrong the less he knows it. Conscience is loudest when it is least needed, and most silent when most required.

Then, besides that, there is a great part of every one's life which is mechanical, instinctive, and all but involuntary. Habits and emotions and passing impulses very seldom come into men's consciousness, and an enormously large proportion of everybody's life is done with the minimum of attention, and is as little remembered as it is observed.

Then, besides that, conscience wants educating. You see that on a large scale, for instance, in the history of the slow progress which Christian principle has made in leavening the world's thinkings. It took eighteen centuries to teach the Church that slavery was unchristian. The Church has not yet learned that war is unchristian, and it is only beginning to surmise that possibly Christian principle may have something to say in social questions, and in the determination, for example, of the relations of capital and labour, and of wealth and poverty. The very same slowness of apprehension and gradual growth in the education of conscience, and in the perception of the application of Christian principles to duty, applies to the individual as to the Church.

Then, besides that, we are all biassed in our own

favour, and what, when another man says it, is 'flat blasphemy,' we think, when we say it, is only 'a choleric word.' We have fine names for our own vices, and ugly ones for the very same vices in other people. David will flare up into generous and sincere indignation about the man that stole the poor man's ewe lamb, but he has not the ghost of a notion that he has been doing the very same thing himself. And so we bribe our consciences as well as neglect them, and they need to be educated.

Thus, down below every life there lies a great dim region of habits and impulses and fleeting emotions, into which it is the rarest thing for a man to go with a candle in his hand to see what it is like.

But I can imagine a man saying, 'Well, if I do not know that I am doing wrong, how can it be a sin?' In answer to that, I would say that, thank God! ignorance diminishes criminality, but ignorance does not alter the nature of the deed. Take a simple illustration. Here is a man who, all unconsciously to himself, is allowing worldly prosperity to sap his Christian character. He does not know that the great current of his life has been turned aside, as it were, by that sluice, and is taken to drive the wheels of his mill, and that there is only a miserable little trickle coming down the river bed. Is he any less guilty because he does not know? Is he not the more so, because he might and would have known if he had thought and felt right? Or, here is another man who has the habit of letting his temper get the better of

him. He calls it 'stern adherence to principle,' or 'righteous indignation'; and he thinks himself very badly used when other people 'drive him' so often into a temper. Other people know, and *he* might know, if he would be honest with himself, that, for all his fine names, it is nothing else than passion. Is he any the less guilty because of his ignorance? It is plain enough that, whilst ignorance, if it is absolute and inevitable, does diminish criminality to the vanishing point, the ignorance of our own faults which most of us display is neither absolute nor inevitable; and therefore, though it may, thank God! diminish, it does not destroy our guilt. 'She wipeth her mouth and saith, I have done no harm': was she, therefore, chaste and pure? In all our hearts there are many vermin lurking beneath the stones, and they are none the less poisonous because they live and multiply in the dark. 'I know nothing against myself, yet am I not hereby justified. But he that judgeth me is the Lord.'

II. Now, secondly, let me ask you to look at the special perilousness of these hidden faults.

As with a blight upon a rose-tree, the little green creatures lurk on the underside of the leaves, and in all the folds of the buds, and because unseen, they increase with alarming rapidity. The very fact that we have faults in our characters, which everybody sees but ourselves, makes it certain that they will grow unchecked, and so will prove terribly perilous. The small things of life are the great things of life.

For a man's character is made up of them, and of their results, striking inwards upon himself. A wine-glassful of water with one drop of mud in it may not be much obscured, but if you come to multiply it into a lakeful, you will have muddy waves that reflect no heavens, and show no gleaming stars.

These secret faults are like a fungus that has grown in a wine-cask, whose presence nobody suspected. It sucks up all the generous liquor to feed its own filthiness, and when the staves are broken, there is no wine left, nothing but the foul growth. Many a Christian man and woman has the whole Christian life arrested, and all but annihilated, by the unsuspected influence of a secret sin. I do not believe it would be exaggeration to say that, for one man who has made shipwreck of his faith and lost his peace by reason of some gross transgression, there are twenty who have fallen into the same condition by reason of the multitude of small ones. 'He that despiseth little things shall fall by little and little'; and whilst the deeds which the Ten Commandments rebuke are damning to a Christian character, still more perilous, because unseen, and permitted to grow without check or restraint, are these unconscious sins. 'Happy is he that condemneth not himself in that thing which he alloweth.'

III. Notice the discipline, or practical issues, to which such considerations should lead.

To begin with, they ought to take down our self-

complacency, if we have any, and to make us feel that, after all, our characters are very poor things. If men praise us, let us try to remember what it will be good for us to remember, too, when we are tempted to praise ourselves—the underworld of darkness which each of us carries about within us.

Further, let me press upon you two practical points. This whole set of contemplations should make us practise a very rigid and close self-inspection. There will always be much that will escape our observation—we shall gradually grow to know more and more of it—but there can be no excuse for that which I fear is a terribly common characteristic of the professing Christianity of this day—the all but entire absence of close inspection of one's own character and conduct. I know very well that it is not a wholesome thing for a man to be always poking in his own feelings and emotions. I know also that, in a former generation, there was far too much introspection, instead of looking to Jesus Christ and forgetting self. I do not believe that self-examination, directed to the discovery of reasons for trusting the sincerity of my own faith, is a good thing. But I do believe that, without the practice of careful weighing of ourselves, there will be very little growth in anything that is noble and good.

The old Greeks used to preach, 'Know thyself.' It was a high behest, and very often a very vain-glorious one. A man's best means of knowing what he is, is to take stock of what he does. If you will put

your conduct through the sieve, you will come to a pretty good understanding of your character. 'He that hath no rule over his own spirit is like a city broken down, without walls,' into which all enemies can leap unhindered, and out from which all things that will may pass. Do you set guards at the gates and watch yourselves with all carefulness.

Then, again, I would say we must try to diminish as much as possible the mere instinctive and habitual and mechanical part of our lives, and to bring, as far as we can, every action under the conscious dominion of principle. The less we live by impulse, and the more we live by intelligent reflection, the better it will be for us. The more we can get habit on the side of goodness, the better; but the more we break up our habits, and make each individual action the result of a special volition of the spirit guided by reason and conscience, the better for us all.

Then, again, I would say, set yourselves to educate your consciences. They need that. One of the surest ways of making conscience more sensitive is always to consult it and always to obey it. If you neglect it, and let it prophesy to the wind, it will stop speaking before long. Herod could not get a word out of Christ when he 'asked Him many questions' because for years he had not cared to hear His voice. And conscience, like the Lord of conscience, will hold its peace after men have neglected its speech. You can pull the clapper out of the bell upon the rock, and then, though the waves may dash, there will not be a

sound, and the vessel will drive straight on to the black teeth that are waiting for it. Educate your conscience by obeying it, and by getting into the habit of bringing everything to its bar.

And, still further, compare yourselves constantly with your model. Do as the art students do in a gallery, take your poor daub right into the presence of the masterpiece, and go over it line by line and tint by tint. Get near Jesus Christ that you may learn your duty from Him, and you will find out many of the secret sins.

And, lastly, let us ask God to cleanse us.

My text, as translated in the Revised Version, says, '*Clear* Thou me from secret faults.' And there is present in that word, if not exclusively, at least predominantly, the idea of a judicial acquittal, so that the thought of the first clause of this verse seems rather to be that of pronouncing guiltless, or forgiving, than that of delivering from the power of. But both, no doubt, are included in the idea, as both, in fact, come from the same source and in response to the same cry.

And so we may be sure that, though our eye does not go down into the dark depths, God's eye goes, and that where He looks He looks to pardon, if we come to Him through Jesus Christ our Lord.

He will deliver us from the power of these secret

faults, giving to us that divine Spirit which is 'the candle of the Lord,' to search us, and to convince of our sins, and to drag our evil into the light; and giving us the help without which we can never overcome. The only way for us to be delivered from the dominion of our unconscious faults is to increase the depth and closeness and constancy of our communion with Jesus Christ; and then they will drop away from us. Mosquitoes and malaria, the one unseen in their minuteness, and the other, 'the pestilence that walketh in darkness,' haunt the swamps. Go up on the hilltop, and neither of them are found. So if we live more and more on the high levels, in communion with our Master, there will be fewer and fewer of these unconscious sins buzzing and stinging and poisoning our lives, and more and more will His grace conquer and cleanse.

They will all be manifested some day. The time comes when He shall bring to light the hidden things and darkness and the counsels of men's hearts. There will be surprises on both hands of the Judge. Some on the right, astonished, will say, 'Lord, when saw we Thee?' and some on the left, smitten to confusion and surprise, will say, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Thy name?'

Let us go to Him with the prayer, 'Search me, O God! and try me; and see if there be any wicked way in me; and lead me in the way everlasting.'

OPEN SINS

> 'Keep back Thy servant also from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me: then shall I be upright, and I shall be innocent from the great transgression.'—PSALM xix. 13.

Another psalmist promises to the man who dwells 'in the secret place of the Most High' that' he shall not be afraid for the terror by night, nor for the arrow that flieth by day, nor for the pestilence that walketh at noonday,' but shall 'tread upon the lion and adder.' These promises divide the dangers that beset us into the same two classes as our Psalmist does—the one secret; the other palpable and open. The former, which, as I explained in my last sermon, are sins hidden, not from others, but from the doer, may fairly be likened to the pestilence that stalks slaying in the dark, or to the stealthy, gliding serpent, which strikes and poisons before the naked foot is aware. The other resembles the 'destruction that wasteth at noonday,' or the lion with its roar and its spring, as, disclosed from its covert, it leaps upon the prey.

Our present text deals with the latter of these two classes. 'Presumptuous sins' does not, perhaps, convey to an ordinary reader the whole significance of the phrase, for it may be taken to define a single class of sins—namely, those of pride or insolence.

What is really meant is just the opposite of 'secret sins'—all sorts of evil which, whatever may be their motives and other qualities, have this in common, that the doer, when he does them, knows them to be wrong.

The Psalmist gets this further glimpse into the terrible possibilities which attach even to a servant of God, and we have in our text these three things—a danger discerned, a help sought, and a daring hope cherished.

I. Note, then, the first of these, the dreaded and discerned danger—'presumptuous sins,' which may 'have dominion over' us, and lead us at last to a 'great transgression.'

Now the word which is translated 'presumptuous' literally means *that which boils or bubbles*; and it sets very picturesquely before us the movement of hot desires—the agitation of excited impulses or inclinations which hurry men into sin in spite of their consciences. It is also to be noticed that the prayer of my text, with singular pathos and lowly self-consciousness, is the prayer of 'Thy servant,' who knows himself to be a servant, and who therefore knows that these glaring transgressions, done in the teeth of conscience and consciousness, are all inconsistent with his standing and his profession, but yet are perfectly possible for him.

An old mediaeval mystic once said, 'There is

nothing weaker than the devil stripped naked.' Would it were true! For there is one thing that is weaker than a discovered devil, and that is my own heart. For we all know that sometimes, with our eyes open, and the most unmistakable consciousness that what we are doing was wrong, we have set our teeth and done it, Christian men though we may profess to be, and may really be. All such conduct is inconsistent with Christianity; but we are not to say, therefore, that it is incompatible with Christianity. Thank God! that is a very different matter. But as long as you and I have two things—viz. strong and hot desires, and weak and flabby wills—so long shall we, in this world full of combustibles, not be beyond the possibility of a dreadful conflagration being kindled by some devil-blown sparks. There are plenty of dry sticks lying about to put under the caldron of our hearts, to make them boil and bubble over! And we have, alas! but weak wills, which do not always keep the reins in their hands as they ought to do, nor coerce these lower parts of our nature into their proper subordination. Fire is a good servant, but a bad master; and we are all of us too apt to let it become master, and then the whole 'course of nature' is 'set on fire of hell.' The servant of God may yet, with open eyes and obstinate disregard of his better self and of all its remonstrances, go straight into 'presumptuous sin.'

Another step is here taken by the Psalmist. He looks shrinkingly and shudderingly into a possible

depth, and he sees, going down into the abyss, a ladder with three rungs on it. The topmost one is wilful, self-conscious transgression. But that is not the lowest stage; there is another step. Presumptuous sin tends to become despotic sin. 'Let them not *have dominion* over me.' A man may do a very bad thing once, and get so wholesomely frightened, and so keenly conscious of the disastrous issues, that he will never go near it again. The prodigal would not be in a hurry, you may depend upon it, to try the swine trough and the far country, and the rags, and the fever, and the famine any more. David got a lesson that he never forgot in that matter of Bathsheba. The bitter fruit of his sin kept growing up all his life, and he had to eat it, and that kept him right. They tell us that broken bones are stronger at the point of fracture than they were before. And it is possible for a man's sin—if I might use a paradox which you will not misunderstand—to become the instrument of his salvation.

But there is another possibility quite as probable, and very often recurring, and that is that the disease, like some other morbid states of the human frame, shall leave a tendency to recurrence. A pin-point hole in a dyke will be widened into a gap as big as a church-door in ten minutes, by the pressure of the flood behind it. And so every act which we do in contradiction of our standing as professing Christians, and in the face of the protests, all unavailing, of that conscience which is only a voice,

and has no power to enforce its behests, will tend to recurrence once and again. The single acts become habits, with awful rapidity. Just as the separate gas jets from a multitude of minute apertures coalesce into a continuous ring of light, so deeds become habits, and get dominion over us. 'He sold himself to do evil.' He made himself a bond-slave of iniquity. It is an awful and a miserable thing to think that professing Christians do often come into that position of being, by their inflamed passions and enfeebled wills, servants of the evil that they do. Alas! how many of us, if we were honest with ourselves, would have to say. 'I am carnal, sold unto sin.'

That is not the lowest rung of the slippery ladder. Despotic sin ends in utter departure.

The word translated here, quite correctly, 'transgression,' and intensified by that strong adjective attached, 'a *great* transgression,' literally means *rebellion*, *revolt*, or some such idea; and expresses, as the ultimate issue of conscious transgression prolonged and perpetuated into habit, an entire casting off of allegiance to God. 'No man can serve two masters.' 'His servants ye are whom ye obey,' whomsoever ye may call your master. The Psalmist feels that the end of indulged evil is going over altogether to the other camp. I suppose all of us have known instances of that sort. Men in my position, with a long life of ministry behind them, can naturally remember many such instances. And this is the outline history of the suicide of a

Christian. First secret sin, unsuspected, because the conscience is torpid; then open sin, known to be such, but done nevertheless; then dominant sin, with an enfeebled will and power of resistance; then the abandonment of all pretence or profession of religion. The ladder goes down into the pit, but not to the bottom of the pit. And the man that is going down it has a descending impulse after he has reached the bottom step and he falls—Where? The first step down is tampering with conscience. It is neither safe nor wise to do anything, howsoever small, against that voice. All the rest will come afterward, unless God restrains—'first the blade, then the ear, then the full corn in the ear,' and then the bitter harvest of the poisonous grain.

II. So, secondly, note the help sought.

The Psalmist is like a man standing on the edge of some precipice, and peeping over the brink to the profound beneath, and feeling his head beginning to swim. He clutches at the strong, steady hand of his guide, knowing that unless he is restrained, over he will go. 'Keep Thou back Thy servant from presumptuous sins.'

So, then, the first lesson we have to take is, to cherish a lowly consciousness of our own tendency to light-headedness and giddiness. 'Blessed is the man that feareth always.' That fear has nothing cowardly about it. It will not abate in the least the buoyancy and bravery of our work. It will not tend to make us

shirk duty because there is temptation in it, but it will make us go into all circumstances realising that without that divine help we cannot stand, and that with it we cannot fall. 'Hold Thou me up, and I shall be safe.' The same Peter that said, 'Though all should forsake Thee, yet will not I,' was wiser and braver when he said, in later days, being taught by former presumption, 'Pass the time of your sojourning here in fear.'

Let me remind you, too, that the temper which we ought to cherish is that of a confident belief in the reality of a divine support. The prayer of my text has no meaning at all, unless the actual supernatural communication by God's own Holy Spirit breathed into men's hearts be a simple truth. 'Hold Thou me up,' 'Keep Thou me back,' means, if it means anything, 'Give me in my heart a mightier strength than mine own, which shall curb all this evil nature of mine, and bring it into conformity with Thy holy will.'

How is that restraining influence to be exercised? There are many ways by which God, in His providence, can fulfil the prayer. But the way above all others is by the actual operation upon heart and will and desires of a divine Spirit, who uses for His weapon the Word of God, revealed by Jesus Christ, and in the Scriptures. 'The sword of the Spirit is the Word of God,' and God's answer to the prayer of my text is the gift to every man who seeks it of that indwelling Power to sustain and to restrain.

That will keep our passions down. The bubbling water is lowered in its temperature, and ceases to bubble, when cold is added to it. When God's Spirit comes into a man's heart, that will deaden his desires after earth and forbidden ways. He will bring blessed higher objects for all his affections. He who has been fed on 'the hidden manna' will not be likely to hanker after the leeks and onions, however strong their smell and pungent their taste, that grew in the Nile mud in Egypt. He who has tasted the higher sweetnesses of God will have his heart's desires after lower delights strangely deadened and cooled. Get near God, and open your hearts for the entrance of that divine Spirit, and then it will not seem foolish to empty your hands of the trash that they carry in order to grasp the precious things that He gives. A bit of scrap-iron magnetised turns to the pole. My heart, touched by the Spirit of God dwelling in me, will turn to Him, and I shall find little sweetness in the else tempting delicacies that earth can supply. 'Keep Thy servant back from,' by depriving him of the taste for, 'presumptuous sins.'

That Spirit will strengthen our wills. For when God comes into a heart, He restores the due subordination which has been broken into discord and anarchy by sin. He dismounts the servant riding on horseback, and carrying the horse to the devil, according to the proverb, and gives the reins into the right hands. Now, if the gift of God's Spirit, working through the Word of God, and the principles and the

motives therein unfolded, and therefrom deducible, be the great means by which we are to be kept from open and conscious transgression, it follows very plainly that our task is twofold. One part of it is to see that we cultivate that spirit of lowly dependence, of self-conscious weakness, of triumphant confidence, which will issue in the perpetual prayer for God's restraint. When we enter upon tasks which may be dangerous, and into regions of temptation which cannot but be so, though they be duty, we should ever have the desire in our hearts and upon our lips that God would keep us from, and in, the evil.

The other part of our duty is to make it a matter of conscience and careful cultivation, to use honestly and faithfully the power which, in response to our desires, has been granted to us. All of you, Christian men and women, have access to an absolute security against every transgression; and the cause lies wholly at your own doors in each case of failure, deficiency, or transgression, for at every moment it was open to you to clasp the Hand that holds you up, and at every moment, if you failed, it was because your careless fingers had relaxed their grasp.

III. Lastly, observe the daring hope here cherished.

'Then shall I be upright, and I shall be innocent from the great transgression.' That is the upshot of the divine answer to both the petitions which have been occupying us in these two successive sermons.

It is connected with the former of them by the recurrence of the same word, which in the first petition was rendered 'cleanse'—or, more accurately, 'clear'—and in this final clause is to be rendered accurately, 'I shall be *clear* from the great transgression.' And it obviously connects in sense with both these petitions, because, in order to be upright and clear, there must, first of all, be divine cleansing, and then divine restraint.

So, then, nothing short of absolute deliverance from the power of sin in all its forms should content the servant of God. Nothing short of it contents the Master for the servant. Nothing short of it corresponds to the power which Christ puts in operation in every heart that believes in Him. And nothing else should be our aim in our daily conflict with evil and growth in grace. Ah! I fear me that, for an immense number of professing Christians in this generation, the hope of—and, still more, the aim towards—anything approximating to entire deliverance from sin, have faded from their consciences and their lives. Aim at the stars, brother! and if you do not hit them, your arrow will go higher than if it were shot along the lower levels.

Note that an indefinite approximation to this condition is possible. I am not going to discuss, at this stage of my discourse, controversial questions which may be involved here. It will be time enough to discuss with you whether you can be absolutely free from sin in this world when you are a great deal

freer from it than you are at present. At all events, you can get far nearer to the ideal, and the ideal must always be perfect. And I lay it on your hearts, dear friends! that you have in your possession, if you are Christian people, possibilities in the way of conformity to the Master's will, and entire emancipation from all corruption, that you have not yet dreamed of, not to say applied to your lives. 'I pray God that He would sanctify you wholly, and that your whole body, soul, and spirit be preserved blameless unto the coming.'

That daring hope will be fulfilled one day; for nothing short of it will exhaust the possibilities of Christ's work or satisfy the desires of Christ's heart.

The Gospel knows nothing of irreclaimable outcasts. To it there is but one unpardonable sin, and that is the sin of refusing the cleansing of Christ's blood and the sanctifying of Christ's Spirit. Whoever you are, whatever you are, go to God with this prayer of our text, and realise that it is answered in Jesus Christ, and you will not ask in vain. If you will put yourself into His hands, and let Him cleanse and restrain, He will give you new powers to detect the serpents in the flowers, and new resolution to shake off the vipers into the fire. For there is nothing that God wants half so much as that we, His wandering children, should come back to Him, and He will cleanse us from the filth of the swine trough and the rags of our exile, and clothe us in 'fine linen clean and white.' We may each be sinless and guiltless. We

can be so in one way only. If we look to Jesus Christ, and live near Him, He 'will be made of God unto us wisdom,' by which we shall detect our secret sins; 'righteousness,' whereby we shall be cleansed from guilt; 'sanctification,' which shall restrain us from open transgression; 'and redemption,' by which we shall be wholly delivered from evil and 'presented faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy.'

FEASTING ON THE SACRIFICE

'The meek shall eat and be satisfied.'—PSALM xxii. 26.

'The flesh of the sacrifice of his peace-offering for thanksgiving shall be offered in the day of his oblation.' Such was the law for Israel. And the custom of sacrificial feasts, which it embodies, was common to many lands. To such a custom my text alludes; for the Psalmist has just been speaking of 'paying his vows' (that is, sacrifices which he had vowed in the time of his trouble), and to partake of these he invites the meek. The sacrificial dress is only a covering for high and spiritual thoughts. In

some way or other the singer of this psalm anticipates that his experiences shall be the nourishment and gladness of a wide circle; and if we observe that in the context that circle is supposed to include the whole world, and that one of the results of partaking of this sacrificial feast is 'your heart shall live for ever,' we may well say with the Ethiopian eunuch, 'Of whom speaketh the Psalmist thus?'

The early part of the psalm answers the question. Jesus Christ laid His hand on this wonderful psalm of desolation, despair, and deliverance when on the Cross He took its first words as expressing His emotion then: 'My God! My God! Why hast Thou forsaken Me?' Whatever may be our views as to its authorship, and as to the connection between the Psalmist's utterances and his own personal experiences, none to whom that voice that rang through the darkness on Calvary is the voice of the Son of God, can hesitate as to who it is whose very griefs and sorrows are thus the spiritual food that gives life to the whole world.

From this, the true point of view, then, from which to look at the whole of this wonderful psalm, I desire to deal with the words of my text now.

I. We have, first, then, the world's sacrificial feast.

The Jewish ritual, and that of many other nations, as I have remarked, provided for a festal meal

following on, and consisting of the material of, the sacrifice. A generation which studies comparative mythology, and spares no pains to get at the meaning underlying the barbarous worship of the rudest nations, ought to be interested in the question of the ideas that formed and were expressed by that elaborate Jewish ritual. In the present case, the signification is plain enough. That which, in one aspect, is a peace-offering reconciling to God, in another aspect is the nourishment and the joy of the hearts that accept it. And so the work of Jesus Christ has two distinct phases of application, according as we think of it as being offered to God or appropriated by men. In the one case it is our peace; in the other it is our food and our life. If we glance for a moment at the marvellous picture of suffering and desolation in the previous portion of this psalm, which sounds the very depths of both, we shall understand more touchingly what it is on which Christian hearts are to feed. The desolation that spoke in 'Why hast Thou forsaken Me?' the consciousness of rejection and reproach, of mockery and contempt, which wailed, 'All that see Me laugh Me to scorn; they shoot out the lip; they shake the head, saying, "He trusted on the Lord that He would deliver Him; let Him deliver Him, seeing He delighteth in Him"'; the physical sufferings which are the very picture of crucifixion, so as that the whole reads liker history than prophecy, in 'All My bones are out of joint; My strength is dried up like a potsherd; and My tongue cleaveth to My jaws'; the

actual passing into the darkness of the grave, which is expressed in 'Thou hast brought Me into the dust of death'; and even the minute correspondence, so inexplicable upon any hypothesis except that it is direct prophecy, which is found in 'They part My garments among them, and cast lots upon My vesture'—these be the viands, not without bitter herbs, that are laid on the table which Christ spreads for us. They are parts of the sacrifice that reconciles to God. Offered to Him they make our peace. They are parts and elements of the food of our spirits. Appropriated and partaken of by us they make our strength and our life.

Brethren! there is little food, there is little impulse, little strength for obedience, little gladness or peace of heart to be got from a Christ who is *not* a Sacrifice. If we would know how much He may be to us, as the nourishment of our best life, and as the source of our purest and permanent gladness, we must, first of all, look upon Him as the Offering for the world's sin, and then as the very Life and Bread of our souls. The Christ that feeds the world is the Christ that died for the world.

Hence our Lord Himself, most eminently in one great and profound discourse, has set forth, not only that He is the Bread of God which 'came down from heaven,' but that His flesh and His blood are such, and the separation between the two in the discourse, as in the memorial rite, indicates that there has come the violent separation of death, and that thereby He

becomes the life of humanity.

So my text, and the whole series of Old Testament representations in which the blessings of the Kingdom are set forth as a feast, and the parables of the New Testament in which a similar representation is contained, do all converge upon, and receive their deepest meaning from, that one central thought that the peace-offering for the world is the food of the world.

We see, hence, the connection between these great spiritual ideas and the central act of Christian worship. The Lord's Supper simply says by act what my text says in words. I know no difference between the rite and the parable, except that the one is addressed to the eye and the other to the ear. The rite is an acted parable; the parable is a spoken rite. And when Jesus Christ, in the great discourse to which I have referred, dilates at length upon the 'eating of His flesh and the drinking of His blood' as being the condition of spiritual life, He is not referring to the Lord's Supper, but the discourse and the rite refer both to the same spiritual truth. One is a symbol; the other is a saying; and symbol and saying mean just the same thing. The saying does not refer to the symbol, but to that to which the symbol refers. It seems to me that one of the greatest dangers which now threaten Evangelical Christianity is the strange and almost inexplicable recrudescence of Sacramentarianism in this generation to which those Christian communities are contributing, however

reluctantly and unconsciously, who say there is something more than commemorative symbols in the bread and wine of the Lord's table. If once you admit that, it seems, in my humble judgment, that you open the door to the whole flood of evils which the history of the Church declares have come with the Sacramentarian hypothesis. And we must take our stand, as I believe, upon the plain, intelligible thoughts—Baptism is a declaratory symbol, and nothing more; the Lord's Supper is a commemorative symbol, and nothing more; except that both are acts of obedience to the enjoining Lord. When we stand there we can face all priestly superstitions, and say, 'Jesus I know; and Paul I know; but who are ye?' 'The meek shall eat and be satisfied,' and the food of the world is the suffering Messiah.

But what have we to say about the act expressed in the text? 'The meek shall eat.' I do not desire to dwell at any length upon the thought of the process by which this food of the world becomes ours, in this sermon. But there are two points which perhaps may be regarded as various aspects of one, on which I would like to say just a sentence or two. Of course, the translation of the 'eating' of my text into spiritual reality is simply that we partake of the food of our spirits by the act of faith in Jesus Christ. But whilst that is so, let me put emphasis, in a sentence, upon the thought that personal appropriation, and making the world's food mine, by my own individual act, is the condition on which alone I get any good from it.

It is possible to die of starvation at the door of a granary. It is possible to have a table spread with all that is needful, and yet to set one's teeth, and lock one's lips, and receive no strength and no gladness from the rich provision. 'Eat' means, at any rate, incorporate with myself, take into my very own lips, masticate with my very own teeth, swallow down by my very own act, and so make part of my physical frame. And that is what we have to do with Jesus Christ, or He is nothing to us. 'Eat'; claim your part in the universal blessing; see that it becomes yours by your own taking of it into the very depths of your heart. And then, and then only, will it become your food.

And how are we to do that if, day in and day out, and week in and week out, and year in and year out, with some of us, there be scarce a thought turned to Him; scarce a desire winging its way to Him; scarce one moment of quiet contemplation of these great truths. We have to ruminate, we have to meditate; we have to make conscious and frequent efforts to bring before the mind, in the first place, and then before the heart and all the sensitive, emotional, and voluntary nature, the great truths on which our salvation rests. In so far as we do that we get good out of them; in so far as we fail to do it, we may call ourselves Christians, and attend to religious observances, and be members of churches, and diligent in good works, and all the rest of it, but nothing passes from Him to us, and we starve even

whilst we call ourselves guests at His table.

Oh! the average Christian life of this day is a strange thing; very, very little of it has the depth that comes from quiet communion with Jesus Christ; and very little of it has the joyful consciousness of strength that comes from habitual reception into the heart of the grace that He brings. What is the good of all your profession unless it brings you to that? If a coroner's jury were to sit upon many of us—and we are dead enough to deserve it—the verdict would be, 'Died of starvation.' 'The meek shall eat,' but what about the professing Christians that feed their souls upon anything, everything rather than upon the Christ whom they say they trust and serve?

II. And now let me say a word, in the second place, about the rich fruition of this feast.

'The meek shall be satisfied.' 'Satisfied!' Who in the world is? And if we are not, why are we not? Jesus Christ, in the facts of His death and resurrection—for His resurrection as well as His death are included in the psalm—brings to us all that our circumstances, relationships, and inward condition can require.

Think of what that death, as the sacrifice for the world's sin, does. It sets all right in regard to our relation to God. It reveals to us a God of infinite love. It provides a motive, an impulse, and a Pattern for all life. It abolishes death, and it gives ample scope for the loftiest and most exuberant hopes that a man can

cherish. And surely these are enough to satisfy the seeking spirit.

But go to the other end, and think, not of what Christ's work does for us, but of what we need to have done for us. What do you and I want to be satisfied? It would take a long time to go over the catalogue; let me briefly run through some of the salient points of it. We want, for the intellect, which is the regal part of man, though it be not the highest, truth which is certain, comprehensive, and inexhaustible; the first, to provide anchorage; the second, to meet and regulate and unify all thought and life; and the last, to allow room for endless research and ceaseless progress. And in that fact that the Eternal Son of the Eternal Father took upon Himself human nature, lived, died, rose, and reigns at God's right hand, I believe there lie the seeds of all truth, except the purely physical and material, which men need. Everything is there; every truth about God, about man, about duty, about a future, about society; everything that the world needs is laid up in germ in that great gospel of our salvation. If a man will take it for the foundation of his beliefs and the guide of his thinkings, he will find his understanding is satisfied, because it grasps the personal Truth who liveth, and is with us for ever.

Our hearts crave, however imperfect their love may be, a perfect love; and a perfect love means one untinged by any dash of selfishness, incapable of any variation or eclipse, all-knowing, all-pitying, all-

powerful. We have made experience of precious loves that die. We know of loves that change, that grow cold, that misconstrue, that may have tears but have no hands. We know of 'loves' that are only a fine name for animal passions, and are twice cursed, cursing them that give and them that take. The happiest will admit, and the lonely will achingly feel, how we all want for satisfaction a love that cannot fail, that can help, that beareth all things, and that can do all things. We have it in Jesus Christ, and the Cross is the pledge thereof.

Conscience wants pacifying, cleansing, enlightening, directing, and we get all these in the good news of One that has died for us, and that lives to be our Lord. The will needs authority which is not force. And where is there an authority so constraining in its sweetness and so sweet in its constraint as in those silken bonds which are stronger than iron fetters? Hope, imagination, and all other of our powers or weaknesses, our gifts or needs, are satisfied when they feed on Christ. If we feed upon anything else it turns to ashes that break our teeth and make our palates gritty, and have no nourishment in them. We shall be 'for ever roaming with a hungry heart' unless we take our places at the feast on the one sacrifice for the world's peace.

III. I can say but a word as to the guests.

It is 'the meek' who eat. The word translated 'meek' has a wider and deeper meaning than that. 'Meek'

refers, in our common language, mainly to men's demeanour to one another; but the expression here goes deeper. It means both 'afflicted' and 'lowly'—the right use of affliction being to bow men, and they that bow themselves are those who are fit to come to Christ's feast. There is a very remarkable contrast between the words of my text and those that follow a verse or two afterwards. 'The meek shall eat and be satisfied,' says the text. And then close upon its heels comes, 'All those that be fat upon earth shall eat.' That is to say, the lofty and proud have to come down to the level of the lowly, and take indiscriminate places at the table with the poor and the starving, which, being turned into plain English is just this—the one thing that hinders a man from partaking of the fulness of Christ's feeding grace is self-sufficiency, and the absence of a sense of need. They that 'hunger and thirst after righteousness shall be filled'; and they that come, knowing themselves to be poor and needy, and humbly consenting to accept a gratuitous feast of charity—they, and only they, do get the rich provisions.

You are shut out because you shut yourselves out. They that do not know themselves to be hungry have no ears for the dinner-bell. They that feel the pangs of starvation and know that their own cupboards are empty, they are those who will turn to the table that is spread in the wilderness, and there find a 'feast of fat things.'

And so, dear friends! when He calls, do not let us

make excuses, but rather listen to that voice that says to us, 'Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labour for that which satisfieth not…. Incline your ear unto Me; hear, and your soul shall live.'

THE SHEPHERD KING OF ISRAEL

> 'The Lord is my shepherd: I shall not want. 2. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: He leadeth me beside the still waters. 3. He restoreth my soul: He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake. 4. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for Thou art with me; Thy rod and Thy staff, they comfort me. 5. Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: Thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over. 6. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever.'—PSALM xxiii. 1-6.

The king who had been the shepherd-boy, and had been taken from the quiet sheep-cotes to rule over

Israel, sings this little psalm of Him who is the true Shepherd and King of men. We do not know at what period of David's life it was written, but it sounds as if it were the work of his later years. There is a fulness of experience about it, and a tone of subdued, quiet confidence which speaks of a heart mellowed by years, and of a faith made sober by many a trial. A young man would not write so calmly, and a life which was just opening would not afford material for such a record of God's guardianship in all changing circumstances.

If, then, we think of the psalm as the work of David's later years, is it not very beautiful to see the old king looking back with such vivid and loving remembrance to his childhood's occupation, and bringing up again to memory in his palace the green valleys, the gentle streams, the dark glens where he had led his flocks in the old days; very beautiful to see him traversing all the stormy years of warfare and rebellion, of crime and sorrow, which lay between, and finding in all God's guardian presence and gracious guidance? The faith which looks back and says, 'It is all very good,' is not less than that which looks forward and says, 'Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life.'

There is nothing difficult of understanding in the psalm. The train of thought is clear and obvious. The experiences which it details are common, the emotions it expresses simple and familiar. The tears that have been dried, the fears that have been

dissipated, by this old song; the love and thankfulness which have found in them their best expression, prove the worth of its simple words. It lives in most of our memories. Let us try to vivify it in our hearts, by pondering it for a little while together now.

The psalm falls into two halves, in both of which the same general thought of God's guardian care is presented, though under different illustrations, and with some variety of detail. The first half sets Him forth as a shepherd, and us as the sheep of His pasture. The second gives Him as the Host, and us as the guests at His table, and the dwellers in His house.

First, then, consider that picture of the divine Shepherd and His leading of His flock.

It occupies the first four verses of the psalm. There is a double progress of thought in it. It rises, from memories of the past, and experiences of the present care of God, to hope for the future. 'The Lord is my Shepherd'—'I will fear no evil.' Then besides this progress from what was and is, to what will be, there is another string, so to speak, on which the gems are threaded. The various methods of God's leading of His flock, or rather, we should say, the various regions into which He leads them, are described in order. These are Rest, Work, Sorrow—and this series is so combined with the order of time already adverted to, as that the past and the present are considered as the regions of rest and of work, while

the future is anticipated as having in it the valley of the shadow of death.

First, God leads His sheep into rest. 'He maketh me to lie down in green pastures, He leadeth me beside the still waters.' It is the hot noontide, and the desert lies baking in the awful glare, and every stone on the hills of Judaea burns the foot that touches it. But in that panting, breathless hour, here is a little green glen, with a quiet brooklet, and moist lush herb-age all along its course, and great stones that fling a black shadow over the dewy grass at their base; and there would the shepherd lead his flock, while the sunbeams, like swords,' are piercing everything beyond that hidden covert. Sweet silence broods there, The sheep feed and drink, and couch in cool lairs till he calls them forth again. So God leads His children.

The psalm puts the rest and refreshment *first*, as being the most marked characteristic of God's dealings. After all, it is so. The years are years of unbroken continuity of outward blessings. The reign of afflictions is ordinarily measured by days. 'Weeping endures for a night.' It is a rainy climate where half the days have rain in them; and that is an unusually troubled life of which it can with any truth be affirmed that there has been as much darkness as sunshine in it.

But it is not mainly of outward blessings that the Psalmist is thinking. They are precious chiefly as

emblems of the better spiritual gifts; and it is not an accommodation of his words, but is the appreciation of their truest spirit, when we look upon them, as the instinct of devout hearts has ever done, as expressing both God's gift of temporal mercies, and His gift of spiritual good, of which higher gift all the lower are meant to be significant and symbolic. Thus regarded, the image describes the sweet rest of the soul in communion with God, in whom alone the hungry heart finds food that satisfies, and from whom alone the thirsty soul drinks draughts deep and limpid enough.

This rest and refreshment has for its consequence the restoration of the soul, which includes in it both the invigoration of the natural life by the outward sort of these blessings, and the quickening and restoration of the spiritual life by the inward feeding upon God and repose in Him.

The soul thus restored is then led on another stage; 'He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake,'—that is to say, God guides us into work.

The quiet mercies of the preceding verse are not in themselves the end of our Shepherd's guidance; they are means to an end, and that is—work. Life is not a fold for the sheep to lie down in, but a road for them to walk on. All our blessings of every sort are indeed given us for our delight. They will never fit us for the duties for which they are intended to prepare us,

unless they first be thoroughly enjoyed. The highest good they yield is only reached through the lower one. But, then, when joy fills the heart, and life is bounding in the veins, we have to learn that these are granted, not for pleasure only, but for pleasure in order to power. We get them, not to let them pass away like waste steam puffed into empty air, but that we may use them to drive the wheels of life. The waters of happiness are not for a luxurious bath where a man may lie, till, like flax steeped too long, the very fibre be rotted out of him; a quick plunge will brace him, and he will come out refreshed for work. Rest is to fit for work, work is to sweeten rest.

All this is emphatically true of the spiritual life. Its seasons of communion, its hours on the mount, are to prepare for the sore sad work in the plain; and he is not the wisest disciple who tries to make the Mount of Transfiguration the abiding place for himself and his Lord.

It is not well that our chief object should be to enjoy the consolations of religion; it is better to seek first to do the duties enjoined by religion. Our first question should be, not, How may I enjoy God? but, How may I glorify Him? 'A single eye to His glory' means that even our comfort and joy in religious exercises shall be subordinated, and (if need were) postponed, to the doing of His will. While, on the one hand, there is no more certain means of enjoying Him than that of humbly seeking to walk in the ways of His commandments, on the other hand, there is

nothing more evanescent in its nature than a mere emotion, even though it be that of joy in God, unless it be turned into a spring of action for God. Such emotions, like photographs, vanish from the heart unless they be fixed. Work for God is the way to fix them. Joy in God is the strength of work for God, but work for God is the perpetuation of joy in God.

Here is the figurative expression of the great evangelical principle, that works of righteousness must follow, not precede, the restoration of the soul. We are justified not by works, but for works, or, as the Apostle puts it in a passage which sounds like an echo of this psalm, we are 'created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained *that we should walk in them*.' The basis of obedience is the sense of salvation. We work not *for* the assurance of acceptance and forgiveness, but *from* it. First the restored soul, then the paths of righteousness for *His* name's sake who has restored me, and restored me that I may be like Him.

But there is yet another region through which the varied experience of the Christian carries him, besides those of rest and of work. God leads His people through sorrow. 'Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil.'

The 'valley of the shadow of death' does not only mean the dark approach to the dark dissolution of soul and body, but any and every gloomy valley of weeping through which we have to pass. Such

sunless gorges we have all to traverse at some time or other. It is striking that the Psalmist puts the sorrow, which is as certainly characteristic of our lot as the rest or the work, into the future. Looking back he sees none. Memory has softened down all the past into one uniform tone, as the mellowing distance wraps in one solemn purple the mountains which, when close to them, have many a barren rock and gloomy rift, All behind is good. And, building on this hope, he looks forward with calmness, and feels that no evil shall befall.

But it is never given to human heart to meditate of the future without some foreboding. And when 'Hope enchanted smiles,' with the light of the future in her blue eyes, there is ever something awful in their depths, as if they saw some dark visions behind the beauty. Some evils may come; some will probably come; one at least is sure to come. However bright may be the path, somewhere on it, perhaps just round that turning, sits the 'shadow feared of man.' So there is never hope only in any heart that wisely considers the future. But to the Christian heart there may be this—the conviction that sorrow, when it comes, will not harm, because God will be with us; and the conviction that the Hand which guides us into the dark valley, will guide us through it and up out of it. Yes, strange as it may sound, the presence of Him who sends the sorrow is the best help to bear it. The assurance that the Hand which strikes is the Hand which binds up, makes the stroke a blessing,

sucks the poison out of the wound of sorrow, and turns the rod which smites into the staff to lean on.

The second portion of this psalm gives us substantially the same thoughts under a different image. It considers God as the host, and us as the guests at His table and the dwellers in His house.

In this illustration, which includes the remaining verses, we have, as before, the food and rest, the journey and the suffering. We have also, as before, memory and present experience issuing in hope. But it is all intensified. The necessity and the mercy are alike presented in brighter colours; the want is greater, the supply greater, the hope for the future on earth brighter; and, above all, while the former set of images stopped at the side of the grave, and simply refused to fear, here the vision goes on beyond the earthly end; and as the hope comes brightly out, that all the weary wanderings will end in the peace of the Father's house, the absence of fear is changed into the presence of triumphant confidence, and the resignation which, at the most, simply bore to look unfaltering into the depth of the narrow house, becomes the faith which plainly sees the open gate of the everlasting home.

God supplies our wants in the very midst of strife. 'Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies. Thou anointest my head with oil. My cup runneth over.' Before, it was food and rest first, work afterwards. Now it Is more than work—it is

conflict. And the mercy is more strikingly portrayed, as being granted not only *before toil*, but *in warfare*. Life is a sore fight; but to the Christian man, in spite of all the tumult, life is a festal banquet. There stand the enemies, ringing him round with cruel eyes, waiting to be let slip upon him like eager dogs round the poor beast of the chase. But for all that, here is spread a table in the wilderness, made ready by invisible hands; and the grim-eyed foe is held back in the leash till the servant of God has fed and been strengthened. This is our condition—always the foe, always the table.

What sort of a meal should that be? The soldiers who eat and drink, and are drunken in the presence of the enemy, like the Saxons before Hastings, what will become of them? Drink the cup of gladness, as men do when their foe is at their side, looking askance over the rim, and with one hand on the sword, 'ready, aye ready,' against treachery and surprise. But the presence of the danger should make the feast more enjoyable too, by the moderation it enforces, and by the contrast it affords—as to sailors on shore, or soldiers in a truce. Joy may grow on the very face of danger, as a slender rose-bush flings its bright sprays and fragrant blossoms over the lip of a cataract; and that not the wild mirth of men in a pestilence, with their 'Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die,' but the simple-hearted gladness of those who have preserved the invaluable childhood gift of living in the present moment, because they

know that to-morrow will bring God, whatever it brings, and not take away His care and love, whatever it takes away.

This, then, is the form under which the experience of the past is presented in the second portion,—joy in conflict, rest and food even in the strife. Upon that there is built a hope which transcends that in the previous portion of the psalm. As to this life, 'Goodness and mercy shall follow us.' This is more than 'I will fear no evil.' That said, sorrow is not evil if God be with us. This says, sorrow is mercy. The one is hope looking mainly at outward circumstances, the other is hope learning the spirit and meaning of them all. These two angels of God—Goodness and Mercy—shall follow and encamp around the pilgrim. The enemies whom God held back while he feasted, may pursue, but will not overtake him. They will be distanced sooner or later; but the white wings of these messengers of the covenant will never be far away from the journeying child, and the air will often be filled with the music of their comings, and their celestial weapons will glance around him in all the fight, and their soft arms will bear him up over all the rough ways, and up higher at last to the throne.

So much for the earthly future. But higher than all that rises the confidence of the closing words, 'I shall dwell in the house of the Lord for ever.' This should be at once the crown of all our hopes for the future, and the one great lesson taught us by all the

vicissitudes of life. The sorrows and the joys, the journeying and the rest, the temporary repose and the frequent struggles, all these should make us *sure* that there is an end which will interpret them all, to which they all point, for which they may all prepare. We get the table in the wilderness here. It is as when the son of some great king comes back from foreign soil to his father's dominions, and is welcomed at every stage in his journey to the capital with pomp of festival, and messengers from the throne, until he enters at last his palace home, where the travel-stained robe is laid aside, and he sits down with his father at his table. God provides for us here in the presence of our enemies; it is wilderness food we get, manna from heaven, and water from the rock. We eat in haste, staff in hand, and standing round the meal. But yonder we sit down with the Shepherd, the Master of the house, at His table in His kingdom. We put off the pilgrim-dress, and put on the royal robe; we lay aside the sword, and clasp the palm. Far off, and lost to sight, are all the enemies. We fear no change. We 'go no more out.'

The sheep are led by many a way, sometimes through sweet meadows, sometimes limping along sharp-flinted, dusty highways, sometimes high up over rough, rocky mountain-passes, sometimes down through deep gorges, with no sunshine in their gloom; but they are ever being led to one place, and when the hot day is over they are gathered into one fold, and the sinking sun sees them safe, where no

wolf can come, nor any robber climb up any more, but all shall rest for ever under the Shepherd's eye.

Brethren! can you take this psalm for yours? Have you returned unto Christ, the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls? Oh! let Him, the Shepherd of Israel, and the Lamb of God, one of the fold and yet the Guide and Defender of it, human and divine, bear you away from the dreary wilderness whither He has come seeking you. He will carry you rejoicing to the fold, if only you will trust yourselves to His gentle arm. He will restore your soul. He will lead you and keep you from all dangers, guard you from every sin, strengthen you when you come to die, and bring you to the fair plains beyond that narrow gorge of frowning rock. Then this sweet psalm shall receive its highest fulfilment, for then 'they shall hunger no more, neither shall they thirst any more, neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat, for the Lamb which is in the midst of the Throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters, and God shall wipe all tears from their eyes.'

A GREAT QUESTION AND ITS ANSWER

'Who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord? and who shall stand in
His holy place?'—PSALM xxiv. 3.

The psalm from which these words are taken flashes up into new beauty, if we suppose it to have been composed in connection with the bringing of the Ark into the Temple, or for some similar occasion. Whether it is David's or not is a matter of very small consequence. But if we look at the psalm as a whole, we can scarcely fail to see that some such occasion underlies it. So just exercise your imaginations for a moment, and think of the long procession of white-robed priests bearing the Ark, and followed by the joyous multitude chanting as they ascended, 'Who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord, or who shall stand in His holy place?' They are bethinking themselves of the qualifications needed for that which they are now doing. They reach the gates, which we must suppose to have been closed that they might be opened, and from the half-chorus outside there peals out the summons, 'Lift up your heads, O ye gates! and be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors, and the King of Glory shall come in.' Then from within another band of singers answers with the question, 'Who is this King of Glory' who thus demands entrance? And triumphantly the reply rings out, 'The Lord, strong and mighty; the Lord, mighty in battle.' Still reluctant, the question is put again, 'Who is this King of Glory?' and the answer is given once more, 'The Lord of hosts, He is the King of

Glory.' There is no reference in the second answer to 'battle.' The conflicts are over, and the dominion is established, and at the reiterated summons the ancient gates roll back on their hinges, burst as by a strong blow, and Jehovah enters into His rest, He and the Ark of His strength. If that is the general connection of the psalm—and I think you will admit that it adds to its beauty and dramatic force if we suppose it so—then this introductory question, sung as the procession climbed the steep, had realised what was needed for those who should get the entrance that they sought, and comes to be a very significant and important one. I deal now with the question and its answer.

I. The question of questions.

That question lies deep in all men's hearts, and underlies sacrifices and priesthoods and asceticisms and tortures of all sorts, and is the inner meaning of Hindoos swinging with hooks in their backs, and others of them measuring the road to the temple by prostrating themselves every yard or two as they advance. These self-torturers are all asking the same question: 'Who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord?' It sometimes rises in the thoughts of the most degraded, and it is present always with some of the better and nobler of men.

Now, there are three places in the Old Testament where substantially the same question is asked. There is this psalm of ours; there is another psalm

which is all but a duplicate, which begins with 'Lord, who shall abide in Thy tabernacle? who shall dwell in Thy holy hill?' And there is another shape into which the question is cast by the fervent and somewhat gloomy imagination of one of the prophets, who puts it thus: 'Who among us shall dwell with the devouring fire? Who shall dwell with the everlasting burnings?' There never was a more disastrous misapplication of Scripture than the popular idea that these two last questions suggest the possibility of a creature being exposed to the torments of future punishment. They have nothing to do with that. 'Who among us shall dwell with the devouring fire?' If you want a commentary, remember the words, 'Our God is a consuming fire.' That puts us on the right track, if we needed any putting on it, for answering this question, not in the gruesome and ghastly sense in which some people take it, but in all the grandeur of Isaiah's thought. He sees God as 'the everlasting burnings.' Fire is the emblem of life as well as of death; fire is the means of quickening as well as of destroying; and when we speak of Him as 'the everlasting burnings' we are reminded of the bush in the desert, where His own signature was set, 'burning and not consumed.'

So the question in all the three places referred to is substantially the same—and what does it indicate? It indicates the deep consciousness that men have that they need to be in that home, that for life and peace and blessedness, they must get somehow to the side

of God, and be quiet there, as children in their Father's house. We all know that this is true, whether our life is regulated by it or not. Very deep in every man's conscience, if he will attend to its voice, there is that which says, 'You are a pilgrim and a sojourner, and homeless and desolate until you nestle beneath the outspread wings in the Holy Place, and are a denizen of God's house.'

The question further suggests another. The universal consciousness—which is, I believe, universal—though it is overlain and stifled by many of us, and neglected and set at nought by others—is that this fellowship with God, which is indispensable to a man's peace, is impossible to a man's impurity. So the question raises the thought of the consciousness of sin which comes creeping over a man when he is sometimes feeling after God, and seems to batter him in the face, and fling him back into the outer darkness, 'How can I enter in there?' and conscience has no answer, and the world has none, and as I shall have to say presently, the answer which the Old Testament, as Law, gives is almost as hopeless as the answer which conscience gives. But at all events that this question should rise and insist upon being answered as it does proves these three things—man's need of God, man's sense of God's purity, man's consciousness of his own sin.

And what does that ascent to the hill of the Lord include? All the present life, for, unless we are 'dwelling in the house of the Lord all the days of our

lives beholding His beauty and inquiring in His Temple,' then we have little in life that is worth the having. The old Arab right of claiming hospitality of the Sheikh into whose tent the fugitive ran is used in Scripture over and over again to express the relation in which alone it is blessed for a man to live—namely, as a guest of God's. That is peace. That is all that we require, to sit at His fireside, if I may so say, to claim the rites of hospitality, which the Arab chief would not refuse to the veriest tatterdemalion, or the greatest enemy that he knew, if he came into his tent and sought it. God sits in the door of His tent, and is ready to welcome us.

The ascent to the hill of the Lord means more than that. It includes also the future. I suppose that when men think about another world—which I am afraid none of us think about as often as we ought to do, in order to make the best of this one—the question, in some shape or other, which this band of singers lifted up, rises to their lips, 'Who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord, or who shall stand in His Holy Place' beyond the stars? Well, brethren! that is the question which concerns us all, more than anything else in the world, to have clearly and rightly answered.

II. Note the answer to this great question.

The psalm answers it in an instructive fashion, which we take as it stands. 'He that hath clean hands and a pure heart.' Let me measure myself by the side of that requirement. 'Clean hands?'—are mine clean?

'And a pure heart?'—what about mine? 'Who hath not lifted up his soul unto vanity'—and where have my desires and thoughts so often gone? 'Nor sworn deceitfully.' These are the qualifications that our psalm dashes down in front of us when we ask the question.

The other two occasions to which I have referred, where the same question is put, give substantially the same answer. It might be interesting, if one had time, or this was the place, to look at the differences in the replies, as suggesting the slight differences in the ideal of a good man as presented by the various writers, but that must be left untouched now. Taking these four conditions that are laid down here, we come to this, that psalmist and prophet with one voice say that same solemn thing: 'Holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord.' There is no faltering in the answer, and it is an answer to which the depths of conscience say 'Yes.' We all admit, when we are wise, that for communion with God on earth, and for treading the golden pavements of that city into which nothing that is unclean shall enter, absolute holiness is necessary. Let no man deceive himself—that stands the irreversible, necessary condition.

Well, then, is anybody to go in? Let us read on in our psalm. An impossible requirement is laid down, broad and stern and unmistakable. But is that all? 'He shall receive a blessing from the Lord, and righteousness from the God of his salvation.' So,

then, the impossible requirement is made possible as a gift to be received. And although I do not know that this psalmist, in the twilight of revelation, saw all that was involved in what he sang, he had caught a glimpse of this great thought, that what God required, God would give, and that our way to get the necessary, impossible condition realised in ourselves is to 'receive' it. 'He shall receive … righteousness from the God of his salvation.' Now, do you not see how, like some great star, trembling into the field of the telescope, and sending arrowy beams before it to announce its approach, the great central Christian truth is here dawning, germinant, prophesying its full rising? And the truth is this, 'that I might be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, but that which is of God through Christ.' Ah, brethren! impossibilities become possible when God comes and says, 'I give thee that which thou canst not have.' The old prophet asked the question, 'What doth God require of thee?' and his answer was, 'That thou shouldst do justice, and love mercy, and walk humbly with thy God.' If he had gone on to ask a better question, 'What does God give thee?' he would have said what all the New Testament says, 'He gives what He commands, and He bestows before He requires.' And so in Jesus Christ there is the forgiveness that blots out the past, and there is the new life bestowed that will develop the righteousness far beyond our reach. And thus the question which evoked first the answer that might drive us to despair, evokes next a response that

commands us to hope.

But that is not all, for the psalm goes on: 'This is the generation of them that seek Him, that seek Thy face.' Yes; couched in germ there lies in that last word the great truth which is expanded in the New Testament, like a beech-leaf folded up in its little brown sheath through all the winter, and ready to break and give out its green plumelets as soon as the warm rains and sunshine of spring come. 'They that seek Him'—'if thou seek Him He will be found of thee.' The requirement of righteousness, as I have said, is not abolished by the Gospel, as some people seem to think that it substitutes faith for righteousness; but it is made possible by the Gospel which through faith gives righteousness. And what the Psalmist meant by 'seeking' we Christian people mean by 'faith.' Earnest desire and confident application to Him are sure to obtain righteousness. To these there will never be returned a refusing answer. 'I have never said to any of the seed of Jacob, seek ye Me in vain.' So, brethren! if we seek we shall receive; if we receive we shall be holy, if we are holy we shall dwell with God, in sweet and blessed communion, and be denizens of His house, and sit together in heavenly places with Him all the days of our lives, and then shall pass, when 'goodness and mercy have followed us all the days of our lives,' and 'dwell in the house of the Lord for ever.'

THE GOD WHO DWELLS WITH MEN

> 'Lift up your heads, O ye gates: and be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors; and the King of glory shall come in. 8. Who is this King of glory? The Lord strong and mighty, the Lord mighty in battle. 9. Lift up your heads, O ye gates; even lift them up, ye everlasting doors; and the King of glory shall come in. 10. Who is this King of glory? The Lord of hosts, He is the King of glory.' —PSALM xxiv. 7-10.

This whole psalm was probably composed at the time of the bringing of the ark into the city of Zion. The former half was chanted as the procession wound its way up the hillside. It mainly consists of the answer to the question 'Who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord?' and describes the kind of men that dwell with God, and the way by which they obtain their purity.

This second half of our psalm is probably to be thought of as being chanted when the procession had

reached the summit of the hill and stood before the barred gates of the ancient Jebusite city. It is mainly in answer to the question, 'Who is this King of Glory?' and is the description of the God that dwells with men, and the meaning of His dwelling with them.

We are to conceive of a couple of half choirs, the one within, the other without the mountain hold. The advancing choir summons the gates to open in the grand words: 'Lift up your heads, O ye gates! even lift them up, ye everlasting doors, and the King of Glory shall come in.' Their lofty lintels are too low for His head to pass beneath; so they have to be lifted that He may find entrance. They are 'everlasting doors,' grey with antiquity, hoary with age. They have looked down, perhaps, upon Melchizedek, King of Salem, as he went forth in the morning twilight of history to greet the patriarch. But in all the centuries they have never seen such a King as this King of Glory, the true King of Israel who now desires entrance.

The answer to the summons comes from the choir within. 'Who is this King of Glory?' the question represents ignorance and possible hesitation, as if the pagan inhabitants of the recently conquered city knew nothing of the God of Israel, and recognised no authority in His name. Of course, the dramatic form of question and answer is intended to give additional force to the proclamation as by God Himself of the Covenant name, the proper name of Israel's God, as

Baal was the name of the Canaanite's God, 'the Lord strong and mighty; the Lord mighty in battle,' by whose warrior power David had conquered the city, which now was summoned to receive its conqueror. Therefore the summons is again rung out, 'Lift up your heads, O ye gates! and the King of Glory shall come in.' And once more, to express the lingering reluctance, ignorance not yet dispelled, suspicion and unwilling surrender, the dramatic question is repeated, 'Who is this King of Glory?' The answer is sharp and authoritative in its brevity, and we may fancy it shouted with a full-throated burst—'The Lord of Hosts,' who, as Captain, commands all the embattled energies of earth and heaven conceived as a disciplined army. That great name, like a charge of dynamite, bursts the gates of brass asunder, and with triumphant music the procession sweeps into the conquered city.

Now these great words, throbbing with the enthusiasm at once of poetry and of devotion, may, I think, teach us a great deal if we ponder them.

I. Notice, first, their application, their historical and original application, to the King who dwelt with Israel.

We must never forget that in the Old Testament we have to do with an incomplete and a progressive revelation, and that if we would understand its significance, we must ever endeavour to ascertain to what point in that progress the words before us

belong. We are not to read into these words New Testament depth and fulness of meaning; we are to take them and try to find out what they meant to David and to his people; and so we shall get a firm basis for any deeper significance which we may hereafter see in them. The thought of God, then, in these words is mainly that of a God of strong and victorious energy, a warrior-God, a conquering King, one whose word is power, who rules amidst the armies of heaven, and amidst the inhabitants of earth.

A brief consideration of each expression is all which can be attempted here. 'Who is this King of Glory?' The first idea, then, is that of sovereign rule; the idea which had become more and more plain and clear to the national consciousness of the Hebrew with the installation of monarchy amongst them. And it is very beautiful to see how David lays hold of that thought of God being Himself the King of Israel; and dwells so often in his psalms on the idea that he, poor, pale, earthly shadow, is but a representative and a viceroy of the true King who sits in the heavens. He takes off his crown and lays it before His throne and says: 'Thou art the King of Israel, the King of Glory.'

The Old Testament meaning of that word 'glory' is a great deal more definite than the ordinary religious use of it amongst us. The 'glory of God' in the Old Testament is, first and foremost, the supernatural light that dwelt between the cherubim and was the

manifestation and symbol of the divine Presence. And next it is the sum total of all the impression made upon the world by God's manifestation of Himself, the Light, of which the material and supernatural light between the cherubs was but the emblem; all by which God flames and flashes Himself upon the trembling and thankful heart; that glory which is substantially the same as the Name of the Lord. And in this brightness, lustrous and dark with excess of light, this King dwells. The splendour of His regalia is the brightness that emanates from Himself. He is the King of Glory.

Next, we have the great Name, 'the Lord,' Jehovah, which speaks of timeless, independent, unchanging, self-sufficing being. It declares that He is His own cause, His own law, His own impulse, the staple from which all the links of the chain of being depend, and not Himself a link, the fontal Source of all which is.

We say: 'I am that which I have become; I am that which I have been made; I am that which I have inherited; I am that which circumstances and example and training have shaped me to be.' God says: 'I AM THAT I AM.' This name is also significant, not only because it proclaims absolute, independent, underived, timeless being, but because it is the Covenant name, and speaks of the God who has come into fellowship with men, and has bound Himself to a certain course of action for their blessing, and is thus the Lord of Israel, and the God, in a special manner, of His people.

'The Lord mighty in battle.' A true warrior-God, who went out in no metaphorical sense, but in prose reality, fought for His people and subdued the nations under them, in order that His name might be spread and His glory be known in the earth.

And then, still further, 'the Lord of Hosts,' the Captain of all the armies of heaven and earth. In that name is the thought to which the modern world is coming so slowly by scientific paths, that all being is one ordered whole, subject to the authority of one Lord. And in addition to that, the grander thought, that the unity of nature is the will of God; and that as the Commander issues His orders over all the field, so He speaks and it is done. The hosts are the angels of whom it is said: 'Bless the Lord all ye His hosts; ye ministers of His that do His pleasure.' The hosts are the stars that fill the nightly heavens, of whom it is said, 'He bringeth out their host by number.' The hosts are all creatures that live and are; and all are the soldiers and servants of this conquering King. Such is the name of the Lord that dwelt with Israel, the great conception that rises before this Psalmist.

II. Now turn to the second application of these great words, that speak to us not only of the God that dwelt in Zion in outward and symbolical form, by means of a material Presence which was an emblem of the true nearness of Israel's God, but yet more distinctly, as I take it, of the Christ that dwells with men.

The devout hearts in Israel felt that there was something more needed than this dwelling of Jehovah within an earthly Temple, and the process of revelation familiarised them with the thought that there was to be in the future a 'coming of the Lord' in some special manner unknown to them. So that the whole anticipation and forward look of the Old Testament system is gathered into and expressed by almost its last words, which prophesy that 'the Lord shall suddenly come to His Temple,' and that once again this King of Glory shall stand before the everlasting gates and summon them to open.

And when was that fulfilled? Fulfilled in a fashion that at first sight seems the greatest contrast to all this vision of grandeur, of warlike strength, of imperial power and rule with which we have been dealing; but which yet was not the contrast to these ideas so much as the highest embodiment of them. For, although at first sight it seems as if there could be no greater contrast than between the lion might of the Jehovah of the Old Testament, and the lamb gentleness of the Jesus of the New, if we look more closely we shall see that it is not a relation of contrast that exists between the two. Christ is all, and more than all, that this psalm proclaimed the Jehovah of the Old Covenant to be. Let us look again from that point of view at the particulars already referred to.

He is the highest manifestation of the divine rule and authority. There is no dominion like the

dominion of the loving Christ, a kingdom based upon suffering and wielded in gentleness, a kingdom of which the crown is a wreath of thorns, and the sceptre a rod of reed; a dominion which is all exercised for the blessing of its subjects, and which, therefore, is an everlasting dominion. There is no rule like that; no height of divine authority towers so high as the authority of Him who rules us so absolutely because He gave Himself for us utterly. This is the King, the Prince of the kings of the earth, because this is the Incarnate God who died for us.

Christ is the highest raying out of the divine Light, or, as the Epistle to the Hebrews calls it, 'the effulgence of His glory.' The true glory of God lies in His love, and of that love Christ is the noblest and most wondrous example. So all other beams of the divine character, bright as their light is, are but dim as compared with the sevenfold lustre of the light that shines from the gentle loving-kindness of the heart of Christ. He has glorified God because He shows us that the divinest thing in God is love.

For the same reason, He is the mightiest exhibition of the divine power—'the Lord strong and mighty.' There is no work of God's hand, no work of God's will so great as that by which we are turned from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God. The Cross is God's noblest revelation of power; and in Him, His weakness, His surrender, His death, with all the wonderful energies that flow from that death for man's salvation, we see the divine strength

made perfect in the human weakness of Jesus. The Gospel of Christ 'is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth.' *There* is divine power in its noblest form, in the paradoxical shape of a dying man; in its noblest effect, salvation; in its widest sweep to all who believe.

"Twas great to speak a world from nought,
'Tis greater to redeem.'

This 'strong Son of God' is the arm of the Lord in whom live and act the energies of omnipotence.

Christ is 'the Lord mighty in battle.' True, He is the Prince of peace, but He is also the better Joshua, the victorious Captain, in whom dwells the conquering divine might. Through all the gentleness of His life there winds a martial strain, and it is not in vain that the Evangelist who was most deeply penetrated by the sweetness of His love, is the one who most often speaks of Him as overcoming, and who has preserved as His last words to His timid followers, that triumphant command, 'Be of good cheer! I have overcome the world.' He has conquered for us, binding the strong man, and so He will spoil his house. Sin, hell, death, the devil, law, fear, our own foolish hearts, all temptations that hover around us—they are all vanquished foes of a 'Lord' that is 'mighty in battle.' And as He overcame, so shall we if we will trust Him.

Christ is the Commander and Wielder of all the

forces of the universe. As one said to Him in the days of His flesh, 'I am a man under authority, and I say to my servant, Do this, and he doeth it. So do Thou speak and Thy word shall be sovereign.' And so it was. He spake to diseases and they vanished. He spake to the winds and the seas and there was a great calm. He spake to demons, and murmuring, but yet obedient, they came out of their victims. He flung His word into the recesses of the grave, and Lazarus came forth, fumbling with the knots on his grave-clothes, and stumbling into the light. 'He spake and it was done.' Who is He, the utterance of whose will is sovereign amongst all the regions of being? 'Who is the King of Glory?' 'Thou art the King of Glory, O Christ!' 'Thou art the Everlasting Son of the Father.'

III. And now, lastly, let me ask you to look, and that for a moment, at the application of these words to the Christ who will dwell in our hearts.

His historical manifestation here upon earth and His Incarnation, which is the true dwelling of Deity amongst men, are not enough. They have left something more than a memory to the world. He is as ready to abide as really within our spirits as He was to tabernacle upon earth amongst men. And the very central message of that Gospel which Is proclaimed to us all is this, that if we will open the gates of our hearts He will come in, in all the plenitude of His victorious power, and dwell in our hearts, their Conqueror and their King.

What a strange contrast, and yet what a close analogy there is between the victorious tones and martial air of this summons of my text. 'Lift up your heads, O ye gates! that the King of Glory may come in,' and the gentle words of the Apocalypse: 'Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if any man hear My voice and open the door, I will come in to him.' But He that in the Old Covenant arrayed in warrior arms, summoned the rebels to surrender, is the same as He who, in the New, with the night-dews in His hair, and patience on His face, and gentleness in the touch of His hand upon the door, waits to enter in. Brethren! open your hearts, 'and the King of Glory shall come in.'

And He will come in as a king that might seek to enter some city far away on the outposts of his kingdom, besieged by his enemies. If the King comes in, the city will be impregnable. If you open your hearts for Him He will come and keep you from all your foes and give you the victory over them all. So, to every hard-pressed heart, waging an unequal contest with toils and temptations, and sorrows and sins, this great hope is given, that Christ the Victor will come in His power to garrison heart and mind. As of old the encouragement was given to Hezekiah in his hour of peril, when the might of Sennacherib insolently threatened Jerusalem, so the same stirring assurances are given to each who admits Christ's succours to his heart—'He shall not come into this city, for I will defend this city to save it for Mine

own sake' Open your hearts and the conquering King will come in.

And do not forget that there is another possible application of these words lying in the future, to the conquering Christ who shall come again. The whole history of the past points onwards to yet a last time when 'the Lord shall suddenly come to His temple,' and predicts that Christ shall so come in like manner as He went up to heaven. Again will the summons ring out. Again will He come arrayed in flashing brightness, and the visible robes of His imperial majesty. Again will He appear, mighty in battle, when 'in righteousness He shall judge and make war.' For a Christian, one great memory fills the past—Christ has come; and one great hope brightens the else waste future—Christ will come. That hope has been far too much left to be cherished only by those who hold a particular opinion as to the chronology of unfulfilled prophecy. But it should be to every Christian heart 'the blessed hope,' even the appearing of the glory of Him who has come in the past. He is with and in us, in the present. He will come in the future 'in His glory, and shall sit upon the throne of His glory.' All our pardon and hope of God's love depend upon that great fact in the past, that 'the Lord was made flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory.' Our purity which will fit us to dwell with God, our present blessedness, all our power for daily strife, and our companionship in daily loneliness, depend on the present fact that He

dwells in our hearts by faith, the seed of all good, and the conquering Antagonist of every evil. And the one light which fills the future with hope, peaceful because assured, streams from that most sure promise that He will come again, sweeping from the highest heavens, on His head the many crowns of universal monarchy, in His hand the weapons of all-conquering power, and none shall need to ask, 'Who is this King of Glory?' for every eye shall know Him, the Judge upon His throne, to be the Christ of the Cross. Open the doors of your hearts to Him, as He sues for entrance now in the meekness of His patient love, that on you may fall in that day of the coming of the King, the blessing of the servants who wait for their returning Lord, that 'when He cometh and knocketh, they may open unto Him immediately.'

GUIDANCE IN JUDGMENT

> 'Good and upright is the Lord; therefore will He teach sinners in the way. 9. The meek will He guide in judgment; and the meek will He teach His way.'—PSALM xxv. 8, 9.

The Psalmist prays in this psalm for three things:

deliverance, guidance, and forgiveness. Of these three petitions the central one is that for guidance. 'Show me Thy ways, O Lord,' he asks in a previous verse; where he means by 'Thy ways,' not God's dealings with men, but men's conduct as prescribed by God. In my text he exchanges petition for contemplation; and gazes on the character of God, in order thereby to be helped to confidence in an answer to his prayer. Such alternations of petition and contemplation are the very heartbeats of devotion, now expanding in desire, now closing on its treasure in fruition. Either attitude is incomplete without the other. Do *our* prayers pass into such still contemplation of the face of God? Do *our* thoughts of His character break into such confident petition? My text contains a striking view of the divine character, a grand confidence built thereupon, and a condition appended on which the fulfilment of that confidence depends. Let us look at these in turn.

I. First, then, we have here the Psalmist's thought of God. 'Good and upright is the Lord.'

Now it is clear that the former of these two epithets is here employed, not in its widest sense of moral perfectness, or else 'upright,' which follows, would be mere tautology, but in the narrower sense, which is familiar too, to us, in our common speech, in which *good* is tantamount to *kind*, *beneficent*, or to say all in a word, *loving*. *Upright* needs no explanation; but the point to notice is the decisiveness with which the Psalmist binds together,

in one thought, the two aspects of the divine nature which so many people find it hard to reconcile, and the separation of which has been the parent of unnumbered misconceptions and errors as to Him and to His dealings. 'Good *and* upright, loving *and* righteous is the Lord,' says the Psalmist. He puts in no qualifying word such as, loving *though* righteous, righteous and *yet* loving. Such phrases express the general notions of the relation of these two attributes. But the Psalmist employs no such expressions. He binds the two qualities together, in the feeling of their profoundest harmony.

Now let me remind you that neither of these two resplendent aspects of the divine nature reaches its highest beauty and supremest power, except it be associated with the other. In the spectrum analysis of that great light there are the two lines; the one purest white of righteousness, and the other tinged with a ruddier glow, the line of love. The one adorns and sets off the other. Love without righteousness is flaccid, a mere gush of good-natured sentiment, impotent to confer blessing, powerless to evoke reverence. Righteousness without love is as white as snow, and as cold as ice; repellent, howsoever it may excite the sentiment of awe-struck distance. But we need that the righteousness shall be loving, and that the love shall be righteous, in order that the one may be apprehended in its tenderest tenderness and the other may be adored in its loftiest loftiness.

And yet we are always tempted to wrench the two

apart, and to think that the operation of the one must sometimes, at all events on the outermost circumference of the spheres, impinge upon, and collide with, the operations of the other. Hence you get types of religion—yes! and two types of Christianity—in which the one or the other of these two harmonious attributes is emphasised to such a degree as almost to blot out the other. You get forms of religion in which the righteousness has swallowed up the love, and others in which the love has destroyed the righteousness. The effect is disastrous. In old days our fathers fell into the extreme on the one hand; and the pendulum has swung with a vengeance as far from the vertical line, to the other extreme, in these days as it ever did in the past. The religion which found its centre-point and its loftiest conception of the divine nature in the thought of His absolute righteousness made strong, if it made somewhat stern, men. And now we see renderings of the truth that God is love which degrade the lofty, noble, sovereign conception of the righteous God that loveth, into mere Indulgence on the throne of the universe. And what is the consequence? All the stern teachings of Scripture men recoil from, and try to explain away. The ill desert of sin, and the necessary iron nexus between sin and suffering—and as a consequence the sacrificial work of Jesus Christ, and the supreme glory of His mission in that He is the Redeemer of mankind—are all become unfashionable to preach and unfashionable to believe. God is Love. We cannot make too much of

His love, unless by reason of it we make too little of His righteousness.

The Psalmist, in his childlike faith, saw deeper and more truly than many would-be theologians and thinkers of this day, when he proclaimed in one breath 'Good *and* upright is the Lord.' Let us not forget that the Apostle, whose great message to the world was, as the last utterance completing the process of revelation, 'God is Love,' had it also in charge to 'declare unto us that God is Light, and in Him is no darkness at all.'

II. And so, secondly, mark the calm confidence builded on this conception of the divine character.

What a wonderful 'therefore' that is!—the logic of faith and not of sense. 'Good and upright is the Lord; *therefore* will He teach sinners in the way.' The coexistence of these two aspects in the perfect divine character is for us a guarantee that He cannot leave men, however guilty they may be, to grope in the dark, or keep His lips locked in silence. The Psalmist does not mean guidance as to practical advantages and worldly prosperity. That may also be looked for, in a modified degree. But what he means is guidance as to the one important thing, the sovereign conception of duty, the eternal law of right and wrong. God will not leave a man without adequate teaching as to that, just because He is loving and righteous.

For what *is* love, in its loftiest, purest, and therefore in its divine aspect? What is it except an infinite desire to impart, and that the object on which it falls shall be blessed. So because 'the Lord is good, and His tender mercies are over all His works,' certainly He must desire, if one may so say, as His deepest desire, the blessedness of His creatures. He is a God whose nature and property it is to love, and His love is the infinite and ceaseless welling out of Himself, in all forms of beauty and blessedness, according to the capacity and contents of His recipient creatures. He is 'the giving God,' as James in his epistle eloquently and wonderfully calls Him, whose very nature it is to give. And that is only to say, in other words, 'good *is the Lord*.'

But then 'good *and* upright'—that combination determines the form which His blessings shall assume, the channel in which by preference they will flow. If we had only to say, 'good is the Lord,' then our happiness, as we call it, the satisfaction of our physical needs and of lower cravings, might be the adequate expression of His love. But if God be righteous, then because Himself is so, it must be His deepest desire for us that we should be like Him. Not our happiness but our rectitude is God's end in all that He does with us. It is worth His while to make us, in the lower sense of the word, 'happy,' but the purpose of joy as of sorrow is to make us pure and righteous. We shall never come to understand the meaning of our own lives, and will always be blindly

puzzling over the mysteries of the providences that beset us, until we learn that not enjoyment and not sorrow is His ultimate end concerning us, but that we may be partakers of His holiness. Since He is righteous, the dearest desire of His loving heart, and that to which all His dealings with us are directed; and that, therefore, to which all our desires and efforts should be directed likewise, is to make us righteous also.

'Therefore will He teach sinners in the way.' If the righteousness existed without the love it must 'come with a rod,' and the sinners who are out of the way must incontinently be crushed where they have wandered. But since righteousness is blended with love, therefore He comes, and must desire to bring all wanderers back into the paths which are His own.

I need not do more than in a word remind you how strong a presumption there lies in this combination of aspects of the divine nature, in favour of an actual revelation. It seems to me that, notwithstanding all the objections that are made to a supernatural and objective revelation, there is nothing half so monstrous as it would be to believe, with the pure deist or theist, that God, being what He is, righteous and loving, had never rent His heavens to say one word to man to lead him in the paths of righteousness. I can understand Atheism, and I can understand a revealing God, but not a God that dwells in the thick darkness, and is yet Love and Righteousness, and looks down upon this world and

never puts out a finger to point the path of duty. A silent God seems to me no God but an Almighty Devil. Revelation is the plain conclusion from the premisses that 'good and upright is the Lord!'

I speak not, for there is no time to do so, of the various manners in which this divine desire to bring sinners into the way fulfils itself. There are our consciences; there are His providences; there is the objective revelation of His word; there are the whispers of His Spirit in men's hearts. I do not know what you believe, but I believe that God can find His way to my heart and infuse there illumination, and move affections, and make my eye clear to discern what is right. 'He that formed the eye, shall He not see?' He that formed the eye, shall He not send light to it? Are we to shut out God, in obedience to the dictates of an arbitrary psychology, from access to His own creature; and to say, 'Thou hast made me, and Thou canst not speak to me. My soul is Thine by creation, but its doors are close barred against Thee; and Thou canst not lay Thy hand upon it?' 'Good and upright is the Lord, therefore will He teach sinners in the way.'

III. Now notice, again, the condition on which the fulfilment of this confidence depends.

'The meek will He guide in judgment, and the meek will He teach His way.' The fact of our being sinful only makes it the more imperative that God should speak to us. But the condition of our hearing

and profiting by the guidance is meekness. By meekness the Psalmist means, I suppose, little else than what we might call docility, of which the prime element is the submission of my own will to God's. The reason why we go wrong about our duties is mainly that we do not supremely want to go right, but rather to gratify inclinations, tastes, or passions. God is speaking to us, but if we make such a riot with the yelpings of our own kennelled desires and lusts, and listen to the rattle and noise of the street and the babble of tongues, He

'Can but listen at the gate,
And hear the household jar within.'

'The meek will He guide in judgment; the meek will He teach His way.' Some of us put our heads down like bulls charging a gate. Some of us drive on full speed, and will not shut off steam though the signals are against us, and the end of that can only be one thing. Some of us do not wish to know what God wishes us to do. Some of us cannot bear suspense of judgment, or of decision, and are always in a hurry to be in action, and think the time lost that is spent in waiting to know what God the Lord will speak. If you do not clearly see what to do, then clearly you may see that you are to do *nothing*.

The ark was to go half a mile in front of the camp before the foremost files lifted a foot to follow, in order that there should be no mistake as to the road. Wait till God points the path, and wish Him to point

it, and hush the noises that prevent your hearing His voice, and keep your wills in absolute submission; and above all, be sure that you act out your convictions, and that you have no knowledge of duty which is not expressed in your practice, and you will get all the light which you need; sometimes being taught by errors no doubt, often being left to make mistakes as to what is expedient in regard to worldly prosperity, but being infallibly guided as to the path of duty, and the path of peace and righteousness.

And now, before I close, let me just remind you of the great fact which transcends the Psalmist's confidence whilst it warrants it.

Because God is Love, and God is Righteousness, He cannot but speak. But this Psalmist did not know how wonderfully God was going to speak by that Word who has called Himself the Light of men; and who has said, 'He that followeth Me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.' He 'teaches sinners in the way,' by Jesus Christ; for we have Him for our Pattern and Example. We have His love for our impelling motive. We have His Spirit to speak in our hearts, and to 'guide us into all truth.' And this Shepherd, 'when He putteth forth His own sheep, goeth before them; and the sheep follow Him and know His voice.' The Psalmist's confidence, bright as it is, is but the glow of the morning twilight. The full sunshine of the transcendent fact to which God's righteous love impelled and bound Him is Christ, who makes us know the will of the Father. But we

want more than knowledge. For we all know our duty a great deal better than any of us do it. What is the use of a guide to a lame man? But our Guide says to us, 'Arise and walk,' and if we clasp His hand we receive strength, and 'the lame man leaps as a hart.'

So, dear brethren! let us all cleave to Him, the Guide, the Way, and the Life which enables us to walk in the way. If we thus cleave, then be sure that He will lead us in the paths of righteousness, which are paths of peace. He is the Way; He is the Leader of the march; He gives power to walk in the light, and His one command, 'Follow Me,' unfolds into all duty and includes all direction, companionship, perfection, and blessedness.

A PRAYER FOR PARDON AND ITS PLEA

> 'For Thy name's sake, O Lord, pardon mine iniquity; for it is great.'—PSALM xxv. 11.

The context shows us that this is the prayer of a man who had long loved and served God. He says that 'on God' he 'waits all the day,' that his 'eyes are

ever toward the Lord,' that he has 'integrity and uprightness' which will 'preserve him, for he waits upon God,' and yet side by side with this consciousness of devotion and service there lie the profound sense of sin and of the need of pardon. The better a man is, the more clearly he sees, and the more deeply he feels, his own badness. If a shoe is all covered with mud, a splash or two more or less will make no difference, but if it be polished and clean, one speck shows. A black feather on a swan's breast is conspicuous. And so the less sin a man has the more obvious it is, and the more he has the less he generally knows it. But whilst this consciousness of transgression and cry for pardon are inseparable and permanent accompaniments of a devout life all along its course, they are the roots and beginning of all true godliness. And as a rule, the first step which a man takes to knit himself consciously to God is through the gate of recognised and repeated and confessed sin and imploring the divine mercy.

I. Notice, first, here the cry for pardon.

'I believe in the forgiveness of sins' hundreds of thousands of Englishmen have said twice to-day. Most of us, when we pray at all, push in somewhere or other the petition, 'Forgive us our sins.' And how many of us understand what we mean when we ask for that? And how many of us feel that we need the thing which we seem to be requesting? Let me dwell for a moment or two upon the Scriptural idea of forgiveness. Of course we may say that when we ask

forgiveness from God we are transferring ideas and images drawn from human relations to the divine. Be it so. That does not show that there is not a basis of reality and of truth in the ideas thus transferred. But there are two elements in forgiveness as we know it, both of which it seems to me to be very important that we should carry in our minds in interpreting the Scriptural doctrine. There is the forgiveness known to law and practised by the lawgiver. There is the forgiveness known to love and practised by the friend, or parent, or lover. The one consists in the remission of external penalties. A criminal is forgiven, or, as we say (with an unconscious restriction of the word *forgiven* to the deeper thing), *pardoned*, when, the remainder of his sentence being remitted, he is let out of gaol, and allowed to go about his business without any legal penalties. But there is a forgiveness deeper than that legal pardon. A parent and a child both of them know that parental pardon does not consist in the waiving of punishment. The averted look, the cold voice, the absence of signs of love are far harder to bear than so-called punishment. And the forgiveness, which belongs to love only, comes when the film between the two is swept away, and both the offended and the offender feel that there is no barrier to the free, unchecked flow of love from the heart of the aggrieved to the heart of the aggressor.

We must carry both of these ideas into our thoughts of God's pardon in order to see the whole

fulness of it. And perhaps we may have to add yet another illustration, drawn from another region, and which is enshrined in one of the versions of the Lord's Prayer, where we read, 'Forgive us our *debts*.' When a debt is forgiven it is cancelled, and the payment of it no longer required. But the two elements that I have pointed out, the remission of the penalty and the uninterrupted flow of God's love, are inseparably united in the full Scriptural notion of forgiveness.

Scripture recognises as equally real and valid, in our relations to God, the judicial and the fatherly side of the relationship. And it declares as plainly that the wages of sin is death as it declares that God's love cannot come in its fulness and its sweetness, upon a heart that indulges in unconfessed and unrepented sin. They are poor friends of men who, for the sake of smoothing away the terrible side of the Gospel, minimise or hide the reality of the awful penalties which attach to every transgression and disobedience, because they thereby maim the notion of the divine forgiveness, and lull into a fatal slumber the consciences of many men.

Dear brethren! I have to stand here saying, 'Knowing, therefore, the terrors of the Lord, we persuade men.' This is sure and certain, that over and above the forcing back upon itself of the love of God by my sin, that sin by necessary consequence will work out awful results for the doer in the present and in the future. I do not wish to dwell upon that

thought, only remember that God is a Judge and God is the Father, and that the divine forgiveness includes both of these elements, the sweeping away of the penal consequences of men's sin, wholly in the future, and to some extent in the present; and the unchecked flow of the love of God to a man's heart.

There are awful words in Scripture—which are not to be ruled out of it by any easy-going, optimistic, rose-water system of a mutilated Christianity—there are awful words in Scripture, concerning what you and I must come to if we live and die in our sins, and there would be no message of forgiveness worth the proclaiming to men, if it had nothing to say about the removal of that which a man's own unsophisticated conscience tells him is certain, the fatal and the damnable effects of his departure from God.

But let us not forget that these two aspects do to a large extent coincide, when we come to remember that the worst of all the penal consequences of sin is that it separates from God, and exposes to 'the wrath of God,' a terrible expression by which the Bible means the necessary disapprobation and aversion of the divine nature, being such as it is, from man's sin.

Experimentalists will sometimes cut off one or other of the triple rays of which sunlight is composed by passing the beam through some medium which intercepts the red, or the violet, or the yellow, as may chance. And my sin makes an atmosphere which

cuts off the gentler rays of that divine nature, and lets the fiery ones of retribution come through. It is not that a sinful man, howsoever drenched overhead in the foul pool of his own unrepented iniquity, is shut out from the love of God, which lingers about him and woos him, and lavishes upon him all the gifts of which he is capable, but that he has made himself incapable of receiving the sweetest of these influences, and that so long as he continues thus, his life and his character cannot but be odious and hateful in the pure eyes of perfect love.

But whilst thus there are external consequences which are swept away by forgiveness, and whilst the real hell of hells and death of deaths is the separation from God, and the misery that must necessarily ensue thereupon, there are consequences of man's sin which forgiveness is not intended to remove, and will not remove, just because God loves us. He loves us too well to take away the issues in the natural sphere, in the social sphere, the issues perhaps in bodily health, reputation, position, and the like, which flow from our transgression. 'Thou wast a God that forgavest them, and Thou didst inflict retribution for their inventions.' He does leave much of these outward issues unswept away by His forgiveness, and the great law stands, 'Whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap.' And yet the pardon that you and I need, and which we can all have for the asking, flows to us unchecked and full—the great stream of the love of God, to whom we are

reconciled, when we turn to Him in penitent dependence on the blood and righteousness of Jesus Christ, our Lord.

This consciousness of sin and cry for pardon lie at the foundation of vigorous practical religion. It seems to me that the differences between different types of Christianity, insipid elegance and fiery earnestness, between coldness and fervour, the difference between a sapless and a living ministry and between a formal and a real Christianity, are very largely due to the differences in realising the fact and the gravity of the fact of transgression. The prominence which we give to that in our thoughts will largely determine our notions of ourselves, and of Christ's work, and to a great extent settle what we think Christianity is for, and what in itself it is. If a man has no deep consciousness of sin he will be satisfied with a very superficial kind of religion. 'Every man his own redeemer' will be his motto. And not knowing the necessity for a Saviour, he will not recognise that Christianity is fundamentally and before anything else, a system of redemption. A moral agent? Yes! A large revelation of great truth? Yes! A power to make men's lives, individually and in the community, nobler and loftier? By all means. But before all these, and all these consequentially on its being a system by which sinful men, else hopeless and condemned, are delivered and set free. So, dear brethren! let me press upon you this,—unless my Christianity gives large prominence to the fact of my

own transgression, and is full of a penitent cry for pardon, it lacks the one thing needful, I was going to say—it lacks, at all events, that which will make it a living power blessedly ruling my heart and life.

II. Note in the next place the plea for pardon.

'For Thy name's sake.' The Psalmist does not come with any carefully elaborated plea, grounded upon anything in himself, either on the excuses and palliations of his evil, his corrupt nature, his many temptations, and the like, or on the depth and reality of his repentance. He does not say, 'Forgive me, for I weep for my evil and loathe myself.' Nor does he say, 'Forgive me, for I could not help doing it, or because I was tempted; or because the thing that I have done is a very little thing after all.' He comes empty-handed, and says, 'For Thy name's sake, O Lord!'

That means, first, the great thought that God's mercy flows from the infinite depths of His own character. He is His own motive. The fountain of His forgiving love wells up of itself, drawn forth by nothing that we do, but propelled from within by the inmost nature of God. As surely as it is the property of light to radiate and of fire to spread, so surely is it His nature and property to have mercy. He forgives, says our text, because He is God, and cannot but do so. Therefore our mightiest plea is to lay hold of His own strength, and to grasp the fact of the unmotived, uncompelled, unpurchased, and therefore unalterable and eternal pardoning love of God.

Scientists tell us that the sun is fed and kept in splendour by the constant impact of bodies from without falling in upon it, and that if that supply were to cease, the furnace of the heavens would go out. But God, who is light in Himself, needs no accession of supplies from without to maintain His light, and no force of motives from without to sway His will. We do not need to seek to bend Him to mercy, for He is mercy in Himself. We do not need to stir His purpose into action, for it has been working from of old and 'its goings forth are from everlasting.' He is His own motive, He forgives because of what He is. So let us dig down to that deepest of all rock foundations on which to build our confidence, and be sure that, if I may use such an expression, the necessity of the divine nature compels Him to pardon iniquity, transgression, and sin.

Then there is another thought here, that the past of God is a plea with God for present forgiveness. 'Thy name' in Scripture means the whole revelation of the divine character, and thus the Psalmist looks back into the past, and sees there how God has, all through the ages, been plenteous in mercy and ready to forgive all that called upon Him; and he pleads that past as a reason for the present and for the future. Thousands of years have passed since David, if he was the Psalmist, offered this prayer; and you and I can look back to the blessed old story of *his* forgiveness, so swift, so absolute and free, which followed upon confession so lowly, and can

remember that infinitely pathetic and wonderful word which puts the whole history of the resurrection and restoration of a soul into two clauses. 'David said unto Nathan, I have sinned against the Lord: and Nathan said unto David'—finishing the sentence—'And the Lord hath made to pass the iniquity of thy sin.' What He was He is; what He is He will be. 'For Thy name's sake, pardon mine iniquity.'

There is yet another thought that may be suggested. The divine forgiveness is in order that men may know Him better. That is represented in Scripture as being the great motive of the divine actions—'for the glory of Thine own name.' That may be so put as to be positively atrocious, or so as to be perfectly divine and lovely. It has often been put, by hard and narrow dogmatists, in such a way as to make God simply an Almighty selfishness, but it ought to be put as the Bible puts it, so as to show Him as an Almighty love. For why does He desire that His name should be known by us but for our sakes, that the light of that great Name may come to us, 'sitting in darkness and in the shadow of death,' and that, knowing Him for what He is, we may have peace, and rest, and joy, and love, and purity? It is pure benevolence that makes Him act, 'for the glory of His great name'; sweeping away the clouds that a darkened earth may expand and rejoice, and all the leaves unfold themselves, and every bird sing, in the restored sunshine.

And there is nothing that reveals the inmost hived sweetness and honey of the name of God like the assurance of His pardon. 'There is forgiveness with Thee that Thou mayest be feared.' Oh, dear brethren! unless you know God as the God that has forgiven you, your knowledge of Him is but shallow and incomplete, and you know not the deepest blessings that flow to them who find that this is life eternal to know the only true God as the all-forgiving Father.

Note the connection between the Psalmist's plea and the New Testament plea. David said, 'For Thy name's sake, pardon,' we say, 'For Christ's sake, forgive.' Are the two diverse? Is the fruit diverse from the bud? Is the complete noonday diverse from the blessed morning twilight? Christ *is* the Name of God, the Revealer of the divine heart and mind. When Christian men pray 'For the sake of Christ,' they are not bringing a motive, which is to move the divine love which else lies passive and inert, because God's love was the cause of Christ's work not Christ's work the cause of God's love, but they are expressing their own dependence on the Great Mediator and His work, and solemnly offering, as the ground of all their hope, that perfect sacrifice which is the medium by which forgiveness reaches men, and without which it is impossible that the government of the righteous God could exist with pardon. Christ has died; Christ, in dying, has borne the sins of the world; that is, yours and mine. And therefore the pardon of God comes to us through that channel,

without, in the slightest degree, trenching on the awfulness of the divine holiness or weakening the sanctities of God's righteous retributive law. 'For Christ's sake hath forgiven us' is the daylight which the Psalmist saw as morning dawn when he cried, 'For Thy name's sake, pardon mine iniquity.'

III. Lastly, note the reason for the earnest cry, 'For it is great.'

That may be a reason for the pardon; more probably it is a reason for the prayer. The fact is true in regard to us all. There is no need to suppose any special heinous sin in the Psalmist's mind. I would fain press upon all consciences that listen to me now that these lowly words of confession are true about every one of us, whether we know it or not. For if you consider how much of self-will, how much of indifference, of alienation from, if not of antagonism against, the law of God, go to every trifling transgression, you will think twice before you call it small. And if it be small, a microscopic viper, the length of a cutting from your finger nail, has got the viper's nature in it, and its poison, and its sting, and it will grow. A very little quantity of mud held in solution in a continuously flowing river will make a tremendous delta at the mouth of it in the course of years. And however small may have been the amount of evil and deflection from God's law in that flowing river of my past life, what a filthy, foul bank of slime must be piled up down yonder at the mouth!

If the fact be so, then is not that a reason for our all going to the only One who can dredge it away, and get rid of it? 'Pardon me; for it is great.' That is to say, 'There is no one else who can deal with it but Thyself, O Lord! It is too large for me to cart away; it is too great for any inferior hand to deal with. I am so bad that I can come only to Thyself to be made better.' It is blessed and wise when the consciousness of our deep transgression drives us to the only Hand that can heal, to the only Heart that can forgive.

So, dear friends! in a blessed desperation of otherwise being unable to get rid of this burden which has grown on our backs ounce by ounce for long years, let us go to Him. He and He alone can deal with it. 'Against Thee, Thee only, have I sinned,' and to Thee, Thee only, will I come.

Only remember that, before you ask, God has given. He is 'like the dew upon the grass, that waiteth not for man.' Instead of praying for pardon which is already bestowed, do you see to it that you take the pardon which God is praying you to receive. Swallow the bitter pill of acknowledging your own transgression; and then one look at the crucified Christ and one motion of believing desire towards Him; 'and the Lord hath made to pass the iniquity of thy sin.'

GOD'S GUESTS

'One thing have I desired of the Lord, that will I seek after; that
I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life.'
—PSALM xxvii. 4.

We shall do great injustice to this mystical aspiration of the Psalmist, if we degrade it to be the mere expression of a desire for unbroken residence in a material Temple. He was no sickly, sentimental seeker after cloistered seclusion. He knew the necessities and duties of life far better than in a cowardly way to wish to shirk them, in order that he might loiter in the temple, idle under the pretence of worship. Nor would the saying fit into the facts of the case if we gave it that low meaning, for no person had his residence in the temple. And what follows in the next verse would, on that hypothesis, be entirely inappropriate. 'In the secret of His tabernacle shall He hide me.' No one went into the secret place of the Most High, in the visible, material structure, except the high priest once a year. But this singer expects that his abode will be there always; and that, in the time of trouble, he can find refuge there.

Apart altogether from any wider considerations as

to the relation between form and spirit under the Old Covenant, I think that such observations compel us to see in these words a desire a great deal nobler and deeper than any such wish.

I. Let us, then, note the true meaning of this aspiration of the
Psalmist.

Its fulfilment depends not on where we are, but on what we think and feel; for every place is God's house, and what the Psalmist desires is that he should be able to keep up unbroken consciousness of being in God's presence and should be always in touch with Him.

That seems hard, and people say, 'Impossible! how can I get above my daily work, and be perpetually thinking of God and His will, and consciously realising communion with Him?' But there is such a thing as having an undercurrent of consciousness running all through a man's life and mind; such a thing as having a melody sounding in our ears perpetually, 'so sweet we know not we are listening to it' until it stops, and then, by the poverty of the naked and silent atmosphere, we know how musical were the sounds that we scarcely knew that we heard, and yet did hear so well high above all the din of earth's noises.

Every man that has ever cherished such an aspiration as this knows the difficulties all too well.

And yet, without entering upon thorny and unprofitable questions as to whether the absolute, unbroken continuity of consciousness of being in God's presence is possible for men here below, let us look at the question, which has a great deal more bearing upon our present condition—viz. whether a greater continuity of that consciousness is not possible than we attain to to-day. It does seem to me to be a foolish and miserable waste of time and temper and energy for good people to be quarrelling about whether they can come to the absolute realisation of this desire in this world, when there is not one of them who is not leagues below the possible realisation of it, and knows that he is. At all events, whether or not the line can be drawn without a break at all, the breaks might be a great deal shorter and a great deal less frequent than they are. An unbroken line of conscious communion with God is the ideal; and that is what this singer desired and worked for. How many of my feelings and thoughts to-day, or of the things that I have said or done since I woke this morning, would have been done and said and felt exactly the same, if there were not a God at all, or if it did not matter in the least whether I ever came into touch with Him or not? Oh, dear friends! it is no vain effort to bring our lives a little nearer that unbroken continuity of communion with Him of which this text speaks. And God knows, and we each for ourselves know, how much and how sore our need is of such a union. 'One thing have I desired, that will I seek after; that I, in my study; I, in my

shop; I, in my parlour, kitchen, or nursery; I, in my studio; I, in my lecture-hall—'may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life.' In our 'Father's house are many mansions.' The room that we spend most of our lives in, each of us, at our tasks or our work-tables may be in our Father's house, too; and it is only we that can secure that it shall be.

The inmost meaning of this Psalmist's desire is that the consciousness of God shall be diffused throughout the whole of a man's days, instead of being coagulated here and there at points. The Australian rivers in a drought present a picture of the Christian life of far too many of us—a stagnant, stinking pool here, a stretch of blinding gravel there; another little drop of water a mile away, then a long line of foul-smelling mud, and then another shallow pond. Why! it ought to run in a clear stream that has a scour in it and that will take all filth off the surface.

The Psalmist longed to break down the distinction between sacred and secular; to consecrate work, of whatsoever sort it was. He had learned what so many of us need to learn far more thoroughly, that if our religion does not drive the wheels of our daily business, it is of little use; and that if the field in which our religion has power to control and impel is not that of the trivialities and secularities of our ordinary life, there is no field for it at all.

'All the days of my life.' Not only on Wednesday

nights, while Tuesday and Thursday are given to the world and self; not only on Sundays; not for five minutes in the morning, when I am eager to get to my daily work, and less than five minutes at night, when I am half asleep, but through the long day, doing this, that, and the other thing for God and by God and with God, and making Him the motive and the power of my course, and my Companion to heaven. And if we have, in our lives, things over which we cannot make the sign of the cross, the sooner we get rid of them the better; and if there is anything in our daily work, or in our characters, about which we are doubtful, here is a good test: does it seem to check our continual communion with God, as a ligature round the wrist might do the continual flow of the blood, or does it help us to realise His presence? If the former, let us have no more to do with it; if the latter, let us seek to increase it.

II. And now let me say a word about the Psalmist's reason for this aspiration.

The word which he employs carries with it a picture which is even more vividly given us by a synonymous word employed in the same connection in some of the other psalms. 'That I may dwell in the house of the Lord'—now, that is an allusion, not only, as I think, to the Temple, but also to the Oriental habit of giving a man who took refuge in the tent of the sheikh, guest-rites of protection and provision and friendship. The habit exists to this day,

and travellers among the Bedouins tell us lovely stories of how even an enemy with the blood of the closest relative of the owner of the tent on his hands, if he can once get in there and partake of the salt of the host, is safe, and the first obligation of the owner of the tent is to watch over the life of the fugitive as over his own. So the Psalmist says, 'I desire to have guest-rites in Thy tent; to lift up its fold, and shelter there from the heat of the desert. And although I be dark and stained with many evils and transgressions against Thee, yet I come to claim the hospitality and provision and protection and friendship which the laws of the house do bestow upon a guest.' Carrying out substantially the same idea, Paul tells the Ephesians, as if it were the very highest privilege that the Gospel brought to the Gentiles: 'Ye are no more strangers, but fellow-citizens with the saints, and *of the household of God*'; incorporated into His family, and dwelling safely in His pavilion as their home.

That is to say, the blessedness of keeping up such a continual consciousness of touch with God is, first and foremost, the certainty of infallible protection. Oh! how it minimises all trouble and brightens all joys, and calms amidst all distractions, and steadies and sobers in all circumstances, to feel ever the hand of God upon us! He who goes through life, finding that, when he has trouble to meet, it throws him back on God, and that when bright mornings of joy drive away nights of weeping, these wake morning

songs of praise, and are brightest because they shine with the light of a Father's love, will never be unduly moved by any vicissitudes of fortune. Like some inland and sheltered valley, with great mountains shutting it in, that 'heareth not the loud winds when they call' beyond the barriers that enclose it, our lives may be tranquilly free from distraction, and may be full of peace, of nobleness, and of strength, on condition of our keeping in God's house all the days of our lives.

There is another blessing that will come to the dweller in God's house, and that not a small one. It is that, by the power of this one satisfied longing, driven like an iron rod through all the tortuosities of my life, there will come into it a unity which otherwise few lives are ever able to attain, and the want of which is no small cause of the misery that is great upon men. Most of us seem, to our own consciousness, to live amidst endless distractions all our days, and our lives to be a heap of links parted from each other rather than a chain. But if we have that one constant thought with us, and if we are, through all the variety of occupations, true to the one purpose of serving and keeping near God, then we have a charm against the frittering away of our lives in distractions, and the misery of multiplicity; and we enter into the blessedness of unity and singleness of purpose; and our lives become, like the starry heavens in all the variety of their motions, obedient to one impulse. For unity in a life does not

depend upon the monotony of its tasks, but upon the simplicity of the motive which impels to all varieties of work. So it is possible for a man harassed by multitudinous avocations, and drawn hither and thither by sometimes apparently conflicting and always bewildering, rapidly-following duties, to say, 'This one thing I do,' if all his doings are equally acts of obedience to God.

III. So, lastly, note the method by which this desire is realised.

'One thing have I desired, … that will I seek after' There are two points to be kept in view to that end. A great many people say, 'One thing have I desired,' and fail in persistent continuousness of the desire. No man gets rights of residence in God's house for a longer time than he continues to seek for them. The most advanced of us, and those that have longest been like Anna, who 'departed not from the Temple,' day nor night, will certainly eject ourselves unless, like the Psalmist, we use the verbs in both tenses, and say, 'One thing *have* I desired … that *will* I seek after.' John Bunyan saw that there was a back door to the lower regions close by the gates of the Celestial City. There may be men who have long lived beneath the shadow of the sanctuary, and at the last will be found outside the gates.

But the words of the text not only suggest, by the two tenses of the verbs, the continuity of the desire which is destined to be granted, but also by the two

verbs themselves—desire and seek after—the necessity of uniting prayer and work. Many desires are unsatisfied because conduct does not correspond to desires. Many a prayer remains unanswered because its pray-ers never do anything to fulfil their prayers. I do not say they are hypocrites; certainly they are not consciously so, but I do say that there is a large measure of conventionality that means nothing, in the prayers of average Christian people for more holiness and likeness to Jesus Christ.

Dear friends! if we truly wish this desire of dwelling in the house of the Lord to be fulfilled, the day's work must run in the same direction as the morning's petition, and we must, like the Psalmist, say, 'I *have desired* it of the Lord, so I, for my part, *will seek after it*.' Then, whether or not we reach absolutely to the standard, which is none the less to be aimed at, though it seems beyond reach, we shall arrive nearer and nearer to it; and, God helping our weakness and increasing our strength, quickening us to 'desire,' and upholding us to 'seek after,' we may hope that, when the days of our life are past, we shall but remove into an upper chamber, more open to the sunrise and flooded with light; and shall go no more out, but 'dwell in the house of the Lord for ever.'

'SEEK YE'—'I WILL SEEK'

> 'When Thou saidst, Seek ye my face; My heart said unto Thee, Thy face, Lord, will I seek. 9. Hide not Thy face far from me.' —PSALM xxvii. 8, 9.

We have here a report of a brief dialogue between God and a devout soul. The Psalmist tells us of God's invitation and of his acceptance, and on both he builds the prayer that the face which he had been bidden to seek, and had sought, may not be hid from him. The correspondence between what God said to him and what he said to God is even more emphatically expressed in the original than in our version. In the Hebrew the sentence is dislocated, at the risk of being obscure, for the sake of bringing together the two voices. It runs thus, 'My heart said to Thee,' and then, instead of going on with his answer, the Psalmist interjects God's invitation 'Seek ye My face,' and then, side by side with that, he lays his response, 'Thy face, Lord, will I seek.' The completeness and swiftness of his answer could not be more vividly expressed. To hear was to obey: as soon as God's merciful call sounded, the Psalmist's heart responded, like a harp-string thrilled into music by the vibration of another tuned to the same note. Without hesitation, and in entire correspondence with the call, was his response. So swiftly, completely, resolutely should we respond to

God's voice, and our ready 'I will' should answer His commandment, as the man at the wheel repeats the captain's orders whilst he carries them out. Upon such acceptance of such an invitation we, too, may build the prayer, 'Hide not Thy face far from me.'

Now, there are three things here that I desire to look at—God's merciful call to us all; the response of the devout soul to that call; and the prayer which is built upon both.

I. We have God's merciful call to us all.

'Thou saidst, Seek ye My face.' Now, that expression, 'the face of God,' though highly metaphorical, is perfectly clear and defined in its meaning. It corresponds substantially to what the Apostle Paul calls, in speaking of the knowledge of God beyond the limits of revelation, 'that which may be known of God'; or, in more modern language, the side of the divine nature which is turned to man; or, in plainer words still, God, in so far as He is revealed. It means substantially the same thing as the other Scriptural expression, 'the name of the Lord.' Both phrases draw a broad distinction between what God is, in the infinite fulness of His incomprehensible being, and what He is as revealed to man; and both imply that what is revealed is knowledge, real and valid, though it may be imperfect.

This, then, being the meaning of the phrase, what

is the meaning of the invitation: 'Seek ye My face'? Have we to search for that, as if it were something hidden, far off, lost, and only to be recovered by our effort? No: a thousand times no! For the seeking, to which God mercifully invites us, is but the turning of the direction of our desires to Him, the recognition of the fact that His face is more than all else to men, the recognition that whilst there are many that say, 'Who will show us any good?' and put the question impatiently, despairingly, vainly, they that turn the seeking into a prayer, and ask, 'Lord! lift Thou the light of Thy countenance upon us,' will never ask in vain. To seek is to desire, to turn the direction of thought and will and affection to Him and to take heed that the ordering of our daily lives is such as that no mist rising from them shall come between us and that brightness of light, or hide from us the vision splendid. They who seek God by desire, by the direction of thought and will and love, and by the regulation of their daily lives in accordance with that desire, are they who obey this commandment.

Next we come to that great thought that God is ever sounding out to all mankind this invitation to seek His face. By the revelation of Himself He bids us all sun ourselves in the brightness of His countenance. One of the New Testament writers, in a passage which is mistranslated in our Authorised Version, says that God 'calls us by His own glory and virtue.' That is to say, the very manifestation of the divine Being is such that there lies in it a summons

to behold Him, and an attraction to Himself. So fair is He, that He but needs to withdraw the veil, and men's hearts rejoice in that countenance, which is as the sun shining in his strength; 'nor know we anything more fair than is the smile upon His face.' If we see Him as He really is, we cannot choose but love. By all His works He calls us to seek Him, not only because the intellect demands that there shall be a personal Will behind all these phenomena, but because they in themselves proclaim His name, and the proclamation of His name is the summons to behold.

By the very make of our own spirits He calls us to Himself. Our restlessness, our yearnings, our movings about as aliens in the midst of things seen and visible, all these bid us turn to Him in whom alone our capacities can be satisfied, and the hunger of our souls appeased. You remember the old story of the Saracen woman who came to England seeking her lover, and passed through these foreign cities, with no word upon her tongue that could be understood of those that heard her except his name whom she sought. Ah! that is how men wander through the earth, strangers in the midst of it. They cannot translate the cry of their own hearts, but it means, 'God—my soul thirsteth for Thee'; and the thirst bids us seek His face.

He summons us by all the providences and events of our changeful lives. Our sorrows by their poignancy, our joys by their incompleteness and

their transiency, alike call us to Him in whom alone the sorrows can be soothed and the joys made full and remain. Our duties, by their heaviness, call us to turn ourselves to Him, in whom alone we can find the strength to fill the *role* that is laid upon us, and to discharge our daily tasks.

But, most of all, He summons us to Himself by Him who is the Angel of His Face, 'the effulgence of His glory, and the express image of His person.' In the face of Jesus Christ, 'the light of the knowledge of the glory of God' beams out upon us, as it never shone on this Psalmist of old. He saw but a portion of that countenance, through a thick veil which thinned as faith gazed, but was never wholly withdrawn. The voice that he heard calling him was less penetrating and less laden with love than the voice that calls us. He caught some tones of invitation sounding in providences and prophecies, in ceremonies and in law; we hear them more full and clear from the lips of a Brother. They sound to us from the cradle and the cross, and they are wafted down to us from the throne. God's merciful invitation to us poor men never has taken, nor will, nor can, take a sweeter and more attractive form than in Christ's version of it: 'Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.' Friend! that summons comes to us; may we deal with it as the Psalmist did!

II. That brings me to note, secondly, the devout soul's response to the loving call from God.

I have already pointed out how beautifully and vividly the contrast between the two is expressed in our text: 'Seek ye My face'—'Thy face will I seek.' The Psalmist takes the general invitation and converts it into an individual one, to which he responds. God's 'ye' is met by his 'I.' The Psalmist makes no hesitation or delay—'*When* Thou saidst … my heart said to Thee.' The Psalmist gathers himself together in a concentrated resolve of a fixed determination—'Thy face *will* I seek.' That is how we ought to respond.

Make the general invitation thy very own. God summons all, because He summons each. He does not cast His invitations out at random over the heads of a crowd, as some rich man might fling coins to a mob, but He addresses every one of us singly and separately, as if there were not another soul in the universe to hear His voice but our very own selves. It is for us not to lose ourselves in the crowd, since He has not lost us in it; but to appropriate, to individualise, to make our very own, the universality of His call to the world. It matters nothing to you what other men may do; it matters not to you how many others may be invited, and whether they may accept or may refuse. When that 'Seek ye' comes to my heart, life or death depends on my answering, 'Whatsoever others may do, as for me I will seek Thy face.' We preachers that have to stand and address a multitude sound out the invitation, and it loses in power, the more there are to listen to us. If I could get you one by one, the poorest words would have

more weight with you than the strongest have when spoken to a crowd. Brother! God individualises us, and God speaks to Thee, 'Wilt thou behold My face?' Answer, 'As for me, I will.'

Again, the Psalmist 'made haste, and delayed not, but made haste' to respond to the merciful summons. Ah! how many of us, in how many different ways, fall into the snare 'by-and-by'! 'not now'; and all these days, that slip away whilst we hesitate, gather themselves together to be our accusers hereafter. Friend! why should you limit the blessedness that may come into your life to the fag end of it when you have got tired and satiated, or tired and disappointed with the world and its good? 'Seek ye the Lord while He may be found, call ye upon Him while He is near.' It is poor courtesy to show to a merciful invitation from a bountiful host if I say; 'After I have looked to the oxen I have bought, and tested them, and measured the field that I have acquired; after I have drunk the sweetness of wedded life with the wife that I have married, then I will come. But, for the present, I pray thee, have me excused.' And that is what many are doing, more or less.

The Psalmist gathered himself together in a fixed resolve, and said, 'I *will*.' That is what we have to do. A languid seeker will not find; an earnest one will not fail to find. But if half-heartedly, now and then, when we are at leisure in the intervals of more important and pressing daily business, we

spasmodically bethink ourselves, and for a little while seek for the light of God's felt presence to shine upon us, we shall not get it. But if we lay a masterful hand, as we ought to do, on these divergent desires that draw us asunder, and bind ourselves, as it were, together, by the strong cord of a resolved purpose carried out throughout our lives, then we shall certainly not seek in vain.

Alas! how strange and how sad is the reception which this merciful invitation receives from so many of us! Some of you never hear it at all. Standing in the very focus where the sounds converge, you are deaf, as if a man behind the veil of the falling water of Niagara, on that rocky shelf there, should hear nothing. From every corner of the universe that voice comes; from all the providences and events of our lives that voice comes; from the life and death of Jesus Christ that voice comes; and not a sound reaches your ears. 'Having ears, they hear not,' and some of us might take the Psalmist's answer, with one sad word added, as ours—'When Thou saidst, Seek ye My face, my heart said unto Thee, Thy face, Lord, will I *not* seek.'

Brethren! it is heaven on earth to say, 'Thou dost call, and I answer. Speak, Lord, for Thy servant heareth.' Yet you shut yourselves up to, and with, misery and vanity, if you so deal with God's merciful summons as some of us are dealing with it, so that He has to say, 'I called, and ye refused; I stretched out My hand, and no man regarded.'

III. Lastly, we have here a prayer built upon both the invitation and the acceptance.

'Hide not Thy face far from me.' That prayer implies that God will not contradict Himself. His promises are commandments. If He bids us seek He binds Himself to show. His veracity, His unchangeableness, are pledged to this, that no man who yields to His invitation will be balked of his desire. He does not hold out the gift in His hand, and then twitch it away when we put out encouraged and stimulated hands to grasp it. You have seen children flashing bright reflections from a mirror on to a wall, and delighting to direct them away to another spot, when a hand has been put out to touch them. That is not how God does. The light that He reveals is steady, and whosoever turns his face to it will be irradiated by its brightness.

The prayer builds itself on the assurance that, because God will not contradict Himself, therefore every heart seeking is sure to issue in a heart finding. There is only one region where that is true, brethren! there is only one tract of human experience in which the promise is always and absolutely fulfilled:—'Ask, and ye shall receive; seek, and ye shall find.' We hunt after all other good, and at the best we get it in part or for a time, and when possessed, it is not as bright as when it shone in the delusive colours of hope and desire. If you follow other good, and are drawn after the elusive lights that dance before you, and only show how great is the darkness, you will not reach

them, but will be mired in the bog. If you follow after God's face, it will make a sunshine in the shadiest places of life here. You will be blessed because you walk all the day long in the light of His countenance, and when you pass hence it will irradiate the darkness of death, and thereafter, 'His servants shall serve Him, and shall see His face,' and, seeing, shall be made like Him, for 'His name shall be in their foreheads.'

Brethren! we have to make our choice whether we shall see His face here on earth, and so meet it hereafter as that of a long-separated and long-desired friend; or whether we shall see it first when He is on His throne, and we at His bar, and so shall have to 'call on the rocks and the hills to fall on us, and cover us from the face of Him who is our Judge.'

THE TWO GUESTS

> 'His anger endureth but a moment; in His favour is life: weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning.'—PSALM xxx. 5.

A word or two of exposition is necessary in order

to bring out the force of this verse. There is an obvious antithesis in the first part of it, between 'His anger' and 'His favour.' Probably there is a similar antithesis between a 'moment' and 'life.' For, although the word rendered 'life' does not unusually mean a *lifetime* it *may* have that signification, and the evident intention of contrast seems to require it here. So, then, the meaning of the first part of my text is, 'the anger lasts for a moment; the favour lasts for a lifetime.' The perpetuity of the one, and the brevity of the other, are the Psalmist's thought.

Then, if we pass to the second part of the text, you will observe that there is there also a double antithesis. 'Weeping' is set over against 'joy'; the 'night' against the 'morning.' And the first of these two contrasts is the more striking if we observe that the word 'joy' means, literally, 'a joyful shout,' so that the voice which was lifted in weeping is conceived of as now being heard in exultant praise. Then, still further, the expression 'may endure' literally means 'may come to lodge.' So that Weeping and Joy are personified. Two guests come; one, dark-robed and approaching at the fitting season for such, 'the night.' The other bright, coming with all things fresh and sunny, in the dewy morn. The guest of the night is Weeping; the guest that takes its place in the morning is Gladness.

The two clauses, then, of my text suggest substantially the same thought, and that is the persistence of joy and the transitoriness of sorrow.

The one speaks of the succession of emotions in the man; the other, of the successive aspects of the divine dealings which occasion these. The whole is a leaf out of the Psalmist's own experience. The psalm commemorates his deliverance from some affliction, probably a sickness. That is long gone past; and the tears that it caused have long since dried up. But this shout of joy of his has lasted all these centuries, and is like to be immortal. Well for us if we can read our life's story with the same cheery confidence as he did his, and have learned like him to discern what is the temporary and what the permanent element in our experience!

I. Note, first, the proportion of joy and sorrow in an ordinary life.

The Psalmist expresses, as I have said, the same idea in both clauses. In the former the 'anger' is contemplated not so much as an element in the divine mind, as in its manifestations in the divine dealings. I shall have a word or two, presently, to say about the Scriptural conception of the 'anger' of God and its relation to the 'favour' of God; but for the present I take the two clauses as being substantially equivalent.

Now is it true—is it not true?—that if a man rightly regards the proportionate duration of these two diverse elements in his life, he must come to the conclusion that the one is continuous and the other is but transitory? A thunderstorm is very short when

measured against the long summer day in which it crashes; and very few days have them. It must be a bad climate where half the days are rainy. If we were to take the chart and prick out upon it the line of our sailing, we should find that the spaces in which the weather was tempestuous were brief and few indeed as compared with those in which it was sunny and calm.

But then, man looks before and after, and has the terrible gift that by anticipation and by memory he can prolong the sadness. The proportion of solid matter needed to colour the Irwell is very little in comparison with the whole of the stream. But the current carries it, and half an ounce will stain miles of the turbid stream. Memory and anticipation beat the metal thin, and make it cover an enormous space. And the misery is that, somehow, we have better memories for sad hours than for joyful ones, and it is easier to get accustomed to 'blessings,' as we call them, and to lose the poignancy of their sweetness because they become familiar, than it is to apply the same process to our sorrows, and thus to take the edge off them. The rose's prickles are felt in the flesh longer than its fragrance lives in the nostrils, or its hue in the eye. Men have long memories for their pains as compared with their remembrance of their sorrows.

So it comes to be a piece of very homely, well-worn, and yet always needful, practical counsel to try not to magnify and prolong grief, nor to minimise

and abbreviate gladness. We can make our lives, to our own thinking, very much what we will. We cannot directly regulate our emotions, but we can regulate them, because it is in our own power to determine which aspect of our life we shall by preference contemplate.

Here is a room, for instance, papered with a paper with a dark background and a light pattern on it. Well, you can manoeuvre your eye about so as either to look at the black background—and then it is all black, with only a little accidental white or gilt to relieve it here and there; or you can focus your eye on the white and gold, and then that is the main thing, and the other is background. We can choose, to a large extent, what we shall conceive our lives to be; and so we can very largely modify their real character.

'There's nothing either good or bad
But thinking makes it so.'

They who will can surround themselves with persistent gladness, and they who will can gather about them the thick folds of an everbrooding and enveloping sorrow. Courage, cheerfulness, thankfulness, buoyancy, resolution, are all closely connected with a sane estimate of the relative proportions of the bright and the dark in a human life.

II. And now consider, secondly, the inclusion of

the 'moment' in the 'life.'

I do not know that the Psalmist thought of that when he gave utterance to my text, but whether he did it or not, it is true that the 'moment' spent in 'anger' is a part of the 'life' that is spent in the 'favour.' Just as within the circle of a life lies each of its moments, the same principle of inclusion may be applied to the other contrast presented here. For as the 'moment' is a part of the 'life,' the 'danger' is a part of the love. The 'favour' holds the 'anger' within itself, for the true Scriptural idea of that terrible expression and terrible fact, the 'wrath of God,' is that it is the necessary aversion of a perfectly pure and holy love from that which does not correspond to itself. So, though sometimes the two may be set against each other, yet at bottom, and in reality, they are one, and the 'anger' is but a mode in which the 'favour' manifests itself. God's love is plastic, and if thrown back upon itself, grieved and wounded and rejected, becomes the 'anger' which ignorant men sometimes seem to think it contradicts. There is no more antagonism between these two ideas when they are applied to God than when they are applied to you parents in your relations to a disobedient child. You know, and it knows, that if there were no love there would be little 'anger.' Neither of you suppose that an irate parent is an unloving parent. 'If ye, being evil, know how,' in dealing with your children, to blend wrath and love, 'how much more shall your Father which is in heaven' be one and the same

Father when His love manifests itself in chastisement and when it expands itself in blessings!

Thus we come to the truth which breathes uniformity and simplicity through all the various methods of the divine hand, that howsoever He changes and reverses His dealings with us, they are one and the same. You may get two diametrically opposite motions out of the same machine. The same power will send one wheel revolving from right to left, and another from left to right, but they are co-operant to grind out at the far end the one product. It is the same revolution of the earth that brings blessed lengthening days and growing summer, and that cuts short the sun's course and brings declining days and increasing cold. It is the same motion which hurls a comet close to the burning sun, and sends it wandering away out into fields of astronomical space, beyond the ken of telescope, and almost beyond the reach of thought. And so one uniform divine purpose, the 'favour' which uses the 'anger,' fills the life, and there are no interruptions, howsoever brief, to the steady continuous flow of His outpoured blessings. All is love and favour. Anger is masked love, and sorrow has the same source and mission as joy. It takes all sorts of weathers to make a year, and all tend to the same issue, of ripened harvests and full barns. O brethren! if we understand that God means something better for us than happiness, even likeness to Himself, we should understand better how our deepest sorrows and

bitterest tears, and the wounds that penetrate deepest into our bleeding hearts, all come from the same motive, and are directed to the same end as their most joyful contraries. One thing the Lord desires, that we may be partakers of His holiness, and so we may venture to give an even deeper meaning to the Psalmist's words than he intended, and recognise that the 'moment' is an integral part of the 'life,' and the 'anger' a mode of the manifestation of the 'favour.'

III. Lastly, notice the conversion of the sorrow into joy.

I have already explained the picturesque image of the last part of my text, which demands a little further consideration. There are two figures presented before us, one dark robed and one bright garmented. The one is the guest of the night, the other is the guest of the morning. The verb which occurs in the first clause of the second half of my text is not repeated in the second, and so the words may be taken in two ways. They may either express how Joy, the morning guest, comes, and turns out the evening visitant, or they may suggest how we took Sorrow in when the night fell, to sit by the fireside, but when morning dawned—who is this, sitting in her place, smiling as we look at her? It is Sorrow transfigured, and her name is changed into Joy. Either the substitution or the transformation may be supposed to be in the Psalmist's mind.

Both are true. No human heart, however wounded, continues always to bleed. Some gracious vegetation creeps over the wildest ruin. The roughest edges are smoothed by time. Vitality asserts itself; other interests have a right to be entertained and are entertained. The recuperative powers come into play, and the pang departs and poignancy is softened. The cutting edge gets blunt on even poisoned spears by the gracious influences of time. The nightly guest, Sorrow, slips away, and ere we know, another sits in her place. Some of us try to fight against that merciful process and seem to think that it is a merit to continue, by half artificial means, the first moment of pain, and that it is treason to some dear remembrances to let life have its way, and to-day have its rights. That is to set ourselves against the dealings of God, and to refuse to forgive Him for what His love has done for us.

But the other thought seems to me to be even more beautiful, and probably to be what was in the Psalmist's mind—viz. the transformation of the evil, Sorrow itself, into the radiant form of Joy. A prince in rags comes to a poor man's hovel, is hospitably received in the darkness, and being received and welcomed, in the morning slips off his rags and appears as he is. Sorrow is Joy disguised.

If it be accepted, if the will submit, if the heart let itself be untwined, that its tendrils may be coiled closer round the heart of God, then the transformation is sure to come, and joy will dawn on

those who have done rightly—that is, submissively and thankfully—by their sorrows. It will not be a joy like what the world calls joy—loud-voiced, boisterous, ringing with idiot laughter; but it will be pure, and deep, and sacred, and permanent. A white lily is fairer than a flaunting peony, and the joy into which sorrow accepted turns is pure and refining and good.

So, brethren! remember that the richest vintages are grown on the rough slopes of the volcano, and lovely flowers blow at the glacier's edge; and all our troubles, big and little, may be converted into gladnesses if we accept them as God meant them. Only they must be so accepted if they are to be thus changed.

But there may be some hearts recoiling from much that I have said in this sermon, and thinking to themselves, 'Ah! there are two kinds of sorrows. There are those that *can* be cured, and there are those that *cannot*. What have you got to say to me who have to bleed from an immedicable wound till the end of my life?' Well, I have to say this—look beyond earth's dim dawns to that morning when 'the Sun of Righteousness shall arise, to them that love His name, with healing in His wings.' If we have to carry a load on an aching back till the end, be sure that when the night, which is far spent, is over, and the day which is at hand hath broken, every raindrop will be turned into a flashing rainbow when it is smitten by the level light, and every sorrow rightly

borne be represented by a special and particular joy.

Only, brother! if a life is to be spent in His favour, it must be spent in His fear. And if our cares and troubles and sorrows and losses are to be transfigured hereafter, then we must keep very near Jesus Christ, who has promised to us that His joy will remain with us, and that our sorrows shall be turned into joys. If we trust to Him, the voices that have been raised in weeping will be heard in gladness, and earth's minor will be transposed by the great Master of the music into the key of Heaven's jubilant praise. If only 'we look not at the things seen, but at the things which are not seen,' then 'our light affliction, which is but for a moment, will work out for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory'; and the weight will be no burden, but will bear up those who are privileged to bear it.

'BE ... FOR THOU ART'

'Be Thou to me a strong Rock, an house of defence to save me. 3. For

Thou art my Rock and my Fortress.'—PSALM xxxi. 2, 3 (R.V.).

It sounds strange logic, 'Be … for Thou art,' and yet it *is* the logic of prayer, and goes very deep, pointing out both its limits and its encouragements. The parallelism between these two clauses is even stronger in the original than in our Version, for whilst the two words which designate the 'Rock' are not identical, their meaning is identical, and the difference between them is insignificant; one being a rock of any shape or size, the other being a perpendicular cliff or elevated promontory. And in the other clause, 'for a house of defence to save me,' the word rendered 'defence' is the same as that which is translated in the next clause 'fortress.' So that if we were to read thus: 'Be Thou a strong Rock to me, for a house, a fortress, for Thou art my Rock and my Fortress,' we should get the whole force of the parallelism. Of course the main idea in that of the 'Rock,' and 'Fortress' is only an exposition of one phase of the meaning of that metaphor.

I. So let us look first at what God is.

'A rock, a fortress-house.' Now, what is the force of that metaphor? Stable being, as it seems to me, is the first thought in it, for there is nothing that is more absolutely the type of unchangeableness and steadfast continuance. The great cliffs rise up, and the river glides at their base—it is a type of mutability, and of the fleeting generations of men, who are as the drops and ripples in its course—it eddies round the foot of the rocks to which the old man looks up, and sees the same dints and streaks

and fissures in it that he saw when he was a child. The river runs onwards, the trees that root themselves in the clefts of the rock bear their spring foliage, and drop their leaves like the generations of men, and the Rock is 'the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever.' And God the Unchangeable rises, if I may so say, like some majestic cliff, round the foot of which rolls for ever the tide of human life, and round which are littered the successive layers of the leaves of many summers.

Then besides this stable being, and the consequences of it, is the other thought which is attached to the emblem in a hundred places in Scripture, and that is defence. 'His place of defence shall be the munitions of rocks.' When the floods are out, and all the plain is being dissolved into mud, the dwellers on it fly to the cliffs. When the enemy's banners appear on the horizon, and the open country is being harried and burned, the peasants hurry to the defence of the hills, and, sheltered there, are safe. And so for us this Name assures us that in Him, whatever floods may sweep across the low levels, and whatever foes may storm over the open land and the unwalled villages, there is always the fortress up in the hills, and thither no flood can rise, and there no enemy can come. A defence and a sure abode is his who dwells in God, and thus folds over himself the warm wings that stretch on either side, and shelter him from all assault. 'Lead me to the Rock that is higher than I.'

But the Rock is a defence in another way. If a hard-pressed fugitive is brought to a stand and can set his back against a rock, he can front his assailants, secure that no unseen foe shall creep up behind and deal a stealthy stab and that he will not be surrounded unawares. 'The God of Israel shall be your rearward,' and he who has 'made the Most High his habitation' is sheltered from 'the pestilence that walketh in darkness,' as well as from 'the destruction that wasteth at noon-day,' and will be cleansed from 'secret faults' if he keeps up unbroken his union with God, for the 'faults' which are not recognised as faults by his partially illuminated conscience are known to God. But the Rock is a defence in yet another way, for it is a sure foundation for our lives. Whoso builds on God need fear no change. When the floods rise, and the winds blow, and the rain storms down, the house that is on the Rock will stand.

And, then, in the Rock there is a spring, and round the spring there is 'the light of laughing flowers,' amidst the stern majesty of the cliff. Just as the Law-giver of old smote the rock, and there gushed out the stream that satisfied the thirst of the whole travelling nation, so Paul would have us Christians repeat the miracle by our faith. Of us, too, it may be said, they drank 'of that Rock that followed them, and that Rock was Christ.' Stable being, secure defence, a fountain of refreshment and satisfaction: all these blessings lie in that great metaphor.

II. Now, note our plea with God, from what He is.

'Be Thou to me a Rock … for Thou art a Rock.' Is that not illogical? No, for notice that little word, 'to me'—be Thou *to me* what Thou art in Thyself, and hast been to all generations.' That makes all the difference. It is not merely 'Be what Thou art,' although that would be much, but it is 'be it to me,' and let *me* have all which is meant in that great Name.

But then, beyond that, let me point out to you how this prayer suggests to us that all true prayer will keep itself within God's revelation of what He is. We take His promises, and all the elements which make up His name or manifestation of His character to the world, whether by His acts or by the utterances of this Book, or by the inferences to be drawn from the life of Jesus Christ, the great Revealer, or by what we ourselves have experienced of Him. The ways by which God has revealed Himself to the world define the legitimate subjects, and lay down the firm foundation, of our petitions. In all His acts God reveals Himself, and if I may so say, when we truly pray, we catch these up, and send them back again to heaven, like arrows from a bow. It is only when our desires and prayers foot themselves upon God's revelation of Himself, and in essence are, in various fashions, the repetition of this prayer of my text: 'Be … for Thou art,' that we can expect to have them answered. Much else may call itself prayer, but it is often but petulant and self-willed endeavour to force our wishes upon Him, and no answer will come to

that. We are to pray about everything; but we are to pray about nothing, except within the lines which are marked out for us by what God has told us, in His words and acts, that He Himself is. Catch these up and fling them back to Him, and for every utterance that He has made of Himself, 'I am' so-and-so, let us go to Him and say 'Be Thou that to me,' and then we may be sure of an answer.

So then two things follow. If we pray after the pattern of this prayer, 'Be Thou to me what Thou art,' then a great many foolish and presumptuous wishes will be stifled in the birth, and, on the other hand, a great many feeble desires will be strengthened and made confident, and we shall be encouraged to expect great things of God. Have you widened your prayers, dear friend!—and I do not mean by that only your outward ones, but the habitual aspiration and expectation of your minds—have you widened these to be as wide as what God has shown us that He is? Have you taken all God's revelation of Himself, and translated it into petition? And do you expect Him to be to you all that He has ever been to any soul of man upon earth? Oh! how such a prayer as this, if we rightly understand it and feel it, puts to shame the narrowness and the poverty of our prayers, the falterings of our faith, and the absence of expectation in ourselves that we shall receive the fulness of God.

God owns that plea: 'Be … what Thou art.' He cannot resist that. That is what the Apostle meant

when he said, 'He abideth faithful, He cannot deny Himself.' He must be true to His character. He can never be other than He always has been. And that is what the Psalmist meant when he goes on, after the words that I have taken for my text, and says, 'For Thy Name's sake lead me and guide me,' What is God's Name? The collocation of letters by which we designate Him? Certainly not. The Name of God is the sum total of what God has revealed Himself as being. And 'for the sake of the Name,' that He may be true to that which He has shown Himself to be, He will always endorse this bill that you draw upon Him when you present Him with His own character, and say 'Be to me what Thou art.'

III. Lastly, we have here the plea with God drawn from what we have taken Him to be to us.

That is somewhat different from what I have already been dwelling upon. Mark the words: 'Be Thou to me a strong Rock, for Thou art *my* Rock and *my* Fortress.' What does that mean? It means that the suppliant has, by his own act of faith, taken God for his; that he has appropriated the great divine revelation, and made it his own. Now it seems to me that that appropriation is, if not *the* point, at least one of the points, in which real faith is distinguished from the sham thing which goes by that name amongst so many people. A man by faith encloses a bit of the common for his very own. When God says that He 'so loved the world that He gave His … Son,' I should say, 'He loved *me*, and gave Himself for *me*.'

When the great revelation is made that He is the Rock of Ages, my faith says: '*My* Rock and *my* Fortress.' Having said that, and claimed Him for mine, I can then turn round to Him and say, 'Be to me what I have taken Thee to be.'

And that faith is expressed very beautifully and strikingly in one of the Old Testament metaphors, which frequently goes along with this one of the Rock. For instance, in a great chapter in Isaiah we find the original of that phrase 'the Rock of Ages.' It runs thus, 'Trust ye in the Lord for ever, for in the Lord JEHOVAH is the *Rock of Ages*.' Now the word for trust there literally means, to flee into a refuge, and so the true idea of faith is 'to fly for refuge,' as the Epistle to the Hebrews has it, 'to the Hope set before us,'—that is (keeping to the metaphor), to the cleft in the Rock.

That act of trust or flight will make it certain that God will be to us for a house of defence, a fortress to save us. Other rock-shelters may crumble. They may be carried by assault; they may be riven by earthquakes. 'The mountains shall depart, and the hills shall be removed,' but this Rock is impregnable, and all who take refuge in it are safe for ever.

And so the upshot of the whole matter is that God will be to us what we have faith to believe that He is, and our faith will be the measure of our possession of the fulness of God. If we can only say in the fulness of our hearts—and keep to the saying: 'Be

Thou to me a Rock, for Thou art my Rock,' then nothing shall ever hurt us; and 'dwelling in the secret place of the Most High' we shall be kept in safety; our 'abode shall be the munitions of rocks, our bread shall be given us, and our water shall be made sure.'

'INTO THY HANDS'

'Into Thine hand I commit my spirit: Thou hast redeemed me, O Lord
God of truth.'—PSALM xxxi. 5.

The first part of this verse is consecrated for ever by our Lord's use of it on the Cross. Is it not wonderful that, at that supreme hour, He deigned to take an unknown singer's words as His words? What an honour to that old saint that Jesus Christ, dying, should find nothing that more fully corresponded to His inmost heart at that moment than the utterance of the Psalmist long ago! How His mind must have been saturated with the Old Testament and with these songs of Israel! And do you not think it would be better for us if ours were completely steeped in those heart-utterances of ancient devotion?

But, of course, the Psalmist was not thinking about

his death. It was an act for his life that he expressed in these words:—'Into Thine hands I commit my spirit.' If you will glance over the psalm at your leisure, you will see that it is the heart-cry of a man in great trouble, surrounded by all sorts of difficulties, with his very life threatened. He was down in the very depths of darkness, and ringed about by all sorts of enemies at that moment, not sitting comfortably, as you and I are here, but in the midst of the hurly-burly and the strife, when by a dead lift of faith he flung himself clean out of his disasters, and, if I might so say, pitched himself into the arms of God. 'Into Thine hands I commit my spirit,' as a man standing in the midst of enemies, and bearing some precious treasure in his hand might, with one strong cast of his arm, fling it into the open hand of some mighty helper, and so baulk the enemies of their prey. That is the figure.

I. Now, let me say a word as to where to lodge a soul for safe keeping.

'Into Thine hands'—a banker has a strong room, and a wise man sends his securities and his valuables to the bank and takes an acknowledgment, and goes to bed at night, quite sure that no harm will come to them, and that he will get them when he wants them. And that is exactly what the Psalmist does here. He deposits his most precious treasure in the safe custody of One who will take care of it. The great Hand is stretched out, and the little soul is put into it. It closes, and 'no man is able to pluck them

out of My Father's hand.'

Now that is only a picturesque way of putting the most threadbare, bald, commonplace of religious teaching. The word faith, when it has any meaning at all in people's minds when they hear it from the pulpit, is extremely apt, I fear, to create a kind of, if not disgust, at least a revulsion of feeling, as if people said, 'Ah, there he is at the old story again!' But will you freshen up your notions of what faith it means by taking that picture of my text as I have tried to expand and illuminate it a little by my metaphor? That is what is meant by 'Into Thy hands I commit my spirit.' There are two or three ways in which that is to be done, and one or two ways in which it is not to be done.

We do it when we trust Him for the salvation of our souls. There are a great many good Christian people who go mourning all their days, or, at least, sometimes mourning and sometimes indifferent. The most that they venture to say is, 'But I cannot be sure.' Our grandfathers used to sing:—

"Tis a point I long to know,
Oft it causes anxious thought.'

Why should it cause anxious thought? Take your own personal salvation for granted, and work from that. Do not work *towards* it. If you have gone to Christ and said, 'Lord, I cannot save myself; save me. I am willing to be saved,' be sure that you have the

salvation that you ask, and that if you have put your soul in that fashion into God's hands, any incredible thing is credible, and any impossible thing is possible, rather than that you should fail of the salvation which, in the bottom of your hearts, you desire. Take the burden off your backs and put it on His. Do not be for ever questioning yourselves, 'Am I a saved man?' You will get sick of that soon, and you will be very apt to give up all thought about the matter at all. But take your stand on the fact, and with emancipated and buoyant hearts, and grateful ones, work from it, and because of it. And when sin rises up in your soul, and you say to yourselves, 'If I were a Christian I could not have done that,' or, 'If I were a Christian I could not be so-and-so'; remember that all sin is inconsistent with being a Christian, but no sin is incompatible with it; and that after all the consciousness of shortcomings and failure, we have just to come back to the old point, and throw ourselves on God's love. His arms are open to clasp us round. 'Into Thy hands I commit my spirit.'

Further, the Psalmist meant, by committing himself to God, trusting Him in reference to daily life, and all its difficulties and duties. Our act of trust is to run through everything that we undertake and everything that we have to fight with. Self-will wrenches our souls out of God's hands. A man who sends his securities to the banker can get them back when he likes. And if we undertake to manage our own affairs, or fling ourselves into our work without

recognition of our dependence upon Him, or if we choose our work without seeking to know what His will is, that is recalling our deposit. Then you *will* get it back again, because God does not keep anybody's securities against his will—you will get it back again, and much good it will do you when you have got it! Self-will, self-reliance, self-determination—these are the opposites of committing the keeping of our souls to God. And, as I say, if you withdraw the deposit, you take all the burden and trouble of it on your own shoulders again. Do not fancy that you are 'living lives of faith in the Son of God,' if you are not looking to Him to settle what you are to do. You cannot expect that He will watch over you, if you do not ask Him where you are to go.

But now there is another thing that I would suggest, this committing of ourselves to God which begins with the initial act of trust in Him for the salvation of our souls, and is continued throughout life by the continual surrender of ourselves to Him, is to be accompanied with corresponding work. The Apostle Peter's memory is evidently hovering round this verse, whether he is consciously quoting it or not, when he says, 'Let them that suffer according to the will of God commit the keeping of their souls to Him *in welldoing*,' which has to go along with the act of trust and dependence. There must come the continual ordering of the life in accordance with His will; for 'well-doing' does not mean merely some works of beneficence and 'charity,' of the sort that

have monopolised to themselves the name in latter days, but it means the whole of righteous conduct in accordance with the will of God.

So Peter tells us that it is vain for us to talk about committing the keeping of our soul to God unless we back up the committing with consistent, Christlike lives. Of course it is vain. How can a man expect God to take care of him when he plunges himself into something that is contrary to God's laws? There are many people who say, 'God will take care of me; He will save me from the consequences.' Not a bit of it—He loves us a great deal too well for that. If you take the bit between your teeth, you will be allowed to go over the precipice and be smashed to pieces. If you wish to be taken care of, keep within the prescribed limits, and consult Him before you act, and do not act till you are sure of His approval. God has never promised to rescue man when he has got into trouble by his own sin. Suppose a servant had embezzled his master's money through gambling, and then expected God to help him to get the money to pay back into the till. Do you think that would be likely to work? And how dare you anticipate that God will keep your feet, if you are walking in ways of your own choosing? All sin takes a man out from the shelter of the divine protection, and the shape the protection has to take then is chastisement. And all sin makes it impossible for a man to exercise that trust which is the committing of his soul to God. So it has to be 'in welldoing,' and the two things are to go together.

'What God hath joined let not man put asunder.' You do not become a Christian by the simple exercise of trust unless it is trust that worketh by love.

But let me remind you, further, that this committing of our souls into God's hands does not mean that we are absolved from taking care of them ourselves. There is a very false kind of religious faith, which seems to think that it shuffles off all responsibility upon God. Not at all; you lighten the responsibility, but you do not get rid of it. And no man has a right to say 'He will keep me, and so I may neglect diligent custody of myself.' He keeps us very largely by helping us to keep our hearts with all diligence, and to keep our feet in the way of truth.

So let me now just say a word in regard to the blessedness of thus living in an atmosphere of continual dependence on, and reference to, God, about great things and little things. Whenever a man is living by trust, even when the trust is mistaken, or when it is resting upon some mere human, fallible creature like himself, the measure of his confidence is the measure of his tranquillity. You know that when a child says, 'I do not need to mind, father will look after that,' he may be right or wrong in his estimate of his father's ability and inclination; but as long as he says it, he has no kind of trouble or anxiety, and the little face is scarred by no deep lines of care or thought. So when we turn to Him and say, 'Why should I the burden bear?' then there comes—I was going to say 'surging,' but 'trickling' is a better

word—into my heart a settled peacefulness which nothing else can give. Look at this psalm. It begins, and for the first half continues, in a very minor key. The singer was not a poet posing as in affliction, but his words were wrung out of him by anguish. 'Mine eyes are consumed with grief; my life is spent with grief'; 'I am … as a dead man out of mind'; 'I am in trouble.' And then with a quick wheel about, 'But I trusted in Thee, O Lord! I said, Thou art my God.' And what comes of that? This—'O how great is Thy goodness which Thou hast laid up for them that fear Thee!' 'Blessed be the Lord, for He hath showed me His marvellous kindness in a strong city.' And then, at the end of all, his peacefulness is so triumphant that he calls upon 'all His saints' to help him to praise. And the last words are 'Be of good courage, and He shall strengthen your heart.' That is what you will get if you commit your soul to God. There was no change in the Psalmist's circumstances. The same enemy was round about him. The same 'net was privily laid for him.' All that had seemed to him half an hour before as wellnigh desperate, continued utterly unaltered. But what *had* altered? God had come into the place, and that altered the whole aspect of matters. Instead of looking with shrinking and tremulous heart along the level of earth, where miseries were, he was looking up into the heavens, where God was; and so everything was beautiful. That will be our experience if we will commit the keeping of our souls to Him in well doing. You can bring June flowers and autumn fruits into snowy

January days by the exercise of this trust in God. It does not need that our circumstances should alter, but only that our attitude should alter. Look up, and cast your souls into God's hands, and all that is round you, of disasters and difficulties and perplexities, will suffer transformation; and for sorrow there will come joy because there has come trust.

I need not say a word about the other application of this verse, which, as I have said, is consecrated to us by our Lord's own use of it at the last. But is it not beautiful to think that the very same act of mind and heart by which a man commits his spirit to God in life may be his when he comes to die, and that death may become a voluntary act, and the spirit may not be dragged out of us, reluctant, and as far as we can, resisting, but that we may offer it up as a libation, to use one metaphor of St. Paul's, or may surrender it willingly as an act of faith? It is wonderful to think that life and death, so unlike each other, may be made absolutely identical in the spirit in which they are met. You remember how the first martyr caught up the words from the Cross, and kneeling down outside the wall of Jerusalem, with the blood running from the wounds that the stones had made, said, 'Lord Jesus! receive my spirit.' That is the way to die, and that is the way to live.

One word is all that time permits about the ground upon which this great venture of faith may be made. 'Thou hast redeemed me, Lord God of Truth.' The Psalmist, I think, uses that word 'redeemed' here, not

in its wider spiritual New Testament sense, but in its frequent Old Testament sense, of deliverance from temporal difficulties and calamities. And what he says is, in effect, this: 'I have had experience in the past which makes me believe that Thou wilt extricate me from this trouble too, because Thou art the God of Truth.' He thinks of what God has done, and of what God is. And Peter, whom we have already found echoing this text, echoes that part of it too, for he says, 'Let them commit the keeping of their souls to Him in well doing, as *unto a faithful Creator*,' which is all but parallel to 'Lord God of Truth.' So God will continue as He has begun, and finish what He has begun.

'A faithful Creator—' He made us to need what we do need, and He is not going to forget the wants that He Himself has incorporated with our human nature. He is bound to help us because He made us. He is the God of Truth, and He will help us. But if we take 'redeemed' in its highest sense, the Psalmist, arguing from God's past mercy and eternal faithfulness, is saying substantially what the Apostle said in the triumphant words, 'Whom He did foreknow, them He also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of His Son … and whom He did predestinate them He also … justified, and whom He justified them He also glorified.' 'Thou hast redeemed me.' 'Thou art the God of Truth; Thou wilt not lift Thy hand away from Thy work until Thou hast made me all that Thou didst bind Thyself to make me in that initial act of

redeeming me.'

So we can say, 'He that spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?' You have experiences, I have no doubt, in your past, on which you may well build confidence for the future. Let each of us consult our own hearts, and our own memories. Cannot *we* say, 'Thou hast been my Help,' and ought we not therefore to be sure that He will not 'leave us nor forsake us' until He manifests Himself as the God of our salvation?

It is a blessed thing to lay ourselves in the hands of God, but the New Testament tells us, 'It is a fearful thing to *fall into* the hands of the living God.' The alternative is one that we all have to face,—either 'into Thy hands I commit my spirit,' or into those hands to fall. Settle which of the two is to be your fate.

GOODNESS WROUGHT AND GOODNESS LAID UP

'Oh how great is Thy goodness, which Thou

> hast laid up for them that fear Thee; which Thou hast wrought for them that trust in Thee before the sons of men!'—PSALM xxxi. 19.

The Psalmist has been describing, with the eloquence of misery, his own desperate condition, in all manner of metaphors which he heaps together —'sickness,' 'captivity,' 'like a broken vessel,' 'as a dead man out of mind.' But in the depth of desolation he grasps at God's hand, and that lifts him up out of the pit. 'I trusted in Thee, O Lord! Thou art my God.' So he struggles up on to the green earth again, and he feels the sunshine; and then he breaks out—'Oh! how great is Thy goodness which Thou hast laid up for them that fear Thee.' So the psalm that began with such grief, ends with the ringing call, 'Be of good courage, and He shall strengthen your heart, all ye that hope in the Lord.'

Now these great words which I have read for my text, and which derive even additional lustre from their setting, do not convey to the hasty English reader the precise force of the antithesis which lies in them. The contrast in the two clauses is between goodness laid up and goodness wrought; and that would come out a little more clearly if we transposed the last words of the text, and instead of reading, as our Authorised Version does, 'which Thou hast wrought for them that trusted in Thee before the sons of men,' read 'which Thou hast wrought before the sons of men for them that trusted in Thee.'

So I think there are, as it were, two great masses of what the Psalmist calls 'goodness'; one of them which has been plainly manifested 'before the sons of men,' the other which is 'laid up' in store. There are a great many notes in circulation, but there is far more bullion in the strong-room. Much 'goodness' has been exhibited; far more lies concealed.

If we take that antithesis, then, I think we may turn it in two or three directions, like a light in a man's hand; and look at it as suggesting—

I. First, the goodness already disposed—'wrought before the sons of men'; and that 'laid up,' yet to be manifested.

Now, that distinction just points to the old familiar but yet never-to-be-exhausted thought of the inexhaustibleness of the divine nature. That inexhaustibleness comes out most wondrously and beautifully in the fundamental manifestation of God on which the Old Testament revelation is built—I mean the vision given to Moses prior to his call, and as the basis of his message, of the bush that burned and was not consumed. That lowly shrub flaming and not burning out was not, as has often been supposed, the symbol of Israel which in the furnace of affliction was not destroyed. It meant the same as the divine name, then proclaimed; 'I AM THAT I AM,' which is but a way of saying that God's Being is absolute, dependent upon none, determined by Himself, infinite, and eternal, burns and is not

burned up, lives and has no proclivity towards death, works and is unwearied, 'operates unspent,' is revealed and yet hidden, gives and is none the poorer.

And as we look upon our daily lives, and travel back in thought, some of us over the many years which have all been crowded with instances and illustrations of divine faithfulness and favouring care, we have to grasp both these exclamations of our text, 'Oh! how great is Thy goodness which Thou hast wrought,' how much greater 'is Thy goodness which is laid up!' The table has been spread in the wilderness, and the verities of Christian experience more than surpass the legends of hungry knights finding banquets prepared by unseen hands in desert places. It is as when Jesus made the multitude sit down on the green grass and feast to the full, and yet abundance remained undiminished after satisfying all the hungry applicants. The bread that was broken yielded more basketfuls for to-morrow than the original quantity in the lad's hands. The fountain rises, and the whole camp, 'themselves and their children and their cattle,' slake their thirst at it, and yet it is full as ever. The goodness wrought is but the fringe and first beginnings of the mass that is laid up. All the gold that has been coined and put into circulation is as nothing compared with the wedges and ingots of massive bullion that lie in the strong room. God's riches are not like the world's wealth. You very soon get to the bottom of its purse. Its

'goodness,' is very soon run dry; and nothing will yield an unintermittent stream of satisfaction and blessing to a poor soul except the 'river of the water of life that proceedeth out of the Throne of God and of the Lamb.'

So, dear brethren! that contrast may suggest to us how quietly and peacefully we may look forward to all the unknown future; and hold up to it so as to enable us to scan its general outlines, the light of the known and experienced past. Let our trustful prayer be; 'Thou hast been my help: leave me not, neither forsake me, O God of my salvation!' and the answer will certainly be: 'I will not leave thee, till I have done unto thee that which I have spoken to thee of.' Our Memory ought to be the mother of our Hope; and we should paint the future in the hues of the past. Thou hast goodness 'laid up,' more than enough to match 'the goodness Thou hast wrought.' God's past is the prophecy of God's future; and my past, if I understand it aright, ought to rebuke every fear and calm every anxiety. We, and only we, have the right to say, 'To-morrow shall be as this day, and much more abundant.' That is delusion if said by any but by those that fear and trust in the Inexhaustible God.

II. Now let us turn our light in a somewhat different direction. The contrast here suggests the goodness that is publicly given and that which is experienced in secret.

If you will notice, in the immediate neighbourhood

of my text there come other words which evidently link themselves with the thought of the goodness laid up: 'Thou shalt hide them in the secret of Thy presence.' That is where also the 'goodness' is. 'Thou shalt keep them secretly in a pavilion … blessed be the Lord! for He hath shewed me His marvellous kindness in a strong city.' So, then, the goodness which is wrought, and which can be seen by the sons of men, dwindles in comparison with the goodness which lies in that secret place, and can only be enjoyed and possessed by those who dwell there, and whose feet are familiar with the way that leads to it. That is to say, if you wish the Psalmist's thought in plain prose, all these visible blessings of ours are but pale shadows and suggestions of the real wealth that we can have only if we live in continual communion with God. The spiritual blessings of quiet minds and strength for work, the joys of communion with God, the sweetness of the hopes that are full of immortality, and all these delights and manifestations of God's inmost love and sweetness which are granted only to waiting hearts that shut themselves off from the tumultuous delights of earth as the bases of their trust or the sources of their gladness—these are fuller, better than the selectest and richest of the joys that God's world can give. God does not put His best gifts, so to speak, in the shop-windows; He keeps these in the inner chambers. He does not arrange His gifts as dishonest traders do their wares, putting the finest outside or on the top, and the less good beneath. 'Thou hast kept the good

wine until now.' It is they who inhabit 'the secret place of the Most High,' and whose lives are filled with communion with Him, realising His presence, seeking to know His will, reaching out the tendrils of their hearts to twine round Him, and diligently, for His dear sake, doing the tasks of life; who taste the selected dainties from God's gracious hands.

How foolish, then, to order life on the principle upon which we are all tempted to do it, and to yield to the temptation to which some of us have yielded far too much, of fancying that the best good is the good that we can touch and taste and handle and that men can see! No! no! Deep down in our hearts a joy that strangers never intermeddle with nor know, a peace that passes understanding, a present Christ and a Heaven all but present, because Christ is present—these are the good things for men, and these are the things which God does not, because He cannot, fling broadcast into the world, but which He keeps, because He must, for those that desire them, and are fit for them. 'He causeth His sun to shine, and His rain to fall on the unthankful and on the disobedient,' but the goodness laid up is better than the sunshine, and more refreshing and fertilising and cleansing than the rain, and it comes, and comes only, to them that trust Him, and live near Him.

III. And so, lastly, we may turn our light in yet another direction, and take this contrast as suggesting the goodness wrought on earth, and the goodness laid up in heaven.

Here we see, sometimes, the messengers coming with the one cluster of grapes on the pole. There we shall live in the vineyard. Here we drink from the river as it flows; there we shall be at the fountain-head. Here we are in the vestibule of the King's house, there we shall be in the throne room, and each chamber as we pass through it is richer and fairer than the one preceding. Heaven's least goodness is more than earth's greatest blessedness. All that life to come, all its conditions and everything about it, are so strange to us, so incapable of being bodied forth or conceived by us, and the thought of Eternity is, it seems to me, so overwhelmingly awful that I do not wonder at even good people finding little stimulus, or much that cheers, in the thought of passing thither. But if we do not know anything more —and we know very little more—let us be sure of this, that when God begins to compare His adjectives He does not stop till He gets to the superlative degree and that *good* begets *better*, and the better of earth ensures the *best* of Heaven. And so out of our poor little experience here, we may gather grounds of confidence that will carry our thoughts peacefully even into the great darkness, and may say, 'What Thou didst work is much, what Thou hast laid up is more.' And the contrast will continue for ever and ever; for all through that strange Eternity that which is wrought will be less than that which is laid up, and we shall never get to the end of God, nor to the end of His goodness.

Only let us take heed to the conditions—'them that fear Him, them that trust in Him.' If we will do these things through each moment of the experiences of a growing Christian life, and at the moment of the experience of a Christian death, and through the eternities of the experience of a Christian heaven, Jesus Christ will whisper to us, 'Thou shalt see greater things than these.'

HID IN LIGHT

> 'Thou shall hide them in the secret of Thy presence from the pride of man; Thou shalt keep them secretly in a pavilion from the strife of tongues.'—PSALM xxxi. 20.

The word rendered 'presence' is literally 'face,' and the force of this very remarkable expression of confidence is considerably marred unless that rendering be retained. There are other analogous expressions in Scripture, setting forth, under various metaphors, God's protection of them that love Him. But I know not that there is any so noble and striking as this. For instance, we read of His hiding His children 'in the secret of His tabernacle,' or tent; as

an Arab chief might do a fugitive who had eaten of his salt, secreting him in the recesses of his tent whilst the pursuers scoured the desert in vain for their prey. Again, we read of His hiding them 'beneath the shadow of His wing'; where the divine love is softened into the likeness of the maternal instinct which leads a hen to gather her chickens beneath the shelter of her own warm and outspread feathers. But the metaphor of my text is more vivid and beautiful still. 'Thou shalt hide them in the secret of Thy face.' The light that streams from that countenance is the hiding-place for a poor man. These other metaphors may refer, perhaps, the one to the temple, and the other to the outstretched wings of the cherubim that shadowed the Mercy-seat. And, if so, this metaphor carries us still more near to the central blaze of the Shekinah, the glory that hovered above the Mercy-seat, and glowed in the dark sanctuary, unseen but once a year by one trembling high priest, who had to bear with him blood of sacrifice, lest the sight should slay. The Psalmist says, into that fierce light a man may go, and stand in it, bathed, hid, secure. 'Thou shalt hide them in the secret of Thy face.'

I. Now, then, let us notice, first, this hiding-place.

The 'face' of God is so strongly figurative an expression that its metaphorical character cannot but be obvious to the most cursory reader. The very frankness, and, we may say, the grossness of the image, saves it from all misconception, and as with

other similar expressions in the Old Testament, at once suggests its meaning. We read, for example, of the 'arm,' the 'hand,' the 'finger' of God, and everybody feels that these mean His power. We read of the 'eye' of God, and everybody knows that that means His omniscience. We read of the 'ear' of God, and we all understand that that holds forth the blessed thought that He hears and answers the cry of such as be sorrowful. And, in like manner, the 'face' of God is the apprehensible part of the divine nature which turns to men, and by which He makes Himself known. It is roughly equivalent to the other Old and New Testament expression, the 'name of the Lord,' the manifested and revealed side of the divine nature. And that is the hiding-place into which men may go.

We have the other expression also in Scripture, 'the light of Thy countenance,' and that helps us to apprehend the Psalmist's meaning. 'The light of Thy face' is 'secret.' What a paradox! Can light conceal? Look at the daily heavens—filled with blazing stars, all invisible till the night falls. The effulgence of the face is such that they that stand in it are lost and hid, like the lark in the blue sky. 'A glorious privacy of light is Thine.' There is a wonderful metaphor in the New Testament of a woman 'clothed with the sun,' and caught up into it from her enemies to be safe there. And that is just an expansion of the Psalmist's grand paradox, 'Thou shalt hide them in the secret of Thy face.' Light conceals when the light is so bright

as to dazzle. They who are surrounded by God are lost in the glory, and safe in that seclusion, 'the secret of Thy face.'

A thought may be suggested, although it is somewhat of a digression from the main purpose of my text, but it springs naturally out of this paradox, and may just deserve a word. Revelation is real, but revelation has its limits. That which is revealed is 'the face of God,' but we read, 'no man can see My face.' After all revelation He remains hidden. After all pouring forth of His beams He remains 'the God that dwelleth in the thick darkness,' and the light which is inaccessible is also a darkness that can be felt. Apprehension is possible; comprehension is impossible. What we know of God is valid and true, but we never shall know all the depths that lie in that which we do know of Him. His face is 'the secret'; and though men may malign Him when they say, 'Verily, Thou art a God that hidest Thyself, O God of Israel!' and He answers them, 'I have not spoken in secret' in a dark 'place of the earth,' it still remains true that revelation has its mysteries born of the greatness of its effulgence, and that all which we know of God is 'dark with excess of light.'

But that is aside from our main purpose. Let me rather remind you of how the thought of the secret of God's face being the secure hiding-place of them that love Him points to this truth—that that brightness of light has a repellent power which keeps far away from all intermingling with it everything

that is evil. The old Greek mythologies tell us that the radiant arrows of Apollo shot forth from his far-reaching bow, wounded to death the monsters of the slime and unclean creatures that crawled and revelled in darkness. And the myth has a great truth in it. The light of God's face slays evil, of whatsoever kind it is; and just as the unlovely, loathsome creatures that live in the dark and find themselves at ease there writhe and wriggle in torment, and die when their shelter is taken away and they are exposed to the light beating on their soft bodies, so the light of God's face turned upon evil things smites them into nothingness. Thus 'the secret of His countenance' is the shelter of all that is good.

Nor need I remind you how, in another aspect of the phrase, the 'light of His face,' is the expression for His favour and loving regard, and how true it is that in that favour and loving regard is the impregnable fortress into which, entering, any man is safe. I said that the expression the 'face of the Lord' roughly corresponded to the other one, 'the name of the Lord,' inasmuch as both meant the revealed aspect of the divine nature. You may remember how we read, 'The name of the Lord is a strong tower into which the righteous runneth and is safe.' The 'light' of the face of the Lord is His favour and loving regard falling upon men. And who can be harmed with that lambent light—like sunshine upon water, or upon a glittering shield—playing around Him?

Only let us remember that for us 'the face of God'

is Jesus Christ. He is the 'arm' of the Lord; He is the 'name' of the Lord; He is the 'face.' All that we know of God we know through and in Him; all that we see of God we see by the shining upon us of Him who is 'the eradiation of His glory and the express image of His person.' So the open secret of the 'face' of God is Jesus, the hiding-place of our souls.

II. Secondly, notice God's hidden ones.

My text carries us back, by that word 'them,' to the previous verse, where we have a double description of those who are thus hidden in the inaccessible light of His countenance. They are 'such as fear Thee,' and 'such as trust in Thee.' Now, that latter expression is congruous with the metaphor of my text, in so far as the words on which we are now engaged speak about a 'hiding-place,' and the word which is translated 'trust' literally means 'to flee to a refuge.' So they that flee to God for refuge are those whom God hides in the 'secret of His face.' Let us think of that for a moment.

I said, in the beginning of these remarks, that there was here an allusion, possibly, to the Temple. All temples in ancient times were asylums. Whosoever could flee to grasp the horns of the altar, or to sit, veiled and suppliant, before the image of the god, was secure from his foes, who could not pass within the limits of the Temple grounds, in which strife and murder were not permissible. We too often flee to other gods and other temples for our refuges. Ay!

and when we get there we find that the deity whom we have invoked is only a marble image that sits deaf, dumb, motionless, whilst we cling to its unconscious skirts. As one of the saddest of our modern cynics once said, looking up at that lovely impersonation of Greek beauty, the Venus de Milo, 'Ah! she is fair; but she has no arms,' so we may say of all false refuges to which men betake themselves. The goddess is powerless to help, however beautiful the presentment of her may have seemed to our eyes. The evils from which we have fled to these false deities and shelterless sanctuaries will pursue us across the threshold; and as Elijah did with the priests of Baal upon Carmel, will slay us at the very foot of the altar to which we have clung, and vexed with our vain prayers. There is only one shrine where there is a sanctuary, and that is the shrine above which shines 'the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ'; into the brightness of which poor men may pass and therein may hide themselves. God hides us, and His hiding is effectual, in the secret of the light and splendour of His face.

I said, too, that there was an allusion, as there is in all the psalms that deal with men as God's guests, to the ancient customs of hospitality, by which a man who has once entered the tent of the chief, and partaken of food there, is safe, not only from his pursuers, but from his host himself, even though that host should be the kinsman-avenger. The red-handed murderer, who has eaten the salt of the man whose

duty it otherwise would have been to slay him where he stood, is safe from his vengeance. And thus they who cast themselves upon God have nothing to fear. No other hand can pluck them from the sanctuary of His tent. He Himself, having admitted them to share His hospitality, cannot and will not lift a hand against them. We are safe *from* God only when we are safe *in* God.

But remember the condition on which this security comes. 'Thou shalt hide *them* in the secret of Thy face.' Whom? Those that flee for refuge to Thee. The act of simple faith is set forth there, by which a poor man, with all his imperfections on his head, may yet venture to put his foot across the boundary line that separates the outer darkness from the beam of light that comes from God's face. 'Who among us shall dwell with the devouring fire? Who among us shall dwell with everlasting burnings?' That question does not mean, as it is often taken to mean—What mortal can endure the punishments of a future life? but, Who can venture to be God's guests? and it is equivalent to the other interrogation, 'Who shall ascend to the hill of the Lord, or who shall stand in His holy place?' The answer is, If you go to Him for refuge, knowing your danger, feeling your impurity, *you* may walk amidst all that light softened into lambent beauty, as those Hebrew children did in the furnace of fire, being at ease there, and feeling it well with themselves, and having nothing about them consumed except the bonds that bound them.

Remember that Jesus Christ is the Hiding-place, and that to flee to Him for refuge is the condition of security, and all they who thus, from the snares of life, from its miseries, disappointments, and burdens, from the agitation of their own hearts, from the ebullition of their own passions, from the stings of their own conscience, or from other of the ills that flesh is heir to, make their hiding-place—by the simple act of faith in Jesus Christ—in the light of God's face, are thereby safe for evermore.

But the initial act of fleeing to the refuge must be continued by abiding in the refuge. It is of no use to take shelter in the light unless we abide in the light. It is of no use to go to the Temple for sanctuary unless we continue in it for sacrifice and worship. We must 'walk in the light as God is in the light.' That is to say, the condition of being hid in God is, first of all, to take refuge in Jesus Christ, and then to abide in Him by continual communion. 'Your life is hid with Christ in God.' Unless we have a hidden life, deep beneath, and high above, and far beyond the life of sense, we have no right to think that the shelter of the Face will be security for us. The very essence of Christianity is the habitual communion of heart, mind, and will with God in Christ. Do you live in the light, or have you only gone there to escape what you are afraid of? Do you live in the light by the continual direction of thought and heart to Him, cultivating the habit of daily and hourly communion with Him amidst the distractions of necessary duty,

care, and changing circumstances?

But not only by communion, but also by conduct, must we keep in the light. The fugitive found outside the city of refuge was fair game for the avenger, and if he strayed beyond its bounds there was a sword in his back before he knew where he was. Every Christian, by each sin, whether it be acted or only thought, casts himself out of the light into the darkness that rings it round, and out there he is a victim to the beasts of prey that hunt in darkness. An eclipse of the sun is not caused by any change in the sun, but by an opaque body, the offspring and satellite of the earth, coming between the earth and sun. And so, when Christian men lose the light of God's face, it is not because there is any 'variableness or shadow of turning' in Him, but because between Him and them has come the blackness—their own offspring—of their own sin. You are not safe if you are outside the light of His countenance. These are the conditions of security.

III. Lastly, note what the hidden ones find in the light.

This burst of confidence in my text comes from the Psalmist immediately after plaintively pouring out his soul under the pressure of afflictions. His experience may teach us the interpretation of his glad assurance.

God will keep all real evil from us if we keep near

Him; but He will not keep the externals that men call evil from us. I do not know whether there is such a thing as filtering any poisons or malaria by means of light, but I am sure that the light of God filters our atmosphere for us. Though it may leave the external form of evil it takes all the poison out of it and turns it into a harmless minister for our good. The arrows that are launched at us may be tipped with venom when they leave the bow, but if they pass through the radiant envelope of divine protection that surrounds us—and they must have passed through that if they reach us—it cleanses all the venom from the points though it leaves the sharpness there. The evil is not an evil if it has got our length; and its having touched us shows that He who lets it pass into the light where His children safely dwell, knows that it cannot harm them.

But, again, we shall find if we live in continual communion with the revealed Face of God, that we are elevated high above all the strife of tongues and the noise of earth. We shall 'outsoar the shadow of the night,' and be lifted to an elevation from which all the clamours of earth will sound faint and poor, like the noises of the city to the dwellers on the mountain peak. Nor do we find only security there, for the word in the second clause of my text, 'Thou shalt *keep* them *secretly*,' is the same as is employed in the previous verse in reference to the treasures which God *lays up* for them that fear Him. The poor men that trust in God, and the wealth which He has

to lavish upon them, are both hid, and they are hid in the same place. The 'goodness wrought before the sons of men' has not emptied the reservoir. After all expenditure the massy ingots of gold in God's storehouse are undiminished. The mercy still to come is greater than that already received. 'To-morrow shall be as this day and much more abundant.' This river broadens as we mount towards its source.

Brethren! the Face of God must be either our dearest joy or our greatest dread. There comes a time when you and I must front it, and look into His eyes. It is for us to settle whether at that day we shall 'call upon the rocks and the hills to hide us' from it, or whether we shall say with rapture, 'Thou hast made us most blessed with Thy countenance'! Which is it to be? It must be one or other. When He says, 'Seek ye My Face,' may our hearts answer, 'Thy Face, Lord, will I seek,' that when we see it hereafter, shining as the sun in his strength, its light may not be darkness to our impure and horror-struck eyes.

A THREEFOLD THOUGHT OF SIN AND FORGIVENESS

> 'Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. 2. Blessed is the man unto whom the Lord imputeth not iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no guile.' —PSALM xxxii. 1, 2.

This psalm, which has given healing to many a wounded conscience, comes from the depths of a conscience which itself has been wounded and healed. One must be very dull of hearing not to feel how it throbs with emotion, and is, in fact, a gush of rapture from a heart experiencing in its freshness the new joy of forgiveness. It matters very little who wrote it. If we accept the superscription, which many of those who usually reject these ancient Jewish notes do in the present case, the psalm is David's, and it fits into some of the specific details of his great sin and penitence. But that is of very small moment. Whoever wrote it, he sings because he must.

The psalm begins with an exclamation, for the clause would be better translated, 'Oh! the blessedness of the man.' Then note the remarkable accumulation of clauses, all expressing substantially the same thing, but expressing it with a difference. The Psalmist's heart is too full to be emptied by one utterance. He turns his jewel, as it were, round and round, and at each turn it reflects the light from a different angle. There are three clauses in my text, each substantially having the same meaning, but which yet present that substantially identical

meaning with different shades. And that is true both in regard to the three words which are employed to describe the fact of transgression, and to the three which are employed to describe the fact of forgiveness. It is mainly to these, and the large lessons which lie in observing the shades of significance in them, that I wish to turn now.

I. Note the solemn picture which is here drawn of various phases of sin.

There are three words employed—'transgression,' 'sin,' 'iniquity.' They all mean the same thing, but they mean it with a different association of ideas and suggestions of its foulness. Let me take them in order. The word translated 'transgression' seems literally to signify separation, or rending apart, or departure, and hence comes to express the notion of apostasy and rebellion.

So, then, here is this thought; all sin is a going away. From what? Rather the question should be—from *whom*? All sin is a departure from God. And that is its deepest and darkest characteristic. And it is the one that needs to be most urged, for it is the one that we are most apt to forget. We are all ready enough to acknowledge faults; none of us have any hesitation in saying that we have done wrong, and have gone wrong. We are ready to recognise that we have transgressed the law; but what about the Lawgiver? The personal element in every sin, great or small, is that it is a voluntary rending of a union

which exists, a departure from God who is with us in the deepest recesses of our being, unless we drag ourselves away from the support of His enclosing arm, and from the illumination of His indwelling grace.

So, dear brethren! this was the first and the gravest aspect under which the penitent and the forgiven man in my text thought of his past, that in it, when he was wildly and eagerly rushing after the low and sensuous gratification of his worst desires, he was rebelling against, and wandering far away from, the ever-present Friend, the all-encircling support and joy, the Lord, his life. You do not understand the gravity of the most trivial wrong act when you think of it as a sin against the order of Nature, or against the law written on your heart, or as the breach of the constitution of your own nature, or as a crime against your fellows. You have not got to the bottom of the blackness until you see that it is flat rebellion against God Himself. This is the true devilish element in all our transgression, and this element is in it all. Oh! if once we do get the habit formed and continued until it becomes almost instinctive and spontaneous, of looking at each action of our lives in immediate and direct relation to God, there would come such an apocalypse as would startle some of us into salutary dread, and make us all feel that 'it is an evil and a bitter thing' (and the two characteristics must always go together), 'to depart from the living God.' The great type of all wrongdoers is in that

figure of the Prodigal Son, and the essence of his fault was, first, that he selfishly demanded for his own his father's goods; and, second, that he went away into a far country. Your sins have separated between you and God. And when you do those little acts of selfish indulgence which you do twenty times a day, without a prick of conscience, each of them, trivial as it is, like some newly-hatched poisonous serpent, a finger-length long, has in it the serpent nature, it is rebellion and separation from God.

Then another aspect of the same foul thing rises before the Psalmist's mind. This evil which he has done, which I suppose was the sin in the matter of Bathsheba, was not only rebellion against God, but it was, according to this text, in the second clause, 'a sin,' by which is meant literally *missing an aim*. So this word, in its pregnant meaning, corresponds with the signification of the ordinary New Testament word for sin, which also implies error, or missing that which ought to be the goal of our lives. That is to say, whilst the former word regarded the evil deed mainly in its relation to God, this word regards it mainly in its relation to ourselves, and that which before Him is rebellion, the assertion of my own individuality and my own will, and therefore in separation from His will, is, considered in reference to myself, my fatally missing the mark to which my whole energy and effort ought to be directed. All sin, big or little, is a blunder. It never hits what it aims at, and if it did, it is aiming at the wrong thing. So

doubly, all transgression is folly, and the true name for the doer is 'Thou fool!' For every evil misses the mark which, regard being had to the man's obvious destiny, he ought to aim at. 'Man's chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy Him for ever'; and whosoever in all his successes fails to realise that end is a failure through and through, in whatever smaller matters he may seem to himself and to others to succeed. He only strikes the target in the bull's eye who lets his arrows be deflected by no gusts of passion, nor aimed wrong by any obliquity of vision; but with firm hand and clear eye seeks and secures the absolute conformity of his will to the Father's will, and makes God his aim and end in all things. 'Thou hast created us for Thyself, and only in Thee can we find rest.' O brother! whatever be your aims and ends in life, take this for the surest verity, that you have fatally misunderstood the purpose of your being, and the object to which you should strain, if there is anything except God, who is the supreme desire of your heart and the goal of your life. All sin is missing the mark which God has set up for man.

Therefore let us press to the mark where hangs the prize which whoso possesses succeeds, whatsoever other trophies may have escaped his grasp.

But there is another aspect of this same thought, and that is that every piece of evil misses its own shabby mark. 'A rogue is a round-about fool.' No man ever gets, in doing wrong, the thing he did the wrong for, or if he gets it, he gets something else along with

it that takes all the sweet taste out of it. The thief secures the booty, but he gets penal servitude besides. Sin tempts us with glowing tales of the delight to be found in drinking stolen waters and eating her bread in secret; but sin lies by suppression of the truth, if not by suggestions of the false, because she says never a word about the sickness and the headache that come after the debauch, nor about the poison that we drink down along with her sugared draughts. The paltering fiend keeps the word of promise to the ear, and breaks it to the hope. All sin, great or little, is a blunder, and missing of the mark.

And lastly, yet another aspect of the ugly thing rises before the Psalmist's eye. In reference to God, evil is separation and rebellion; in reference to myself, it is an error and missing of my true goal; and in reference to the straight standard and law of duty, it is, according to the last of the three words for sin in the text, 'iniquity,' or, literally, *something twisted* or distorted. It is thus brought into contrast with the right line of the plain, straight path in which we ought to walk. We have the same metaphor in our own language. We talk about things being right and wrong, by which we mean, in the one case, parallel with the rigid law of duty, and in the other case, 'wrung,' or wavering, crooked and divergent from it. There is a standard as well as a Judge, and we have not only to think of evil as being rebellion against God and separation from Him, and

as, for ourselves, issuing in fatal missing of the mark, but also as being divergent from the one manifest law to which we ought to be conformed. The path to God is a right line; the shortest road from earth to Heaven is absolutely straight. The Czar of Russia, when railways were introduced into that country, was asked to determine the line between St. Petersburg and Moscow. He took a ruler and drew a straight line across the map, and said, 'There!' Our Autocrat has drawn a line as straight as the road from earth to Heaven, and by the side of it are 'the crooked, wandering ways in which we live.'

Take these three thoughts then—as for law, divergence; as for the aim of my life, a fatal miss; as for God, my Friend and my Life, rebellion and separation—and you have, if not the complete physiognomy of evil, at least grave thoughts concerning it, which become all the graver when we think that they are true about us and about our deeds.

II. And so let me ask you to look secondly at the blessed picture drawn here of the removal of the sin.

There are three words here for forgiveness, each of which adds its quota to the general thought. It is 'forgiven,' 'covered,' 'not imputed.' The accumulation of synonyms not only sets forth various aspects of pardon, but triumphantly celebrates the completeness and certainty of the gift.

As to the first, it means literally to lift and bear away a load or burden. As to the second, it means, plainly enough, to cover over, as one might do some foul thing, that it may no longer offend the eye or smell rank to Heaven. Bees in their hives, when there is anything corrupt and too large for them to remove, fling a covering of wax over it, and hermetically seal it, and no foul odour comes from it. And so a man's sin is covered over and ceases to be *in evidence*, as it were before the divine Eye that sees all things. He Himself casts a merciful veil over it and hides it from Himself. A similar idea, though with a modification in metaphor, is included in that last word, the sin is not reckoned. God does not write it down in His Great Book on the debit side of the man's account. And these three things, the lifting up and carrying away of the load, the covering over of the obscene and ugly thing, the non-reckoning in the account of the evil deed; these three things taken together do set forth before us the great and blessed truth that a man's transgressions may become, in so far as the divine heart and the divine dealings with him are concerned, as if nonexistent.

Men tell us that that is not possible and that it is immoral to preach a doctrine of forgiveness. O dear brethren! there is no gospel to preach that will touch a man's heart except the gospel that begins with this —God bears away, covers over, does not reckon to a man, his rebellions, his errors, his departures from the law of right. Sin *is* capable of forgiveness, and,

blessed be God! every sin He is ready to forgive. I should be ashamed of myself to stand here, and not preach a gospel of pardon. I know not anything else that will touch consciences and draw hearts except this gospel, which I am trying in my poor way to lay upon your hearts.

Notice how my text includes also a glance at the condition on our part on which this absolute and utter annihilation of our wicked past is possible. That last clause of my text, 'In whose spirit there is no guile,' seems to me to refer to the frank sincerity of a confession, which does not try to tell lies to God, and, attempting to deceive Him, really deceives only the self-righteous sinner. Whosoever opens his heart to God, makes a clean breast of it, and without equivocation or self-deception or the palliations which self-love teaches, says, 'I have played the fool and erred exceedingly,' to that man the Psalmist thinks pardon is sure to come.

Now remember that the very heart and centre of that Jewish system was an altar, and that on that altar was sacrificed the expiatory victim. I am not going to insist upon any theory of an atonement, but I do want to urge this, that Christianity is nothing, if it have not explained and taken up into itself that which was symbolised in that old ritual. The very first words from human lips which proclaimed Christ's advent to man were, 'Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world,' and amongst the last words which Christ spoke upon

earth, in the way of teaching His disciples, were these, 'This is My blood, shed for many for the remission of sins.' The Cross of Christ explains my psalm, the Cross of Christ answers the confidence of the Psalmist, which was fed upon the shadow of the good things to come. He has died, the Just for the unjust, that the sins which were laid upon Him might be taken away, covered, and not reckoned to us.

Brethren! unless my sins are taken away by the Lamb of God they remain. Unless they are laid upon Christ, they crush me. Unless they are covered by His expiation, they lie there before the Throne of God, and cry for punishment. Unless His blood has wiped out the record that is against us, the black page stands for ever. And to you and me there will be said one day, in a voice which we dare not dispute, 'Pay Me that thou owest!' The blacker the sin the brighter the Christ. I would that I could lay upon all your hearts this belief, 'the blood of Jesus Christ,' and nothing else, 'cleanses from all sin!'

III. I will touch in a word only upon the last thought suggested by the text, and that is the blessedness of this removal of sin.

As I said, my text is really an exclamation, a gush of rapture from a heart that is tasting the fresh-drawn blessedness of pardon. And the rest of the psalm is little more than an explanation of the various aspects and phases of that blessedness. Let me just run over them in the briefest possible

manner.

If we receive this forgiveness through Jesus Christ and our faith in Him, then we have manifold blessedness in one. There is the blessedness of deliverance from sullen remorse and of the dreadful pangs of an accusing conscience. How vividly, and evidently as a transcript from a page in his own autobiography, the Psalmist describes that condition, 'When I kept silence my bones waxed old through my roaring all the day long'! When a man's heart is locked against confession he hears a tumult of accusing voices within himself, and remorse and dread creep over his heart. The pains of sullen remorse were never described more truly and more dreadfully than in this context. 'Day and night Thy hand was heavy upon me, my moisture is turned into the drought of summer.' Some of us may know something of that. But there is a worse state than that, and one or other of the two states belongs to us. If we have not found our way into the liberty of confession and forgiveness, we have but a choice between the pains of an awakened conscience and the desolation of a dead one. It is worse to have no voice within than to have an accusing one. It is worse to feel no pressure of a divine Hand than to feel it. And they whose consciences are seared as with a hot iron have sounded the lowest depths. They are perfectly comfortable, quite happy; they say all these feelings that I am trying to suggest to you seem to them to be folly. 'They make a solitude and

call it peace.' It is an awful thing when a man has come to this point, that he has got past the accusations of conscience, and can swallow down the fiercest draughts without feeling them burn. Dear brethren! there is only one deliverance from an accusing conscience which does not murder the conscience, and that is that we should find our way into the peace of God which is through Christ Jesus and His atoning death.

Then, again, my psalm goes on to speak about the blessedness of a close clinging to God in peaceful trust, which will ensure security in the midst of all trials, and a hiding-place against every storm. The Psalmist uses a magnificent figure. God is to him as some rocky island, steadfast and dry, in the midst of a widespread inundation; and taking refuge there in the clefts of the rock, he looks down upon the tossing, shoreless sea of troubles and sorrows that breaks upon the rocky barriers of his Patmos, and stands safe and dry. Only through forgiveness do we come into that close communion with God which ensures safety in all disasters.

And then there follows the blessedness of a gentle guidance and of a loving obedience. 'Thou shalt guide me with Thine eye.' No need for force, no need for bit and bridle, no need for anything but the glance of the Father, which the child delights to obey. Docility, glad obedience unprompted by fear, based upon love, are the fruits of pardon through the blood of Christ.

And, lastly, there is the blessedness of exuberant gladness; the joy that comes from the sorrow according to God is a joy that will last. All other delights, in their nature, are perishable; all other raptures, by the very necessity of their being and of ours, die down, sometimes into vanity, always into commonplace or indifference. But the joy that springs in the pardoned heart, and is fed by closeness of communion with God, and by continual obedience to His blessed guidance, has in it nothing that can fade, nothing that can burn out, nothing that can be disturbed. The deeper the penitence the surer the rebound into gladness. The more a man goes down into the depths of his own heart and learns his own evil, the more will he, trusting in Christ, rise into the serene heights of thankfulness, and live, if not in rapture, at least in the calm joy of conscious communion and unending fellowship. Every tear may be crystallised into a diamond that shall flash in the light. And they, and only they, who begin in the valley of weeping, confessing their sins and imploring forgiveness through the merits and mediation of Jesus Christ our Lord, will rise to heights of a joy that remains, and remaining, is full.

THE ENCAMPING ANGEL

'The Angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear Him, and delivereth them.'—PSALM xxxiv. 7.

If we accept the statement in the superscription of this psalm, it dates from one of the darkest hours in David's life. His fortunes were never lower than when he fled from Gath, the city of Goliath, to Adullam. He never appears in a less noble light than when he feigned madness to avert the dangers which he might well dread there. How unlike the terror and self-degradation of the man who 'scrabbled on the doors,' and let 'the spittle run down his beard,' is the heroic and saintly constancy of this noble psalm! And yet the contrast is not so violent as to make the superscription improbable, and the tone of the whole well corresponds to what we should expect from a man delivered from some great peril, but still surrounded with dangers. There, in the safety of his retreat among the rocks, with the bit of level ground where he had fought Goliath just at his feet in the valley, and Gath, from which he had escaped, away down at the mouth of the glen (if Conder's identification of Adullam be correct), he sings his song of trust and praise; he hears the lions roar among the rocks where Samson had found them in his day; he teaches his 'children,' the band of broken men who there began to gather around him, the fear of the Lord; and calls upon them to help him in his praise. What a picture of the outlaw and his wild followers tamed into something like order, and lifted

into something like worship, rises before us, if we follow the guidance of that old commentary contained in the superscription!

The words of our text gain especial force and vividness by thus localising the psalm. Not only 'the clefts of the rock' but the presence of God's Angel is his defence; and round him is flung, not only the strength of the hills, but the garrison and guard of heaven.

It is generally supposed that the 'Angel of the Lord' here is to be taken collectively, and that the meaning is—the 'bright-harnessed' hosts of these divine messengers are as an army of protectors round them who fear God. But I see no reason for departing from the simpler and certainly grander meaning which results from taking the word in its proper force of a singular. True, Scripture does speak of the legions of ministering spirits, who in their chariots of fire were once seen by suddenly opened eyes 'round about' a prophet in peril, and are ever ministering to the heirs of salvation. But Scripture also speaks of One, who is in an eminent sense 'the Angel of the Lord'; in whom, as in none other, God sets His 'Name'; whose form, dimly seen, towers above even the ranks of the angels that 'excel in strength'; whose offices and attributes blend in mysterious fashion with those of God Himself. There may be some little incongruity in thinking of the single Person as 'encamping round about' us; but that does not seem a sufficient reason for obliterating the reference to that remarkable Old

Testament doctrine, the retention of which seems to me to add immensely to the power of the words.

Remember some of the places in which the 'Angel of the Lord' appears, in order to appreciate more fully the grandeur of this promised protection. At that supreme moment when Abraham 'took the knife to slay his son,' the voice that 'called to him out of heaven' was 'the voice of the Angel of the Lord.' He assumes the power of reversing a divine command. He says, 'Thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son, from *Me*,' and then pronounces a blessing, in the utterance of which one cannot distinguish His voice from the voice of Jehovah. In like manner it is the Angel of the Lord that speaks to Jacob, and says, 'I am the God of Bethel.' The dying patriarch invokes in the same breath 'the God which fed me all my life long,' 'the Angel which redeemed me from all evil,' to bless the boys that stand before him, with their wondering eyes gazing in awe on his blind face. It was that Angel's glory that appeared to the outcast, flaming in the bush that burned unconsumed. It was He who stood before the warrior leader of Israel, sword in hand, and proclaimed Himself to be the Captain of the Lord's host, the Leader of the armies of heaven, and the true Leader of the armies of Israel; and His commands to Joshua, His lieutenant, are the commands of 'the Lord.' And, to pass over other instances, Isaiah correctly sums up the spirit of the whole earlier history in words which go far to lift the conception of this Angel of the Lord out of the

region of created beings—'In all their affliction He was afflicted, and the Angel of His face saved them,'

It is this lofty and mysterious Messenger, and not the hosts whom He commands, that our Psalmist sees standing ready to help, as He once stood, sword-bearing by the side of Joshua. To the warrior leader, to the warrior Psalmist, He appears, as their needs required, armoured and militant. The last of the prophets saw that dim, mysterious Figure, and proclaimed, 'The Lord whom ye seek shall suddenly come to His temple; even the Angel of the Covenant, whom ye delight in'; and to his gaze it was wrapped in obscure majesty and terror of purifying flame. But for us the true Messenger of the Lord is His Son, whom He has sent, in whom He has put His name; who is the Angel of His face, in that we behold the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ; who is the Angel of the Covenant, in that He has sealed the new and everlasting covenant with His blood; and whose own parting promise, 'Lo! I am with you always,' is the highest fulfilment to us Christians of that ancient confidence: 'The Angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear Him.'

Whatever view we adopt of the significance of the first part of the text, the force and beauty of the metaphor in the second remain the same. If this psalm were indeed the work of the fugitive in his rocky hold at Adullam, how appropriate the thought becomes that his little encampment has such a guard. It reminds one of the incident in Jacob's life, when

his timid and pacific nature was trembling at the prospect of meeting Esau, and when, as he travelled along, encumbered with his pastoral wealth, and scantily provided with means of defence, 'the angels of God met him, and he named the place Mahanaim,' that is, two camps—his own feeble company, mostly made up of women and children, and that heavenly host that hovered above them. David's faith sees the same defence encircling his weakness, and though sense saw no protection for him and his men but their own strong arms and their mountain fastness, his opened eyes beheld the mountain full of the chariots of fire, and the flashing of armour and light in the darkness of his cave.

The vision of the divine presence ever takes the form which our circumstances most require. David's then need was safety and protection. Therefore he saw the Encamping Angel; even as to Joshua the leader He appeared as the Captain of the Lord's host; and as to Isaiah, in the year that the throne of Judah was emptied by the death of the earthly king, was given the vision of the Lord sitting on a throne, the King Eternal and Immortal. So to us all His grace shapes its expression according to our wants, and the same gift is Protean in its power of transformation; being to one man wisdom, to another strength, to the solitary companionship, to the sorrowful consolation, to the glad sobering, to the thinker truth, to the worker practical force—to each his heart's desire, if the heart's delight be God. So manifold are the

aspects of God's infinite sufficiency, that every soul, in every possible variety of circumstance, will find there just what will suit it. That armour fits every man who puts it on. That deep fountain is like some of those fabled springs which give forth whatsoever precious draught any thirsty lip asked. He takes the shape that our circumstances most need. Let us see that we, on our parts, use our circumstances to help us in anticipating the shapes in which God will draw near for our help.

Learn, too, from this image, in which the Psalmist appropriates to himself the experience of a past generation, how we ought to feed our confidence and enlarge our hopes by all God's past dealings with men. David looks back to Jacob, and believes that the old fact is repeated in his own day. So every old story is true for us; though outward form may alter, inward substance remains the same. Mahanaim is still the name of every place where a man who loves God pitches his tent. We may be wandering, solitary, defenceless, but we are not alone. Our feeble encampment may lie open to assault, and we be all unfit to guard it, but the other camp is there too, and our enemies must force their way through it before they get at us. We are in its centre—as they put the cattle and the sick in the midst of the encampment on the prairies when they fear an assault from the Indians—because we are so weak. Jacob's experience may be ours: 'The Lord of Hosts is with us: the God of Jacob is our refuge.'

Only remember that the eye of faith alone can see that guard, and that therefore we must labour to keep our consciousness of its reality fresh and vivid. Many a man in David's little band saw nothing but cold gray stone where David saw the flashing armour of the heavenly Warrior. To the one all the mountain blazed with fiery chariots, to the other it was a lone hillside, with the wind moaning among the rocks. We shall lose the joy and the strength of that divine protection unless we honestly and constantly try to keep our sense of it bright. Eyes that have been gazing on earthly joys, or perhaps gloating on evil sights, cannot see the Angel presence. A Christian man, on a road which he cannot travel with a clear conscience, will see no angel, not even the Angel with the drawn sword in His hand, that barred Balaam's path among the vineyards. A man coming out of some room blazing with light cannot all at once see into the violet depths of the mighty heavens, that lie above him with all their shimmering stars. So this truth of our text is a truth of faith, and the believing eye alone beholds the Angel of the Lord.

Notice, too, that final word of deliverance. This psalm is continually recurring to that idea. The word occurs four times in it, and the thought still oftener. Whether the date is rightly given, as we have assumed it to be, or not, at all events that harping upon this one phrase indicates that some season of great trial was its birth-time, when all the writer's

thoughts were engrossed and his prayers summed up in the one thing—deliverance. He is quite sure that such deliverance must follow if the Angel presence be there. But he knows too that the encampment of the Angel of the Lord will not keep away sorrows, and trial, and sharp need. So his highest hope is not of immunity from these, but of rescue out of them. And his ground of hope is that his heavenly Ally cannot let him be overcome. That He will let him be troubled and put in peril he has found; that He will not let him be crushed he believes. Shadowed and modest hopes are the brightest we can venture to cherish. The protection which we have is protection in, and not protection from, strife and danger. It is a filter which lets the icy cold water of sorrow drop numbing upon us, but keeps back the poison that was in it. We have to fight, but He will fight with us; to sorrow, but not alone nor without hope; to pass through many a peril, but we shall get through them. Deliverance, which implies danger, need, and woe, is the best we can hope for.

It is the least we are entitled to expect if we love Him. It is the certain issue of His encamping round about us. Always with us, He will strike for us at the best moment. The Lord God is in the midst of her always; 'the Lord will help her, and that right early.' So like the hunted fugitive in Adullam we may lift up our confident voices even when the stress of strife and sorrow is upon us; and though Gath be in sight and Saul just over the hills, and we have no better

refuge than a cave in a hillside; yet in prophecy built upon our consciousness that the Angel of the Covenant is with us now, we may antedate the deliverance that shall be, and think of it as even now accomplished. So the Apostle, when within sight of the block and the headsman's axe, broke into the rapture of his last words: 'The Lord shall deliver me from every evil work, and will preserve me to His heavenly kingdom: to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.' Was he wrong?

STRUGGLING AND SEEKING

'The young lions do lack, and suffer hunger: but they that seek the

Lord shall not want any good thing.'—PSALM xxxiv. 10.

If we may trust the superscription of this psalm, it was written by David at one of the very darkest days of his wanderings, probably in the Cave of Adullam, where he had gathered around him a band of outlaws, and was living, to all appearance, a life uncommonly like that of a brigand chief, in the hills. One might have pardoned him if, at such a moment,

some cloud of doubt or despondency had crept over his soul. But instead of that his words are running over with gladness, and the psalm begins 'I will bless the Lord at all times, and His praise shall continually be in my mouth.' Similarly here he avers, even at a moment when he wanted a great deal of what the world calls 'good,' that 'they that seek the Lord shall not want any good thing.' There were lions in Palestine in David's time. He had had a fight with one of them, as you may remember, and his lurking place was probably not far off the scene of Samson's exploits. Very likely they were prowling about the rocky mouth of the cave, and he weaves their howls into his psalm: 'The young lions do lack, and suffer hunger: but they that seek the Lord shall not want any good.'

So, then, here are the two thoughts—the struggle that always fails and the seeking that always finds.

I. The struggle that always fails.

'The young lions do lack, and suffer hunger.' They are taken as the type of violent effort and struggle, as well as of supreme strength, but for all their teeth and claws, and lithe spring, 'they lack, and suffer hunger.' The suggestion is, that the men whose lives are one long fight to appropriate to themselves more and more of outward good, are living a kind of life that is fitter for beasts than for men. A fierce struggle for material good is the true description of the sort of life that hosts of us live. What is the meaning of all

this cry that we hear about the murderous competition going on round us? What is the true character of the lives of, I am afraid, the majority of people in a city like Manchester, but a fight and a struggle, a desire to have, and a failure to obtain? Let us remember that that sort of existence is for the brutes, and that there is a better way of getting what is good; the only fit way for man. Beasts of prey, naturalists tell us, are always lean. It is the graminivorous order that meekly and peacefully crop the pastures that are well fed and in good condition —'which things are an allegory.'

'The young lions do lack, and suffer hunger'—and that, being interpreted, just states the fact to which every man's experience, and the observation of every man that has an eye in his head, distinctly say, 'Amen, it is so.' For there is no satisfaction or success ever to be won by this way of fighting and struggling and scheming and springing at the prey. For if we do not utterly fail, which is the lot of so many of us, still partial success has little power of bringing perfect satisfaction to a human spirit. One loss counterbalances any number of gains. No matter how soft is the mattress, if there is one tiny thorn sticking up through it all the softness goes for nothing. There is always a Mordecai sitting at the gate when Haman goes prancing through it on his white horse; and the presence of the unsympathetic and stiff-backed Jew, sitting stolid at the gate, takes the gilt off the gingerbread, and embitters the enjoyment. So men

count up their disappointments, and forget all their fulfilled hopes, count up their losses and forget their gains. They think less of the thousands that they have gained than of the half-crown that they were cheated of.

In every way it is true that the little annoyances, like a grain of dust in the sensitive eye, take all the sweetness out of mere material good, and I suppose that there are no more bitterly disappointed men in this world than the perfectly 'successful men,' as the world counts them. They have been disillusionised in the process of acquisition. When they were young and lusted after earthly good things, these seemed to be all that they needed. When they are old, and have them, they find that they are feeding on ashes, and the grit breaks their teeth, and irritates their tongues. The 'young lions do lack' even when their roar and their spring 'have secured the prey,' and 'they suffer hunger' even when they have fed full. Ay! for if the utmost possible measure of success were granted us, in any department in which the way of getting the thing is this fighting and effort, we should be as far away from being at rest as ever we were.

You remember the old story of the *Arabian Nights*, about the wonderful palace that was built by magic, and all whose windows were set in precious stones, but there was one window that remained unadorned, and that spoiled all for the owner. His palace was full of treasures, but an enemy looked on all the wealth and suggested a previously unnoticed defect by

saying, 'You have not a roc's egg.' He had never thought about getting a roc's egg, and did not know what it was. But the consciousness of something lacking had been roused, and it marred his enjoyment of what he had and drove him to set out on his travels to secure the missing thing. There is always something lacking, for our desires grow far faster than their satisfactions, and the more we have, the wider our longing reaches out, so that as the wise old Book has it, 'He that loveth silver shall not be satisfied with silver, nor he that loveth abundance with increase.' You cannot fill a soul with the whole universe, if you do not put God in it. One of the greatest works of fiction of modern times ends, or all but ends, with a sentence something like this, 'Ah! who of us has what he wanted, or having it, is satisfied?' 'The young lions do lack, and suffer hunger'—and the struggle always fails—'but they that seek the Lord shall not want any good thing.'

II. The seeking which always finds.

Now, how do we 'seek the Lord'? It is a metaphorical expression, of course, which needs to be carefully interpreted in order not to lead us into a great mistake. We do not seek Him as if He had not sought us, or was hiding from us. But our search of Him is search after one who is near every one of us, and who delights in nothing so much as in pouring Himself into every heart and mind, and will and life, if only heart, mind, will, life, are willing to accept Him. It is a short search that the child by her

mother's skirts, or her father's side, has to make for mother or father. It is a shorter search that we have to make for God.

We seek Him by desire. Do you want Him? A great many of us do not. We seek Him by communion, by turning our thoughts to Him, amidst all the rush of daily life, and such a turning of thought to Him, which is quite possible, will prevent our most earnest working upon things material from descending to the likeness of the lions' fighting for it. We seek Him by desire, by communion, by obedience. And they who thus seek Him find Him in the act of seeking Him, just as certainly as if I open my eye I see the sun, or as if I dilate my lungs the atmosphere rushes into them. For He is always seeking us. That is a beautiful word of our Lord's to which we do not always attach all its value, 'The Father *seeketh* such to worship Him.' Why put the emphasis upon the 'such,' as if it was a definition of the only kind of acceptable worship? It is that. But we might put more emphasis upon the 'seeketh' without spoiling the logic of the sentence; and thereby we should come nearer the truth of what God's heart to us is, so that if we do seek Him, we shall surely find. In this region, and in this region only, there is no search that is vain, there is no effort that is foiled, there is no desire unaccomplished, there is no failure possible. We each of us have, accurately and precisely, as much of God as we desire to have. If there is only a very little of the Water of Life in our vessels, it is because we did

not care to possess any more. 'Seek, and ye shall find.'

We shall be sure to find everything in God. Look at the grand confidence, and the utterance of a life's experience in these great words: 'Shall not want any good.' For God is everything to us, and everything else is nothing; and it is the presence of God in anything that makes it truly able to satisfy our desires. Human love, sweet and precious, dearest and best of all earthly possessions as it is, fails to fill a heart unless the love grasps God as well as the beloved dying creature. And so with regard to all other things. They are good when God is in them, and when they are ours in God. They are nought when wrenched away from Him. We are sure to find everything in Him, for this is the very property of that infinite divine nature that is waiting to impart itself to us, that, like water poured into a vessel, it will take the shape of the vessel into which it is poured. Whatever is my need, the one God will supply it all.

You remember the old Rabbinical tradition which speaks a deep truth, dressed in a fanciful shape. It says that the manna in the wilderness tasted to every man just what he desired, whatever dainty or nutriment he most wished; that the manna became like the magic cup in the old fairy legends, out of which could be poured any precious liquor at the pleasure of the man who was to drink it. The one God is everything to us all, anything that we desire,

and the thing that we need; Protean in His manifestations, one in His sufficiency. With Him, as well as in Him, we are sure to have all that we require. 'Seek ye first the Kingdom … and all these things shall be added unto you.'

Let us begin, dear brethren! with seeking, and then our struggling will not be violent, nor self-willed, nor will it fail. If we begin with seeking, and have God, be sure that all we need we shall get, and that what we do not get we do not need. It is hard to believe it when our vehement wishes go out to something that His serene wisdom does not send. It is hard to believe it when our bleeding hearts are being wrenched away from something around which they have clung. But it is true for all that. And he that can say, 'Whom have I in heaven but Thee, and there is none upon earth that I desire beside Thee,' will find that the things which he enjoys in subordination to his one supreme good are a thousand times more precious when they are regarded as second than they ever could be when our folly tried to make them first. 'Seek first the Kingdom,' and be contented that the 'other things' shall be appendices, additions, over and above the one thing that is needful.

Now, all that is very old-fashioned, threadbare truth. Dear brethren! if we believed it, and lived by it, 'the peace of God which passes understanding' would 'keep our hearts and minds.' And, instead of fighting and losing, and desiring to have and howling out because we cannot obtain, we should patiently

wait before Him, submissively ask, earnestly seek, immediately find, and always possess and be satisfied with, the one good for body, soul, and spirit, which is God Himself.

'There be many that cry, Oh! that one would show as any good.' The wise do not cry to men, but pray to God. 'Lord! lift Thou the light of Thy countenance upon us.'

NO CONDEMNATION

'None of them that trust in Him shall be desolate.'
—PSALM xxxiv. 22.

These words are very inadequately represented in the translation of the Authorised Version. The Psalmist's closing declaration is something very much deeper than that they who trust in God 'shall not be desolate.' If you look at the previous clause, you will see that we must expect something more than such a particular blessing as that:—'The Lord redeemeth the soul of His servants.' It is a great drop from that thought, instead of being a climax, to follow it with nothing more than, 'None of them that trust in Him shall be desolate.' But the Revised Version accurately

renders the words: 'None of them that trust in Him shall be *condemned*.' There we have something that is worthy to follow 'The Lord redeemeth the soul of His servants,' and we have a most striking anticipation of the clearest and most Evangelical teaching of the New Testament.

The entirely New Testament tone of these words of the psalm comes out still more clearly, if we recognise that, not only in the latter, but in the former, part of the clause, we have one of the very keynotes of New Testament teaching. When we read in the New Testament that 'we are justified by faith,' the meaning is precisely the same as that of our text. Thus, however it came about, here is this Psalmist, David or another, standing away back amidst the shadows and symbols and ritualisms of that Old Covenant, and rising at once above all the mists, right up into the sunshine, and seeing, as clearly as we see it nineteen centuries after Jesus Christ, that the way to escape condemnation is simple faith. Let us look at both of the parts of these great words. We consider—

I. The people that are spoken of here.

'None of them that trust in Him'—I need not, I suppose, further dwell upon the absolute identity shown by this phrase between the Old and the New Testament conceptions; but I should like to make a remark, which I dare say I have often made before—it cannot be made too often—that, whatever be the

differences between the Old and the New, this is not the difference, that they present two different ways of approaching God. There are a great many differences; the conception of the divine nature is no doubt infinitely deepened, made more tender and more lofty, by the thought of the Fatherhood of God. The contents of the revelation which our faith is to grasp are brought out far more definitely and articulately and fully in the New Testament. But in the Old, the road to God was the same as it is to-day; and from the beginning there has only been, and through all Eternity there will only be, one path by which men can have access to the Father, and that is by faith. 'Trust' is the Old Testament word, 'faith' is the New. They are absolutely identical, and there would have been a flood of light—sorely needed by a great many good people—cast upon the relations between those two complementary and harmonious halves of a consistent whole, if our translators had not been influenced by their unfortunate love for varying translations of the same word, but had contented themselves with choosing one of these two words 'trust' or 'faith,' and had used that one consistently and uniformly throughout the Old and New books. Then we should have understood, what anybody who will open his eyes can see now, that what the New Testament magnifies as 'faith' is identical with what the Old Testament sets forth as 'trust.' 'None of them that trust in Him shall be condemned.'

But there is one more remark to make on this matter, and that is that a great flood of light, and of more than light, of encouragement and of stimulus, is cast upon that saving exercise of trust by noticing the literal meaning of the word that is rightly so rendered here. All those words, especially in the Old Testament, that express emotions or acts of the mind, originally applied to corporeal acts or material things. I suppose that is so in all language. It is very conspicuously so in the Hebrew. And the word that is here translated, rightly, 'trust,' means literally to fly to a refuge, or to betake oneself to some defence in order to get shelter there.

There is a trace of both meanings, the literal and the metaphorical, in another psalm, where we read, amidst the Psalmist's rapturous heaping together of great names for God: 'My Rock, in whom I will trust.' Now keep to the literal meaning there, and you see how it flashes up the whole into beauty: 'My Rock, to whom I will flee for refuge,' and put my back against it, and stand as impregnable as it; or get myself well into the clefts of it, and then nothing can touch me.

'Rock of Ages! cleft for me,
Let me hide myself in Thee.'

Then we find the same words, with the picture of flight and the reality of faith, used with another set of associations in another psalm, which says: 'He shall cover thee with His feathers, and under His wings shalt thou trust.' That grates, one gets away

from the metaphor too quickly; but if we preserve the literal meaning, and read, 'under His wings shalt thou flee for refuge,' we have the picture of the chicken flying to the mother-bird when kites are in the sky, and huddling close to the warm breast and the soft downy feathers, and so with the spread of the great wing being sheltered from all possibility of harm. This psalm is ascribed to David when he was in hiding. The superscription says that it is 'a psalm of David, when he changed his behaviour before Abimelech; who drove him away, and he departed.' And where did he go? To the cave in the rock. And as he sat in the mouth of it, with the rude arch stretching above him, like the wings of some great bird, feeling himself absolutely safe, he said, 'None of them that take refuge in Thee shall be condemned.'

Does not that metaphor teach us a great deal more of what faith is, and encourage us far more to exercise it, than much theological hair-splitting? What lies in the metaphor? Two things, the earnest eagerness of the act of flight, and the absolute security which comes when we have reached the shadow of the great Rock in a weary land.

But there is one thing more that I would notice, and that is that this designation of the persons as 'them that trust in Him' follows last of all in a somewhat lengthened series of designations for good people. They are these: 'the righteous'—'them that are of a broken heart'—'such as be of a contrite spirit'—'His servants,' and then, lastly, comes, as

basis of all, as, so to speak, the keynote of all, 'none of them that *trust* in Him.' That is to say—righteousness, true and blessed pulverising of the obstinate insensibility of self alienated from God, true and blessed consciousness of sin, joyful surrender of self to loving and grateful submission to God's will, are all connected with or flow from that act of trust in Him. And if you are trusting in Him, in anything more than the mere formal, dead way in which multitudes of nominal Christians in all our congregations are doing so, your trust will produce all these various fruits of righteousness, and lowliness, and joyful service. 'Faith' or 'trust' is the mother of all graces and virtues, and it produces them all because it directly kindles the creative flame of an answering love to Him in whom we trust. So much, then, for the first part of my remarks. Consider, next—

II. The blessing here promised.

'None of them that trust in Him shall be condemned.' The word which is inadequately rendered 'desolate,' and more accurately 'condemned,' includes the following varying shades of meaning, which, although they are various, are all closely connected, as you will see—to incur guilt, to feel guilty, to be condemned, to be punished. All these four are inextricably blended together. And the fact that the one word in the Old Testament covers all that ground suggests some very solemn thoughts.

First of all, it suggests this, that guilt, or sin, and condemnation and punishment, are, if not absolutely identical, inseparable. To be guilty is to be condemned. That is to say, since we live, as we do, under the continual grip of an infinitely wise and all-knowing law, and in the presence of a Judge who not only sees us as we are, but treats us as He sees us—sin and guilt go together, as every man knows that has a conscience. And sin and guilt and condemnation and punishment go together, as every man may see in the world, and experience in himself. To be separated from God, which is the immediate effect of sin, is to pass into hell here. 'Every transgression and disobedience,' not only 'shall receive its just recompense,' away out yonder, in some misty, far-off, hypothetical future, but down here to-day. All sin works automatically, and to do wrong is to be punished for doing it.

Then my text suggests another solemn thought, and that is that this judgment, this condemnation, is not only present, according to our Lord's own great words, which perhaps are an allusion to these: 'He that believeth not is condemned already'; but it also suggests the universality of that condemnation. Our Psalmist says that only through trusting Him can a man be taken and lifted away, as it were, from the descent of the thundercloud, and its bolt that lies above his head. 'They that trust Him are not condemned,' every one else is; not 'shall be,' but is, to-day, here and now. If there is a man or woman in

my audience now who is not exercising trust in God through Jesus Christ, on that man or woman, young or old, cultivated or uncultivated, professing Christian or not, there is bound the burden of their sin, which is the crushing weight of their condemnation.

So my text suggests, that the sole deliverance from this universal pressure of the condemnatory influence of universal sin lies in that fleeing for refuge to God. And then comes in the Christian addition, 'to God, as manifested in Jesus Christ.' The Psalmist did not know that. All the more wonderful is it that without the knowledge he should have risen to the great thought of our text—all the more inexplicable unless you believe that 'holy men of old spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.'

Wonderful it is still, but not unintelligible, if you believe that. But you and I know more than this singer did; for we can listen to the Master, who says, 'He that believeth on Him is not condemned'; and to the servant who echoes—and perhaps both of them are alluding to our psalm—'There is therefore now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus.' My faith, if it knits me to Jesus Christ, unties the bonds by which my sin is bound upon me, for it makes me to share in His Spirit, in His righteousness, in His glory.

And so, dear brethren! the Psalmist, though he did not know it, may point us away to the truth hidden

from him, but sunlight clear for us, that by simple trust we may receive the Saviour through whom all our condemnation will pass away, and may be found in Him having the 'righteousness which is of God by faith.'

'Not condemned'—Is that all? Are the blessings of the Gospel all to be reduced to this mere negative expression? Certainly not. The Psalmist could have said a great deal more, and in the previous context he does say a great deal more. But to that restrained and moderate statement of the case, which is far less than the facts of the case, 'he that trusteth is not condemned,' let us add Paul's expansion, 'whom He called them He also justified, and whom He justified them He also glorified.'

SKY, EARTH, AND SEA: A PARABLE OF GOD

> 'Thy mercy, O Lord, is in the heavens; and Thy faithfulness reacheth unto the clouds. 6. Thy righteousness is like the great mountains; Thy judgments are a great deep: O Lord, Thou preservest man and beast. 7. How excellent is Thy loving-kindness, O God! therefore the children of men put their trust under the shadow of Thy wings.' —PSALM xxxvi. 5-7.

This wonderful description of the manifold brightness of the divine nature is introduced in this psalm with singular abruptness. It is set side by side with a vivid picture of an evildoer, a man who mutters in his own heart his godlessness, and with obstinate determination plans and plots in forgetfulness of God. Without a word to break the violence of the transition, side by side with that picture, the Psalmist sets before us these thoughts of the character of God. He seems to feel that that character was the only relief in the contemplation of

the miserable sights of which the earth is only too full. We should go mad when we think of man's wickedness unless we could look up and see, with one quick turn of the eye, the heaven opened and the throned Love that sits up there gazing on all the chaos, and working to soothe sorrow, and to purify evil.

Perhaps there is another reason for this dramatic and striking swiftness of contrast between the godless man and the revealed God. The true test of a life is its power to bear the light of God being suddenly let in upon it. How would yours look, my friend! if all at once a window in heaven was opened, and God glared in upon you? Set your lives side by side with Him. They always are side by side with Him whether you know it or not; but you had better bring your 'deeds to the light that they may be made manifest' now, than to have to do it as suddenly, and a great deal more sorrowfully, when you are dragged out of the shows and illusions of time, and He meets you on the threshold of another world. Would a beam of light from God, coming in upon your life, be like a light falling upon a gang of conspirators, that would make them huddle all their implements under their cloaks, and scuttle out of the way as fast as possible? Or would it be like a gleam of sunshine upon the flowers, opening out their petals and wooing from them fragrance? Which?

But I turn from such considerations as these to the more immediate subject of my contemplations in this

discourse. I have ventured to take so great words for my text, though each clause would be more than enough for many a sermon, because my aim now is a very modest one. I desire simply to give, in the briefest way, the connection and mutual relation of these wonderful words; not to attempt any adequate treatment of the great thoughts which they contain, but only to set forth the meaning and interdependence of these manifold names for the beams of the divine light, which are presented here. The chief part of our text sets before us God in the variety and boundlessness of His loving nature, and the close of it shows us man sheltering beneath God's wings. These are the two main themes for our present consideration.

I. We have, first, God in the boundlessness of His loving nature.

The one pure light of the divine nature is broken up, in the prism of the psalm, into various rays, which theologians call, in their hard, abstract way, divine attributes. These are 'mercy, faithfulness, righteousness.' Then we have two sets of divine acts —'judgments,' and the 'preservation' of man and beast; and finally we have again 'lovingkindness,' as our version has unfortunately been misled, by its love for varying its translation, to render the same word which begins the series and is there called 'mercy.'

Now that 'mercy' or 'lovingkindness' of which my

text thus speaks, is very nearly equivalent to the New Testament 'love'; or, perhaps, still more nearly equivalent to the New Testament 'grace.' Both the one and the other mean substantially this—active love communicating itself to creatures that are inferior and that might have expected something else to befall them. Mercy is a modification of love, inasmuch as it is love to an inferior. The hand is laid gently upon the man, because if it were laid with all its weight it would crush him. It is the stooping goodness of a king to a beggar. And mercy is likewise love in its exercise to persons that might expect something else, being guilty. As a general coming to a body of mutineers with pardon and favour upon his lips, instead of with condemnation and death; so God comes to us forgiving and blessing. All His goodness is forbearance, and His love is mercy, because of the weakness, the lowliness, and the ill desert of us on whom the love falls.

Now notice that this same 'quality of mercy' stands here at the beginning and at the end. All the attributes of the divine nature, all the operations of the divine hand lie within the circle of His mercy—like diamonds set in a golden ring. Mercy, or love flowing out in blessings to inferior and guilty creatures, is the root and ground of all God's character; it is the foundation and impulse of all His acts. Modern science reduces all modes of physical energy to one, for which it has no name but—energy. We are taught by God's own revelation of Himself—

and most especially by His final and perfect revelation of Himself in Jesus Christ—to trace all forms of divine energy back to one which David calls 'mercy,' which John calls 'love.'

It is last as well as first, the final upshot of all revelation. The last voice that speaks from Scripture has for its special message 'God is Love.' The last voice that sounds from the completed history of the world will have the same message, and the ultimate word of all revelation, the end of the whole of the majestic unfolding of God's purposes will be the proclamation to the four corners of the universe, as from the trump of the Archangel, of the name of God as Love. The northern and the southern poles of the great sphere are one and the same, a straight axle through the very heart of it, from which the bounding lines swell out to the equator, and towards which they converge again on the opposite side of the world. So mercy is the strong axletree, the northern pole and the southern, on which the whole world of the divine perfections revolves and moves. The first and last, the Alpha and Omega of God, beginning and crowning and summing up all His being and His work, is His mercy, His lovingkindness.

But next to mercy comes faithfulness. 'Thy faithfulness reacheth unto the clouds.' God's faithfulness is in its narrowest sense His adherence to His promises. It implies, in that sense, a verbal revelation, and definite words from Him pledging

Him to a certain line of action. 'He hath said, and shall He not do it?' 'He will not alter the thing that is gone out of His lips.' It is only a God who has actually spoken to men who can be a 'faithful God.' He will not palter with a double sense, 'keeping His word of promise to the ear, and breaking it to the hope.'

But not only His articulate promises, but also His own past actions, bind Him. He is always true to these; and not only continues to do as He has done, but discharges every obligation which His past imposes on Him. The ostrich was said to leave its eggs to be hatched in the sand. Men bring men into positions of dependence, and then lightly shake responsibility from careless shoulders. But God accepts the cares laid upon Him by His own acts, and discharges them to the last jot. He is a 'faithful Creator.' Creation brings obligations with it; obligations for the creature; obligations for the Creator. If God makes a being, God is bound to take care of the being that He has made. If He makes a being in a given fashion, He is bound to provide for the necessities that He has created. According to the old proverb, if He makes mouths it is His business to feed them. And He recognises the obligation. His past binds Him to certain conduct in His future. We can lay hold on the former manifestation, and we can plead it with Him. 'Thou hast been, and therefore Thou must be.' 'Thou hast taught me to trust in Thee; vindicate and warrant my trust by Thy

unchangeableness.' So His word, His acts, and His own nature, bind God to bless and help. His faithfulness is the expression of His unchangeableness. 'Because He could swear by no greater, He sware by Himself.'

Take, then, these two thoughts of God's lovingkindness and of God's faithfulness and weave them together, and see what a strong cord they are to which a man may cling, and in all His weakness be sure that it will never give nor break. Mercy might be transient and arbitrary, but when you braid in 'faithfulness' along with it, it becomes fixed as the pillars of heaven, and immutable as the throne of God. Only when we are sure of God's faithfulness can we lift up thankful voices to Him, 'because His mercy endureth for ever.' A despotic monarch may be all full of tenderness at this moment, and all full of wrath and sternness the next. He may have a whim of favour to-day, and a whim of severity to-morrow, and no man can say, 'What doest thou?' But God is not a despot. He has, so to speak, 'decreed a constitution.' He has limited Himself. He has marked out His path across the great wide region of possibilities of the divine action; He has buoyed out His channel on that ocean, and declared to us His purposes. So we can reckon on God, as astronomers can foretell the motions of the stars. We can plead His faithfulness along with His love, and feel that the one makes sure that the other shall be from everlasting to everlasting.

The next beam of the divine brightness is righteousness. 'Thy righteousness is like the great mountains.' Righteousness is not to be taken here in its narrow sense of stern retribution which gives to the evildoer the punishment that he deserves. There is no thought here, whatever there may be in other places in Scripture, of any opposition between mercy and righteousness, but the notion of righteousness here is a broader and greater one. It is just this, to put it into other words, that God has a law for His being to which He conforms; and that whatsoever things are fair and lovely, and good, and pure down here, those things are fair, and lovely, and good, and pure up there; that He is the Archetype of all excellence, the Ideal of all moral completeness: that we can know enough of Him to be sure of this that what we call right He loves, and what we call right He practises.

Brethren! unless we have that for the very foundation of our thoughts of God, we have no foundation to rest on. Unless we feel and know that 'the Judge of all the earth doeth right,' and is right, and law and righteousness have their home and seat in His bosom, and are the expression of His inmost being, then I know not where our confidence can be built. Unless 'Thy righteousness, like the great mountains,' surrounds and guards the low plain of our lives, they will lie open to all foes.

Then, next, we pass from the divine character to the divine acts. Mercy, faithfulness, and

righteousness all converge and flow into the great river of the divine 'judgments.'

By judgments are not meant merely the acts of God's punitive righteousness, the retributions that destroy evildoers, but all God's decisions and acts in regard to man. Or, to put it into other and briefer words, God's judgments are the whole of the 'ways,' the methods of the divine government. So Paul, alluding to this very passage when he says 'How unsearchable are Thy judgments!' adds, as a parallel clause, meaning the same thing, 'and Thy ways past finding out.' That includes all which men call, in a narrower sense, judgments, but it includes, too, all acts of kindness and loving gifts. God's judgments are the expressions of His thoughts, and these thoughts are thoughts of good and not of evil.

But notice, in the next place, the boundlessness of all these characteristics of the divine nature.

'Thy mercy is in the heavens,' towering up above the stars, and dwelling there, like some divine ether filling all space. The heavens are the home of light, the source of every blessing, arching over every head, rimming every horizon, holding all the stars, opening into abysses as we gaze, with us by night and by day, undimmed by the mist and smoke of earth, unchanged by the lapse of centuries; ever seen, never reached, bending over us always, always far above us. So the mercy of God towers above us, and stoops down towards us, rims us all about and

arches over us all, sheds down its dewy benedictions by night and by day; is filled with a million stars and light-points of duty and of splendour; is near us ever to bless and succour and help, and holds us all in its blue round.

'Thy faithfulness reacheth to the clouds.' Strange that God's fixed faithfulness should be compared to the very emblems of mutation. The clouds are unstable, they whirl and melt and change. Strange to think of the unalterable faithfulness as reaching to them! May it not be that the very mutability of the mutable may be the means of manifesting the unalterable sameness of God's faithful purpose, of His unchangeable love, and of His ever consistent dealings? May not the apparent incongruity be a part of the felicity of the bold words? Is it not true that earthly things, as they change their forms and melt away, leaving no track behind, phantomlike as they are, do still obey the behests of that divine faithfulness, and gather and dissolve and break in brief showers of blessing, or short, sharp crashes of storm, at the bidding of that steadfast purpose which works out one unalterable design by a thousand instruments, and changeth all things, being in itself unchanged? The thing that is eternal, even the faithfulness of God, dwells amid, and shows itself through, the things that are temporal, the flying clouds of change.

Again, 'Thy righteousness is like the great mountains.' Like these, its roots are fast and stable;

like these, it stands firm for ever; like these, its summits touch the fleeting clouds of human circumstance; like these, it is a shelter and a refuge, inaccessible in its steepest peaks, but affording many a cleft in its rocks, where a man may hide and be safe. But, unlike these, it knew no beginning, and shall know no end. Emblems of permanence as they are, though Olivet looks down on Jerusalem as it did when Melchizedek was its king, and Tabor and Hermon stand as they did before human lips had named them, they are wearing away by winter storms and summer heats. But, as Isaiah has taught us, when the earth is old, God's might and mercy are young; for 'the mountains shall depart and the hills be removed, but My kindness shall not depart from thee.' 'The earth shall wax old like a garment, but My righteousness shall not be abolished.' It is more stable than the mountains, and firmer than the firmest things upon earth.

Then, with wonderful poetical beauty and vividness of contrast, there follows upon the emblem of the great mountains of God's righteousness the emblem of the 'mighty deep' of His judgments. Here towers Vesuvius; there at its feet lie the waters of the bay. So the righteousness springs up like some great cliff, rising sheer from the water's edge, while its feet are laved by the sea of the divine judgments, unfathomable and shoreless. The mountains and the sea are the two grandest things in nature, and in their combination sublime; the one the home of calm

and silence, the other in perpetual motion. But the mountain's roots are deeper than the depths of the sea, and though the judgments are a mighty deep, the righteousness is deeper, and is the bed of the ocean.

The metaphor, of course, implies obscurity, but what sort of obscurity? The obscurity of the sea. And what sort of obscurity is that? Not that which comes from mud, or anything added, but that which comes from depth. As far as a man can see down into its blue-green depths they are clear and translucent; but where the light fails and the eye fails, there comes what we call obscurity. The sea is clear, but our sight is limited.

And so there is no arbitrary obscurity in God's dealings, and we know as much about them as it is possible for us to know; but we cannot see to the bottom. A man on the cliff can look much deeper into the ocean than a man on the level beach. The higher you climb the further you will see down into the 'sea of glass mingled with fire' that lies placid before God's throne. Let us remember that it is a hazardous thing to judge of a picture before it is finished; of a building before the scaffolding is pulled down, and it is as hazardous for us to say about any deed or any revealed truth that it is inconsistent with the divine character. Wait a bit; wait a bit! 'Thy judgments are a great deep.' The deep will be drained off one day, and you will see the bottom of it. 'Judge nothing before the time.'

But as an aid to patience and faith hearken how the Psalmist finishes up his contemplations: 'O Lord! Thou preservest man and beast.' Very well then, all this mercy, faithfulness, righteousness, judgment, high as the heavens, deep as the ocean, firm as the hills, it is all working for this—to keep the millions of living creatures round about us, and ourselves, in life and well-being. The mountain is high, the deep is profound. Between the mountain and the sea there is a strip of level land. God's righteousness towers above us; God's judgments go down beneath us; we can scarcely measure adequately the one or the other. But upon the level where we live there are the green fields where the cattle browse, and the birds sing, and men live and till and reap and are fed. That is to say, we all have enough in the plain, patent facts of creation and preservation of man and animal life in this world to make us quite sure of what is the principle that prevails up to the very top of the inaccessible mountains, and down to the very bottom of the unfathomable deep. What we know of Him, in the blessings of His love and providence, ought to interpret for us all that is perplexing. What we understand is good and loving. Let us be sure that what we do not yet understand is good and loving too. The web is of one texture throughout. The least educated ear can catch the music of the simpler melodies which run through the Great Composer's work. We shall one day be able to appreciate the yet fuller music of the more recondite parts, which to us at present seem only jangling and discord. It is not

His melody but our ears that are at fault. But we may well accept the obscurity of the mighty deep of God's judgment, when we can see plainly that, after all, the earth is full of His mercy, and that 'the eyes of all things wait on God, and He giveth them their meat in due season.'

II. So much, then, for the great picture here of these boundless characteristics of the divine nature. Now let us look for a moment at the picture of man sheltering beneath God's wings.

'How excellent is Thy lovingkindness, O God! therefore the children of men put their trust under the shadow of Thy wings.' God's lovingkindness, or mercy, as I explained the word might be rendered, is *precious*, for that is the true meaning of the word translated 'excellent.' We are rich when we have that for ours; we are poor without it. Our true wealth is to possess God's love, and to know in thought and realise in feeling and reciprocate in affection His grace and goodness, the beauty and perfectness of His wondrous character. That man is wealthy who has God on his side; that man is a pauper who has not God for his.

'How precious is Thy lovingkindness, *therefore* the children of men put their trust.' There is only one thing that will ever win a man's heart to love God, and that is that God should love him first, and let him see it. 'We love Him because He first loved us,' is the New Testament teaching. Is it not all adumbrated

and foretold in these words: 'How precious is Thy loving-kindness, O God! therefore the children of men put their trust'?

We may be driven to worship after a sort by power; we may be smitten into some cold admiration, into some kind of reluctant subjection and trembling reverence, by the manifestation of divine perfections. But there is only one thing that wins a man's heart, and that is the sight of God's heart; and it is only when we know how precious His lovingkindness is that we shall be drawn towards Him.

And then this last verse tells us how we can make God our own: 'They put their trust under the shadow of Thy wings.' The word here rendered, and accurately rendered, 'put their trust,' has a very beautiful literal meaning. It means to flee for refuge, as the manslayer might flee into the strong city, or as Lot did out of Sodom to the little city on the hill, or as David did into the cave from his enemies. So, with such haste, with such intensity, staying for nothing, and with the effort of your whole will and nature, flee to God. That is trust. Go to Him for refuge from all evil, from all harm, from your own souls, from all sin, from hell, and death, and the devil.

Put your trust under 'the shadow of His wings.' That is a beautiful image, drawn, probably, from the grand words of Deuteronomy, where God is likened to the 'eagle stirring up her nest, fluttering over her

young,' with tenderness in her fierce eye, and protecting strength in the sweep of her mighty pinion. So God spreads the covert of His wing, strong and tender, beneath which we may all gather ourselves and nestle.

And how can we do that? By the simple process of fleeing unto Him, as made known to us in Christ our Saviour; to hide ourselves there. For let us not forget how even the tenderness of this metaphor was increased by its shape on the tender lips of the Lord: 'How often would I have gathered thy children together, as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings!' The Old Testament took the emblem of the eagle, sovereign, and strong, and fierce; the New Testament took the emblem of the domestic fowl, peaceable, and gentle, and affectionate. Let us flee to that Christ, by humble faith with the plea on our lips —

'Cover my defenceless head
With the shadow of Thy wing';

and then all the Godhead in its mercy, its faithfulness, its righteousness, and its judgments will be on our side; and we shall know how precious is the lovingkindness of the Lord, and find in Him the home and hiding-place of our hearts for ever.

WHAT MEN FIND BENEATH THE WINGS OF GOD

> 'They shall be abundantly satisfied with the fatness of Thy house; and Thou shalt make them drink of the river of Thy pleasures. 9. For with Thee is the fountain of life: in Thy light shall we see light.' —PSALM xxxvi. 8, 9.

In the preceding verses we saw a wonderful picture of the boundless perfections of God; His lovingkindness, faithfulness, righteousness, and of His twofold act, the depths of His judgments and the plainness of His merciful preservation of man and beast. In these verses we have an equally wonderful picture of the blessedness of the godly, the elements of which consist in four things: satisfaction, represented under the emblem of a feast; joy, represented under the imagery of full draughts from a flowing river of delight; life, pouring from God as a fountain; light, streaming from Him as source.

And this picture is connected with the previous one by a very simple link. Who are they who 'shall be abundantly satisfied'? The men 'who put their trust beneath the shadow of Thy wings.' That is to say, the simple exercise of confidence in God is the channel through which all the fulness of divinity passes into and fills our emptiness.

Observe, too, that the whole of the blessings here promised are to be regarded as present and not future. 'They shall be abundantly satisfied' would be far more truly rendered in consonance with the Hebrew: 'They *are* satisfied'; and so also we should read 'Thou *dost* make them drink of the river of Thy pleasures; in Thy light *do* we see light.' The Psalmist is not speaking of any future blessedness, to be realised in some far-off, indefinite day to come, but of what is possible even in this cloudy and sorrowful life. My text was true on the hills of Palestine, on the day when it was spoken; it may be true amongst the alleys of Manchester to-day. My purpose at this time is simply to deal with the four elements in which this blessedness consists—satisfaction, joy, life, light.

I. Satisfaction: 'They shall be abundantly satisfied with the fatness of
Thy house.'

Now, I suppose, there is a double metaphor in that. There is an allusion, no doubt, to the festal meal of priests and worshippers in the Temple, on occasion of the peace-offering, and there is also the simpler metaphor of God as the Host at His table, at which we are guests. 'Thy house' may either be, in the narrower sense, the Temple; and then all life is represented as being a glad sacrificial meal in His presence, of which 'the meek shall eat and be satisfied,' or Thy 'house' may be taken in a more general sense; and then all life is represented as the gathering of children round the abundant board

which their Father's providence spreads for them, and as glad feasting in the 'mansions' of the Father's house.

In either case the plain teaching of the text is, that by the might of a calm trust in God the whole mass of a man's desires are filled and satisfied. What do we want to satisfy us? It is something almost awful to think of the multiplicity, and the variety, and the imperativeness of the raging desires which every human soul carries about within it. The heart is like a nest of callow fledglings, every one of them a great, wide open, gaping beak, that ever needs to have food put into it. Heart, mind, will, appetites, tastes, inclinations, weaknesses, bodily wants—the whole crowd of these are crying for their meat. The Book of Proverbs says there are three things that are never satisfied: the grave, the earth that is not filled with water, and the fire that never says, 'It is enough.' And we may add a fourth, the human heart, insatiable as the grave; thirsty as the sands, on which you may pour Niagara, and it will drink it all up and be ready for more; fierce as the fire that licks up everything within reach and still hungers.

So, though we be poor and weak creatures, we want much to make us restful. We want no less than that every appetite, desire, need, inclination shall be filled to the full; that all shall be filled to the full at once, and that by one thing; that all shall be filled to the full at once, by one thing that shall last for ever. Else we shall be like men whose store of provision

gives out before they are half-way across the desert. And we need that all our desires shall be filled at once by one thing that is so much greater than ourselves that we shall grow up towards it, and towards it, and towards it, and yet never be able to exhaust or surpass it.

Where are you going to get that? There is only one answer, dear brethren! to the question, and that is—God, and God alone is the food of the heart; God, and God alone, will satisfy your need. Let us bring the full Christian truth to bear upon the illustration of these words. Who was it that said, 'I am the Bread of Life. He that cometh unto Me shall never hunger'? Christ will feed my mind with truth if I will accept His revelation of Himself, of God, and of all things. Christ will feed my heart with love if I will open my heart for the entrance of His love. Christ will feed my will with blessed commands if I will submit myself to His sweet and gentle, and yet imperative, authority. Christ will satisfy all my longings and desires with His own great fulness. Other food palls upon man's appetite, and we wish for change; and physiologists tell us that a less wholesome and nutritious diet, if varied, is better for a man's health than a more nutritious one if uniform and monotonous. But in Christ there are all constituents that are needed for the building up of the human spirit, and so we never weary of Him if we only know His sweetness. After a world of hungry men have fed upon Him, He remains inexhaustible as at the beginning; like the

bread in His own miracles, of which the pieces that were broken and ready to be given to the eaters were more than the original stock, as it appeared when the meal began, or like the fabled feast in the Norse Walhalla, to which the gods sit down to-day, and to-morrow it is all there on the board, as abundant and full as ever. So if we have Christ to live upon, we shall know no hunger; and 'in the days of famine we shall be satisfied.'

O brethren! have you ever known what it is to feel that your hungry heart is at rest? Did you ever know what it is to say, 'It is enough'? Have you anything that satisfies your appetite and makes you blessed? Surely, men's eager haste to get more of the world's dainties shows that there is no satisfaction at its table. Why will you 'spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labour for that which satisfieth not,' as Indians in famine eat clay which fills their stomachs, but neither stays hunger, nor ministers strength? Eat and your soul shall live.

II. Now, turn to the next of the elements of blessedness here—Joy.
'Thou makest them drink of the river of Thy pleasures.'

There may be a possible reference here, couched in the word 'pleasures,' to the Garden of Eden, with the river that watered it parting into four heads; for 'Eden' is the singular of the word which is here translated 'pleasures' or 'delight.' If we take that

reference, which is very questionable, there would be suggested the thought that amidst all the pain and weariness of this desert life of ours, though the gates of Paradise are shut against us, they who dwell beneath the shadow of the divine wing really have a paradise blooming around them; and have flowing ever by their side, with tinkling music, the paradisaical river of delights, in which they may bathe and swim, and of which they may drink. Certainly the joys of communion with God surpass any which unfallen Eden could have boasted.

But, at all events, the plain teaching of the text is that the simple act of trusting beneath the shadow of God's wings brings to us an ever fresh and flowing river of gladness, of which we may drink. The whole conception of religion in the Bible is gladsome. There is no puritanical gloom about it. True, a Christian man has sources of sadness which other men have not. There is the consciousness of his own sin, and the contest that he has daily to wage; and all things take a soberer colouring to the eye that has been accustomed to look, however dimly, upon God. Many of the sources of earthly felicity are dammed up and shut off from us if we are living beneath the shadow of God's wings. Life will seem to be sterner, and graver, and sadder than the lives 'that ring with idiot laughter solely,' and have no music because they have no melancholy in them. That cannot be helped. But what does it matter though two or three surface streams, which are little better than drains for

sewage, be stopped up, if the 'pure river of the water of life' is turned into your hearts? Surely it will be a gain if the sadness which has joy for its very foundation is yours, instead of the laughter which is only a mocking mask for a death's head, and of which it is true that even 'in laughter the heart is sorrowful, and the end of that mirth is heaviness.' Better to be 'sorrowful, yet always rejoicing,' than to be glad on the surface, with a perpetual sorrow and unrest gnawing at the root of your life.

And if it be true that the whole Biblical conception of religion is of a glad thing, then, my brother! it is your duty, if you are a Christian man, to be glad, whatever temptations there may be in your way to be sorrowful. It is a hard lesson, and one which is not always insisted upon. We hear a great deal about other Christian duties. We do not hear so much as we ought about the Christian duty of gladness. It takes a very robust faith to say, 'Though the fig-tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vine, yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation,' but unless we can say it, there is an attainment of Christian life yet unreached, to which we have to aspire.

But be that as it may, my point is simply this—that all real and profound possession of, and communion with, God in Christ will make us glad; glad with a gladness altogether unlike that of the world round about us, far deeper, far quieter, far nobler, the sister and the ally of all great things, of all pure life, of all

generous and lofty thought. And where is it to be found? Only in fellowship with Him. 'The river of Thy pleasures' may mean something yet more solemn and wonderful than pleasures of which He is the Author. It may mean pleasures *which He shares*, the very delights of the divine nature itself. The more we come into fellowship with Him, the more shall we share in the very joy of God Himself. And what is His joy? He delights in mercy; He delights in self-communication: He is the blessed, the happy God, because He is the giving God. He delights in His love. He 'rejoices over' His penitent child 'with singing,'

In that blessedness we may share; or if that be too high and mystical a thought, may we not remember who it was that said: 'These things speak I unto you that My joy may remain in you'; and who it is that will one day say to the faithful servant: 'Enter thou into the joy of thy Lord'? Christ makes us drink of the river of His pleasures. The Shepherd and the sheep drink from the same stream, and the gladness which filled the heart of the Man of Sorrows, and lay deeper than all His sorrows, He imparts to all them that put their trust in Him.

So, dear brethren! what a blessing it is for us to have, as we may have, a source of joy, frozen by no winter, dried up by no summer, muddied and corrupted by no iridescent scum of putrefaction which ever mantles over the stagnant ponds of earthly joys! Like some citadel that has an unfailing well in its courtyard, we may have a fountain of

gladness within ourselves which nothing that touches the outside can cut off. We have but to lap a hasty mouthful of earthly joys as we run, but we cannot drink too full draughts of this pure river of water which makes glad the city of God.

III. We have the third element of the blessedness of the godly represented under the metaphor of Life, pouring from the fountain, which is God. 'With Thee is the fountain of life.'

The words are true in regard to the lowest meaning of 'life'—physical existence—and they give a wonderful idea of the connection between God and all living creatures. The fountain rises, the spray on the summit catches the sunlight for a moment, and then falls into the basin, jet after jet springing up into the light, and in its turn recoiling into the darkness. The water in the fountain, the water in the spray, the water in the basin, are all one. Wherever there is life there is God. The creature is bound to the Creator by a mystic bond and tie of kinship, by the fact of life. The mystery of life knits all living things with God. It is a spark, wherever it burns, from the central flame. It is a drop, wherever it is found, from the great fountain. It is in man the breath of God's nostrils. It is not a gift given by a Creator who dwells apart, having made living things, as a watchmaker might a watch, and then 'seeing them go.' But there is a deep mystic union between the God who has life in Himself and all the living creatures who draw their life from Him, which we

cannot express better than by that image of our text, 'With Thee is the fountain of life.'

But my text speaks about a blessing belonging to the men who put their trust under the shadow of God's wing, and therefore it does not refer merely to physical existence, but to something higher than that, namely, to that life of the spirit in communion with God, which is the true and the proper sense of 'life'; the one, namely, in which the word is almost always used in the Bible.

There is such a thing as death in life; living men may be 'dead in trespasses and sins,' 'dead in pleasure,' dead in selfishness. The awful vision of Coleridge in the *Ancient Mariner*, of dead men standing up and pulling at the ropes, is only a picture of the realities of life; where, as on some Witches' Sabbath, corpses move about and take part in the activities of this dead world. There are people full of energy in regard of worldly things, who yet are all dead to that higher region, the realities of which they have never seen, the actions of which they have never done, the emotions of which they have never felt. Am I speaking to such living corpses now? There are some of my audience alive to the world, alive to animalism, alive to lust, alive to passion, alive to earth, alive perhaps to thought, alive to duty, alive to conduct of a high and noble kind, but yet dead to God, and, therefore, dead to the highest and noblest of all realities. Answer for yourselves the question—do you belong to this class?

There is life for you in Jesus Christ, who '*is* the Life.' Like the great aqueducts that stretch from the hills across the Roman Campagna, His Incarnation brings the waters of the fountain from the mountains of God into the lower levels of our nature, and the fetid alleys of our sins. The cool, sparkling treasure is carried near to every lip. If we drink, we live. If we will not, we die in our sins, and are dead whilst we live. Stop the fountain, and what becomes of the stream? It fades there between its banks, and is no more. You cannot even live the animal life except that life were joined to Him. If it could be broken away from God it would disappear as the clouds melt in the sky, and there would be nobody, and you would be nowhere. You cannot break yourself away from God *physically* so completely as to annihilate yourself. You can do so *spiritually*, and some of you do it, and the consequence is that you are dead, *dead*, DEAD! You can be made 'alive from the dead,' if you will lay hold on Jesus Christ, and get His life-giving Spirit into your hearts.

IV. Light. 'In Thy light shall we see light.'

God is 'the Father of lights.' The sun and all the stars are only lights kindled by Him. It is the very crown of revelation that 'God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all.' Light seems to the unscientific eye, which knows nothing about undulations of a luminiferous ether, to be the least material of material things. All joyous things come with it. It brings warmth and fruit, fulness and life. Purity, and

gladness, and knowledge have been symbolised by it in all tongues. The Scripture uses light, and the sun, which is its source, as an emblem for God in His holiness, and blessedness, and omniscience. This great word here seems to point chiefly to light as knowledge.

This saying is true, as the former clause was, in relation to all the light which men have. 'The inspiration of the Almighty giveth him understanding.' The faculties by which men know, and all the exercise of those faculties, are His gift. It is in the measure in which God's light comes to the eye that the eye beholds. 'Light' may mean not only the faculty, but the medium of vision. It is in the measure in which God's light comes, and because His light comes, that all light of reason in human nature sees the truth which is its light. God is the Author of all true thoughts in all mankind. The spirit of man is a candle kindled by the Lord.

But as I said about life, so I say about light. The material or intellectual aspects of the word are not the main ones here. The reference is to the spiritual gift which belongs to the men 'who put their trust beneath the shadow of Thy wings.' In communion with Him who is the Light as well as the Life of men, we see a whole universe of glories, realities, and brightnesses. Where other eyes see only darkness, we behold 'the King in His beauty, and the land that is very far off.' Where other men see only cloudland and mists, our vision will pierce into the unseen, and

there behold 'the things which are,' the only real things, of which all that the eye of sense sees are only the fleeting shadows, seen as in a dream, while these are the true, and the sight of them is sight indeed. They who see by the light of God, and see light therein, have a vision which is more than imagination, more than opinion, more than belief. It is certitude. Communication with God does not bring with it superior intellectual perspicuity, but it does bring a perception of spiritual realities and relations, which, in respect of clearness and certainty, may be called sight. Many of us walk in darkness, who, if we were but in communion with God, would see the lone hillside blazing with chariots and horses of fire. Many of us grope in perplexity, who, if we were but hiding under the shadow of God's wings, would see the truth and walk at liberty in the light, which is knowledge and purity and joy.

In communication with God, we see light upon all the paths of duty. It is wonderful how, when a man lives near God, he gets to know what he ought to do. That great Light, which is Christ, is like the star that hung over the Magi, blazing in the heavens, and yet stooping to the lowly task of guiding three wayfaring men along a muddy road upon earth. So the highest Light of God comes down to be 'a lantern for our paths and a light for our feet.'

And in the same communion with God, we get light in all seasons of darkness and of sorrow. 'To the upright there ariseth light in the darkness'; and the

darkest hours of earthly fortune will be like a Greenland summer night, when the sun scarcely dips below the horizon, and even when it is absent, all the heaven is aglow with a calm twilight.

All these great blessings belong to-day to those who take refuge under the shadow of His wings. But blessed as the present experience is, we have to look for the perfecting of it when we pass from the forecourt to the inner sanctuary, and in that higher house sit with Christ at His table and feast at 'the marriage supper of the Lamb.' Here we drink from the river, but there we shall be carried up to the source. The life of God in the soul is here often feeble in its flow, 'a fountain sealed' and all but shut up in our hearts, but there it will pour through all our being, a fountain springing up into everlasting life. The darkness is scattered even here by beams of the true light, but here we are only in the morning twilight, and many clouds still fill the sky, and many a deep gorge lies in sunless shadow, but there the light shall be a broad universal blaze, and there shall be 'nothing hid from the heat thereof.'

Now, dear brethren! the sum of the whole matter is, that all this fourfold blessing of satisfaction, joy, life, light, is given to you, if you will take Christ. He will feed you with the bread of God; He will give you His own joy to drink; He will be in you the life of your lives, and 'the master-light of all your seeing.' And if you will not have Him, you will starve, and your lips will be cracked with thirst; and you will

live a life which is death, and you will sink at last into outer darkness.

Is that the fate which you are going to choose? Choose Christ, and He will give you satisfaction, and joy, and life, and light.

THE SECRET OF TRANQUILLITY

> 'Delight thyself also in the Lord, and He shall give thee the desires of thine heart 5. Commit thy way unto the Lord.... 7. Rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for Him.'—PSALM xxxvii. 4, 5, 7.

'I have been young, and now am old,' says the writer of this psalm. Its whole tone speaks the ripened wisdom and autumnal calm of age. The dim eyes have seen and survived so much, that it seems scarcely worth while to be agitated by what ceases so soon. He has known so many bad men blasted in all their leafy verdure, and so many languishing good men revived, that—

> 'Old experience doth attain
> To something of prophetic strain';

and is sure that 'to trust in the Lord and do good' ever brings peace and happiness. Life with its changes has not soured but quieted him. It does not seem to him an endless maze, nor has he learned to despise it. He has learned to see God in it all, and that has cleared its confusion, as the movements of the planets, irregular and apparently opposite, when viewed from the earth, are turned into an ordered whole, when the sun is taken for the centre. What a contrast between the bitter cynicism put into the lips of the son, and the calm cheerful godliness taught, according to our psalm, by the father! To Solomon, old age is represented as bringing the melancholy creed, 'All is vanity'; David believes, 'Delight thyself in the Lord, and He shall give thee the desires of thine heart.' Which style of old age is the nobler? what kind of life will lead to each?

These clauses, which I have ventured to isolate from their context, contain the elements which secure peace even in storms and troubles. I think that, if we consider them carefully, we shall see that there is a well-marked progress in them. They do not cover the same ground by any means; but each of the later flows from the former. Nobody can 'commit his way unto the Lord' who has not begun by 'delighting in the Lord'; and nobody can 'rest in the Lord' who has not 'committed his way to the Lord.' These three precepts, then, the condensed result of the old man's lifelong experience, open up for our consideration the secret of tranquillity. Let us think of them in

order.

I. Here is the secret of tranquillity in freedom from eager, earthly desires—'Delight thyself in the Lord, and He shall give thee the desires of thine heart.'

The great reason why life is troubled and restless lies not without, but within. It is not our changing circumstances, but our unregulated desires, that rob us of peace. We are feverish, not because of the external temperature, but because of the state of our own blood. The very emotion of desire disturbs us; wishes make us unquiet; and when a whole heart, full of varying, sometimes contradictory longings, is boiling within a man, how can he but tremble and quiver? One desire unfulfilled is enough to banish tranquillity; but how can it survive a dozen dragging different ways? A deep lesson lies in that word *distraction*, which has come to be so closely attached to *desires*; the lesson that all eager longing tears the heart asunder. Unbridled and varying wishes, then, are the worst enemies of our repose.

And, still further, they destroy tranquillity by putting us at the mercy of externals. Whatsoever we make necessary for our contentment, we make lord of our happiness. By our eager desires we give perishable things supreme power over us, and so intertwine our being with theirs, that the blow which destroys them lets out our life-blood. And, therefore, we are ever disturbed by apprehensions and shaken by fears. We tie ourselves to these outward

possessions, as Alpine travellers to their guides, and so, when they slip on the icy slopes, their fall is our death. If we were not eager to stand on the giddy top of fortune's rolling wheel, we should not heed its idle whirl; but we let our foolish hearts set our feet there, and thenceforward every lurch of the glittering instability threatens to lame or kill us. He who desires fleeting joys is sure to be restless always, and to be disappointed at the last. For, even at the best, the heart which depends for peace on the continuance of things subjected to a thousand accidents, can only know quietness by forcibly closing its eyes against the inevitable; and, even at the best, such a course must end on the whole in failure. Disappointment is the law for all earthly desires; for appetite increases with indulgence, and as it increases, satisfaction decreases. The food remains the same, but its power to appease hunger diminishes. Possession bring indifference. The dose that lulls into delicious dreams to-day must be doubled to-morrow, if it is to do anything; and there is soon an end of that. Each of your earthly joys fills but a part of your being, and all the other ravenous longings either come shrieking at the gate of the soul's palace, like a mob yelling for bread, or are starved into silence; but either way there is disquiet. And then, if a man has fixed his happiness on anything lower than the stars, less stable than the heavens, less sufficient than God, there does come, sooner or later, a time when it passes from him, or he from it. Do not venture the rich freightage of your

happiness in crazy vessels. If you do, be sure that, somewhere or other, before your life is ended, the poor frail craft will strike on some black rock rising sheer from the depths, and will grind itself to chips there. If your life twines round any prop but God your strength, be sure that, some time or other, the stay to which its tendrils cling will be plucked up, and the poor vine will be lacerated, its clusters crushed, and its sap will bleed out of it.

If, then, our desires are, in their very exercise, a disturbance, and in their very fruition prophesy disappointment, and if that certain disappointment is irrevocable and crushing when it comes, what shall we do for rest? Dear brethren! there is but one answer—'Delight thyself in the Lord.' These eager desires, transfer to Him; on Him let the affections fix and fasten; make Him the end of your longings, the food of your spirits. This is the purest, highest form of religious emotion—when we can say, 'Whom have I but Thee? possessing Thee I desire none beside.' And this glad longing for God is the cure for all the feverish unrest of desires unfulfilled, as well as for the ague fear of loss and sorrow. Quietness fills the soul which delights in the Lord, and its hunger is as blessed and as peaceful as its satisfaction.

Think how surely rest comes with delighting in God. For that soul must needs be calm which is freed from the distraction of various desires by the one master-attraction. Such a soul is still as the great river above the falls, when all the side currents and

dimpling eddies and backwaters are effaced by the attraction that draws every drop in the one direction; or like the same stream as it nears its end, and, forgetting how it brawled among rocks and flowers in the mountain glens, flows with a calm and equable motion to its rest in the central sea. Let the current of your being set towards God, then your life will be filled and calmed by one master-passion which unites and stills the soul.

And for another reason there will be peace: because in such a case desire and fruition go together. 'He shall give thee the desires of thine heart.' Only do not vulgarise that great promise by making it out to mean that, if we will be good, He will give us the earthly blessings which we wish. Sometimes we shall get them, and sometimes not; but our text goes far deeper than that. God Himself is the heart's desire of those who delight in Him; and the blessedness of longing fixed on Him is that it ever fulfils itself. They who want God have Him. Your truest joy is in His fellowship and His grace. If, set free from creatural delights, our wills reach out towards God, as a plant growing in darkness to the light—then we shall wish for nothing contrary to Him, and the wishes which run parallel to His purposes, and embrace Himself as their only good, cannot be vain. The sunshine flows into the opened eye, the breath of life into the expanding lung—so surely, so immediately the fulness of God fills the waiting, wishing soul. To delight in God is to possess

our delight. Heart! lift up thy gates: open and raise the narrow, low portals, and the King of Glory will stoop to enter.

Once more: desire after God will bring peace by putting all other wishes in their right place. The counsel in our text does not enjoin the extinction, but the subordination, of other needs and appetites —'Seek ye *first* the kingdom of God.' Let that be the dominant desire which controls and underlies all the rest. Seek for God in everything, and for everything in God. Only thus will you be able to bridle those cravings which else tear the heart. The presence of the king awes the crowd into silence. When the full moon is in the nightly sky, it sweeps the heavens bare of flying cloud-rack, and all the twinkling stars are lost in the peaceful, solitary splendour. So let delight in God rise in our souls, and lesser lights pale before it—do not cease to be, but add their feebleness, unnoticed, to its radiance. The more we have our affections set on God, the more shall we enjoy, because we subordinate, His gifts. The less, too, shall we dread their loss, the less be at the mercy of their fluctuations. The capitalist does not think so much of the year's gains as does the needy adventurer, to whom they make the difference between bankruptcy and competence. If you have God for your 'enduring substance,' you can face all varieties of condition, and be calm, saying—

'Give what Thou canst, without Thee I am poor,
And with Thee rich, take what Thou wilt away.'

The amulet that charms away disquiet lies here. Still thine eager desires, arm thyself against feverish hopes, and shivering fears, and certain disappointment, and cynical contempt of all things; make sure of fulfilled wishes and abiding joys. 'Delight thyself in the Lord, and He shall give thee the desires of thine heart.'

II. But this is not all. The secret of tranquillity is found, secondly, in freedom from the perplexity of choosing our path.

'Commit thy way unto the Lord'—or, as the margin says, 'roll' it upon God; leave to Him the guidance of thy life, and thou shalt be at peace on the road.

This is a word for all life, not only for its great occasions. Twice, or thrice, perhaps in a lifetime, a man's road leads him up to a high dividing point, a watershed as it were, whence the rain runs from the one side of the ridge to the Pacific, and from the other to the Atlantic. His whole future may depend on his bearing the least bit to the right hand or to the left, and all the slopes below, on either side, are wreathed in mist. Powerless as he is to see before him, he has yet to choose, and his choice determines the rest of his days. Certainly he needs some guidance then. But he needs it not less in the small decisions of every hour. Our histories are made up of a series of trifles, in each of which a separate act of will and choice is involved. Looking to the way in which character is made, as coral reefs are built up,

by a multitude of tiny creatures whose united labours are strong enough to breast the ocean; looking to the mysterious way in which the greatest events in our lives have the knack of growing out of the smallest; looking to the power of habit to make any action of the mind almost instinctive: it is of far more importance that we should become accustomed to apply this precept of seeking guidance from God to the million trifles than to the two or three decisions which, at the time of making them, we know to be weighty. Depend upon it that, if we have not learned the habit of committing the daily-recurring monotonous steps to Him, we shall find it very, very hard to seek His help, when we come to a fork in the road. So this is a command for all life, not only for its turning-points.

What does it prescribe? First, the subordination—not the extinction—of our own *inclinations*. We must begin by ceasing from self. Not that we are to cast out of consideration our own wishes. These are an element in every decision, and often are our best helps to the knowledge of our powers and of our duties. But we have to take special care that they never in themselves settle the question. They are second, not first. 'Thus I will, and therefore thus I decide; my wish is enough for a reason,' is the language of a tyrant over others, but of a slave to himself. Our first question is to be, not 'What should I like?' but 'What does God will, if I can by any means discover it?' Wishes are to be held in

subordination to Him. Our will is to be master of our passions, and desires, and whims, and habits, but to be servant of God. It should silence all their cries, and itself be silent, that God may speak. Like the lawgiver-captain in the wilderness, it should stand still at the head of the ordered rank, ready for the march, but motionless, till the Pillar lifts from above the sanctuary. Yes! 'Commit thy way'—unto whom? Conscience? No: unto Duty? No: but 'unto God'—which includes all these lower laws, and a whole universe besides. Hold the will in equilibrium, that His finger may incline the balance.

Then the counsel of our text prescribes the submission of our *judgment* to God, in the confidence that His wisdom will guide us. Committing our way unto the Lord does not mean shifting the trouble of patient thought about our duty off our own shoulders. It is no cowardly abnegation of the responsibility of choice which is here enjoined; nor is there any sanction of lazily taking the first vagrant impulse, wafted we know not whence, that rises in the mind, for the voice of God. But, just because we are to commit our way to Him, we are bound to the careful exercise of the best power of our own brains, that we may discover what the will of God is. He does not reveal that will to people who do not care to know it. I suppose the precursor of all visions of Him, which have calmed His servants' souls with the peace of a clearly recognised duty, has been their cry, 'Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?' God

counsels men who use their own wits to find out His counsel. He speaks to us through our judgments when they take all the ordinary means of ascertaining our course. The law is: Do your best to find out your duty; suppress inclination, and desire to do God's will, and He will certainly tell you what it is. I, for my part, believe that the Psalmist spoke a truth when he said, 'In all thy ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct thy steps.' Only let the eye be fixed on Him, and He will guide us in the way. If we chiefly desire, and with patient impartiality try, to be directed by Him, we shall never want for direction.

But all this is possible only if we 'delight in the Lord.' Nothing else will still our desires—the voice within, and the invitations without, which hinder us from hearing the directions of our Guide. Nothing else will so fasten up and muzzle the wild passions and lusts that a little child may lead them. To delight in Him is the condition of all wise judgment. For the most part, it is not hard to discover God's will concerning us, if we supremely desire to know and do it; and such supreme desire is but the expression of this supreme delight in Him. Such a disposition wonderfully clears away mists and perplexities; and though there will still remain ample scope for the exercise of our best judgment, and for reliance on Him to lead us, yet he whose single object is to walk in the way that God points, will seldom have to stand still in uncertainty as to what that way is. 'If thine

eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light.'

Thus, dear brethren! these two keys—joy in God, and trust in His guidance—open for us the double doors of 'the secret place of the Most High'; where all the roar of the busy world dies upon the ear, and the still small voice of the present God deepens the silence, and hushes the heart. Be quiet, and you will hear Him speak—delight in Him, that you may be quiet. Let the affections feed on Him, the will wait mute before Him, till His command inclines it to decision, and quickens it into action; let the desires fix upon His all-sufficiency; and then the wilderness will be no more trackless, but the ruddy blaze of the guiding pillar will brighten on the sand a path which men's hands have never made, nor human feet trodden into a road. He will 'guide us with His eye,' if our eyes be fixed on Him, and be swift to discern and eager to obey the lightest glance that love can interpret. Shall we be 'like the horse or the mule, which have no understanding,' and need to be pulled with bridles and beaten with whips before they know how to go; or shall we be like some trained creature that is guided by the unseen cord of docile submission, and has learned to read the duty, which is its joy, in the glance of its master's eye, or the wave of his hand? 'Delight thyself in the Lord: commit thy way unto Him.'

III. Our text takes one more step. The secret of tranquillity is found, thirdly, in freedom from the anxiety of an unknown future. 'Best in the Lord, and

wait patiently for Him.'

Such an addition to these previous counsels is needful, if all the sources of our disquiet are to be dealt with. The future is dim, after all our straining to see into its depths. The future is threatening, after all our efforts to prepare for its coming storms. A rolling vapour veils it all; here and there a mountain peak seems to stand out; but in a moment another swirl of the fog hides it from us. We know so little, and what we do know is so sad, that the ignorance of what may be, and the certainty of what must be, equally disturb us with hopes which melt into fears, and forebodings which consolidate into certainties. We are sure that in that future are losses, and sorrows, and death; thank God! we are sure too, that He is in it. That certainty alone, and what comes of it, makes it possible for a thoughtful man to face to-morrow without fear or tumult. The only rest from apprehensions which are but too reasonable is 'rest in the Lord.' If we are sure that He will be there, and if we delight in Him, then we can afford to say, 'As for all the rest, let it be as He wills, it will be well.' That thought alone, dear friends! will give calmness. What else is there, brethren! for a man fronting that vague future, from whose weltering sea such black, sharp-toothed rocks protrude? Shall we bow before some stern Fate, as its lord, and try to be as stern as It? Shall we think of some frivolous Chance, as tossing its unguided waves, and try to be as frivolous as It? Shall we try to be content with an animal

limitation to the present, and heighten the bright colour of the little to-day by the black background that surrounds it, saying, 'Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die'? Is it not better, happier, nobler, every way truer, to look into that perilous uncertain future, or rather to look past it to the loving Father who is its Lord and ours, and to wait patiently for Him? Confidence that the future will but evolve God's purposes, and that all these are enlisted on our side, will give peace and power. Without it all is chaos, and we flying atoms in the anarchic mass; or else all is coldblooded impersonal law, and we crushed beneath its chariot-wheels. Here, and here alone, is the secret of tranquillity.

But remember, brethren! that the peaceful confidence of this final counsel is legitimate only when we have obeyed the other two. I have no business, for instance, to expect God to save me from the natural consequences of my own worldliness or folly. If I have taken up a course from eager desires for earthly good, or from obedience to any inclination of my own without due regard to His will, I have no right, when things begin to go awry, to turn round to God and say, 'Lord! I wait upon Thee to save me.' And though repentance, and forsaking of our evil ways at any point in a man's course, do ensure, through Jesus Christ, God's loving forgiveness, yet the evil consequences of past folly are often mercifully suffered to remain with us all our days. He who has delighted in the Lord, and

committed his way unto Him, can venture to front whatever may be coming; and though not without much consciousness of sin and weakness, can yet cast upon God the burden of taking care of him, and claim from his faithful Father the protection and the peace which He has bound Himself to give.

And O dear friends! what a calm will enter our souls then, solid, substantial, 'the peace of God,' gift and effluence from the 'God of peace'! How blessed then to leave all the possible to-morrow with a very quiet heart in His hands! How easy then to bear the ignorance, how possible then to face the certainties, of that solemn future! Change and death can only thin away and finally remove the film that separates us from our delight. Whatever comes here or yonder can but bring us blessing; for we must be glad if we have God, and if our wills are parallel with His, whose Will all things serve. Our way is traced by Him, and runs alongside of His. It leads to Himself. Then rest in the Lord, and 'judge nothing before the time.' We cannot criticise the Great Artist when we stand before His unfinished masterpiece, and see dim outlines here, a patch of crude colour there. But wait patiently for Him, and so, in calm expectation of a blessed future and a finished work, which will explain the past, in honest submission of our way to God, in supreme delight in Him who is the gladness of our joy, the secret of tranquillity will be ours.

THE BITTERNESS AND BLESSEDNESS OF THE BREVITY OF LIFE

> 'Surely every man walketh in a vain shew…. 12. I am a stranger with Thee, and a sojourner, as all my fathers were.' —PSALM xxxix. 6, 12.

These two sayings are two different ways of putting the same thing. There is a common thought underlying both, but the associations with which that common thought is connected in these two verses are distinctly different. The one is bitter and sad—a gloomy half truth. The other, out of the very same fact, draws blessedness and hope. The one may come from no higher point of view than the level of worldly experience; the other is a truth of faith. The former is at best partial, and without the other may be harmful; the latter completes, explains, and hallows it.

And that this progress and variety in the thought is the key to the whole psalm is, I think, obvious to any one who will examine it with care. I cannot here enter on that task but in the hastiest fashion, by way of vindicating the connection which I trace between the two verses of our text. The Psalmist begins, then, with telling how at some time recently passed—in

consequence of personal calamity not very clearly defined, but apparently some bodily sickness aggravated by mental sorrow and anxiety—he was struck dumb with silence, so that he 'held his peace even from good.' In that state there rose within him many sad and miserable thoughts, which at last forced their way through his locked lips. They shape themselves into a prayer, which is more complaint than petition—and which is absorbed in the contemplation of the manifest melancholy facts of human life—'Thou hast made my days as an handbreadth; and mine age is as nothing before Thee.' And then, as that thought dilates and sinks deeper into his soul, he looks out upon the whole race of man—and in tones of bitterness and hopelessness, affirms that all are vanity, shadows, disquieted in vain. The blank hopelessness of such a view brings him to a standstill. It is true—but taken alone is too dreadful to think of. 'That way madness lies,'—so he breaks short off his almost despairing thoughts, and with a swift turning away of his mind from the downward gaze into blackness that was beginning to make him reel, he fixes his eyes on the throne above—'And now, Lord! what wait I for? my hope is in Thee.' These words form the turning-point of the psalm. After them, the former thoughts are repeated, but with what a difference—made by looking at all the blackness and sorrow, both personal and universal, in the bright light of that hope which streams upon the most lurid masses of opaque cloud, till their gloom begins to glow with an

inward lustre, and softens into solemn purples and reds. He had said, 'I was dumb with silence—even from good.' But when his hope is in God, the silence changes its character and becomes resignation and submission. 'I opened not my mouth; because Thou didst it.' The variety of human life and its transiency is not less plainly seen than before; but in the light of that hope it is regarded in relation to God's paternal correction, and is seen to be the consequence, not of a defect in His creative wisdom or love, but of man's sin. 'Thou with rebukes dost correct man for iniquity.' That, to him who waits on the Lord, is the reason and the alleviation of the reiterated conviction, 'Every man is vanity.' Not any more does he say every man 'at his best state,' or, as it might be more accurately expressed, 'even when most firmly established,'—for the man who is established in the Lord is not vanity, but only the man who founds his being on the fleeting present. Then, things being so, life being thus in itself and apart from God so fleeting and so sad, and yet with a hope that brightens it like sunshine through an April shower—the Psalmist rises to prayer, in which that formerly expressed conviction of the brevity of life is reiterated, with the addition of two words which changes its whole aspect, 'I am a stranger *with Thee*.' He is God's guest in his transient life. It is short, like the stay of a foreigner in a strange land; but he is under the care of the King of the Land—therefore he need not fear nor sorrow. Past generations, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—whose names God 'is not ashamed'

to appeal to in His own solemn designation of Himself—have held the same relation, and their experience has sealed His faithful care of those who dwell with Him. Therefore, the sadness is soothed, and the vain and fleeting life of earth assumes a new appearance, and the most blessed and wisest issue of our consciousness of frailty and insufficiency is the fixing of our desires and hopes on Him in whose house we may dwell even while we wander to and fro, and in whom our life being rooted and established shall not be vain, howsoever it may be brief.

If, then, we follow the course of contemplation thus traced in the psalm, we have these three points brought before us—first, the thought of life common to both clauses; second, the gloomy, aimless hollowness which that thought breathes into life apart from God; third, the blessedness which springs from the same thought when we look at it in connection with our Father in heaven.

I. Observe the very forcible expression which is given here to the thought of life common to both verses.

'Every man walketh in a vain show.' The original is even more striking and strong. And although one does not like altering words so familiar as those of our translation, which have sacredness from association and a melancholy music in their rhythm —still it is worth while to note that the force of the

expression which the Psalmist employs is correctly given in the margin, 'in an image'—or 'in a shadow.' The phrase sounds singular to us, but is an instance of a common enough Hebrew idiom, and is equivalent to saying—he walks in the character or likeness of a shadow, or, as we should say, he walks as a shadow. That is to say, the whole outward life and activity of every man is represented as fleeting and unsubstantial, like the reflection of a cloud which darkens leagues of the mountains' side in a moment, and ere a man can say, 'Behold!' is gone again for ever.

Then, look at the other image employed in the other clause of our text to express the same idea, 'I am a stranger and a sojourner, as all my fathers.' The phrase has a history. In that most pathetic narrative of an old-world sorrow long since calmed and consoled, when 'Abraham stood up from before his dead,' and craved a burying-place for his Sarah from the sons of Heth, his first plea was, 'I am a stranger and a sojourner with you.' In his lips it was no metaphor. He was a stranger, a visitor for a brief time to an alien land; he was a sojourner, having no rights of inheritance, but settled among them for a while, and though dwelling among them, not adopted into their community. He was a foreigner, not naturalised. And such is our relation to all this visible frame of things in which we dwell. It is alien to us; though we be in it, our true affinities are elsewhere; though we be in it, our stay is brief, as

that of 'a wayfaring man that turns aside to tarry for a night.'

And there is given in the context still another metaphor setting forth the same fact in that dreary generalisation which precedes my text, 'Every man at his best state'—or as the word means, 'established,'—with his roots most firmly struck in the material and visible—'is only a breath.' It appears for a moment, curling from lip and nostril into the cold morning air, and vanishes away, so thus vaporous, filmy, is the seeming solid fact of the most stable life.

These have been the commonplaces of poets and rhetoricians and moralists in all time. But threadbare as the thought is, I may venture to dwell on it for a moment. I know I am only repeating what we all believe—and all forget. It is never too late to preach commonplaces, until everybody acts on them as well as admits them—and this old familiar truth has not yet got so wrought into the structure of our lives that we can afford to say no more about it.

'Surely every man walketh in a shadow.' Did you ever stand upon the shore on some day of that 'uncertain weather, when gloom and glory meet together,' and notice how swiftly there went, racing over miles of billows, a darkening that quenched all the play of colour in the waves, as if all suddenly the angel of the waters had spread his broad wings between sun and sea, and then how in another moment as swiftly it flits away, and with a burst the

light blazes out again, and leagues of ocean flash into green and violet and blue. So fleeting, so utterly perishable are our lives for all their seeming solid permanency. 'Shadows in a career, as George Herbert has it—breath going out of the nostrils. We think of ourselves as ever to continue in our present posture. We are deceived by illusions. Mental indolence, a secret dislike of the thought, and the impostures of sense, all conspire to make us blind to, or at least oblivious of, the plain fact which every beat of our pulses might preach, and the slow creeping hands of every parish clock confirm. How awful that silent, unceasing footfall of receding days is when once we begin to watch it! Inexorable, passionless—though hope and fear may pray, 'Sun! stand thou still on Gibeon; and thou moon! in the valley of Ajalon,'—the tramp of the hours goes on. The poets paint them as a linked chorus of rosy forms, garlanded, and clasping hands as they dance onwards. So they may be to some of us at some moments. So they may seem as they approach; but those who come hold the hands of those who go, and that troop has no rosy light upon their limbs, their garlands are faded, the sunshine falls not upon the grey and shrouded shapes, as they steal ghostlike through the gloom—and ever and ever the bright and laughing sisters pass on into that funereal band which grows and moves away from us unceasing. Alas! for many of us it bears away with it our lost treasures, our shattered hopes, our joys from which all the bright petals have dropped! Alas! for many of us there is nothing but

sorrow in watching how all things become 'part and parcel of the dreadful past.'

And how strangely sometimes even a material association may give new emphasis to that old threadbare truth. Some more permanent *thing* may help us to feel more profoundly the shadowy fleetness of *man*. The trifles are so much more lasting than their owners. Or, as 'the Preacher' puts it, with such wailing pathos, 'One generation passeth away, and another generation cometh, but the earth abideth for ever.' This material is perishable—but yet how much more enduring than we are! The pavements we walk upon, the coals in our grates—how many millenniums old are they? The pebble you kick aside with your foot—how many generations will it outlast? Go into a museum and you will see hanging there, little the worse for centuries, battered shields, notched swords, and gaping helmets—aye, but what has become of the bright eyes that once flashed the light of battle through the bars, what has become of the strong hands that once gripped the hilts? 'The knights are dust,' and 'their good swords are' *not* 'rust.' The material lasts after its owner. Seed corn is found in a mummy case. The poor form beneath the painted lid is brown and hard, and more than half of it gone to pungent powder, and the man that once lived has faded utterly: but the handful of seed has its mysterious life in it, and when it is sown, in due time the green blade pushes above English soil, as it would have done under the shadow of the

pyramids four thousand years ago—and its produce waves in a hundred harvest fields to-day. The money in your purses now, will some of it bear the head of a king that died half a century ago. It is bright and useful—where are all the people that in turn said they 'owned' it? Other men will live in our houses, will preach from this pulpit, and sit in these pews, when you and I are far away. And other June days will come, and the old rose-trees will flower round houses where unborn men will then be living, when the present possessor is gone to nourish the roots of the roses in the graveyard!

'Our days are as a shadow, and there is none abiding.' So said David on other occasions. We know, dear brethren! how true it is, whether we consider the ceaseless flux and change of things, the mystic march of the silent-footed hours, or the greater permanence which attaches to the 'things which perish,' than to our abode among them. We know it, and yet how hard it is not to yield to the inducement to act and feel as if all this painted scenery were solid rock and mountain. By our own inconsiderateness and sensuousness, we live in a lie, in a false dream of permanence, and so in a sadder sense we walk in 'a vain show,'—deluding ourselves with the conceit of durability, and refusing to see that the apparent is the shadowy, and the one enduring reality God. It is hard to get even the general conviction vivified in men's minds, hardest of all to get any man to reflect upon it as applying to

himself. Do not think that you have said enough to vindicate neglect of my words now, when you call them commonplace. So they are. But did you ever take that well-worn old story, and press it on your own consciousness—as a man might press a common little plant, whose juice is healing, against his dim eye-ball—by saying to yourself, 'It is true of *me*. *I* walk as a shadow. *I* am gliding onwards to my doom. Through *my* slack hands the golden sands are flowing, and soon *my* hour-glass will run out, and *I* shall have to stop and go away.' Let me beseech you for one half-hour's meditation on that fact before this day closes. You will forget my words then, when with your own eyes you have looked upon that truth, and felt that it is not merely a toothless commonplace, but belongs to and works in *thy* life, as it ebbs away silently and incessantly from *thee*.

II. Let me point, in the second place, to the gloomy, aimless hollowness which that thought, apart from God, infuses into life.

There is, no doubt, a double idea in the metaphor which the Psalmist employs. He desires to set forth, by his image of a shadow, not only the transiency, but the unsubstantialness of life. Shadow is opposed to substance, to that which is real, as well as to that which is enduring. And we may further say that the one of these characteristics is in great part the occasion of the other. Because life is fleeting, therefore, in part, it is so hollow and unsatisfying. The fact that men are dragged away from their

pursuits so inexorably makes these pursuits seem, to any one who cannot see beyond that fact, trivial and not worth the following. Why should we fret and toil and break our hearts, 'and scorn delights, and live laborious days' for purposes which will last so short a time, and things which we shall so soon have to leave? What is all our bustle and business, when the sad light of that thought falls on it, but 'labouring for the wind'? 'Were it not better to lie still?' Such thoughts have at least a partial truth in them, and are difficult to meet as long as we think only of the facts and results of man's life that we can see with our eyes, and our psalm gives emphatic utterance to them. The word rendered 'walketh' in our text is not merely a synonym for passing through life, but has a very striking meaning. It is an intensive frequentative form of the word—that is, it represents the action as being repeated over and over again. For instance, it might be used to describe the restless motion of a wild beast in a cage, raging from side to side, never still, and never getting any farther for all the racing backward and forward. So here it signifies 'walketh to and fro,' and implies hurry and bustle, continuous effort, habitual unrest. It thus comes to be parallel with the stronger words which follow,—'Surely they are *disquieted* in vain'; and one reason why all this effort and agitation are purposeless and sad, is because the man who is straining his nerves and wearying his legs is but a shadow in regard to duration—'He heapeth up riches, and knoweth not who shall gather them.'

Yes! if we have said all, when we have said that men pass as a fleeting shadow—if my life has no roots in the Eternal, nor any consciousness of a life that does not pass, and a light that never perishes, if it is derived from, directed to, 'cribbed, cabined, and confined' within this visible diurnal sphere, then it is all flat and unprofitable, an illusion while it seems to last, and all its pursuits are folly, its hopes dreams, its substances vapours, its years a lie. For, if life be thus short, I who live it am conscious of, and possess whether I be conscious of them or no, capacities and requirements which, though they were to be annihilated to-morrow, could be satisfied while they lasted by nothing short of the absolute ideal, the all-perfect, the infinite—or, to put away abstractions, 'My soul thirsteth for God, the living God!' 'He hath put eternity in their heart,' as the book of Ecclesiastes says. Longings and aspirations, weaknesses and woes, the limits of creature helps and loves, the disproportion between us and the objects around us —all these facts of familiar experience do witness, alike by blank misgivings and by bright hopes, by many disappointments and by indestructible expectations surviving them all, that nothing which has a date, a beginning, or an end, can fill our souls or give us rest. Can you fill up the swamps of the Mississippi with any cartloads of faggots you can fling in? Can you fill your souls with anything which belongs to this fleeting life? Has a flying shadow an appreciable thickness, or will a million of them pressed together occupy a space in your empty,

hungry heart?

And so, dear brethren! I come to you with a message which may sound gloomy, and beseech you to give heed to it. No matter how you may get on in the world—though you may fulfil every dream with which you began in your youth—you will certainly find that without Christ for your Brother and Saviour, God for your Friend, and heaven for your hope, life, with all its fulness, is empty. It lasts long, too long as it sometimes seems for work, too long for hope, too long for endurance; long enough to let love die, and joys wither and fade, and companions drop away, but without God and Christ, you will find it but 'as a watch in the night.' At no moment through the long weary years will it satisfy your whole being; and when the weary years are all past, they will seem to have been but as one troubled moment breaking the eternal silence. At every point *so* profitless, and all the points making so thin and short a line! The crested waves seem heaped together as they recede from the eye till they reach the horizon, where miles of storm are seen but as a line of spray. So when a man looks back upon his life, if it have been a godless one, be sure of this, that he will have a dark and cheerless retrospect over a tossing waste, with a white rim of wandering barren foam vexed by tempest, and then, if not before, he will sadly learn how he has been living amidst shadows, and, with a nature that needs God, has wasted himself upon the world. 'O life! as futile then as frail'; 'surely,' in such

a case, 'every man walketh in a vain show.'

III. But note, finally, how our other text in its significant words gives us the blessedness which springs from this same thought of life, when it is looked at in connection with God.

The mere conviction of the brevity and hollowness of life is not in itself a religious or a helpful thought. Its power depends upon the other ideas which are associated with it. It is susceptible of the most opposite applications, and may tend to impel conduct in exactly opposite directions. It may be the language of despair or of bright hope. It may be the bitter creed of a worn-out debauchee, who has wasted his life in hunting shadows, and is left with a cynical spirit and a barbed tongue. It may be the passionless belief of a retired student, or the fanatical faith of a religious ascetic. It may be an argument for sensuous excess, 'Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die'; or it may be the stimulus for noble and holy living, 'I must work the works of Him that sent me while it is day. The night cometh.' The other accompanying beliefs determine whether it shall be a blight or a blessing to a man.

And the one addition which is needed to incline the whole weight of that conviction to the better side, and to light up all its blackness, is that little phrase in this text, 'I am a stranger *with Thee*, and a sojourner.' There seems to be an allusion here to remarkable words connected with the singular

Jewish institution of the Jubilee. You remember that by the Mosaic law, there was no absolute sale of land in Israel, but that every half century the whole returned to the descendants of the original occupiers. Important economical and social purposes were contemplated in this arrangement, as well as the preservation of the relative position of the tribes as settled at the Conquest. But the law itself assigns a purely religious purpose—the preservation of the distinct consciousness of the tenure on which the people held their territory, namely, obedience to and dependence on God. 'The land shall not be sold for ever, for the land is Mine, for ye are *strangers and sojourners with Me*.' Of course, there was a special sense in which that was true with regard to Israel, but David thought that the words were as true in regard to his whole relation to God, as in regard to Israel's possession of its national inheritance.

If we grasp these words as completing all that we have already said, how different this transient and unsubstantial life looks! You must have the light from both sides to stereoscope and make solid the flat surface picture. Transient! yes—but it is passed in the presence of God. Whether we know it or no, our brief days hang upon Him, and we walk, all of us, in the light of His countenance. That makes the transient eternal, the shadowy substantial, the trivial heavy with solemn meaning and awful yet vast possibilities. 'In our embers is something that doth live.' If we had said all, when we say 'We are as a

shadow,' it would matter very little, though even then it *would* matter something, how we spent our shadowy days; but if these poor brief hours are spent 'in the great Taskmaster's eye,'—if the shadow cast on earth proclaims a light in the heavens—if from this point there hangs an unending chain of conscious being—Oh! then, with what awful solemnity is the brevity, with what tremendous magnitude is the minuteness, of our earthly days invested! 'With Thee'—then I am constantly in the presence of a sovereign Law and its Giver; 'with Thee'—then all my actions are registered and weighed yonder; 'with Thee'—then 'Thou, God, seest me.' Brethren! it is the prismatic halo and ring of eternity round this poor glass of time that gives it all its dignity, all its meaning. The lives that are lived before God cannot be trifles.

And if this relation to time be recognised and accepted and held fast by our hearts and minds, then what calm blessedness will flow into our souls!

'A stranger with Thee,'—then we are the guests of the King. The Lord of the land charges Himself with our protection and provision; we journey under His safe conduct. It is for His honour and faithfulness that no harm shall come to us travelling in His territory, and relying on His word. Like Abraham with the sons of Heth, we may claim the protection and help which a stranger needs. He recognises the bond and will fulfil it. We have eaten of His salt, and He will answer for our safety.—'He that toucheth you

toucheth the apple of Mine eye.'

'A stranger with Thee,'—then we have a constant Companion and an abiding Presence. We may be solitary and necessarily remote from the polity of the land. We may feel amid all the visible things of earth as if foreigners. We may not have a foot of soil, not even a grave for our dead. Companionships may dissolve and warm hands grow cold and their close clasp relax—what then? He is with us still. He will join us as we journey, even when our hearts are sore with loss. He will walk with us by the way, and make our chill hearts glow. He will sit with us at the table —however humble the meal, and He will not leave us when we discern Him. Strangers we are indeed here—but not solitary, for we are 'strangers with Thee.' As in some ancestral home in which a family has lived for centuries—son after father has rested in its great chambers, and been safe behind its strong walls—so, age after age, they who love Him abide in God.—'Thou hast been our dwelling-place in all generations.'

'Strangers with Thee,'—then we may carry our thoughts forward to the time when we shall go to our true home, nor wander any longer in a land that is not ours. If even here we come into such blessed relationships with God, that fact is in itself a prophecy of a more perfect communion and a heavenly house. They who are strangers with Him will one day be 'at home with the Lord,' and in the light of that blessed hope the transiency of this life

changes its whole aspect, loses the last trace of sadness, and becomes a solemn joy. Why should we be pensive and wistful when we think how near our end is? Is the sentry sad as the hour for relieving guard comes nigh? Is the wanderer in far-off lands sad when he turns his face homewards? And why should not we rejoice at the thought that we, strangers and foreigners here, shall soon depart to the true metropolis, the mother-country of our souls? I do not know why a man should be either regretful or afraid, as he watches the hungry sea eating away this 'bank and shoal of time' upon which he stands—even though the tide has all but reached his feet—if he knows that God's strong hand will be stretched forth to him at the moment when the sand dissolves from under him, and will draw him out of many waters, and place him high above the floods in that stable land where there is 'no more sea.'

Lives rooted in God through faith in Jesus Christ are not vanity. Let us lay hold of Him with a loving grasp—and 'we shall live also' *because* He lives, *as* He lives, *so long* as He lives. The brief days of earth will be blessed while they last, and fruitful of what shall never pass. We shall have Him with us while we journey, and all our journeyings will lead to rest in Him. True, men walk in a vain show; true, 'the world passeth away and the lust thereof,' but, blessed be God! true, also, 'He that doeth the will of God abideth for ever.'

TWO INNUMERABLE SERIES

> 'Many, O Lord my God, are Thy wonderful works which Thou hast done, and Thy thoughts which are to us-ward: they cannot be reckoned up in order unto Thee: if I would declare and speak of them, they are more than can be numbered … 12. Innumerable evils have compassed me about: mine iniquities have taken hold upon me, so that I am not able to look up; they are more than the hairs of mine head; therefore my heart faileth me.'—PSALMS xl. 5, 12.

So then, there are two series of things which cannot be numbered, God's mercies, man's sins. This psalm has for its burden a cry for deliverance; but the Psalmist begins where it is very hard for a struggling man to begin, but where we always should begin, with grateful remembrance of God's mercy. His wondrous dealings seem to the Psalmist's thankful heart as numberless as the blades of grass which carpet the fields, or as the wavelets which glance in the moonlight and break in silver upon the sand. They come pouring out continuously, like the innumerable undulations of the ether which make upon the eyeballs the single sensation of light. He thinks not only of God's wonderful works, His realised purposes of mercy, but of 'His thoughts which are to us-ward,' the purposes, still more

wonderful, of a yet greater mercy which wait to be realised. He thinks not only of God's lovingkindness to Him, but his contemplations embrace God's goodness to his brethren—'Thy thoughts which are to us-ward.' And as he thinks of all this 'multitude of His tender mercies,' his lips break into this rapturous exclamation of my text.

But there is a wonderful change in tone, in the two halves of the psalm. The deliverance that seems so complete in the earlier part is but partial. The triumph and the trust seem both to be clouded over. A frowning mass lifts itself up against the immense mass of God's mercies. The Psalmist sees himself ringed about by numberless evils, as a man tied to a stake might be by a circle of fire. 'Innumerable evils have compassed me about.' His conscience tells him that the evils are deserved; they are his iniquities transformed which have come back to him in another shape, and have laid their hands upon him as a constable does upon a thief. 'Mine iniquities have taken hold upon me'—they hem him in so that his vision is interrupted, the smoke from the circle of flame blinds his eyes—'I cannot see.' His roused conscience and his quivering heart conceive of them as 'more than the hairs of his head,' and so courage and confidence have ebbed away from him. 'My heart faileth me——,' and there is nothing left for him but to fling himself in his misery out of himself and on to God.

Now what I wish to do in this sermon is not so

much to deal with these two verses separately as to draw some of the lessons from the very remarkable juxtaposition of these two innumerable things—God's tender mercies, and man's iniquity and evil.

I. To begin with, let me remind you how, if we keep these two things both together in our contemplations, they suggest for us very forcibly the greatest mystery in the universe, and throw a little light upon it.

The difficulty of difficulties, the one insoluble problem is——, given a good and perfect God, where does sorrow come from, and why is there any pain? Men have fumbled at that knot for all the years that there have been men in the world, and they have not untied it yet. They have tried to cut it and it has resisted all their knives and all their ingenuity. And there the question stands before us, grim, insoluble, the despair of all thinkers and often the torture of our own hearts, in the hours of our personal experience. Is it true that 'God's mercies are innumerable'? If it be, what is the meaning of all this that makes me writhe and weep? Nobody has answered that question, and nobody ever will.

Only let us beware of the temptation of blinking half of the facts by reason of the clearness of our confidence or the depth of our feeling of the other half. That is always our temptation. You must have had a singularly unruffled life if there has never come to you some moment when, in the depth of

your agony, you have ground your teeth together, as you said to yourself, 'Is there a God then at all? And does He care for me at all? And can He help me at all? And if there is, why in the name of pity does He not?'

Well, my brother! when such moments come to us, and they come to us all sooner or later—and I was going to add a parenthesis, which you will think strange, and say that they come to us all sooner or later, blessed be God!—when such moments come to us, do not let the black mass hide the light one from you, but copy this Psalmist, and in the energy of your faith, even though it be the extremity of your pain, grasp and grip them both; and though you have to say and to wail: 'Innumerable evils have compassed me about,' be sure that you do not let that prevent you from saying, 'Many, O Lord my God! are Thy wonderful works which are to us-ward. They are more than can be numbered.'

I do not enter upon this as a mere matter of philosophical speculation. It is far too serious and important a matter to be so dealt with, in a pulpit at any rate, but I would also add in one sentence that the mere thinker, who looks at the question solely from an intellectual point of view, has need to take the lesson of my two texts, and to be sure that he keeps clear before him both halves of the facts—though they seem to be as unlike each other as the eclipsed and the uneclipsed silver half of the moon—with which he has to deal.

Remember, the one does not contradict the other; but let us ask ourselves if the one does not *explain* the other. If it be that these mercies are so innumerable as my first text says, may it not be that they go deep down beneath, and include in their number, the experience that seems most opposite to them, even the sorrow that afflicts our lives? Must it not be, that the innumerable sum of God's mercies has not to have subtracted from it, but has to have added to it, the sum which also at intervals appears to us innumerable, of our sorrows and our burdens? Perhaps the explanation does not go to the bottom of the bottomless, but it goes a long way down towards it. 'Whom the Lord loveth, He chasteneth' makes a bridge across the gulf which seems to part the opposing cliffs, these two sets effect, and turn the darker into a form in which the brighter reveals itself. 'All things work together for good.' And God's innumerable mercies include the whole sum total of my sorrows.

II. So, again, notice how the blending of these two thoughts together heightens the impression of each.

All artists, and all other people know the power of contrast. White never looks so white as when it is relieved against black; black never so intense as when it is relieved against white. A white flower in the twilight gleams out in spectral distinctness, paler and fairer than it looked in the blazing sunshine. So, if we take and put these two things together—the dark mass of man's miseries and the radiant

brightness of God's mercies, each heightens the colour of the other.

Only, let me observe, as I have already suggested that, in the second of my two texts, whilst the Psalmist starts from the 'innumerable evils' that have compassed him about, he passes from these to the earlier evils which he had done. It is pain that says, 'Innumerable evils have compassed me about.' It is conscience that says, 'Mine iniquities have taken hold upon me.' His wrong-doing has come back to him like the boomerang that the Australian savage throws, which may strike its aim but returns to the hand that flung it. It has come back in the shape of a sorrow. And so 'Mine iniquities have taken hold upon me' is the deepening of the earliest word of my text. Therefore, I am not reading a double meaning into it, but the double meaning is in it when I see here a reference both to a man's manifold sorrows and to a man's multiplied transgressions. Taking the latter into consideration, the contrast between these two heightens both of them.

God's mercies never seem so fair, so wonderful, as when they are looked at in conjunction with man's sin. Man's sin never seems so foul and hideous as when it is looked at close against God's mercies. You cannot estimate the conduct of one of two parties to a transaction unless you have the conduct of the other before you. You cannot understand a father's love unless you take into account the prodigal son's sullen unthankfulness, or his unthankfulness without

remembering his father's love. You cannot estimate the clemency of a patient monarch unless you know the blackness and persistency of the treason of his rebellious subjects, nor their treason, except when seen in connection with his clemency. You cannot estimate the long-suffering of a friend unless you know the crimes against friendship of which his friend has been guilty, nor the blackness of his treachery without the knowledge of the other's loyalty to him. So we do not see the radiant brightness of God's loving-kindness to us until we look at it from the depth of the darkness of our own sin. The stars are seen from the bottom of the well. The loving-kindness of God becomes wonderful when we think of the sort of people on whom it has been lavished. And my evil is never apprehended in its true hideousness until I have set it black and ugly, but searched through and through, and revealed in every deformed outline, and in every hideous lineament, by the light against which I see it. You must take both in order to understand either.

And not only so, but actually these two opposites, which are ever warring with one another in a duel, most merciful, patient, and long-suffering on His part —these two elements do intensify one another, not only in our estimation but in reality. For it is man's sin that has drawn out the deepest and most wonderful tenderness of the divine heart; and it is God's love partly recognised and rejected, which leads men to the darkest evil. Man's sin has

heightened God's love to this climax and consummation of all tenderness, that He has sent us His Son. And God's love thus heightened has darkened and deepened man's sin. God's chiefest gift is His Son. Man's darkest sin is the rejection of Christ. The clearest light makes the blackest shadow, the tenderer the love, the more criminal the apathy and selfishness which oppose it.

My brother! let us put these two great things together, and learn how the sin heightens the love, and how the love aggravates the sin.

III. That leads me to another point, that the keeping of these two thoughts together should lead us all to conscious penitence.

The Psalmist's words are not the mere complaint of a soul in affliction, they are also the acknowledgment of a conscience repenting. The contemplation of these two numberless series should affect us all in a like manner.

Now there is a superficial kind of popular religion which has a great deal to say about the first of these texts; and very little or next to nothing about the second. It is a very defective kind of religion that says:—'Many, O Lord my God! are Thy thoughts which are to us-ward,' but has never been down on its knees with the confession 'Mine iniquities have taken hold upon me.' But defective as it is, it is all the religion which many people have, and I doubt

not, some of my hearers have no more. I would press on you all this truth, that there is no deep personal religion without a deep consciousness of personal transgression. Have you got that, my brother? Have you ever had it? Have you ever known what it is so to look at God's love that it smites you into tears of repentance when you think of the way you have requited Him? If you have not, I do not think the sense of God's love has gone very deeply into you, notwithstanding all that you say; and sure I am that you have never got to the point where you can understand it most clearly and most deeply. The sense of sin, the consciousness of personal demerit, the feeling that I have gone against Him and His loving law,—that is as important and as essential an element in all deep personal religion as the clear and thankful apprehension of the love of God. Nay, more; there never has been and there never will be in a man's heart, a worthy adequate apprehension of, and response to, the wonderful love of God, except it be accompanied with a sense of sin. I, therefore, urge this upon you that, for the vigour of your own personal religion, you must keep these two things well together. Beware of such a shallow, easy-going, matter-of-course, taking for granted God's infinite love, that it makes you think very little of your own sins against that love.

And remember, on the other hand, that the only way, or at least by far the surest way, to learn the depth and the darkness of my own transgression is

by bringing my heart under the influence of that great love of God in Jesus Christ. It is not preaching hell that will break a man's heart down into true repentance. It is not thundering over him with the terrors of law and trying to prick his conscience that will bring him to a deep real knowledge of his sin. These may be subordinate and auxiliary, but the real power that convinces of sin is the love of God. The one light which illuminates the dark recesses of one's own heart, and makes us feel how dark they are, and how full of creeping unclean things, is the light of the love of God that shines in Jesus Christ, the light that shines from the Cross of Calvary. Oh, dear friends! if we are ever to know the greatness of God's love we must feel our personal sin which that great love has forgiven and purged away, and if we are ever to know the depth of our own evil, we must measure it by His wonderful tenderness. We must set our 'sins in the light of His countenance,' and contrast that supreme sacrifice with our own selfish loveless lives, that the contrast may subdue us to penitence and melt us to tears.

IV. Lastly, looking at these two numberless series together will bring into the deepest penitence a joyful confidence.

There are regions of experience the very opposite of that error of which I have just been speaking. There are some of us, perhaps, who have so profound a sense of their own shortcomings and sins that the mists rising from these have blurred the sky to us

and shut out the sun. Some of you, perhaps, may be saying to yourselves that you cannot get hold of God's love because your sin seems to you to be so great, or may be saying to yourselves that it is impossible that you should ever get the victory over this evil of yours, because it has laid hold upon you with so tight a grasp. If there be in any heart listening to me now any inclination to doubt the infinite love of God, or the infinite possibility of cleansing from all sin, let me come with the simple word, Bind these two texts together, and never so look at your own evil as to lose sight of the infinite mercy of God. It is safe to say—ay! it is blessed to say—'Mine iniquities are more than the hairs of mine head,' when we can also say, 'Thy thoughts to me are more than can be numbered.'

There are not two innumerable series, there is only one. There is a limit and a number to my sins and to yours, but God's mercies are properly numberless. They overlap all our sins, they stretch beyond our sins in all dimensions. They go beneath them, they encompass them, and they will thin them away and cause them to disappear. My sins may be many, God's mercies are more. My sins may be inveterate, God's mercy is from everlasting. My sins may be strong, God's mercy is omnipotent. My sins may seem to 'have laid upon me,' God can rescue me from their grip. They are a film on the surface of the deep ocean of His love. My sins may be as the sand which is by the seashore, innumerable, the love of God in Jesus

Christ is like the great sea which rolls over the sands and buries them. My sins may rise mountains high, but His mercies are a great deep which will cover the mountains to their very summit. Ah! my sin is enormous, God's mercy is inexhaustible. 'With Thee is plenteous redemption, and He will redeem Israel from all his iniquities.'

THIRSTING FOR GOD

'My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God.'—PSALM xiii. 2.

This whole psalm reads like the sob of a wounded heart. The writer of it is shut out from the Temple of his God, from the holy soil of his native land. One can see him sitting solitary yonder in the lonely wilderness (for the geographical details that occur in one part of the psalm point to his situation as being on the other side of the Jordan, in the mountains of Moab)—can see him sitting there with long wistful gaze yearning across the narrow valley and the rushing stream that lay between him and the land of God's chosen people, and his eye resting perhaps on the mountaintop that looked down upon Jerusalem.

He felt shut out from the presence of God. We need not suppose that he believed all the rest of the world to be profane and God-forsaken, except only the Temple. Nor need we wonder, on the other hand, that his faith did cling to form, and that he thought the sparrows beneath the eaves of the Temple blessed birds! He was depressed, because he was shut out from the tokens of God's presence; and because he *was* depressed, he shut himself out from the reality of the presence. And so he cried with a cry which never is in vain, 'My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God!'

Taken, then, in its original sense, the words of our text apply only to that strange phenomenon which we call religious depression. But I have ventured to take them in a wider sense than that. It is not only Christian men who are cast down, whose souls 'thirst for God.' It is not only men upon earth whose souls thirst for God. All men, everywhere, may take this text for theirs. Every human heart may breathe it out, if it understands itself. The longing for 'the living God' belongs to all men. Thwarted, stifled, it still survives. Unconscious, it is our deepest misery. Recognised, yielded to, accepted, it is the foundation of our highest blessings. Filled to the full, it still survives unsatiated and expectant. For all men upon earth, Christian or not Christian, for Christians here below, whether in times of depression or in times of gladness, and for the blessed and calm spirits that in ecstasy of longing, full of fruition, stand around

God's throne—it is equally true that their souls 'thirst for God, for the living God.' Only with this difference, that to some the desire is misery and death, and to some the desire is life and perfect blessedness. So that the first thought I would suggest to you now is, that there is an unconscious and unsatisfied longing after God, which is what we call the state of nature; secondly, that there is an imperfect longing after God, fully satisfied, which is what we call the state of grace; and lastly, that there is a perfect longing, perfectly satisfied, which is what we call the state of glory. Nature; religion upon earth; blessedness in heaven—my text is the expression, in divers senses, of them all.

I. In the first place, then, there is in every man an unconscious and unsatisfied longing after God, and that is the state of nature.

Experience is the test of that assertion. And the most superficial examination of the facts of daily life, as well as the questioning of our own souls, will tell us that *this* is the leading feature of them—a state of unrest. What is it that one of those deistic poets of our own land says, about 'Man never *is*, but always *to be* blest'? What is the meaning of the fact that all round about us, and we partaking of it, there is ceaseless, gigantic activity going on? The very fact that men work, the very fact of activity in the mind and life, noble as it is, and root of all that is good, and beautiful as it is, is still the testimony of nature to this fact that I by myself am full of passionate

longings, of earnest desires, of unsupplied wants. 'I thirst,' is the voice of the whole world.

No man is made to be satisfied from himself. For the stilling of our own hearts, for the satisfying of our own nature, for the strengthening and joy of our being, we need to go beyond ourselves, and to fix upon something external to ourselves. We are not independent. None of us can stand by himself. No man carries within him the fountain from which he can draw. If a heart is to be blessed, it must go out of the narrow circle of its own individuality; and if a man's life is to be strong and happy, he must get the foundation of his strength somewhere else than in his own soul. And, my friends! especially you young men, all that modern doctrine of self-reliance, though it has a true side to it, has also a frightfully false side. Though it may he quite true that a man ought to be, in one sense, sufficient for himself, and that there is no real blessedness of which the root does not lie within the nature and heart of the man; though all that be quite true, yet, if the doctrine means (as on the lips of many a modern eloquent and powerful teacher of it, it does mean) that we can do without God, that we may be self-reliant and self-sufficient, and proudly neglectful of all the divine forces that come down into life to brighten and gladden it, it is a lie, false and fatal; and of all the falsehoods that are going about this world at present, I know not one that is varnished over with more apparent truth, that is smeared over with more of the

honey that catches young, ardent, ingenuous hearts, than that half-truth, and therefore most deceptive error, which preaches independence, and self-reliance, and which *means*—a man's soul does not 'thirst for the living God.' Take care of it! We are made *not* to be independent.

We are made, next, to need, not *things*, but *living beings*. 'My soul thirsteth'—for what? An abstraction, a possession, riches, a thing? No! 'my soul thirsteth for God, for *the living God*.' Yes, hearts want hearts. The converse of Christ's saying is equally true; He said, 'God is a Spirit, and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit'; man has a spirit, and man must have Spirit to worship, to lean upon, to live by, or all will be inefficient and unsatisfactory. Oh, lay this to heart, my brother!—no *things* can satisfy a living soul. No accumulation of dead matter can become the life of an immortal being. The two classes are separated by the whole diameter of the universe—matter and spirit, thing and person; and *you* cannot feed yourself upon the dead husks that lie there round about you—wealth, position, honour. Books, thoughts, though they are nobler than these other, are still inefficient. Principles, 'causes,' emotions springing from truth, these are not enough. I want more than that, I want something to love, something to lay a hand upon, that shall return the grasp of the hand. A living man must have a living God, or his soul will perish in the midst of earthly plenty, and will thirst and die whilst the water of

earthly delights is running all around him. We are made to need *persons*, not *things*.

Then again, we need *one* Being who shall be all-sufficient. There is no greater misery than that which may ensue from the attempt to satisfy our souls by the accumulation of objects, each of them imperfect and finite, which yet we fancy, woven together, will make an adequate whole. When a heart is diverted from its one central purpose, when a life is split up in a hundred different directions and into a hundred different emotions, it is like a beam of light passed through some broken surface where it is all refracted and shivered into fragments; there is no clear vision, there is no perfect light. If a man is to be blessed, he must have one source to which he can go. The merchantman that seeks for many goodly pearls, may find the many; but until he has bartered them all for the one, there is something lacking. Not only does the understanding require to pass through the manifold, up and up in ever higher generalisations, till it reaches the One from whom all things come; but the heart requires to soar, if it would be at rest, through all the diverse regions where its love may legitimately tarry for a while, until it reaches the sole and central throne of the universe, and there it may cease its flight, and fold its weary wings, and sleep like a bird within its nest. We want a *Being*, and we want *one Being* in whom shall be sphered all perfection, in whom shall abide all power and blessedness; beyond whom thought cannot pass, out

of whose infinite circumference love does not need to wander; besides whose boundless treasures no other riches can be required; who is light for the understanding, power for the will, authority for the practical life, purpose for the efforts, motive for the doings, end and object for the feelings, home of the affections, light of our seeing, life of our life, the love of our heart, the one living God, infinite in wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness and truth; who is all in all, and without whom everything else is misery. 'My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God.'

Brother! let me ask you the question, before I pass on—the question for the sake of which I am preaching this sermon: Do *you* know that Father? I know this much, that every heart here now answers an 'Amen' (if it will be honest) to what I have been saying. Unrest; panting, desperate thirst, deceiving itself as to where it should go; slaking itself 'at the gilded puddles that the beasts would cough at,' instead of coming to the water of life!—that is the state of man without God. That is nature. That is irreligion. The condition in which every man is that is not trusting in Jesus Christ, is this—thirsting for God, and not knowing *whom* he is thirsting for, and so not getting the supply that he wants.

II. There is a conscious longing, imperfect, but answered; and that is the state of grace—the beginning of religion in a man's soul.

If it be true that there are, as part of the universal human experience, however overlaid and stifled, these necessities of which I have been speaking, the very existence of the necessities affords a presumption, before all evidence, that, somehow and somewhere, they shall be supplied. There can be no deeper truth—none, I think, that ought to have more power in shaping some parts of our Christian creed, than this, that God is a faithful Creator; and where He makes men with longings, it is a prophecy that those longings are going to be supplied. The same ground which avails to defend doctrines that cannot be so well defended by any other argument—the same ground on which we say that there is an immortality, because men long for it and believe in it; that there is a God because men cannot get rid of the instinctive conviction that there is; that there is a retribution, because men's consciences do ask for it, and cry out for it—the very same process which may be applied to the buttressing and defending of all the grandest truths of the Gospel, applies also in this practical matter. If I, made by God who knew what He was doing when He made me, am formed with these deep necessities, with these passionate longings —then it cannot but be that it is intended that they should be to me a means of leading me to Him, and that there they should be satisfied. For He is 'the faithful Creator,' and He remembers the conditions under which His making of us has placed us. 'He knoweth our frame,' and He remembereth what He has implanted within us. And the presumption is, of

course, turned into an actual certainty when we let in the light of the Gospel upon the thing. Then we can say to every man that thus is yearning after a goodness dimly perceived, and does not know what it is that he wants, and we say to you now, Brother! betake yourself to the cross of Christ go with those wants of yours to 'the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world': He will interpret them to you. He will explain to you, as you do not now know, what they mean; and, better than that, He will supply them all. Your souls are thirsting; and you look about, here and there, and everywhere, for springs of water. *There* is the fountain—go to Christ. Your souls are thirsting for God. The unfathomed ocean of the Godhead lies far beyond my lip; but here is the channel through which there flows that river of water of life. Here is the manifested God, here is the granted God, here is the Godhead coming into connection and union with man, his wants and his sins—the 'living God' and His living Son, His everlasting Word. 'He that believeth upon Him shall never hunger, and he that cometh unto Him shall never thirst.' God is the divine and unfathomable ocean; Christ the Son is the stream that brings salvation to every man's lips. All wants are supplied there. Take it as a piece of the simplest prose, with no rhetorical exaggeration about it, that Christ is *everything*, everything that a man can want. We are made to require, and to be restless until we possess, perfect truth—there it is! We are made to want, and to be restless until we get, perfect, infinite

unchangeable love—there it is! We must have, or the burden of our own self-will will be a misery to us, a hand laid upon the springs of our conduct, authoritative and purifying, and have the blessedness of some voice to say to us, 'I bid thee, and that is enough'—there it is! We must have rest, purity, hope, gladness, life in our souls—there they all are! Whatever form of human nature and character be yours, my brother!—whatever exigencies of life you may be lying under the pressure of—man or woman, adult or child, father or son, man of business or man of thought, struggling with difficulties or bright with joy—Oh! believe us, the perfecting of your character may be got in the Lamb of God, and without Him it never can be possessed. Christ is everything, and 'out of His fulness all we receive grace for grace.'

Not only in Christ is there the perfect supply of all these necessities, but also that fulness *becomes ours* on the simple condition of desiring it. The thirst for the living God in a man who has faith in Christ Jesus, is not a thirst which amounts to pain, or arises from a sense of non-possession. But in this divine region the principle of the giving is this—to desire is to have; to long for is to possess. There is no wide interval between the sense of thirst and the trickling of the stream over the parched lip; but ever it is flowing, flowing past us, and the desire is but the opening of the lips to receive the limpid and life-giving waters. No one ever desired the grace of God, really and truly desired it; but just in proportion as

he desired it, he got it—just in proportion as he thirsted, he was satisfied. Therefore we have to preach that grand gospel that faith, simple, conscious longing, turned to Christ, avails to bring down the full and perfect supply.

But some Christian people here may reply, 'Ah! I wish it were so: what was that you were saying at the beginning of your sermon, about men having religious depression, about Christians longing and not possessing?' Well, I have only this to say about that matter. Wherever in a heart that really believes on God in Christ, there is a thirst that amounts to pain, and that has with it a sense of non-possession, that is not because Christ's fulness has become shrunken; that is not because there is a change in God's law, that the measure of the desire is the measure of the reception; but it is only because, for some reason or other that belongs to the man alone, the desire is not deep, genuine, simple, but is troubled and darkened. What we ask, we get. If I am a Christian, however feeble I may be, the feebleness of my faith and the feebleness of my desire may make my supplies of grace feeble; but if I am a Christian, there is no such thing as an earnest longing unsatisfied, no such thing as a thirst accompanied with a pain and sense of want, except in consequence of my own transgression.

And thus there *is* a longing imperfect in this life, but fully supplied according to the measure of its intensity, a longing after 'the living God'; and that is

the state of a Christian man. And O my friend! that is a widely different desire from the other that I have been speaking about. It is blessed thus to say, 'My soul thirsteth for God.' It is blessed to feel the passionate wish for more light, more grace, more peace, more wisdom, more of God. That *is* joy, that *is* peace! Is that *your* experience in this present life?

III. Lastly, there is a perfect longing perfectly satisfied; and that is heaven.

We shall not there be independent, of course, of constant supplies from the great central Fulness, any more than we are here. One may see in one aspect, that just as the Christian life here on earth is in a very true sense a state of never thirsting any more, because we have Christ, and yet in another sense is a state of continual longing and desire—so the Christian and glorified life in heaven, in one view of it, is the removal of all that thirst which marked the condition of man upon earth, and in another is the perfecting of all those aspirations and desires. Thirst, as longing, is eternal; thirst, as aspiration after God, is the glory of heaven; thirst, as desire for more of Him, is the very condition of the celestial world, and the element of all its blessedness.

That future life gives us two elements, an infinite God, and an indefinitely expansible human spirit: an infinite God to fill, and a soul to be filled, the measure and the capacity of which has no limit set to it that we can see. What will be the consequence of

the contact of these two? Why this, for the first thing, that always, at every moment of that blessed life, there shall be a perpetual fruition, a perpetual satisfaction, a deep and full fountain filling the whole soul with the refreshment of its waves and the music of its flow. And yet, and yet—though at every moment in heaven we shall be satisfied, filled full of God, full to overflowing in all our powers—yet the very fact that the God who dwells in us, and fills our whole natures with unsullied and perfect blessedness, is an infinite God; and that we in whom the infinite Father dwells, are men with souls that can grow, and can grow for ever—will result in this, that at every moment our capacities will expand; that at every moment, therefore, the desire will grow and spring afresh; that at every moment God will be seen unveiling undreamed-of beauties, and revealing hitherto unknown heights of blessedness before us; and that the sight of that transcendent, unapproached, unapproachable, and yet attracting and transforming glory, will draw us onward as by an impulse from above, and the possession of some portion of it will bear us upward as by a power from within; and so, nearer, nearer, ever nearer to the throne of light, the centre of blessedness, the growing, and glorifying, and greatening souls of the perfectly and increasingly blessed shall 'mount up with wings as eagles.' Heaven *is* endless longing, accompanied with an endless fruition—a longing which is blessedness, a longing which is life!

My brother! let me put two sayings of Scripture side by side, 'My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God,'—'Father Abraham! send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue.' There be two thirsts, one, the longing for God, which, satisfied, is heaven; one, the longing for quenching of self-lit fires, and for one drop of the lost delights of earth to cool the thirsty throat, which, unsatisfied, is hell. Then hearken to the final vision on the page of Scripture, 'He showed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb.' To us it is showed, and to us the whole revelation of God converges to that last mighty call, 'Let him that is athirst come, and whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely!'

THE PSALMIST'S REMONSTRANCE WITH HIS SOUL

'Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted within me? Hope in God: for I shall yet praise Him, the health of my countenance, and my God.'—PSALM xliii. 5.

This verse, which closes this psalm, occurs twice in the previous one. It is a kind of refrain. Obviously this little psalm, of which my text is a part, was originally united with the preceding one. That the two made one is clear to anybody that will read them, by reason of structure, and tone, and similarity of the singer's situation, and the recurrence of many phrases, and especially of these significant words of my text.

The Psalmist is in circumstances of trouble and sorrow. We need not enter upon them particularly, but the thing that I desire to point out is that three times does the Psalmist take himself to task and question himself as to the reasonableness of the emotions that are surging in his soul, and checks these by higher considerations. Thrice he does it; twice in vain, for the trouble and anxiety come rolling back upon him in spite of the moment's respite, but the third time he triumphs.

I. We note, then, first, that moods and emotions should be examined and governed by a higher self.

In the Psalmist's case, his gloom and despondency, which could plead good reasons for their existence, had everything their own way at first, and swept over his soul like the first rush of waters which have burst their bounds. But, presently, the ruling part of his nature wakes, and brings the feebler lower soul to its tribunal, and says, in effect, 'Now! now that I am here, what hast thou to say about these sorrows

that thou hast been complaining about? *Why* art thou cast down, O my soul? Why art thou disquieted? … Hope in God!'

I shall have a word or two to say presently about the details of this remonstrance, but the main point that I make, to begin with, is just this, that however strong and reasonably occasioned by circumstances a man's emotions and feelings, either of the bright or the dark kind, may be, they are not to be indulged, unless they have passed muster and examination by that higher and better self. It is necessary to keep a very tight hand upon *all* our feelings, whether they be the natural desires of the sensuous part of our nature, or whether they be the sentiments of sadness, or doubt, or anxiety, or perplexity, which are the natural results of outward circumstances of trial; or whether, on the contrary, they be the bright and buoyant ones which come, like angels, along with prosperous hours. But that necessity, commonplace as it is of all morals and all religion, is yet a thing which, day by day, we so forget that we need to be ever and anon reminded of it.

There are hosts of people who, making profession of being Christians, do not habitually put the brake on their moods and tempers, and who seem to think that it is a sufficient vindication of gloom and sadness to say that things are going badly with them in the outer world, and who act as if they supposed that no joy can be too exuberant and no elation too lofty if, on the other hand, things are going rightly. It

is a miserable travesty of the Christian faith to suppose that its prime purpose is anything else than to put into our hands the power of ruling ourselves because we let Christ rule us.

And so, dear brethren! though it be the A B C of Christian teaching, suffer this word of exhortation. It is only 'milk for babes,' but it is milk that the babes are very unwilling to take. Learn from this verse before us the solemn duty of rigid control, by the higher self, of the tremulous, emotional lower self which responds so completely to every change of temperature or circumstances in the world without. And remember that there should be a central heat which keeps the temperature substantially the same, whatever be the weather outside. As the wheel-house, and the steering gear, and the rudder of the ship proclaim their purpose of guidance and direction, so eloquently and unmistakably does the make of our inward selves tell us that emotions and moods and tempers are meant to be governed, often to be crushed, always to be moderated, by sovereign will and reason. In the Psalmist's language, 'My soul' has to give account of its tremors and flutterings to 'Me,' the ruling Self, who should be Lord of temperament, and control the fluctuations of feeling.

II. Note that there are two ways of looking at causes of dejection and disquiet.

The whole preceding parts of both the psalms, before this refrain, are an answer to the question

which my text puts. 'Why art thou cast down, O my soul?' 'My soul' has been talking two whole psalms, to explain why it is cast down. And after all the eloquent torrent of words to vindicate and explain its reasons for sadness—separation from the sanctuary, bitter remembrances of bright days, which the poet tells us are 'a sorrow's crown of sorrow,' taunts of enemies and the like—after all these have been said over and over again, the Psalmist says to himself: 'Come now, let us hear it all once more. *Why* art thou cast down? Why art thou disquieted within me? Thou hast been telling the reasons abundantly. Speak them once again, and let us have a look at them.'

There is a court of appeal in each man, which tests and tries his reasons for his moods; and these, which look very sufficient to the flesh, turn out to be very insufficient when investigated and tested by the higher spirit or self. We should 'appeal from Philip drunk to Philip sober.' And if a man will be honest with himself, and tell himself why he is in such a pucker of terror, or why he is in such a rapture of joy, nine times out of ten the attempt to tell the reasons will be the condemnation of the mood which they are supposed to justify. If men would only bring the causes or occasions of the tempers and feelings which they allow to direct them, to the bar of common sense, to say nothing of religious faith, half the furious boilings in their hearts would stop their ebullition. It would be like pouring cold water into a kettle on the fire. It would end its bubbling.

Everything has two handles. The aspect of any event depends largely on the beholder's point of view. 'There's nothing either good or bad, but thinking makes it so.' 'Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted within me?' The answer is often very hard to give; the question is always very salutary to ask.

III. Note that no reasons for being cast down are so strong as those for elation and calm hope.

'Hope thou in God, for I shall yet praise Him, who is the health of my countenance and my God.' I need not deal here with the fact that the first of the three occurrences of this refrain is, in our Bible, a little different from the other two. That is probably a mistake in the text. In all three cases the words ought to stand the same.

Try to realise what God is to yourselves—'My God' and 'the health of my countenance.' That will stimulate sluggish feeling; that will calm disturbed emotion. He that can say 'My God!' and in that possession can repose, will not be easily moved, by the trivialities and transitorinesses of this life, to excessive disquiet, whether of the exuberant or of the woful sort. There is a wonderful calming power in realising our possession of God as our portion—not stagnating, but quieting. I am quite sure that the troubles of our lives, and the gladnesses of our lives, which often distract, would be far less operative in disturbing, if we felt more that God was ours and

that we were God's.

Brethren! 'there is no joy but calm.' To be at rest is better than rapture. And there is no way of getting and keeping a fixed temper of still tranquillity unless we go into that deep and hidden chamber, in the secret place of the Most High, where we cannot 'hear the loud winds when they call,' but dwell in security, whatever storms harass the land. 'Why art thou cast down,' or lifted 'up,' and, in either case, 'disquieted'? 'Hope in God,' and be at rest.

IV. Note that the effort to lay hold on the truth which calms is to be repeated in spite of failures.

The words of our text are thrice repeated in these two psalms. In the two former instances they are followed by a fresh burst of pained feeling. A moment of tranquillity interrupts the agitation of the Psalmist's soul, but is soon followed by the recurrence of 'the horrible storm' that 'begins afresh.' A tiny island of blue appears in his sky, and then the pale, ugly, grey rack drives across it once more. But the guiding self keeps the hand firm on the tiller, notwithstanding the wash of the water and the rolling of the ship, and the dominant will conquers at last, and at the third time the yielding soul obeys and is quiet, because the Psalmist's will resolved that it should be quiet, and it hopes in God because He, by a dead lift of effort, lifts it up to hope.

No effort at tranquillising our hearts is wholly lost;

and no attempt to lay hold upon God is wholly in vain. Men build a dam to keep out the sea, and the winter storms make a breach in it, but it is not washed away altogether, and next season they will not need to begin to build from quite so low down; but there will be a bit of the former left, to put the new structure upon, and so by degrees it will rise above the tide, and at last will keep it out.

Did you ever see a child upon a swing, or a gymnast upon a trapeze? Each oscillation goes a little higher; each starts from the same lowest point, but the elevation on either side increases with each renewed effort, until at last the destined height is reached and the daring athlete leaps on to a solid platform. So we may, if I might say so, by degrees, by reiterated efforts, swing ourselves up to that steadfast floor on which we may stand high above all that breeds agitation and gloom. It is possible, in the midst of change and circumstances that excite sad emotions, anxieties, and fears—it is possible to have this calmness of hope in God. The rainbow that spans the cataract rises steadfast above the white, tortured water beneath, and persists whilst all is hurrying change below, and there are flowers on the grim black rocks by the side of the fall, whose verdure is made greener and whose brightness is made brighter, by the freshening of the spray of the waterfall. So we may be 'as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing,' and may bid dejected and disquieted souls to hope in God and be still.

THE KING IN HIS BEAUTY

> 'Thou art fairer than the children of men; grace is poured into Thy lips: therefore God hath blessed Thee forever. 3. Gird Thy sword upon Thy thigh, O mighty one, Thy glory and Thy majesty. 4. And in Thy majesty ride on prosperously, because of truth and meekness and righteousness: and Thy right hand shall teach Thee terrible things. 5. Thine arrows are sharp; the peoples fall under Thee; they are in the heart of the King's enemies. 6. Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever: a sceptre of equity is the sceptre of Thy kingdom. 7. Thou hast loved righteousness, and hated wickedness: therefore God, Thy God, hath anointed Thee with the oil of gladness above Thy fellows.' — PSALM xlv. 2-7 (R.V.).

There is no doubt that this psalm was originally the marriage hymn of some Jewish king. All attempts to settle who that was have failed, for the very obvious reason that neither the history nor the character of any of them correspond to the psalm. Its language is a world too wide for the diminutive stature and stained virtues of the greatest and best of them, and it is almost ludicrous to attempt to fit its glowing sentences even to a Solomon. They all look like little David in Saul's armour. So, then, we must

admit one of two things. Either we have here a piece of poetical exaggeration far beyond the limits of poetic license, or 'a greater than Solomon is here.' Every Jewish king, by virtue of his descent and of his office, was a living prophecy of the greatest of the sons of David, the future King of Israel. And the Psalmist sees the ideal Person who, as he knew, was one day to be real, shining through the shadowy form of the earthly king, whose very limitations and defects, no less than his excellences and his glories, forced the devout Israelite to think of the coming King in whom 'the sure mercies' promised to David should be facts at last. In plainer words, the psalm celebrates Christ, not only although, but because, it had its origin and partial application in a forgotten festival at the marriage of some unknown king. It sees Him in the light of the Messianic hope, and so it prophesies of Christ. My object is to study the features of this portrait of the King, partly in order that we may better understand the psalm, and partly in order that we may with the more reverence crown Him as Lord of all.

I. The Person of the King.

The old-world ideal of a monarch put special emphasis upon two things—personal beauty and courtesy of address and speech. The psalm ascribes both of these to the King of Israel, and from both of them draws the conclusion that one so richly endowed with the most eminent of royal graces is the object of the special favour of God. 'Thou art

fairer than the children of men, grace is poured into Thy lips: therefore God hath blessed Thee for ever.'

Here, at the very outset, we have the keynote struck of superhuman excellence; and though the reference is, on the surface, only to physical perfection, yet beneath that there lies the deeper reference to a character which spoke through the eloquent frame, and in which all possible beauties and sovereign graces were united in fullest development, in most harmonious co-operation and unstained purity.

'Thou art fairer than the children of men.' Put side by side with that, words which possibly refer to, and seem to contradict it. A later prophet, speaking of the same Person, said: 'His visage was so marred, more than any man, and His form than the sons of men…. There is no form nor comeliness, and when we shall see Him there is no beauty that we should desire Him.' We have to think, not of the outward form, howsoever lovely with the loveliness of meekness and transfigured with the refining patience of suffering it may have been, but of the beauty of a soul that was all radiant with a lustre of loveliness that shames the fragmentary and marred virtues of the best of us, and stands before the world for ever as the supreme type and high-water mark of the grace that is possible to a human spirit. God has lodged in men's nature the apprehension of Himself, and of all that flows from Him, as true, as good, as beautiful; and to these three there correspond

wisdom, morality, and art. The latter, divorced from the other two, becomes earthly and devilish. This generation needs the lesson that beauty wrenched from truth and goodness, and pursued for its own sake, by artist or by poet or by *dilettante*, leads by a straight descent to ugliness and to evil, and that the only true satisfying of the deep longing for 'whatsoever things are lovely' is to be found when we turn to Christ and find in Him, not only wisdom that enlightens the understanding, and righteousness that fills the conscience, but beauty that satisfies the heart. He is 'altogether lovely.' Nor let us forget that once on earth 'the fashion of His countenance was altered, and His raiment did shine as the light,' as indicative of the possibilities that lay slumbering in His lowly Manhood, and as prophetic of that to which we believe that the ascended Christ hath now attained—viz. the body of His glory, wherein He reigns, filled with light and undecaying loveliness on the Throne of the Heaven. Thus He is fairer in external reality now, as He is, by the confession of an admiring, though not always believing, world, fairer in inward character than the children of men.

Another personal characteristic is 'Grace is poured into Thy lips.' Kingly courtesy, and kingly graciousness of word, must be the characteristic of the Sovereign of men. The abundance of that bestowment is expressed by that word, 'poured.' We need only remember, 'All wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of His mouth,' or how

even the rough instruments of authority were touched and diverted from their appointed purpose, and came back and said, 'Never man spake like this Man.' To the music of Christ's words all other eloquence is harsh, poor, shallow—like the piping of a shepherd boy upon some wretched oaten straw as compared with the full thunder of the organ. Words of unmingled graciousness came from His lips. That fountain never sent forth 'sweet waters and bitter.' He satisfies the canon of St. James: 'If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man.' Words of wisdom, of love, of pity, of gentleness, of pardon, of bestowment, and only such, came from Him. 'Daughter! be of good cheer.' 'Son! thy sins be forgiven thee.' 'Come unto Me all ye that labour and are heavy-laden.'

'Grace is poured into Thy lips'; and, withal, it is the grace of a King. For His language is authoritative even when it is most tender, and regal when it is most gentle. His lips, sweet as honey and the honeycomb, are the lips of an Autocrat. 'He speaks, and it is done: He commands, and it stands fast.' He says to the tempest, 'Be still!' and it is quiet; and to the demons, 'Come out of him!' and they disappear; and to the dead, 'Come forth!' and he stumbles from the tomb.

Another personal characteristic is—'God hath blessed Thee for ever.' By which we are to understand, not that the two preceding graces are the reasons for the divine benediction, but that the

divine benediction is the cause of them; and therefore they are the signs of it. It is not that because He is lovely and gracious therefore God hath blessed Him; but it is that we may know that God has blessed Him, since He is lovely and gracious. These endowments are the results, not the causes; the signs or the proofs, not the reasons of the divine benediction. That is to say, the humanity so fair and unique shows by its beauty that it is the result of the continual and unique operation and benediction of a present God. We understand Him when we say, 'On Him rests the Spirit of God without measure or interruption.' The explanation of the perfect humanity is the abiding Divinity.

II. We pass from the person of the King, in the next place, to His warfare.

The Psalmist breaks out in a burst of invocation, calling upon the King to array Himself in His weapons of warfare, and then in broken clauses vividly pictures the conflict. The Invocation runs thus: 'Gird on thy sword upon thy thigh, O mighty hero! gird on thy glory and thy majesty, and ride on prosperously on behalf (or, in the cause) of truth and meekness and righteousness.' The King, then, is the perfection of warrior strength as well as of beauty and gentleness—a combination of qualities that speaks of old days when kings *were* kings, and reminds us of many a figure in ancient song, as well as of a Saul and a David in Jewish history.

The singer calls upon Him to bind on His side His glittering sword, and to put on, as His armour, 'glory and majesty.' These two words, in the usage of the psalms, belong to Divinity, and they are applied to the monarch here as being the earthly representative of the divine supremacy, on whom there falls some reflection of the glory and the majesty of which He is the vice-regent and representative. Thus arrayed, with His weapon by His side and glittering armour on His limbs, He is called upon to mount His chariot or His warhorse and ride forth.

But for what? 'On behalf of truth, meekness, righteousness.' If He be a warrior, these are the purposes for which the true King of men must draw His sword, and these only. No vulgar ambition or cruel lust of conquest, earth-hunger, or 'glory' actuates Him. Nothing but the spread through the world of the gracious beauties which are His own can be the end of the King's warfare. He fights for truth; He fights—strange paradox—for meekness; He fights for righteousness. And He not only fights *for* them, but *with* them, for they are His own, and by *reason* of them He 'rides prosperously,' as well as 'rides prosperously' in order to establish them.

In two or three swift touches the Psalmist next paints the tumult and hurry of the fight. 'Thy right hand shall teach Thee terrible things.' There are no armies or allies, none to stand beside Him. The one mighty figure of the Kingly Warrior stands forth, as in the Assyrian sculptures of conquerors, erect and

solitary in His chariot, crashing through the ranks of the enemy, and owing victory to His own strong arm alone.

Then follow three short, abrupt clauses, which, in their hurry and fragmentary character, reflect the confusion and swiftness of battle. 'Thine arrows are sharp…. The people fall under Thee.' … 'In the heart of the King's enemies.' The Psalmist sees the bright arrow on the string; it flies; he looks—the plain is strewed with prostrate forms, the King's arrow in the heart of each.

Put side by side with that this picture:—A rocky road; a great city shining in the morning sunlight across a narrow valley; a crowd of shouting peasants waving palm branches in their rustic hands; in the centre the meek carpenter's Son, sitting upon the poor robes which alone draped the ass's colt, the tears upon His cheeks, and His lamenting heard above the Hosannahs, as He looked across the glen and said, 'If thou hadst known the things that belong to thy peace!' That is the fulfilment, or part of the fulfilment, of this prophecy. The slow-pacing, peaceful beast and the meek, weeping Christ are the reality of the vision which, in such strangely contrasted and yet true form, floated before the prophetic eye of this ancient singer, for Christ's humiliation is His majesty, and His sharpest weapon is His all-penetrating love, and His cross is His chariot of victory and throne of dominion.

But not only in His earthly life of meek suffering does Christ fight as a King, but all through the ages the world-wide conflict for truth and meekness and righteousness is His conflict; and wherever that is being waged, the power which wages it is His, and the help which is done upon earth He doeth it all Himself. True, He has His army, willing in the day of His power, and clad in priestly purity and armour of light, but all their strength, courage, and victory are from Him; and when they fight and conquer, it is not they, but He in them who struggles and overcomes. We have a better hope than that built on 'a stream of tendency that makes for righteousness.' We know a Christ crucified and crowned, who fights for it, and what He fights for will hold the field.

This prophecy of our psalm is not exhausted yet. I have set side by side with it one picture—the Christ on the ass's colt. Put side by side with it this other. 'I beheld the heaven opened; and lo! a white horse. And He that sat upon him was called Faithful and True; and in righteousness He doth judge and make war.' The psalm waits for its completion still, and shall be fulfilled on that day of the true marriage supper of the Lamb, when the festivities of the marriage chamber shall be preceded by the last battle and crowning victory of the King of kings, the Conqueror of the world.

III. Lastly, we have the royalty of the King.

'Thy throne, O God! is for ever and ever.' This is

not the place nor time to enter on the discussion of the difficulties of these words. I must run the risk of appearing to state confident opinions without assigning reasons, when I venture to say that the translation in the Authorised Version is the natural one. I do not say that others have been adopted by reason of doctrinal prepossessions; I know nothing about that; but I do say that they are not by any means so natural a translation as that which stands before us. What it may mean is another matter; but the plain rendering of the words, I venture to assert, is what our English Bible makes it—'Thy throne, O God! is for ever and ever.'

Then it is to be remembered that, throughout the Old Testament, we have occasional instances of the use of that great and solemn designation in reference to persons in such place and authority as that they are representatives of God. So kings and judges and lawyers and the like are spoken of more than once. Therefore there is not, in the language, translated as in our English Bible, necessarily the implication of the unique divinity of the persons so addressed. But I take it that this is an instance in which the prophet was 'wiser than he knew,' and in which you and I understand him better than he understood himself, and know what God, who spoke through him, meant, whatsoever the prophet, through whom He spoke, did mean. That is to say, I take the words before us as directly referring to Jesus Christ, and as directly declaring the divinity of His person, and therefore

the eternity of His kingdom.

We live in days when that perpetual sovereignty is being questioned. In a revolutionary time like this it is well for Christian people, seeing so many venerable things going, to tighten their grasp upon the conviction that, whatever goes, Christ's kingdom will not go; and that, whatever may be shaken by any storms, the foundation of His Throne stands fast. For our personal lives, and for the great hopes of the future beyond the grave, it is all-important that we should grasp, as an elementary conviction of our faith, the belief in the perpetual rule of that Saviour whose rule is life and peace. In the great mosque of Damascus, which was a Christian church once, there may still be read, deeply cut in the stone, high above the pavement where now Mohammedans bow, these words, 'Thy kingdom, O Christ! is an everlasting kingdom.' It is true, and it shall yet be known that He is for ever and ever the Monarch of the world.

Then, again, this royalty is a royalty of righteousness. 'The sceptre of Thy kingdom is a right sceptre. Thou lovest righteousness and hatest wickedness.' His rule is no arbitrary sway, His rod is no rod of iron and tyrannical oppression, His own personal character is righteousness. Righteousness is the very life-blood and animating principle of His rule. He loves righteousness, and, therefore, puts His broad shield of protection over all who love it and seek after it. He hates wickedness, and therefore He wars against it wherever it is, and seeks to draw men

out of it. And thus His kingdom is the hope of the world.

And, lastly, this dominion of perennial righteousness is the dominion of unparalleled gladness. 'Therefore God, even Thy God, hath anointed Thee with the oil of joy above Thy fellows.' Set side by side with that the other words, 'A Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief.' And remember how, near the very darkest hour of the Lord's earthly experiences, He said:—'These things have I spoken unto you that My joy may remain in you, and that your joy may be full.' Christ's gladness flowed from Christ's righteousness. Because His pure humanity was ever in touch with God, and in conscious obedience to Him, therefore, though darkness was around, there was light within. He was 'sorrowful, yet always rejoicing,' and the saddest of men was likewise the gladdest, and possessed 'the oil of joy above His fellows.'

Brother! that kingdom is offered to us; participation in that joy of our Lord may belong to each of us. He rules that He may make us like Himself, lovers of righteousness, and so, like Himself, possessors of unfading joy. Make Him your King, let His arrow reach your heart, bow in submission to His power, take for your very life His words of graciousness, lovingly gaze upon His beauty till some reflection of it shall shine from you, fight by His side with strength drawn from Him alone, own and adore Him as the enthroned God-man, Jesus Christ, the Son

of God. Crown Him with the many crowns of supreme trust, heart-whole love, and glad obedience. So shall you be honoured to share in His warfare and triumph. So shall you have a throne close to His and eternal as it. So shall His sceptre be graciously stretched out to you to give you access with boldness to the presence-chamber of the King. So shall He give you too, 'the oil of joy for mourning,' even in the 'valley of weeping,' and the fulness of His gladness for evermore, when He sets you at His right hand.

THE PORTRAIT OF THE BRIDE

'Hearken, O daughter, and consider, and incline thine ear; forget also thine own people, and thy father's house; 11. So shall the King desire thy beauty: for He is thy Lord; and worship thou Him. 12. And the daughter of Tyre shall be there with a gift; even the rich among the people shall entreat thy favour. 13. The King's daughter within the palace is all glorious: her clothing is inwrought with gold. 14. She shall be led unto the King in broidered work: the virgins, her companions, that follow her shall be brought unto thee. 15. With gladness and

rejoicing shall they be led; they shall enter into the King's palace.'—PSALM xlv. 10-15 (R.V.).

The relation between God and Israel is constantly represented in the Old Testament under the emblem of a marriage. The tenderest promises of protection and the sharpest rebukes of unfaithfulness are based upon this foundation. 'Thy Maker is thy Husband'; or, 'I am married unto thee, saith the Lord.' The emblem is transferred in the New Testament to Christ and His Church. Beginning with John the Baptist's designation of Him as the Bridegroom, it reappears in many of our Lord's sayings and parables, is frequent in the writings of the Apostle Paul, and reaches its height of poetic splendour and terror in that magnificent description in Revelation of 'the Bride, the Lamb's wife,' and 'the marriage supper of the Lamb.'

Seeing, then, the continual occurrence of this metaphor, it is unnatural and almost impossible to deny its presence in this psalm. In a former sermon I have directed attention to the earlier portion of it, which presents us, in its portraiture of the King, a shadowy and prophetic outline of Jesus Christ. I desire, in a similar fashion, to deal now with the latter portion, which, in its portrait of the bride, presents us with truths having their real fulfilment in the Church collectively and in the individual soul.

Of course, inasmuch as the consort of a Jewish monarch was not an incarnate prophecy as her

husband was, the transference of the historical features of this wedding-song to a spiritual purpose is not so satisfactory, or easy, in the latter part as in the former. There is a thicker rind of prose fact, as it were, to cut through, and certain of the features cannot be applied to the relation between Christ and His Church without undue violence. But, whilst we admit that, it is also clear that the main, broad outlines of this picture do require as well as permit its higher application. Therefore I turn to them to try to bring out what they teach us so eloquently and vividly of Christ's gifts to, and requirements from, the souls that are wedded to Him.

I. Now the first point is this—the all-surrendering Love that must mark the Bride.

The language of the tenth verse is the voice of prophecy or inspiration; speaking words of fatherly counsel to the princess—'Forget also thine own people and thy father's house.' Historically I suppose it points to the foreign birth of the queen, who is called upon to abandon all old ties, and to give herself with wholehearted consecration to her new duties and relations.

In all real wedded life, as those who have tasted it know, there comes, by sweet necessity, the subordination, in the presence of a purer and more absorbing love, brought close by a will itself ablaze with the sacred glow.

Therefore, while giving all due honour to other forms of Christian opposition to the prevailing unbelief, I urge the cultivation of a quickened spiritual life as by far the most potent. Does not history bear me out in that view? What, for instance, was it that finished the infidelity of the eighteenth century? Whether had Butler's *Analogy* or Charles Wesley's hymns, Paley's *Evidences* or Whitefield's sermons, most to do with it? A languid Church breeds unbelief as surely as a decaying oak does fungus. In a condition of depressed vitality, the seeds of disease, which a full vigour would shake off, are fatal. Raise the temperature, and you kill the insect germs. A warmer tone of spiritual life would change the atmosphere which unbelief needs for its growth. It belongs to the fauna of the glacial epoch, and when the rigours of that wintry time begin to melt, and warmer days to set in, the creatures of the ice have to retreat to arctic wildernesses, and leave a land no longer suited for their life. A diffused unbelief, such as we see around us to-day, does not really arise from the logical basis on which it seems to repose. It comes from something much deeper,—a certain habit and set of mind which gives these arguments their force. For want of a better name, we call it the spirit of the age. It is the result of very subtle and complicated forces, which I do not pretend to analyse. It spreads through society, and forms the congenial soil in which these seeds of evil, as we believe them to be, take root. Does anybody suppose that the growth of popular unbelief is owing

to the logical force of certain arguments? It is in the air; a wave of it is passing over us. We are in a condition in which it becomes shall drop the toys of earth as easily and naturally as a child will some trinket or plaything, when it stretches out its little hand to get a better gift from its loving mother. Love will sweep the heart clean of its antagonists; and there is no real union between Jesus Christ and us except in the measure in which we joyfully, and not as a reluctant giving up of things that we would much rather keep if we durst, 'count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus our Lord.'

Have the terms of wedded life changed since my psalm was written? Is there less need now than there used to be that, if we are to possess a heart, we should give a whole heart? And have the terms of Christian living altered since the old days, when He said, 'Whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be My disciple'? Ah! I fear me that it is no uncharitable judgment to say that the bulk of so-called Christians are playing at being Christians, and have never penetrated into the depths either of the sweet all-sufficiency of the love which they say that they possess, or the constraining necessity that is in it for the surrender of all besides. Many happy husbands and wives, if they would only treat Jesus Christ as they treat one another, would find out a power and a blessedness in the Christian life that they know nothing about at present.

'Daughter! forget thine own people and thy father's house!'

II. Again, the second point here is that which directly follows—the King's love and the Bride's reverence. 'So shall the King greatly desire thy beauty: for He is thy Lord; and worship thou Him.'

The King is drawn, in the outgoings of His affection, by the sweet trust and perfect love which has surrendered everything for him and happily followed him from the far-off land. And then, in accordance with Oriental ideas, and with His royal rank, the bride is exhorted, in the midst of the utter trust and equality born of love, to remember, 'He is thy Lord, and reverence thou Him.' So, then, here are two thoughts that go, as I take it, very deep into the realities of the Christian life. The first is that, in simple literal fact, Jesus Christ is affected, in His relation to us, by the completeness of our dependence upon Him, and surrender of all else for Him. We do not believe that half vividly enough. We have surrounded Jesus Christ with a halo of mystery and of remoteness which neither lets us think of Him as being really man or really God. And I press on you this as a plain fact, no piece of pulpit rhetoric, that His relation to us as Christians hinges upon our surrender to Him. Of course, there is a love with which He pours Himself out over the unworthy and the sinful—blessed be His name!—and the more sinful and the more unworthy, the deeper the tenderness and the more yearning the pity and

pathos of invitation which He lavishes upon us. But that is a different thing from this other, which is that He is pleased or displeased, actually drawn to or repelled from us, in the measure of the completeness and gladness of our surrender of ourselves to Him. That is what Paul means when he says that he labours that 'whether present or absent he may be pleasing to Christ.' And this is the highest and strongest motive that I know for all holy and noble living, that we shall bring a smile into our Master's face and draw Him nearer to ourselves thereby. '*So* shall the King greatly desire thy beauty.'

Again, in the measure in which we live out our Christianity, in whole-hearted and thorough surrender, in that measure shall we be *conscious* of His nearness and feel His love.

There are many Christian people that have only religion enough to make them uncomfortable, only enough to make religion to them a system of regulations, negative and positive, the reasonableness and sweetness of which they but partially apprehend. They must not do *this* because it is forbidden; they ought to do *that* because it is commanded. They would much rather do the forbidden thing, and they have no wish to do the commanded thing, and so they live in twilight, and when they come beside a man who really has been walking in the light of Christ's face, the language of his experience, though it be but a transcript of facts, sounds to them all unreal and fanatical. They miss

the blessing that is waiting for them, just because they have not really given up themselves. If by resolute and continual opening of our hearts to Christ's real love and presence, and by consequent casting off of our false and foolish self-dependence, we were to blow away the clouds that come between us and Him, we should feel the sunshine. But as it is, a miserable multitude of professing Christians 'walk in the darkness, and have no light,' or, at the most, but some wintry sunshine that struggles through the thick mist, and does little more than reveal the barrenness that lies around. Brethren! if you want to be happy Christians, be out-and-out ones; and if you would have your hands and your hearts filled with Christ, empty them of the trash that they grip so closely now.

Then, on the other side, there is the reminder and exhortation: 'He is thy Lord, worship thou Him.' The beggar-maid that, in the old ballad, married the king, in all her love was filled with reverence; and the ragged, filthy souls, whom Jesus Christ stoops to love, and wash, and make His own, are never to forget, in the highest rapture of their joy, their lowly adoration, nor in the glad familiarity of their loving approach to Him, cease to remember that the test of love is, 'Keep My commandments.'

There are types of emotional and sentimental religion that have a great deal more to say about love than about obedience; that are full of half wholesome apostrophes to a 'dear Lord,' and almost

forget the '*Lord*' in the emphasis which they put on the '*dear*.' And I want you to remember this, as by no means an unnecessary caution, and of especial value in some quarters to-day, that the test of the reality of Christian love is its lowliness, and that all that which indulges in heated emotion, and forgets practical service, is rotten and spurious. Though the King desire her beauty, still, when He stretches out the golden sceptre, Esther must come to Him with lowly guise and a reverent heart. 'He is thy Lord, worship thou Him.'

III. The next point in this portraiture is the reflected honour and influence of the bride.

There are difficulties about the translation of the 12th verse of our psalm with which I do not need to trouble you. We may take it for our purpose as it stands before us. 'The daughter of Tyre' (representing the wealthy, outside nations) 'shall be there with a gift; even the rich among the people shall entreat thy favour.'

The bride being thus beloved by the King, thus standing by His side, those around recognise her dignity and honour, and draw near to secure her intercession. Translate that out of the emblem into plain words, and it comes to this—if Christian people, and communities of such, are to have influence in the world, they must be thorough-going Christians. If they are, they will get hatred sometimes; but men know honest people and

religious people when they see them, and such Christians will win respect and be a power in the world. If Christian men and Christian communities are despised by outsiders, they very generally earn the contempt and deserve it, both from men and from heaven. The true evangelist is Christian character. They that manifestly live with the sunshine of the Lord's love on their faces, and whose hands are plainly clear from worldly and selfish graspings, will have the world recognising the fact and honouring them accordingly. 'The sons of them that afflicted thee shall come bending unto thee, and all they that despised thee shall bow themselves down to the soles of thy feet.' When the Church has cast the world out of its heart, it will conquer the world—and not till then.

IV. The next point in this picture is the fair adornment of the bride. The language is in part ambiguous; and if this were the place for commenting would require a good deal of comment. But we take it as it stands in our Bible, 'The King's daughter is all glorious within'—not within her nature, but within the innermost recesses of the palace—'her clothing is of wrought gold. She shall be brought unto the King in raiment of needlework.'

It is an easy and well-worn metaphor to talk about people's character as their dress. We speak about the 'habits' of a man, and we use that word to express both his customary manners and his costume. Custom and costume, again, are the same word. So

here, without any departure from the well-trodden path of Scriptural emblem, we cannot but see in the glorious apparel the figure of the pure character with which the bride is clothed. The Book of the Revelation dresses her in the fine linen clean and white, which symbolises the lustrous radiance and snowy purity of righteousness. The psalm describes her dress as partly consisting in garments gleaming with gold, which suggests splendour and glory, and partly in robes of careful and many-coloured embroidery, which suggests the patience with which the slow needle has been worked through the stuff, and the variegated and manifold graces and beauties with which she is adorned.

So, putting all the metaphors together, the true Christian character, which will be ours if we really are the subjects of that divine love, will be lustrous and snowy as the snows on Hermon, or as was the garment whose whiteness outshone the neighbouring snows when He was 'transfigured before them.' Our characters will be splendid with a splendour far above the tawdry beauties and vulgar conspicuousness of the 'heroic' and worldly ideals, and will be endowed with a purity and harmony of colouring in richly various graces, such as no earthly looms can ever weave.

We are not told here how the garment is attained. It is no part of the purpose of the psalm to tell us that, but it is part of its purpose to insist that there is no marriage between Christ and the soul except that

soul be pure, none except it be robed in the beauty of righteousness and the splendour of consecration, and the various gifts of an all-giving Spirit. The man that came into the wedding-feast, with his dirty, every-day clothes on, was turned out as a rude insulter. But what of the queen that should come foully dressed? There would be no place for her amidst its solemnities. You will never stand at the right hand of Christ, unless jour souls here are clothed in the fine linen clean and white, and over it the flashing wealth and the harmonised splendour of the gold and embroidery of Christlike graces. We know how to get the garment. Faith strips the rags and puts the best robe on us; and effort based upon faith enables us day by day to put off the old man with his deeds and to put on the new man. The bride 'made *herself* ready,' and 'to her was *granted* that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white.'

V. Lastly, we have the picture of the homecoming of the bride. 'She shall be brought unto the King…. with gladness and rejoicing shall they be brought; they shall enter into the King's palace.'

The presence of virgin companions waiting on the bride is no more difficult to understand here than it is in Christ's parable of the Ten Virgins. It is a characteristic of all parabolical representation to be elastic, and sometimes to duplicate its emblems for the same thing; and that is the case here. But the main point to be insisted upon is this, that, according to the perspective of Scripture, the life of the

Christian Church here on earth is, if I may so say, a betrothal in righteousness and loving-kindness; and that the betrothal waits for its consummation in that great future when the bride shall pass into the presence of the King. The whole collective body of sinful souls redeemed by His blood, and who know the sweetness of His partially received love, shall be drawn within the curtains of that upper house, and enter into a union with Christ Jesus ineffable, incomprehensible till experienced; and of which the closest union of loving souls on earth is but a dim shadow. 'He that is joined to the Lord is one spirit'; and the reality of our union with Him rises above the emblem of a marriage, as high as spirit rises above flesh.

The psalm stops at the palace-gate. 'Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him.' But there is a solemn prelude to that completed union and its deep rapture. Before it there comes the last campaign of the conquering King on the white horse, who wars in righteousness. Dear friends! you must choose now whether you will be of the company of the Bride or of the company of the enemy. 'They that were ready went in with Him unto the marriage, and the door was shut.'

Which side of the door do *you* mean to be on?

THE CITY AND RIVER OF GOD

> 'There is a river, the streams whereof shall make glad the city of God, the holy place of the tabernacles of the most High. 5. God is in the midst of her; she shall not be moved: God shall help her, and that right early. 6. The heathen raged, the kingdoms were moved: He uttered His voice, the earth melted. 7. The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge.'—PSALM xlvi 4-7.

There are two remarkable events in the history of Israel, one or other of which most probably supplied the historical basis upon which this psalm rests. One is that wonderful deliverance of the armies of Jehoshaphat from the attacking forces of the bordering nations, which is recorded in the twentieth chapter of the Book of Chronicles. There you will find that, by a singular arrangement, the sons of Korah, members of the priestly order, were not only in the van of the battle, but celebrated the victory by hymns of gladness. It is possible that this may be one of those hymns; but I think rather that the more ordinary reference is the correct one, which sees in this psalm and in the two succeeding ones, echoes of that supernatural deliverance of Israel in the time of Hezekiah, when

'The Assyrian came down like a wolf on the fold,'

and Sennacherib and all his army were, by the blast of the breath of His nostrils, swept into swift destruction.

The reasons for that historical reference may be briefly stated. We find, for instance, a number of remarkable correspondences between these three psalms and portions of the Book of the prophet Isaiah, who, as we know, lived in the period of that deliverance. The comparison, for example, which is here drawn with such lofty, poetic force between the quiet river which 'makes glad the city of God,' and the tumultuous billows of the troubled sea, which shakes the mountain and moves the earth, is drawn by Isaiah in regard to the Assyrian invasion, when he speaks of Israel refusing 'the waters of Shiloah, which go softly,' and, therefore, having brought upon them the waters of the river—the power of Assyria —'which shall fill the breadth of Thy land, O Immanuel!' Notice, too, that the very same consolation which was given to Isaiah, by the revelation of that significant appellation, 'Immanuel, God with us,' appears in this psalm as a kind of refrain, and is the foundation of all its confident gladness, 'The Lord of Hosts is with us.' Besides these obvious parallelisms, there are others to which I need not refer, which, taken together, seem to render it at least probable that we have in this psalm the devotional echo of the great deliverance of Israel from Assyria in the time of Hezekiah.

Now, these verses are the cardinal central portion of the song. We may call them The Hymn of the Defence and Deliverance of the City of God. We cannot expect to find in poetry the same kind of logical accuracy in the process of thought which we require in treatises; but the lofty emotion of devout song obeys laws of its own: and it is well to surrender ourselves to the flow, and to try to see with the Psalmist's eyes for a moment his sources of consolation and strength.

I take the four points which seem to be the main turning-points of these verses—first, the gladdening river; second, the indwelling Helper; third, the conquering voice; and fourth, the alliance of ourselves by faith with the safe dwellers in the city of God.

I. First, we have the gladdening river—an emblem of many great and joyous truths.

The figure is occasioned by, or at all events derives much of its significance from, a geographical peculiarity of Jerusalem. Alone among the great cities and historical centres of the world, it stood upon no broad river. One little perennial stream, or rather rill of living water, was all which it had; but Siloam was mightier and more blessed for the dwellers in the rocky fortress of the Jebusites than the Euphrates, Nile, or Tiber for the historical cities which stood upon their banks. One can see the Psalmist looking over the plain eastward, and

beholding in vision the mighty forces which came against them, symbolised and expressed by the breadth and depth and swiftness of the great river upon which Nineveh sat as a queen, and then thinking upon the little tiny thread of living water that flowed past the base of the rock upon which the temple was perched. It seems small and unconspicuous—nothing compared to the dash of the waves and the rise of the floods of those mighty secular empires, still, 'There is a river the streams whereof shall make glad the city of God.' Its waters shall never fail, and thirst shall flee whithersoever this river comes.

It is also to be remembered that the psalm is running in the track of a certain constant symbolism that pervades all Scripture. From the first book of Genesis down to the last chapter of Revelation, you can hear the dashing of the waters of the river. 'It went out from the garden and parted into four heads.' 'Thou makest them drink of the river of Thy pleasures.' 'Behold, waters issued out from under the threshold of the house eastward,' and 'everything shall live whithersoever the river cometh.' 'He that believeth on me, out of His belly shall flow rivers of living water.' 'And he shewed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb.' Isaiah, who has already afforded some remarkable parallels to the words of our psalm, gives another very striking one to the image now under consideration, when he says,

'The glorious Lord will be unto us a place of broad rivers and streams, wherein shall go no galley with oars.' The picture in that metaphor is of a stream lying round Jerusalem, like the moated rivers which girdle some of the cities in the plains of Italy, and are the defence of those who dwell enclosed in their flashing links.

Guided, then, by the physical peculiarity of situation which I have referred to, and by the constant meaning of Scriptural symbolism, I think we must conclude that this river, 'the streams whereof make glad the city of God,' is God Himself in the outflow and self-communication of His own grace to the soul. The stream is the fountain in flow. The gift of God, which is living water, is God Himself, considered as the ever-imparting Source of all refreshment, of all strength, of all blessedness. 'This spake He of the Spirit, which they that believe should receive.'

We must dwell for a moment or two still further upon these words, and mark how this metaphor, in a most simple and natural way, sets forth very grand and blessed spiritual truths with regard to this communication of God's grace to them that love Him and trust Him. First, I think we may see here a very beautiful suggestion of the manner, and then of the variety, and then of the effects of that communication of the divine love and grace.

We have only to read the previous verses to see

what I mean. 'God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore will not we fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea; though the waters thereof roar and be troubled, though the mountains shake with the swelling thereof.' There you can hear the wild waves dashing round the base of the firm hills, sapping their strength, and toppling their crests down in the bubbling, yeasty foam. Remember how, not only in Scripture but in all poetry, the sea has been the emblem of endless unrest. Its waters, those barren, wandering fields of foam, going moaning round the world with unprofitable labour, how they have been the emblem of unbridled power, of tumult and strife, and anarchy and rebellion! Then mark how our text brings into sharpest contrast with all that hurly-burly of the tempest, and the dash and roar of the troubled waters, the gentle, quiet flow of the river, 'the streams whereof make glad the city of God'; the translucent little ripples purling along beds of golden pebbles, and the enamelled meadows drinking the pure stream as it steals by them. Thus, says our psalm, not with noise, not with tumult, not with conspicuous and destructive energy, but in silent, secret underground communication, God's grace, God's love, His peace, His power, His almighty and gentle Self flow into men's souls. Quietness and confidence on our sides correspond to the quietness and serenity with which He glides into the heart. Instead of all the noise of the sea you have within

the quiet impartations of the voice that is still and small, wherein God dwells. The extremest power is silent. The mightiest force in all the universe is the force which has neither speech nor language. The parent of all physical force, as astronomers seem to be more and more teaching us, is the great central sun which moveth all things, which operates all physical changes, whose beams are all but omnipotent, and yet fall so quietly that they do not disturb the motes that dance in their path. Thunder and lightning are child's play compared with the energy that goes to make the falling dews and quiet rains. The power of the sunshine is the root power of all force which works in material things. And so we turn, with the symbol in our hands, to the throne of God, and when He says, 'Not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit,' we are aware of an energy, the signature of whose might is its quietness, which is omnipotent because it is gentle and silent. The seas may roar and be troubled, the tiny thread of the river is mightier than them all.

And then, still further, in this first part of our text there is also set forth very distinctly the number and the variety of the gifts of God. 'The streams whereof,' literally, 'the divisions whereof,'—that is to say, going back to Eastern ideas, the broad river is broken up into canals that are led off into every man's little bit of garden ground; coming down to modern ideas, the water is carried by pipes into every man's household and chamber. The stream has its divisions;

listen to words that are a commentary upon the meaning of this verse, 'All these worketh that one and the selfsame Spirit, dividing unto every man severally as He will'—an infinite variety, an endless diversity, according to all the petty wants of each that is supplied thereby. As you can divide water all but infinitely, and it will take the shape of every containing vessel, so into every soul according to its capacities, according to its shape, according to its needs, this great gift, this blessed presence of the God of our strength, will come. The varieties of His gifts are as much the mark of His omnipotence as the gentleness and stillness of them.

And then I need only touch upon the last thought, the effects of this communicated God. 'The streams make glad'—with the gladness which comes from refreshment, with the gladness which comes from the satisfying of all thirsty desires, with the gladness which comes from the contact of the spirit with absolute completeness; of the will, with perfect authority; of the heart, with changeless love; of the understanding, with pure incarnate truth; of the conscience, with infinite peace; of the child, with the Father; of my emptiness, with His fulness; of my changeableness, with His immutability; of my incompleteness, with His perfectness. They to whom this stream passes shall know no thirst; they who possess it from them it shall come. Out of him 'shall flow rivers of living water.' That all-sufficient Spirit not only becomes to its possessor the source of

individual refreshment, and slakes his own thirst, but flows out from him for the gladdening of others.

> 'The least flower with a brimming cup may stand,
> And share its dew-drop with another near.'

The city thus supplied may laugh at besieging hosts. With the deep reservoir in its central fortress, the foe may do as they list to all surface streams, its water shall be sure, and no raging thirst shall ever drive it to surrender. The river breaks from the threshold of the Temple, within its walls, and when all beyond that safe enclosure is cracked and parched in the fierce heat, and no green thing can be seen in the dry and thirsty land, that stream shall 'make glad the city of our God,' and 'everything shall live whithersoever the river cometh.' 'Thou shalt be as a well-watered garden, and as a river whose streams fail not.'

II. Then notice, secondly, substantially the same general thought, but modified and put in plain words —the indwelling Helper.

'God is in the midst of her, she shall not be moved: God shall help her, *and that* right early,' or, as the latter clause had better be translated, as it is given in the margin of some of our Bibles, 'God shall help her at the appearance of the morning.' There are two promises here: first of all, the constant presence; and second, help at the right time. Whether there be actual help or no, there is always with us the

potential help of God, and it flashes into energy at the moment that He knows to be the right one. The 'appearing of the morning' He determines; not you or I. Therefore, we may be confident that we have God ever by our sides. Not that that Presence is meant to avert outward or inward trouble and trial, and painfulness and weariness; but in the midst of these, and while they last, here is the assurance, 'She shall not be moved'; and that it will not always last, here is the ground of the confidence, 'God shall help her when the morning dawns.'

I need not point out to you the contrast here between the tranquillity of the city which has for its central Inhabitant and Governor the omnipotent God, and the tumult of all that turbulent earth. The waves of the troubled waters break everywhere,—they run over the flat plains and sweep over the mountains of secular strength and outward might, and worldly kingdoms, and human polities and earthly institutions, acting on them all either by slow corrosive action at the base, or by the tossing floods swirling against them, until they shall be lost in the ocean of time. For 'the history of the world is the judgment of the world.' When He wills the plains are covered and mountains disappear, but one rock stands fast—'The mountain of the Lord's house is exalted above the top of the mountains'; and when everything is rocking and swaying in the tempests, here is fixity and tranquillity. 'She shall not be moved.' Why? Because of her citizens? No. Because

of her guards and gates? No! Because of her polity? No! Because of her orthodoxy? No! But because God is in her, and she is safe, and where He dwells no evil can come. 'Thou carriest Caesar and his fortunes.' The ship of Christ carries the Lord and His fortunes; and, therefore, whatsoever becomes of the other little ships in the wild dash of the tempest, this with the Lord on board arrives at its desired haven —'God is in the midst of her, she shall not be moved.'

Then, still further, that Presence which is always the pledge of stability, and unmoved calm, even while causes of agitation are storming around, will, as I said, flash into energy, and be a Helper and a Deliverer at the right moment. And when will that right moment be? At the appearing of the morning. 'And when they arose early in the morning, they were all dead corpses'; in the hour of greatest extremity, but ere the foe has executed his purposes; not too soon for fear and faith, not too late for hope and help; when the morning dawns, when the appointed hour of deliverance, which He alone determines, has struck. 'It is not for you to know the times and seasons'; but this we may know, that He who is the Lord of time will ever save at the best possible moment. He will not come so quickly as to prevent us from feeling our need; He will not tarry so long as to make us sick with hope deferred, or so long as to let the enemy fulfil his purposes of destruction. 'Lord, behold! he whom Thou lovest is sick. Now Jesus loved Martha, and her sister, and

Lazarus. When He had heard therefore that he was sick, He abode two days still in the same place where He was…. Lord, if Thou hadst been here, my brother had not died. Jesus saith unto her, Thy brother shall rise again…. And he that was dead came forth.'

The Lord may seem to sleep on His hard wooden pillow in the stern of the little fishing boat, and even while the frail craft begins to fill may show no sign of help. But ere the waves have rolled over her, the cry of fear that yet trusts, and of trust that yet fears, wakes Him who knew the need, even while He seemed to slumber, and one mighty word, as of a master to some petulant slave, 'Peace! be still,' hushes the confusion, and rebukes the fear, and rewards the faith.

'The Lord is in the midst of her'—that is the perennial fact. 'The Lord shall help her, and that right early'—that is the 'grace for seasonable help.'

III. The psalm having set forth these broad grounds of confidence, goes on to tell the story of actual deliverance which confirms them, and of which they are indeed but the generalised expression.

The condensed narrative moves to its end by a series of short crashing sentences like the ring of the destructive axe at the roots of trees. We see the whole sequence of events as by lightning flashes, which give brief glimpses and are quenched. The grand graphic words seem to pant with haste, as they

record Israel's deliverance. That deliverance comes from the Conquering Voice. 'The heathen raged' (the same word, we may note, as is found a verse or two back, 'Though the waters thereof *roar*'), 'the kingdoms were moved; He uttered His voice, the earth melted.' With what vigour these hurried sentences describe, first, the wild wrath and formidable movements of the foe, and then the One Sovereign Word which quells them all, as well as the instantaneous weakness that dissolves the seeming solid substance when the breath of His lips smites it!

And where will you find a grander or loftier thought than this, that the simple word—the utterance of the pure will of God conquers all opposition, and tells at once in the sphere of material things? He speaks, and it is done. At the sound of that thunder-voice, hushed stillness and a pause of dread fall upon all the wide earth, deeper and more awe-struck than the silence of the woods with their huddling leaves, when the feebler peals roll through the sky. 'The depths are congealed in the heart of the sea'—as if you were to lay hold of Niagara in its wildest plunge, and were with a word to freeze all its descending waters and stiffen them into immovableness in fetters of eternal ice. So He utters His voice, and all meaner noises are hushed. 'The lion hath roared, who shall not fear?'

He speaks—no weapon, no material vehicle is needed. The point of contact between the pure divine will and the material creatures which obey its

behests is ever wrapped in darkness, whether these be the settled ordinances which men call nature, or the less common which the Bible calls miracle. In all alike there is, to every believer in a God at all, an incomprehensible action of the spiritual upon the material, which allows of no explanations to bridge over the gulf recognised in the broken utterances of our psalm, 'He uttered His voice: the earth melted.'

How grandly, too, these last words give the impression of immediate and utter dissolution of all opposition! All the Titanic brute forces are, at His voice, disintegrated, and lose their organisation and solidity. 'The hills melted like wax'; 'The mountains flowed down at Thy presence.' The hardness and obstinacy is all liquefied and enfeebled, and parts with its consistency and is lost in a fluid mass. As two carbon points when the electric stream is poured upon them are gnawed to nothingness by the fierce heat, and you can see them wasting before your eyes, so the concentrated ardour of His breath falls upon the hostile evil, and lo! it is not.

The Psalmist is generalising the historical fact of the sudden and utter destruction of Sennacherib's host into a universal law. And it *is* a universal law—true for us as for Hezekiah and the sons of Korah, true for all generations. Martin Luther might well make this psalm the battle cry of the Reformation, and we may well make our own the rugged music and dauntless hope of his rendering of these words:—

And let the Prince of Ill
Look grim as e'er he will,
He harms us not a whit.
For why? His doom is writ.
A word shall quickly slay him.'

IV. Then note, finally, how the psalm shows us the act by which we enter the City of God.

'The Lord of Hosts is with *us*; the God of Jacob is *our* refuge.' It is not enough to lay down general truths, however true and however blessed, about the safe and sacred city of God—not enough to be theoretically convinced of the truth of the supreme governance and ever-present aid of God. We must take a further step that will lead us far beyond the regions of barren intellectual apprehension of the great truths of God's love and care. These truths are nothing to us, brethren! unless, like the Psalmist here, we make them our own, and losing the burden of self in the very act of grasping them by faith, unite ourselves with the great multitude who are joined together in Him, and say, 'He is *my* God: He is *our* refuge.' That living act of 'appropriating faith' presupposes, indeed, the presence of these truths in our understandings, but in the very act they are changed into powers in our lives. They pass into the affections and the will. They are no more empty generalities. Bread nourishes, not when it is looked at, but when it is eaten. 'He that eateth Me, even he shall live by Me.' We feed on Christ when we make Him ours by faith, and each of us is sustained and

blessed by Him when we can say, 'My Lord and my God!'

Mark, too, how there is here set forth the twofold ground for our calmest confidence in these two mighty names of God.

'The Lord of Hosts is with us.' That majestic name includes all the deepest and most blessed thoughts of God which the earlier revelation imparted. That name of 'Jehovah' proclaims at once His Eternal Being and His covenant relation—manifesting Him by its mysterious meaning as He who dwells above time, the tideless sea of absolute unchanging existence, from whom all the stream of creatural life flows forth many-coloured and transient, to whom it all returns, who, Himself unchanging, changeth all things, and declaring Him, by the historical associations connected with it, as having unveiled His purposes in firm words, to which men may trust, and as having entered into that solemn league with Israel which underlay their whole national life. He is *the Lord* the Eternal,—the covenant name.

He is the Lord of Hosts, the 'Imperator,' absolute Master and Commander, Captain and King of all the combined forces of the universe, whether they be personal or impersonal, spiritual or material, who, in serried ranks, wait on Him, and move harmonious, obedient to His will. And this Eternal Master of the legions of the universe is with us, weak and poor, and troubled and sinful as we are. Therefore, we will

not fear: what can man do unto us?

Again, when we say, 'The God of Jacob is our refuge,' we reach back into the past, and lay hold of the mercies promised to, and received by, the long vanished generations who trusted in Him and were lightened. As, by the one name, we appeal to His own Being and uttered pledge, so, by the other, we appeal to His ancient deeds—past as we call them, but present with Him, who lives and loves in the undivided eternity above the low fences of time. All that He has been, He is; all that He has done, He is doing. We on whom the ends of the earth are come have the same Helper, the same Friend that 'the world's grey fathers' had. They that go before do not prevent them that come after. The river is full still. The van of the pilgrim host did, indeed, long, long ago drink and were satisfied, but the bright waters are still as pellucid, still as near, still as refreshing, still as abundant as they ever were. Nay, rather, they are fuller and more accessible to us than to patriarch and Psalmist, 'God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect.'

For we, brethren! have a fuller revelation of that mighty name, and a more wondrous and closer divine presence by our sides. The psalm rejoices in that 'The Lord of Hosts is with us'; and the choral answer of the Gospel swells into loftier music, as it tells of the fulfilment of psalmists' hopes and prophets' visions in Him who is called 'Immanuel,'

which is, being interpreted, 'God with us.' The psalm is confident in that God dwelt in Zion, and our confidence has the more wondrous fact to lay hold of, that even now the Word who dwelt among us makes His abode in every believing heart, and gathers them all together at last in that great city, round whose flashing foundations no tumult of ocean beats, whose gates of pearl need not be closed against any foes, with whose happy citizens 'God will dwell, and they shall be His people, and God Himself shall be with them, and be their God.'

THE LORD OF HOSTS, THE GOD OF JACOB

'The Lord of Hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our Refuge.'

—PSALM xlvi. 11.

Some great deliverance, the details of which we do not know, had been wrought for Israel, and this psalmist comes forth, like Miriam with her choir of maidens, to hymn the victory. The psalm throbs with exultation, but no human victor's name degrades the singer's lips. There is only one Conqueror whom he celebrates. The deliverance has been 'the work of the Lord'; the 'desolations' that have been made on the 'earth' 'He has made.' This great refrain of the song, which I have chosen for my text, takes the experience of deliverance as a proof in act of an astounding truth, and as a hope for the future. 'The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our Refuge.'

There is in these words a significant duplication of idea, both in regard to the names which are given to

God, and to that which He is conceived as being to us; and I desire now simply to try to bring out the force of the consolation and strength which lie in these two epithets of His, and in the double wonder of His relation to us men.

I. First, then, I ask you to look at the twin thoughts of God that are here. 'The Lord of hosts … The God of Jacob.'

Now, with regard to the former of these grand names, it may be observed that it does not occur in the earliest stages of Revelation as recorded in the Old Testament. The first instance in which we find it is in the song of Hannah in the beginning of the first Book of Samuel; and it re-appears in the Davidic psalms and in psalms and prophecies of later date.

What 'hosts' are they of which God is the Lord? Is that great title a mere synonym for the half-heathenish idea of the 'God of battles'? By no means. True! He is the Lord of the armies of Israel, but the hosts which the Psalmist sees ranged in embattled array, and obedient to the command of the great Captain, are far other and grander than any earthly armies. If we would understand the whole depth and magnificent sweep of the idea enshrined in this name, we cannot do better than recall one or two other Scripture phrases. For instance, the account of the Creation in the Book of Genesis is ended by, 'Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them.' Then, remember that,

throughout the Old Testament, we meet constantly with the idea of the celestial bodies as being 'the hosts of heaven.' And, still further, remember how, in one of the psalms, we hear the invocation to 'all ye His hosts, ye ministers of His that do His pleasure,' 'the angels that excel in strength,' to praise and bless Him. If we take account of all these and a number of similar passages, I think we shall come to this conclusion, that by that title, 'the Lord of hosts,' the prophets and psalmists meant to express the universal dominion of God over the whole universe in all its battalions and sections, which they conceived of as one ranked army, obedient to the voice of the great General and Ruler of them all.

So the idea contained in the name is precisely parallel with that to which the heathen centurion in the Gospels had come, by reflecting upon the teaching of the legion in which he himself commanded, when he said, 'I am a man under authority, having servants under me; and I say to this one, Go, and he goeth; to another, Come, and he cometh; to another, Do this, and he doeth it—speak Thou the word!' To him Jesus Christ was Captain of the Lord's hosts, and Ruler of all the ordered forces of the universe. The Old Testament name enshrines the same idea. The universe is an ordered whole. Science tells us that. Modern thought emphasises it. But how cruel, relentless, crushing, that conception may be unless we grasp the further thought which is presented in this great Name, and see, behind all the

play of phenomena, the one Will which is the only power in the universe, and sways and orders all besides! The armies of heaven and every creature in the great *Cosmos* are the servants of this Lord. Then we can stand before the dreadful mysteries and the all but infinite complications of this mighty Whole, and say, 'These are His soldiers, and He is their Captain, the Lord of hosts.'

Next we turn, by one quick bound, from the wide sweep of that mighty Name to the other, 'The God of Jacob.' The one carries us out among the glories of the universe, and shows us, behind them all, the personal Will of which they are the servants, and the Character of which they are the expressions. The other brings us down to the tent of the solitary wanderer, and shows us that that mighty Commander and Emperor enters into close, living, tender, personal relations with one poor soul, and binds Himself by that great covenant, which is rooted in His love alone, to be the God who cares for and keeps and blesses the man in all his wanderings. Neither does the command of the mighty Whole hinder the closest relation to the individual, nor does the care of the individual interfere with the direction of the Whole. The single soul stands out clear and isolated, as if there were none in the universe but God and himself; and the whole fulness of the divine power, and all the tenderness of the God-heart, are lavished upon the individual, even though the armies of the skies wait upon His nod.

So, if we put the two names together, we get the completion of the great idea; and whilst the one speaks to us of infinite power, of absolute supremacy, of universal rule, and so delivers us from the fear of nature, and from the blindness which sees only the material operations and not the working Hand that underlies them, the other speaks to us of gentle and loving and specific care, and holds out the hope that, between man and God, there may be a bond of friendship and of mutual possession so sweet and sacred that nothing else can compare with it. The God of Jacob is the Lord of hosts. More wondrous still, the Lord of hosts is the God of Jacob.

II. Note, secondly, the double wonder of our relation to this great God.

There is almost a tone of glad surprise, as well as of triumphant confidence, in this refrain of our psalm, which comes twice in it, and possibly ought to have come three times—at the end of each of its sections. The emphasis is to be laid on the 'us' and the 'our,' as if that was the miracle, and the fact which startled the Psalmist into the highest rapture of astonished thankfulness.

'The Lord of hosts is with *us*.' What does that say? It proclaims that wondrous truth that no gulf between the mighty Ruler of all and us, the insignificant little creatures that creep upon the face of this tiny planet, has any power of separating us from Him. It is always hard to believe that. It is

harder to-day than it was when our Psalmist's heart beat high at the thought. It is hard by reason of our sense-bound blindness, by reason of our superficial way of looking at things, which only shows us the nearest, and veils with their insignificances the magnitude of the furthest. Jupiter is blazing in our skies every night now; he is not one-thousandth part as great or bright as any one of the little needle-points of light, the fixed stars, that are so much further away; but he is nearer, and the intrusive brightness of the planet hides the modest glories of the distant and shrouded suns. Just so it is hard for us ever to realise, and to walk in the light of the realisation of, the fact that the Lord of hosts, the Emperor of all things, is of a truth with each of us.

It is harder to-day than ever it was; for we have learned to think rightly—or at least more rightly and approximately rightly—of the position and age of man upon this earth. The Psalmist's ancient question of devout thankfulness is too often travestied to-day into a question of scoffing or of melancholy unbelief: 'When I consider the heavens, the work of Thy hands; what is man? Art Thou mindful of him?' This psalm comes to answer that. 'The Lord of hosts is with us.' True, we are but of yesterday, and know nothing. True, earth is but a pin-point amidst the universe's glories. True, we are crushed down by sorrow and by care; and in some moods it seems supremely incredible that we should be of such worth in the scale of Creation as that the Lord of all

things should, in a deeper sense than the Psalmist knew, have dwelt with us and be with us still. But bigness is not greatness, and there is nothing incredible in the belief that men, lower than the angels, and needing God more because of their sin, do receive His visitations in an altogether special sense, and that, passing by the lofty and the great that may inhabit His universe, His chariot wheels stoop to us, and that, because we are sinners, God is with us.

Let me remind you, dear brethren! of how this great thought of my text is heightened and transcended by the New Testament teaching. We believe in One whose name is 'Immanuel, *God with us*.' Jesus Christ has come to be with men, not only during the brief years of His earthly ministry, in corporeal reality, but to be with all who love Him and trust Him, in a far closer, more real, more deep, more precious, more operative Presence than when He dwelt here. Through all the ages Christ Himself is with every soul that loves Him; and He will dwell beside *us* and bless *us* and keep *us*. God's presence means God's sympathy, God's knowledge, God's actual help, and these are ours if we will. Instead of staggering at the apparent improbability that so transcendent and mighty a Being should stoop from His throne, where He lords it over the universe, and enter into the narrow room of our hearts, let us rather try to rise to the rapture of the astonished Psalmist when, looking upon the deliverance that

had been wrought, this was the leading conviction that was written in flame upon his heart, 'The Lord of hosts is with *us*.'

And then the second of the wonders that are here set forth in regard to our relations to Him is, 'the God of Jacob is *our* Refuge.'

That carries for us the great truth that, just as the distance between us and God makes no separation, and the gulf is one that is bridged over by His love, so distance in time leads to no exhaustion of the divine faithfulness and care, nor any diminution of the resources of His grace. 'The God of Jacob is *our* Refuge.' The story of the past is the prophecy of the future. What God has been to any man He will be to every man, if the man will let Him. There is nothing in any of these grand narratives of ancient days which is not capable of being reproduced in our lives. God drew near to Jacob when he was lying on the stony ground, and showed him the ladder set upon earth, with its top in the heavens, and the bright-winged soldiers and messengers of His will ascending and descending upon it, and His own face at the top. God shows you and me that vision to-day. It was no vanishing splendour, no transient illumination, no hallucination of the man's own thoughts seeking after a helper, and the wish being father to the vision. But it was the unveiling for a moment, in supernatural fashion, of the abiding reality. 'The God of Jacob is *our* Refuge'; and whatever He was to His servant of old He is to-day to

you and me.

We say that miracle has ceased. Yes. But that which the miracle effected has not ceased; and that from which the miracle came has not ceased. The realities of a divine protection, of a divine supply, of a divine guidance, of a divine deliverance, of a divine discipline, and of a divine reward at the last, are as real to-day as when they were mediated by signs and wonders, by an open heaven and by an outstretched hand. They who went before have not emptied the treasures of the Father's house, nor eaten all the bread that He spreads upon the table. God has no stepchildren, and no favourite and spoiled ones. All that the elder brethren have had, we, on whom the ends of the dispensation are come, may have just as really; and whatever God has been to the patriarch He is to us to-day.

Remember the experience of the man of whom our text speaks. The God of Jacob manifested Himself to him as being a God who would draw near to, and care for, and help, a very unworthy and poor creature. Jacob was no saint at the beginning. Selfishness and cunning and many a vice clung very close to his character; but for all that, God drew near to him and cared for him and guided him, and promised that He would not leave him till He had done that which He had spoken to him of. And He will do the same for us—blessed be His name!—with all our faults and weaknesses and craftiness and worldliness and sins. If He cared for that huckstering

Jew, as He did, even in his earlier days, He will not put us away because He finds faults in us. 'The God of Jacob,' the supplanter, the trickster, 'is our Refuge.'

But remember how the divine Presence with that man had to be, because of his faults, a Presence that wrought him sorrows and forced him to undergo discipline. So it will be with us. He will not suffer sin upon us; He will pass us through the fire and the water; and do anything with us short of destroying us, in order to destroy the sin that is in us. He does not spare His rod for His child's crying, but smites with judgment, and sends us sorrows 'for our profit, that we should be partakers of His holiness.' We may write this as the explanation over most of our griefs —'the God of Jacob is our Refuge,' and He is disciplining us as He did him.

And remember what the end of the man was. 'Thy name shall no more be called Jacob, but Israel; for as a prince thou hast power with God, and hast prevailed.' So if we have God, who out of such a sow's ear made a silk purse, out of such a stone raised up a servant for Himself, we may be sure that His purpose in all discipline will be effected on us submissive, and we shall end where His ancient servant ended, and shall be in our turn princes with God.

Let me recall to you also the meaning which Jesus Christ found in this name. He quoted 'the God of

Abraham and of Isaac and of Jacob' as being the great guarantee and proof to us of immortality. 'The God of Jacob is our Refuge.' If so, what can the grim and ghastly phantom of death do to us? He may smite upon the gate, but he cannot enter the fortress. The man who has knit himself to God by saying to God, 'Lo! I am Thine, and Thou art mine,' in that communion has a proof and a pledge that nothing shall ever break it, and that death is powerless. The fact of religion—true, heartfelt religion, with its communion, its prayer, its consciousness of possessing and of being possessed, makes the idea that death ends a man's conscious existence an absurdity and an impossibility.

'The God of Jacob is our Refuge,' and so we may say to the storms of life, and after them to the last howling tornado of death—Blow winds and crack your cheeks, and do your worst, you cannot touch me in the fortress where I dwell. The wind will hurtle around the stronghold, but within there shall be calm.

Dear brethren! make sure that you are in the refuge. Make sure that you have fled for 'Refuge to the hope set before you in the Gospel.' The Lord of hosts is with us,' but you may be parted from Him. He is our Refuge, but you may be standing outside the sanctuary, and so be exposed to all the storms. Flee thither, cast yourselves on Him, trust in that great Saviour who has given Himself for us, and who says to us, 'Lo! I am with you always.' Take Christ for

your hiding-place by simple faith in Him and loving obedience born of faith, and then the experience of our Psalmist will be yours. Your life will not want for deliverances which will thrill your heart with thankfulness, and turn the truth of faith into a truth of experience. So you may set to your seals the great saying of our psalm, which is fresh to-day, though centuries have passed since it came glowing fiery from the lips of the ancient seer, and may take up as yours the great words in which Luther has translated it for our times, the 'Marseillaise' of the Reformation —

'A safe stronghold our God is still;
A trusty shield and weapon;
He'll help us clear from all the ill
That hath us now o'ertaken.'

A SONG OF DELIVERANCE

'Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised in the city of our God, in the mountain of His holiness. 2. Beautiful for situation, the joy of the whole earth, is mount Zion, on the sides of the north, the city of the great King. 3. God is

known in her palaces for a refuge. 4. For, lo, the kings were assembled, they passed by together. 5. They saw it, and so they marvelled; they were troubled, and hasted away. 6. Fear took hold upon them there, and pain, as of a woman in travail. 7. Thou breakest the ships of Tarshish with an east wind. 8. As we have heard, so have we seen in the city of the Lord of hosts, in the city of our God: God will establish it for ever. 9. We have thought of Thy loving-kindness, O God, in the midst of Thy temple. 10. According to Thy name, O God, so is Thy praise unto the ends of the earth: Thy right hand is full of righteousness. 11. Let mount Zion rejoice, let the daughters of Judah be glad, because of Thy judgments. 12. Walk about Zion, and go round about her: tell the towers thereof. 13. Mark ye well her bulwarks, consider her palaces; that ye may tell it to the generation following. 14. For this God is our God for ever and ever: He will be our guide even unto death.'—PSALM xlviii. 1-14.

The enthusiastic triumph which throbs in this psalm, and the specific details of a great act of deliverance from a great peril which it contains, sufficiently indicate that it must have had some historical event as its basis. Can we identify the fact which is here embalmed?

The psalm gives these points—a formidable muster before Jerusalem of hostile people under confederate

kings, with the purpose of laying siege to the city; some mysterious check which arrests them before a sword is drawn, as if some panic fear had shot from its towers and shaken their hearts; and a flight in wild confusion from the impregnable dwelling-place of the Lord of hosts. The occasion of the terror is vaguely hinted at, as if some solemn mystery brooded over it. All that is clear about it is that it was purely the work of the divine hand—'Thou breakest the ships of Tarshish with an east wind'; and that in this deliverance, in their own time, the Levite minstrels recognised the working of the same protecting grace which, from of old, had 'commanded deliverances for Jacob.'

Now there is one event, and only one, in Jewish history, which corresponds, point for point, to these details—the crushing destruction of the Assyrian army under Sennacherib. There, there was the same mustering of various nations, compelled by the conqueror to march in his train, and headed by their tributary kings. There, there was the same arrest before an arrow had been shot, or a mound raised against the city. There, there was the same purely divine agency coming in to destroy the invading army.

I think, then, that from the correspondence of the history with the requirements of the psalm, as well as from several similarities of expression and allusion between the latter and the prophecies of Isaiah, who has recorded that destruction of the invader, we

may, with considerable probability, regard this psalm as the hymn of triumph over the baffled Assyrian, and the marvellous deliverance of Israel by the arm of God.

Whatever may be thought, however, of that allocation of it to a place in the history, the great truths that it contains depend upon no such identification. They are truths for all time; gladness and consolation for all generations. Let us read it over together now, if, perchance, some echo of the confidence and praise that is found in it may be called forth from our hearts! If you will look at your Bibles you will find that it falls into three portions. There is the glory of Zion, the deliverance of Zion, and the consequent grateful praise and glad trust of Zion.

I. There is the glory of Zion.

Hearken with what triumph the Psalmist breaks out: 'Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised in the city of our God, in the mountain of His holiness. Beautiful for situation (or rather elevation), the joy of the whole earth, is mount Zion, on the sides of the north, the city of the great King.' Now these words are something more than mere patriotic feeling. The Jew's glory in Jerusalem was a different thing altogether from the Roman's pride in Rome. To the devout men amongst them, of whom the writer of this psalm was one, there was one thing, and one only, that made Zion glorious. It was beautiful

indeed in its elevation, lifted high upon its rocky mountain. It was safe indeed, isolated from the invader by the precipitous ravines which enclosed and guarded the angle of the mountain plateau on which it stood; but *the one* thing that gave it glory was that in *it* God abode. The name even of that earthly Zion was 'Jehovah-Shammah, the Lord is there.' And the emphasis of these words is entirely pointed in that direction. What they celebrate concerning *Him* is not merely the general thought that the Lord is great, but that the Lord is *great in Zion*. What they celebrate concerning *it* is that it is His city, the mountain of His holiness, where He dwells, where He manifests Himself. Because there is His self-manifestation, therefore He is there greatly to be praised. And because the clear voice of His praise rings out from Zion, therefore is she 'the joy of the whole earth.' The glory of Zion, then, is that it is the dwelling-place of God.

Now, remember, that when the Old Testament Scripture speaks about God abiding in Jerusalem, it means no heathenish or material localising of the Deity, nor does it imply any depriving of the rest of the earth of the sanctity of His presence. The very psalm which most distinctly embodies the thought of God's abode protests against that narrowness, for it begins, 'The earth is the Lord's and the fulness thereof: the world and they that dwell therein.' The very ark which was the symbol of His presence, protests by its name against all such localising, for

the name of it was 'the ark of the covenant of the God of the whole earth.' When the Bible speaks of Zion as the dwelling-place of God, it is but the expression of the fact that there, between the cherubim, was the visible sign of His presence—that there, in the Temple, as from the centre of the whole land, He ruled, and 'out of Zion, the perfection of beauty, God shone.'

We are, then, not 'spiritualising,' or forcing a New Testament meaning into these words, when we see in them an Eternal Truth. We are but following in the steps of history and prophecy, and of Christ and His Apostles, and of that last vision of the Apocalypse. We are but distinguishing between an idea and the fact which more or less perfectly embodies it. An idea may have many garments, may transmigrate into many different material forms. The idea of the dwelling of God with men had its less perfect embodiment, has its more perfect embodiment, will have its absolutely perfect embodiment. It had its less perfect in that ancient time. It has its real but partial embodiment in this present time, when, in the midst of the whole community of believing and loving souls, which stretches wider than any society that calls itself a Church, the living God abides and energises by His Spirit and by His Son in the souls of them that believe upon Him. 'Ye are come unto Mount Zion and unto the city of the living God.' And we wait for the time when, filling all the air with its light, there shall come down from God a perfect and

permanent form of that dwelling; and that great city, the New Jerusalem, 'having the glory of God,' shall appear, and He will dwell with men and be their God.

But in all these stages of the embodiment of that great truth the glory of Zion rests in this, that in it God abides, that from it He flames in the greatness of His manifestations, which are 'His praise in all the earth.' It is that presence which makes her fair, as it is that presence which keeps her safe. It is that light shining within her palaces—not their own opaque darkness, which streams out far into the waste night with ruddy glow of hospitable invitation. It is God in her, not anything of her own, that constitutes her 'the joy of the whole earth.' 'Thy beauty was perfect, through My comeliness, which I had put upon thee, saith the Lord.' Zion is where hearts love and trust and follow Christ. The 'city of the great King' is a permanent reality in a partial form upon earth—and that partial form is itself a prophecy of the perfection of the heavens.

II. Still further, there is a second portion of this psalm which, passing beyond these introductory thoughts of the glory of Zion, recounts with wonderful power and vigour the process of the deliverance of Zion.

It extends from the fourth to the eighth verses. Mark the dramatic vigour of the description of the deliverance. There is, first, the mustering of the

armies—'The kings were assembled.' Some light is thrown upon that phrase by the proud boast which the prophet Isaiah puts into the lips of the Assyrian invader, 'Are not my princes altogether kings?' The subject-monarchs of the subdued nationalities that were gathered round the tyrant's standard were used, with the wicked craft of conquerors in all ages, to bring still other lands under the same iron dominion. 'The kings were assembled'—we see them gathering their far-reaching and motley army, mustered from all corners of that gigantic empire. They advance together against the rocky fortress that towers above its girdling valleys. 'They saw it, they marvelled'—in wonder, perhaps, at its beauty, as they first catch sight of its glittering whiteness from some hill crest on their march; or, perhaps, stricken by some strange amazement, as if, basilisk-like, its beauty were deadly, and a beam from the Shechinah had shot a nameless awe into their souls—'they were troubled, they hasted away.'

I need not dilate on the power of this description, nor do more than notice how the abruptness of the language, huddled together, as it were, without connecting particles, conveys the impression of hurry and confusion, culminating in the rush of fugitives fleeing under the influence of panic-terror. They are like the well-known words, 'I came, I saw, I conquered,' only that here we have to do with swift defeat—they came, they saw, they were conquered. They are, in regard to vivid picturesqueness, arising

from the broken construction, singularly like other words which refer to the same event in the forty-sixth psalm, 'The heathen raged, the kingdoms were moved; He uttered His voice, the earth melted.' In their scornful emphasis of triumph they remind us of Isaiah's description of the end of the same invasion —'So Sennacherib, king of Assyria, departed, and went and returned, and dwelt at Nineveh.'

Mark, still further, the eloquent silence as to the cause of the panic and the flight. There is no appearance of armed resistance. This is no 'battle of the warrior with garments rolled in blood,' and the shock of contending hosts. But an unseen Hand smites once—'and when the morning dawned they were all dead corpses.' The impression of terror produced by such a blow is increased by the veiled allusion to it here. The silence magnifies the deliverance. If we might apply the grand words of Milton to that night of fear—

'The trumpet spake not to the armed throng,
But kings sat still, with awful eye,
As if they surely knew their sovereign Lord was by.'

The process of the deliverance is not told here, as there was no need it should be in a hymn which is not history, but the lyrical echo of what is told in history; one image explains it all—'Thou breakest the ships of Tarshish with an east wind.' The metaphor—one that does not need expansion here—is that of a

ship like a great unwieldy galleon, caught in a tempest. However strong for fight, it is not fit for sailing. It is like some of those turret ships of ours, if they venture out from the coast and get into a storm, their very strength is their destruction, their armour wherein they trusted ensures that they shall sink. And so, this huge assailant of Israel, this great 'galley with oars,' washing about there in the trough of the sea, as it were—God broke it in two with the tempest, which is His breath. You remember how on the medal that commemorated the destruction of the Spanish Armada—our English deliverance—there were written the words of Scripture: 'God blew upon them and they were scattered.' What was there true, literally, is here true in figure. The Psalmist is not thinking of any actual scattering of hostile fleets—from which Jerusalem was never in danger; but is using the shipwreck of 'the ship of Tarshish' as a picture of the utter, swift, God-inflicted destruction which ground that invading army to pieces, as the savage rocks and wild seas will do the strongest craft that is mangled between them.

And then, mark how from this dramatic description there rises a loftier thought still. The deliverance thus described links the present with the past. 'As we have heard so have we seen in the city of the Lord of hosts, in the city of our God.' Yes, brethren! God's merciful manifestation for ourselves, as for those Israelitish people of old, has this blessed effect, that it changes hearsay and tradition into

living experience;—this blessed effect, that it teaches us, or ought to teach us, the inexhaustibleness of the divine power, the constant repetition in every age of the same works of love. Taught by it, we learn that all these old narratives of His grace and help are ever new, not past and gone, but ready to be reproduced in their essential characteristics in our lives too. 'We have heard with our ears, O Lord, our fathers have told us what work Thou didst in their days.' But is the record only a melancholy contrast with our own experience? Nay, truly. 'As we have heard so have we seen.' We are ever tempted to think of the present as commonplace. The sky right above our heads is always farthest from earth. It is at the horizon behind and the horizon in front, where earth and heaven seem to blend. We think of miracles in the past, we think of a manifest presence of God in the future, but the present ever seems to our sense-bound understandings as beggared and empty of Him, devoid of His light. But this verse suggests to us how, if we mark the daily dealings of that loving Hand with us, we have every occasion to say, Thy loving-kindness of old lives still. Still, as of old, the hosts of the Lord encamp round about them that fear Him to deliver them. Still, as of old, the voice of guidance comes from between the cherubim. Still, as of old, the pillar of cloud and fire moves before us. Still, as of old, angels walk with men. Still, as of old, His hand is stretched forth, to bless, to feed, to guard. Nothing in the past of God's dealings with men has passed away. The eternal present embraces

what we call the past, present, and future. They that went before do not prevent us on whom the ends of the ages are come. The table that was spread for them is as fully furnished for the latest guests. The light, which was so magical and lustrous in the morning beauty, for us has not faded away into the light of common day. The river which flowed in these past ages has not been drunk up by the thirsty sands. The fire that once blazed so clear has not died down into grey ashes. 'The God of *Jacob* is *our* refuge.' 'As we have heard so have we seen.'

And then, still further, the deliverance here is suggested as not only linking most blessedly the present with the past, but also linking it for our confidence with all the *future*. 'God will establish it for ever.'

'Old experience doth attain
To something of prophetic strain.'

In the strength of what that moment had taught of God and His power, the singer looks onward, and whatever may be the future he knows that the divine arm will be outstretched. God will establish Zion; or, as the word might be translated, God will hold it erect, as if with a strong hand grasping some pole or banner-staff that else would totter and fall—He will keep it up, standing there firm and steadfast.

It would lead us too far to discuss the bearing of such a prophecy upon the future history and

restoration of Israel, but the bearing of it upon the security and perpetuity of the Church is unquestionable. The city is immortal because God dwells in it. For the individual and for the community, for the great society and for each of the single souls that make it up, the history of the past may seal the pledge which He gives for the future. If it had been possible to destroy the Church of the living God, it had been gone long, long ago. Its own weakness and sin, the ever-new corruptions of its belief and paring of its creed, the imperfections of its life and the worldliness of its heart, the abounding evils that lie around it and the actual hostility of many that look upon it and say, Raze it, even to the ground, would have smitten it to the dust long since. It lives, it has lived in spite of all, and therefore it shall live. 'God will establish it for ever.'

In almost every land there is some fortress or other, which the pride of the inhabitants calls 'the maiden fortress,' and whereof the legend is, that it has never been taken, and is inexpugnable by any foe. It is true about the tower of the flock, the stronghold of the daughter of Zion. The grand words of Isaiah about this very Assyrian invader are our answer to all fears within and foes without: 'Say unto him, the virgin, the daughter of Zion, hath despised thee, and laughed thee to scorn; the daughter of Jerusalem hath shaken her head at thee.... I will defend this city to save it for My own sake, and for My servant David's sake.' 'God will establish it for

ever,' and the pledges of that eternal stability are the deliverances of the past and of the present.

III. Then, finally, there is still another section of this psalm to be looked at for a moment, which deals with the consequent grateful praise and glad trust of Zion.

I must condense what few things I have to say about these closing verses. The deliverance, first of all, deepens the glad meditation on God's favour and defence. 'We have thought,' say the ransomed people, as with a sigh of rejoicing, 'we have thought of Thy loving-kindness in the midst of Thy temple.' The scene of the manifestation of His power is the scene of their thankfulness, and the first issue of His mercy is His servants' praise.

Then, the deliverance spreads His fame throughout the world. 'According to Thy name, O God! so is Thy praise unto the ends of the earth. Thy right hand is full of righteousness.' The name of God is God's own making known of His character, and the thought of these words is double. They most beautifully express the profoundest trust in that blessed name that it only needs to be known in order to be loved. There is nothing wanted but His manifestation of Himself for His praise and glory to spread. Why is the Psalmist so sure that according to the revelation of His character will be the revenue of His praise? Because the Psalmist is so sure that that character is purely, perfectly, simply good—nothing else but good and

blessing—and that He cannot act but in such a way as to magnify Himself. That great sea will cast up nothing on the shores of the world but pearls and precious things. He is all 'light, and in Him is no darkness at all.' There needs but the shining forth in order that the light of His character shall bring gladness and joy, and the song of birds, and opening flowers wheresoever it falls.

Still further, there is the other truth in the words, that we misapprehend the purpose of our own deliverances, and the purpose of God's mercy to Zion, if we confine these to any personal objects or lose sight of the loftier end of them all—that men may learn to know and love Him. Brethren! we neither rightly thank Him for His gifts to us nor rightly apprehend the meaning of His dealings, unless the sweetest thought to us, even in the midst of our own personal joy for deliverance, is not 'we are saved,' but 'God is exalted.'

And then, beyond that, the deliverance produces in Zion, the mother city and her daughter villages, a triumph of rapture and gladness. 'Let mount Zion rejoice, let the daughters of Judah be glad because of Thy judgments.' Yes, even though an hundred and four score and five thousand dead men lay there, they were to be glad. Solemn and awful as is the baring of His righteous sword, it is an occasion for praise. It is right to be glad when men and systems that hinder and fight against God are swept away as with the besom of destruction. 'When the wicked

perish there is shouting,' and the fitting epitaph for the oppressors to whom the surges of the Red Sea are shroud and gravestone is, 'Sing ye to the Lord, for He hath triumphed gloriously.'

The last verses set forth, more fully than even the preceding ones, the height and perfectness of the confidence which the manifold mercies of God ought to produce in men's hearts. The citizens who have been cooped up during the invasion, and who, in the temple, as we have seen, have been rendering the tribute of their meditation and thankful gratitude to God for His loving-kindness, are now called upon to come forth from the enclosure of the besieged city, and free from all fear of the invading army, to 'walk about Zion, and go round about her and tell the towers,' and 'mark her bulwarks and palaces.'

They look first at the defences, on which no trace of assault appears, and then at the palaces guarded by them, that stand shining and unharmed. The deliverance has been so complete that there is not a sign of the peril or the danger left. It is not like a city besieged, and the siege raised when the thing over which contending hosts have been quarrelling has become a ruin, but not one stone has been smitten from the walls, nor one agate chipped in the windows of the palaces. It is unharmed as well as uncaptured.

Thus, we may say, no matter what tempests assail us, the wind will but sweep the rotten branches out

of the tree. Though war should arise, nothing will be touched that belongs to Thee. We have a city which cannot be moved; and the removal of the things which can be shaken but makes more manifest its impregnable security, its inexpugnable peace. As in war they will clear away the houses and the flower gardens that have been allowed to come and cluster about the walls and fill up the moat, yet the walls will stand; so in all the conflicts that befall God's church and God's truth, the calming thought ought to be ours that if anything perishes it is a sign that it is not His, but man's excrescence on His building. Whatever is His will stand for ever.

And then, with wonderful tenderness and beauty, the psalm in its last words drops, as one might say, in one aspect, and in another, *rises* from its contemplations of the immortal city and the community to the thought of the individuals that make it up: 'For this God is our God for ever and ever; He will be our guide *even* unto death.' Prosaic commentators have often said that these last two words are an interpolation, that they do not fit into the strain of the psalm, and have troubled themselves to find out what meaning to attach to them, because it seemed to them so unlikely that, in a hymn that had only to do with the community, we should find this expression of individual confidence in anticipation of that most purely personal of all evils. That seems to me the very reason for holding fast by the words as being a genuine part of the psalm,

because they express a truth, without which the confident hope of the psalm, grand as it is, is but poor consolation for each heart. It is not enough for passing, perishing men to say, 'Never mind your own individual fate: the society, the community, will stand fast and firm.'

I want something more than to know that God will establish Zion for ever. What about *me*, my own individual self? And these last words answer that question. Not merely the city abides, but 'He will be our guide even unto death.' And surely, if so—if His loving hand will lead the citizens of His eternal kingdom even to the edge of that great darkness—He will not lose them even in its gloom. Surely there is here the veiled hope that if the city be eternal and the gates of the grave cannot prevail against *it*, the community cannot be eternal unless the individuals be immortal.

Such a hope is vindicated by the blessed words of a newer revelation: 'God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He hath prepared for them a city.'

Dear brethren! remember the last words, or all but the last words of Scripture which, in their true text and reading, tell us how, instead of aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, we may become fellow-citizens with the saints. 'Blessed are they that wash their robes that they may have a right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gate into the city!'

TWO SHEPHERDS AND TWO FLOCKS

'Like sheep they are laid in the grave; Death shall feed on them.'
—PSALM xlix. 14.

'The Lamb which is in the midst of the Throne shall feed them.'
—REV. vii. 17.

These two verses have a much closer parallelism in expression than appears in our Authorised Version. If you turn to the Revised Version you will find that it rightly renders the former of my texts, 'Death shall be their shepherd,' and the latter, 'The Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall be their Shepherd.' The Old Testament Psalmist and the New Testament Seer have fallen upon the same image to describe death and the future, but with how different a use! The one paints a grim picture, all sunless and full of shadow; the other dips his pencil in brilliant colours, and suffuses his canvas with a glow as of molten sunlight. The difference between the two is partly due to the progress of revelation and the light cast on life and immortality by Christ through the Gospel. But it is much more due to the fact that the two writers have different classes in view. The one is speaking of men whose portion is in this life, the other of men who have washed their robes and made

them white in the blood of the Lamb. And it is the characters of the persons concerned, much more than the degree of enlightenment possessed by the writers, that makes the difference between these two pictures. Life and death and the future are what each man makes of them for himself. We shall best deal with these two pictures if we take them separately, and let the gloom of the one enhance the glory of the other. They hang side by side, like a Rembrandt beside a Claude or a Turner, each intensifying by contrast the characteristics of the other. So let us look at the two—first, the grim picture drawn by the Psalmist; second, the sunny one drawn by the Seer. Now, with regard to the former,

I. The grim picture drawn by the Psalmist.

We too often forget that a psalmist is a poet, and misunderstand his spirit by treating his words as matter-of-fact prose. His imagination is at work, and our sympathetic imagination must be at work too, if we would enter into his meaning. Death a shepherd —what a grim and bold inversion of a familiar metaphor! If this psalm is, as is probable, of a comparatively late date, then its author was familiar with many sweet and tender strains of early singers, in which the blessed relation between a loving God and an obedient people was set forth under that metaphor. 'The Lord is *my* Shepherd' may have been ringing in his ears when he said, 'Death is *their* shepherd.' He lays hold of the familiar metaphor, and if I may so speak, turns it upside down, stripping it of

all that is beautiful, tender, and gracious, and draping it in all that is harsh and terrible. And the very contrast between the sweet relation which it was originally used to express, and the opposite kind of one which he uses it to set forth, gives its tremendous force to the daring metaphor.

'Death is their shepherd.' Yes, but what manner of shepherd? Not one that gently leads his flock, but one that stalks behind the huddled sheep, and drives them fiercely, club in hand, on a path on which they would not willingly go. The unwelcome necessity, by which men that have their portion in this world are hounded and herded out of all their sunny pastures and abundant feeding, is the thought that underlies the image. It is accentuated, if we notice that in the former clause, 'like sheep they are laid in the grave,' the word rendered in the Authorised Version 'laid,' and in the Revised Version 'appointed,' is perhaps more properly read by many, 'like sheep they are *thrust down*.' There you have the picture—the shepherd stalking behind the helpless creatures, and coercing them on an unwelcome path.

Now that is the first thought that I suggest, that to one type of man, Death is an unwelcome necessity. It is, indeed, a necessity to us all, but necessities accepted cease to be painful; and necessities resisted —what do they become? Here is a man being swept down a river, the sound of the falls is in his ears, and he grasps at anything on the bank to hold by, but in vain. That is how some of us feel when we face the

thought, and will feel more when we front the reality, of that awful 'must.' 'Death shall be their shepherd,' and coerce them into darkness. Ask yourself the question, Is the course of my life such as that the end of it cannot but be a grim necessity which I would do anything to avoid?

This first text suggests not only a shepherd but a fold: 'Like sheep they are thrust down to the grave.' Now I am not going to enter upon what would be quite out of place here: a critical discussion of the Old Testament conception of a future life. That conception varies, and is not the same in all parts of the book. But I may, just in a word, say that 'the grave' is by no means the adequate rendering of the thought of the Psalmist, and that 'Hell' is a still more inadequate rendering of it. He does not mean either the place where the body is deposited, or a place where there is punitive retribution for the wicked, but he means a dim region, or, if I might so say, a localised condition, in which all that have passed through this life are gathered, where personality and consciousness continue, but where life is faint, stripped of all that characterises it here, shadowy, unsubstantial, and where there is inactivity, absolute cessation of all the occupations to which men were accustomed. But there may be restlessness along with inactivity; may there not? And there is no such restlessness as the restlessness of compulsory idleness. That is the main idea that is in the Psalmist's mind. He knows little about retribution, he

knows still less about transmutation into a glorious likeness to that which is most glorious and divine. But he conceives a great, dim, lonely land, wherein are prisoned and penned all the lives that have been foamed away vainly on earth, and are now settled into a dreary monotony and a restless idleness. As one of the other books of the Old Testament puts it, it is a 'land of the shadow of death, without order, and in which the light is as darkness.'

I know, of course, that all that is but the imperfect presentation of partially apprehended, and partially revealed, and partially revealable truth. But what I desire to fix upon is that one dreary thought of this fold, into which the grim shepherd has driven his flock, and where they lie cribbed and huddled together in utter inactivity. Carry that with you as a true, though incomplete thought.

Let me remind you, in the next place, with regard to this part of my subject, of the kind of men whom the grim shepherd drives into that grim fold. The psalm tells us that plainly enough. It is speaking of men who have their portion in this life, who 'trust in their wealth, and boast themselves in the multitude of their riches … whose inward thought is that their house shall continue for ever … who call their lands after their own names.' Of every such man it says: 'when he dieth he shall carry nothing away'—none of the possessions, none of the forms of activity which were familiar to him here on earth. He will go into a state where he finds nothing which interests him,

and nothing for him to do.

Must it not be so? If we let ourselves be absorbed and entangled by the affairs of this life, and permit our whole spirits to be bent in the direction of these transient things, what is to become of us when the things that must pass have passed, and when we come into a region where there are none of them to occupy us any more? What would some Manchester men do if they were in a condition of life where they could not go on 'Change on Tuesdays and Fridays? What would some of us do if the professions and forms of mental activity in which we have been occupied as students and scholars were swept away? 'Whether there be knowledge it shall cease; whether there be tongues they shall vanish away,' and what are you going to do then, you men that have only lived for intellectual pursuits connected with this transient state? We are going to a world where there are no books, no pens nor ink, no trade, no dress, no fashion, no amusements; where there is nothing but things in which some of us have no interest, and a God who 'is not in all our thoughts.' Surely we shall be 'fish out of water' there. Surely we shall feel that we have been banned and banished from everything that we care about. Surely men that boasted themselves in their riches, and in the multitude of their wealth, will be necessarily condemned to inactivity. Life is continuous, and all on one plane. Surely if a man knows that he must some day, and may any day, be summoned to the other side of the

world, he would be a wise man if he got his outfit ready, and made some effort to acquire the customs and the arts of the land to which he was going. Surely life here is mainly given to us that we may develop powers which will find their field of exercise yonder, and acquire characters which shall be in conformity with the conditions of that future life. Surely there can be no more tragic folly than the folly of letting myself be so absorbed and entangled by this present world, as that when the transient has passed, I shall feel homeless and desolate, and have nothing that I can do or care about amidst the activities of Eternity. Dear friend, should *you* feel homeless if you were taken, as you will be taken, into that world?

Turn now to

II. The sunny landscape drawn by the Seer.

Note the contrast presented by the shepherds. 'Death shall be their shepherd.' 'The Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall be their Shepherd.' I need not occupy your time in trying to show, what has sometimes been doubted, that the radiant picture of the Apocalyptic Seer is dealing with nothing in the present, but with the future condition of certain men. I would just remind you that the words in which it is couched are to a large extent a quotation from ancient prophecy, a description of the divine watchfulness over the pilgrim's return from captivity to the Land of Promise. But the quotation is

wonderfully elevated and spiritualised in the New Testament vision; for instead of reading, as the Original does: 'He that hath mercy on them shall lead them,' we have here, 'the Lamb which is in the midst of the Throne shall be their Shepherd,' and instead of their being led merely to 'the springs of water,' here we read that He 'leads them to the fountains of the water of life.'

We have to think, first, of that most striking, most significant and profound modification of the Old Testament words, which presents the Lamb as 'the Shepherd.' All Christ's shepherding on earth and in heaven depends, as do all our hopes for heaven and earth, upon the fact of His sacrificial death. It is only because He is the 'Lamb that was slain' that He is either the 'Lamb in the midst of the Throne,' or the Shepherd of the flock. And we must make acquaintance with Him first in the character of 'the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world,' before we can either follow in His footsteps as our Guide, or be compassed by His protection as our Shepherd.

He is the Lamb, and He is the Shepherd—that suggests not only that the sacrificial work of Jesus Christ is the basis of all His work for us on earth and in heaven, but the very incongruity of making One, who bears the same nature as the flock to be the Shepherd of the flock, is part of the beauty of the metaphor. It is His humanity that is our guide. It is His continual manhood, all through eternity and its

glories, that makes Him the Shepherd of perfected souls. They follow Him because He is one of themselves, and He could not be the Shepherd unless he were the Lamb.

But then this Shepherd is not only gracious, sympathetic, kin to us by participation in a common nature, and fit to be our Guide because He has been our Sacrifice and the propitiation of our sins, but He is the Lamb 'in the midst of the throne,' wielding therefore all divine power, and standing—not as the rendering in our Bible leads an English reader to suppose, on the throne, but—in the middle point between it and the ring of worshippers, and so the Communicator to the outer circumference of all the blessings that dwell in the divine centre. He shall be their Shepherd, not coercing, not driving by violence, but leading to the fountains of the waters of life, gently and graciously. It is not compulsory energy which He exercises upon us, either on earth or in heaven, but it is the drawing of a divine attraction, sweet to put forth and sweet to yield to.

There is still another contrast. Death huddled and herded his reluctant sheep into a fold where they lay inactive but struggling and restless. Christ leads His flock into a pasture. He shall guide them 'to the fountains of waters of life.' I need not dwell at any length on the blessed particulars of that future, set forth here and in the context. But let me suggest them briefly. There is joyous activity. There is constant progression. He goeth before; they follow.

The perfection of heaven begins at entrance into it, but it is a perfection which can be perfected, and is being perfected, through the ages of Eternity, and the picture of the Shepherd in front and the flock behind, is the true conception of all the progress of that future life. 'They shall follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth'—a sweet guidance, a glad following, a progressive conformity! 'In the long years liker must they grow.'

Further, there is the communication of life more and more abundantly. Therefore there is the satisfaction of all desire, so that 'they shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more.' The pain of desire ceases because desire is no sooner felt than it is satisfied, the joy of desire continues, because its satisfaction enables us to desire more, and so, appetite and eating, desire and fruition, alternate in ceaseless reciprocity. To us, being every moment capable of more, more will be given; and 'to-morrow shall be as this day, and much more abundant.'

There is one point more in regard to that pasture into which the Lamb leads the happy flock, and that is, the cessation of all pains and sorrows. Not only shall they 'hunger no more, neither thirst any more'; but 'the sun shall not smite them, nor any heat, and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes.' Here the Shepherd carried rod and staff, and sometimes had to strike the wandering sheep hard: there these are needed no more. Here He had sometimes to move them out of green pastures, and away from still

waters, into valleys of the shadow of death; but 'there,' as one of the prophets has it: 'they shall lie in a good fold, and in a fat pasture shall they feed.'

But now, we must note, finally, the other kind of men whom this other Shepherd leads into His pastures, 'They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.' Aye! that is it. That is why He can lead them where He does lead them. Strange alchemy which out of two crimsons, the crimson of our sins and the crimson of His blood, makes one white! But it is so, and the only way by which we can ever be cleansed, either with the initial cleansing of forgiveness, or with the daily cleansing of continual purifying and approximation to the divine holiness, is by our bringing the foul garment of our stained personality and character into contact with the blood which, 'shed for many,' takes away their sins, and infused into their veins, cleanses them from all sin.

You have yourselves to bring about that contact. '*They* have washed their robes.' And how did they do it? By faith in the Sacrifice first, by following the Example next. For it is not merely a forgiveness for the past, but a perfecting, progressive and gradual, for the future, that lies in that thought of washing their robes and making them white in the blood of the Lamb.

Dear brethren, life here and life hereafter are continuous. They are homogeneous, on one plane

though an ascending one. The differences there are great—I was going to say, and it would be true, that the resemblances are greater. As we have been, we shall be. If we take Christ for our Shepherd here, and follow Him, though from afar and with faltering steps, amidst all the struggles and windings and rough ways of life, then and only then, will He be our Shepherd, to go with us through the darkness of death, to make it no reluctant expulsion from a place in which we would fain continue to be, but a tranquil and willing following of Him by the road which He has consecrated for ever, and deprived for ever of its solitude, because Himself has trod it.

Those two possibilities are before each of us. Either of them may be yours. One of them must be. Look on this picture and on this; and choose—God help you to choose aright—which of the two will describe your experience. Will you have Christ for your Shepherd, or will you have Death for your shepherd? The answer to that question lies in the answer to the other—have you washed your robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb; and are you following Him? You can settle the question which lot is to be yours, and only you can settle it. See that you settle it aright, and that you settle it soon.

END OF VOL. I.

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DAVID'S CRY FOR PARDON

> '… Blot out my transgressions. 2. Wash me throughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin.'—PSALM li. 1, 2.

A whole year had elapsed between David's crime and David's penitence. It had been a year of guilty satisfaction not worth the having; of sullen hardening of heart against God and all His appeals. The thirty-second Psalm tells us how *happy* David had been during that twelvemonth, of which he says, 'My bones waxed old through my roaring all the day long. For day and night Thy hand was heavy on me.' Then came Nathan with his apologue, and with that dark threatening that 'the sword should never depart from his house,' the fulfilment of which became a well-head of sorrow to the king for the rest of his days, and gave a yet deeper poignancy of anguish to the crime of his spoiled favourite Absalom. The stern words had their effect. The frost that had bound his soul melted all away, and he confessed his sin, and was forgiven then and there. 'I have sinned against the Lord' is the confession as recorded in the historical books; and, says Nathan, 'The Lord hath made to pass from thee the iniquity of thy sin.' Immediately, as would appear from the narrative, that very same day, the child of Bathsheba and David was smitten with fatal disease, and died in a week. And it is *after* all these events—the threatening, the

penitence, the pardon, the punishment—that he comes to God, who had so freely forgiven, and likewise so sorely smitten him, and wails out these prayers: 'Blot out my transgressions, wash me from mine iniquity, cleanse me from my sin.'

One almost shrinks from taking as the text of a sermon words like these, in which a broken and contrite spirit groans for deliverance, and which are, besides, hallowed by the thought of the thousands who have since found them the best expression of their sacredest emotions. But I would fain try not to lose the feeling that breathes through the words, while seeking for the thoughts which are in them, and hope that the light which they throw upon the solemn subjects of guilt and forgiveness may not be for any of us a mere cold light.

I. Looking then at this triad of petitions, they teach us first how
David thought of his sin.

You will observe the reiteration of the same earnest cry in all these clauses, and if you glance over the remainder of this psalm, you will find that he asks for the gifts of God's Spirit, with a similar threefold repetition. Now this characteristic of the whole psalm is worth notice in the outset. It is not a mere piece of Hebrew parallelism. The requirements of poetical form but partially explain it. It is much more the earnestness of a soul that cannot be content with once asking for the blessings and then passing

on, but dwells upon them with repeated supplication, not because it thinks that it shall be heard for its 'much speaking,' but because it longs for them so eagerly.

And besides that, though the three clauses do express the same general idea, they express it under various modifications, and must be all taken together before we get the whole of the Psalmist's thought of sin.

Notice again that he speaks of his evil as 'transgressions' and as 'sin,' first using the plural and then the singular. He regards it first as being broken up into a multitude of isolated acts, and then as being all gathered together into one knot, as it were, so that it is one thing. In one aspect it is 'my transgressions'—'that thing that I did about Uriah, that thing that I did about Bathsheba, those other things that these dragged after them.' One by one the acts of wrongdoing pass before him. But he does not stop there. They are not merely a number of deeds, but they have, deep down below, a common root from which they all came—a centre in which they all inhere. And so he says, not only 'Blot out my *transgressions*,' but 'Wash me from mine *iniquity*.' He does not merely generalise, but he sees and he feels what you and I have to feel, if we judge rightly of our evil actions, that we cannot take them only in their plurality as so many separate deeds, but that we must recognise them as coming from a common source, and we must lament before God not only our

'sins' but our 'sin'—not only the outward acts of transgression, but that alienation of heart from which they all come; not only sin in its manifold manifestations as it comes out in the life, but in its inward roots as it coils round our hearts. You are not to confess acts alone, but let your contrition embrace the principle from which they come.

Further, in all the petitions we see that the idea of his own single responsibility for the whole thing is uppermost in David's mind. It is *my* transgression, it is *mine* iniquity, and *my* sin. He has not learned to say with Adam of old, and with some so-called wise thinkers to-day: 'I was tempted, and I could not help it.' He does not talk about 'circumstances,' and say that they share the blame with him. He takes it all to himself. 'It was *I* did it. True, I was tempted, but it was my soul that made the occasion a temptation. True, the circumstances led me astray, but they would not have led me astray if I had been right, and *where* as well as *what* I ought to be.' It is a solemn moment when that thought first rises in its revealing power to throw light into the dark places of our souls. But it is likewise a blessed moment, and without it we are scarcely aware of ourselves. Conscience quickens consciousness. The sense of transgression is the first thing that gives to many a man the full sense of his own individuality. There is nothing that makes us feel how awful and incommunicable is that mysterious personality by which every one of us lives alone after all

companionship, so much as the contemplation of our relations to God's law. 'Every man shall bear his own burden.' 'Circumstances,' yes; 'bodily organisation,' yes; 'temperament,' yes; 'the maxims of society,' 'the conventionalities of the time,' yes,—all these things have something to do with shaping our single deeds and with influencing our character; but after we have made all allowances for these influences which affect *me*, let us ask the philosophers who bring them forward as diminishing or perhaps annihilating responsibility, 'And what about that *me* which these things influence?' After all, let me remember that the deed is *mine*, and that every one of us shall, as Paul puts it, give account of *himself* unto God.

Passing from that, let me point for one moment to another set of ideas that are involved in these petitions. The three words which the Psalmist employs for sin give prominence to different aspects of it. 'Transgression' is not the same as 'iniquity,' and 'iniquity' is not the same as 'sin.' They are not aimless, useless synonyms, but they have each a separate thought in them. The word rendered 'transgression' literally means rebellion, a breaking away from and setting oneself against lawful authority. That translated 'iniquity' literally means that which is twisted, bent. The word in the original for 'sin' literally means missing a mark, an aim. And this threefold view of sin is no discovery of David's, but is the lesson which the whole Old Testament system had laboured to print deep on the national

consciousness. That lesson, taught by law and ceremonial, by denunciation and remonstrance, by chastisement and deliverance, the penitent king has learned. To all men's wrongdoings these descriptions apply, but most of all to his. Sin is ever, and his sin especially is, rebellion, the deflection of the life from the straight line which God's law draws so clearly and firmly, and hence a missing the aim.

Think how profound and living is the consciousness of sin which lies in calling it *rebellion*. It is not merely, then, that we go against some abstract propriety, or break some impersonal law of nature when we do wrong, but that we rebel against a rightful Sovereign. In a special sense this was true of the Jew, whose nation stood under the government of a divine king, so that sin was treason, and breaches of the law acts of rebellion against God. But it is as true of us all. Our theory of morals will be miserably defective, and our practice will be still more defective, unless we have learned that morality is but the garment of religion, that the definition of virtue is obedience to God, and that the true sin in sin is not the yielding to impulses that belong to our nature, but the assertion in the act of yielding, of our independence of God and of our opposition to His will. And all this has application to David's sin. He was God's viceroy and representative, and he sets to his people the example of revolt, and lifts the standard of rebellion. It is as if the ruler of a province declared war against the central authority

of which he was the creature, and used against it the very magazines and weapons with which it had intrusted him. He had rebelled, and in an eminent degree, as Nathan said to him, given to the enemies of God occasion to blaspheme.

Not less profound and suggestive is that other name for sin, that which is twisted, or bent, mine 'iniquity.' It is the same metaphor which lies in our own word 'wrong,' that which is wrung or warped from the straight line of right. To that line, drawn by God's law, our lives should run parallel, bending neither to the right hand nor to the left. But instead of the firm directness of such a line, our lives show wavering deformity, and are like the tremulous strokes in a child's copy-book. David had the pattern before him, and by its side his unsteady purpose, his passionate lust, had traced this wretched scrawl. The path on which he should have trodden was a straight course to God, unbending like one of these conquering Roman roads, that will turn aside for neither mountain nor ravine, nor stream nor bog. If it had been thus straight, it would have reached its goal. Journeying on that way of holiness, he would have found, and we shall find, that on it no ravenous beast shall meet us, but with songs and everlasting joy upon their lips the happy pilgrims draw ever nearer to God, obtaining joy and gladness in all the march, until at last 'sorrow and sighing shall flee away.' But instead of this he had made for himself a crooked path, and had lost his road and his peace in

the mazes of wandering ways. 'The labour of the foolish wearieth every one of them, because he knoweth not how to come to the city.'

Another very solemn and terrible thought of what sin is, lies in that final word for it, which means 'missing an aim.' How strikingly that puts a truth which siren voices are constantly trying to sing us out of believing! Every sin is a blunder as well as a crime. And that for two reasons, because, first, God has made us for Himself, and to take anything besides for our life's end or our heart's portion is to divert ourselves from our true destiny; and because, second, that being so, every attempt to win satisfaction or delight by such a course is and must be a failure. Sin misses the aim if we think of our proper destination. Sin misses its own aim of happiness. A man never gets what he hoped for by doing wrong, or, if he seem to do so, he gets something more that spoils it all. He pursues after the fleeing form that seems so fair, and when he reaches her side, and lifts her veil, eager to embrace the tempter, a hideous skeleton grins and gibbers at him. The siren voices sing to you from the smiling island, and their white arms and golden harps and the flowery grass draw you from the wet boat and the weary oar; but when a man lands he sees the fair form end in a slimy fish, and she slays him and gnaws his bones. 'He knows not that the dead are there, and that her guests are in the depths of hell.' Yes! every sin is a mistake, and the epitaph for the

sinner is 'Thou fool!'

II. These petitions also show us, in the second place, How David thinks of forgiveness.

As the words for sin expressed a threefold view of the burden from which the Psalmist seeks deliverance, so the triple prayer, in like manner, sets forth that blessing under three aspects. It is not merely pardon for which he asks. He is making no sharp dogmatic distinction between forgiveness and cleansing.

The two things run into each other in his prayer, as they do, thank God! in our own experience, the one being inseparable, in fact, from the other. It is absolute deliverance from the power of sin, in all forms of that power, whether as guilt or as habit, for which he cries so piteously; and his accumulative petitions are so exhaustive, not because he is coldly examining his sin, but because he is intensely feeling the manifold burden of his great evil.

That first petition conceives of the divine dealing with sin as being the erasure of a writing, perhaps of an indictment. There is a special significance in the use of the word here, because it is also employed in the description of the Levitical ceremonial of the ordeal, where a curse was written on a scroll and blotted out by the priest. But apart from that the metaphor is a natural and suggestive one. Our sin stands written against us. The long gloomy

indictment has been penned by our own hands. Our past is a blurred manuscript, full of false things and bad things. We have to spread the writing before God, and ask Him to remove the stained characters from its surface, that once was fair and unsoiled.

Ah, brethren! some people tell us that the past is irrevocable, that the thing once done can never be undone, that the life's diary written by our own hands can never be cancelled. The melancholy theory of some thinkers and teachers is summed up in the words, infinitely sad and despairing when so used, 'What I have written I have written.' Thank God! we know better than that. We know who blots out the handwriting 'that is against us, nailing it to His Cross.' We know that of God's great mercy our future may 'copy fair our past,' and the past may be all obliterated and removed. And as sometimes you will find in an old monkish library the fair vellum that once bore lascivious stories of ancient heathens and pagan deities turned into the manuscript in which a saint has penned his Contemplations, an Augustine his Confessions, or a Jerome his Translations, so our souls may become palimpsests. The old wicked heathen characters that we have traced there may be blotted out, and covered over by the writing of that divine Spirit who has said, 'I will put My laws into their minds, and write them in their hearts.' As you run your pen through the finished pages of your last year's diaries, as you seal them up and pack them away, and begin a new page in a

clean book on the first of January, so it is possible for every one of us to do with our lives. Notwithstanding all the influence of habit, notwithstanding all the obstinacy of long-indulged modes of thought and action, notwithstanding all the depressing effect of frequent attempts and frequent failures, we may break ourselves off from all that is sinful in our past lives, and begin afresh, saying, 'God helping me! I will write another sort of biography for myself for the days that are to come.'

We cannot erase these sad records from our past. The ink is indelible; and besides all that we have visibly written in these terrible autobiographies of ours, there is much that has sunk into the page, there is many a 'secret fault,' the record of which will need the fire of that last day to make it legible, Alas for those who learn the black story of their own lives for the first time then! Learn it now, my brother! and learn likewise that Christ can wipe it all clean off the page, clean out of your nature, clean out of God's book. Cry to Him, with the Psalmist, 'Blot out my transgressions!' and He will calm and bless you with the ancient answer, 'I have blotted out as a thick cloud thy transgressions, and as a cloud thy sins.'

Then there is another idea in the second of these prayers for forgiveness: '*Wash me throughly* from mine iniquity.' That phrase does not need any explanation, except that the word expresses the antique way of cleansing garments by treading and beating. David, then, here uses the familiar symbol of

a robe, to express the 'habit' of the soul, or, as we say, the character. That robe is all splashed and stained. He cries to God to make it a robe of righteousness and a garment of purity.

And mark that he thinks the method by which this will be accomplished is a protracted and probably a painful one. He is not praying for a mere declaration of pardon, he is not asking only for the one complete, instantaneous act of forgiveness, but he is asking for a process of purifying which will be long and hard. 'I am ready,' says he, in effect, 'to submit to any sort of discipline, if only I may be clean. Wash me, beat me, tread me down, hammer me with mallets, dash me against stones, rub me with smarting soap and caustic nitre—do anything, anything with me, if only those foul spots melt away from the texture of my soul!' A solemn prayer, my brethren! if we pray it aright, which will be answered by many a sharp application of God's Spirit, by many a sorrow, by much very painful work, both within our own souls and in our outward lives, but which will be fulfilled at last in our being clothed like our Lord, in garments which shine as the light.

We know, dear brethren! who has said, 'I counsel thee to buy of Me white raiment, that the shame of thy nakedness may not appear.' And we know well who were the great company before the throne of God, that had 'washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.' 'Though your sins be

as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.' 'Wash me throughly from mine iniquity.'

The deliverance from sin is still further expressed by that third supplication, 'Cleanse me from my sin.' That is the technical word for the priestly act of declaring ceremonial cleanness—the cessation of ceremonial pollution, and for the other priestly act of making, as well as declaring, clean from the stains of leprosy. And with allusion to both of these uses, the Psalmist employs it here. That is to say, he thinks of his guilt not only as a blotted past record which he has written, not only as a garment spotted by the flesh which his spirit wears, but he thinks of it too as inhering in himself, as a leprosy and disease of his own personal nature. He thinks of it as being, like that, incurable, fatal, twin sister to and precursor of death; and he thinks of it as capable of being cleansed only by a sacerdotal act, only by the great High Priest and by His finger being laid upon it. And we know who it was that—when the leper, whom no man in Israel was allowed to touch on pain of uncleanness, came to His feet—put out His hand in triumphant consciousness of power, and touched him, and said, 'I *will*! be thou clean.' Let this be thy prayer, 'Cleanse me from my sin'; and Christ will answer, 'Thy leprosy hath departed from thee.'

III. These petitions likewise show us whence the Psalmist draws his confidence for such a prayer.

'According to the multitude of Thy tender mercies, blot out my transgressions.' His whole hope rests upon God's own character, as revealed in the endless continuance of His acts of love. He knows the number and the greatness of his sins, and the very depth of his consciousness of sin helps him to a corresponding greatness in his apprehension of God's mercy. As he says in another of his psalms, 'Innumerable evils have compassed me about; they are more than the hairs of my head…. Many, O Lord my God! are Thy wonderful works…. They are more than can be numbered.' This is the blessedness of all true penitence, that the more profoundly it feels its own sore need and great sinfulness, in that very proportion does it recognise the yet greater mercy and all-sufficient grace of our loving God, and from the lowest depths beholds the stars in the sky, which they who dwell amid the surface-brightness of the noonday cannot discern.

God's own revealed character, His faithfulness and persistency, notwithstanding all our sins, in that mode of dealing with men which has blessed all generations with His tender mercies—these were David's pleas. And for us who have the perfect love of God perfectly expressed in His Son, that same plea is incalculably strengthened, for we can say, 'According to Thy tender mercy in Thy dear Son, for the sake of Christ, blot out my transgressions.' Is the depth of our desire, and is the firmness of our confidence, proportioned to the increased clearness

of our knowledge of the love of our God? Does the Cross of Christ lead us to as trustful a penitence as David had, to whom meditation on God's providences and the shadows of the ancient covenant were chiefest teachers of the multitude of His tender mercies?

Remember further that a comparison of the narrative in the historical books seems to show, as I said, that this psalm followed Nathan's declaration of the divine forgiveness, and that therefore these petitions of our text are the echo and response to that declaration.

Thus we see that the revelation of God's love precedes, and is the cause of, the truest penitence; that our prayer for forgiveness is properly the appropriating, or the effort to appropriate, the divine promise of forgiveness; and that the assurance of pardon, so far from making a man think lightly of his sin, is the thing that drives it home to his conscience, and first of all teaches him what it really is. As long as you are tortured with thoughts of a possible hell because of guilt, as long as you are troubled by the contemplation of consequences affecting your happiness as ensuing upon your wrongdoing, so long there is a foreign and disturbing element in even your deepest and truest penitence. But when you know that God has forgiven—when you come to see the 'multitude of Thy tender mercies,' when the fear of punishment has passed out of your apprehension, then you are left with a heart at leisure from dread,

to look the fact and not the consequences in the face, and to think of the moral nature, and not of the personal results, of your sin. And so one of the old prophets, with profound truth, says, 'Thou shalt be ashamed and confounded, and never open thy mouth any more because of thy sin, when I am pacified towards thee for all thou hast done.'

Dear friends! the wheels of God's great mill may grind us small, without our coming to know or to hate our sin. About His chastisements, about the revelation of His wrath, that old saying is true to a great extent: 'If you bray a fool in a mortar, his folly will not depart from him.' You may smite a man down, crush him, make his bones to creep with the preaching of vengeance and of hell, and the result of it will often be, if it be anything at all, what it was in the case of that poor wretched Judas, who, because he only saw wrath, flung *himself* into despair, and was lost, not because he had betrayed Christ, but because he believed that there was no forgiveness for the man that had betrayed.

But Love comes, and 'Love is Lord of all.' God's assurance, 'I have forgiven,' the assurance that we do not need to plead with Him, to bribe Him, to buy pardon by tears and amendment, but that it is already provided for us—the blessed vision of an all-mighty love treasured in a dying Saviour, the proclamation 'God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them'—Oh! these are the powers that break, or

rather that melt, our hearts; these are the keen weapons that wound to heal our hearts; these are the teachers that teach a 'godly sorrow that needeth not to be repented of.' Think of all the patient, pitying mercy of our Father, with which He has lingered about our lives, and softly knocked at the door of our hearts! Think of that unspeakable gift in which are wrapped up all His tender mercies—the gift of Christ who died for us all! Let it smite upon your heart with a rebuke mightier than all the thunders of law or terrors of judgment. Let it unveil for you not only the depths of the love of God, but the darkness of your own selfish rebellion from Him. Measure your crooked lives by the perfect rightness of Christ's. Learn how you have missed the aim which He reached, who could say, 'I delight to do Thy will, O my God!' And let that same infinite love that teaches sin announce frank forgiveness and prophesy perfect purity. Then, with heart fixed upon Christ's Cross, let your cry for pardon be the echo of the most sure promise of pardon which sounds from His dying lips; and as you gaze on Him who died that we might be freed from all iniquity, ask Him to blot out your transgressions, to wash you throughly from your iniquity, and to cleanse you from your sins. Ask, for you cannot ask in vain; ask earnestly, for you need it sorely; ask confidently, for He has promised before you ask; but ask, for unless you do, you will not receive. Ask, and the answer is sent already—'The blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth from all sin.'

DAVID'S CRY FOR PURITY

'… Renew a right spirit within me. 11. … And take not Thy Holy

Spirit from me. 12. … And uphold me with Thy free Spirit.'

—PSALM li. 10-12.

We ought to be very thankful that the Bible never conceals the faults of its noblest men. David stands high among the highest of these. His words have been for ages the chosen expression for the devotions of the holiest souls; and whoever has wished to speak longings after purity, lowly trust in God, the aspirations of love, or the raptures of devotion, has found no words of his own more natural than those of the poet-king of Israel. And this man sins, black, grievous sin. Self-indulgent, he stays at home while his army is in the field. His moral nature, relaxed by this shrinking from duty, is tempted, and easily conquered. The sensitive poet nature, to which all delights of eye and sense appeal so strongly, is for a time too strong for the devout soul. One sin drags on another. As self-indulgence opened the door for lust, so lust, which dwells hard by hate, draws after it murder. The king is a traitor to his subjects, the soldier untrue to the chivalry of arms, the friend the betrayer of the friend. Nothing can be blacker than the whole story, and the Bible tells the shameful history in all its naked ugliness.

Many a precious lesson is contained in it. For instance, It is not innocence which makes men good. 'This is your man after God's own heart, is it?' runs the common, shallow sneer. Yes; not that God thought little of his foul sin, nor that 'saints' make up for adultery and murder by making or singing psalms; not that 'righteousness' as a standard of conduct is lower than 'morality'; but that, having fallen, he learned to abhor his sin, and with deepened trust in God's mercy, and many tears, struggled out of the mire, and with unconquered resolve and strength drawn from a divine source, sought still to press towards the mark. It is not the attainment of purity, not the absence of sin, but the presence and operation, though it be partial, of an energy which is at war with all impurity, that makes a man righteous. That is a lesson worth learning.

Again, David was not a hypocrite because of this fall of his. All sin is inconsistent with a religious character. But it is not for us to say what sin is incompatible with a religious character.

Again, the worst sin is not some outburst of gross transgression, forming an exception to the ordinary tenor of a life, bad and dismal as such a sin is; but the worst and most fatal are the small continuous vices, which root underground and honeycomb the soul. Many a man who thinks himself a Christian, is in more danger from the daily commission, for example, of small pieces of sharp practice in his business, than ever was David at his worst. White

ants pick a carcase clean sooner than a lion will.

Most precious of all is the lesson as to the possibility of all sin being effaced, and of the high hopes which even a man sunk in transgression has a right to cherish, as to the purity and beauty of character to which he may come. What a prayer these clauses contain to be offered by one who has so sinned! What a marvellous faith in God's pardoning love, and what a boldness of hope in his own future, they disclose! They set forth a profound ideal of a noble character; they make of that ideal a prayer; they are the prayer of a great transgressor, who is also a true penitent. In all these aspects they are very remarkable, and lead to valuable lessons. Let us look at them from these points of view successively.

I. Observe that here is a remarkable outline of a holy character.

It is to be observed that of these three gifts—a right spirit, Thy Holy Spirit, a free spirit—the central one alone is in the original spoken of as God's; the 'Thy' of the last clause of the English Bible being an unnecessary supplement. And I suppose that this central petition stands in the middle, because the gift which it asks is the essential and fundamental one, from which there flow, and as it were, diverge on the right hand and on the left, the other two. God's Holy Spirit given to a man makes the human spirit holy, and then makes it 'right' and 'free.' Look then at the petitions, not in the order in which they stand in the

text, but in the order which the text indicates as the natural one.

Now as to that fundamental petition, 'Take not Thy Holy Spirit from me,' one thing to notice is that David regards himself as possessing that Spirit. We are not to read into this psalm the fully developed New Testament teaching of a personal Paraclete, the Spirit whom Christ reveals and sends. To do that would be a gross anachronism. But we are to remember that it is an anointed king who speaks, on whose head there has been poured the oil that designated him to his office, and in its gentle flow and sweet fragrance, symbolised from of old the inspiration of a divine influence that accompanied every divine call. We are to remember, too, how it had fared with David's predecessor. Saul had been chosen by God; had been for a while guided and upheld by God. But he fell into sin, and—not because he fell into it, but because he continued in it; not because he did wrong, but because he did not repent—the solemn words are recorded concerning him, that 'the Spirit of the Lord departed from Saul, and an evil spirit from the Lord troubled him.' The divine influence which came on the towering head of the son of Kish, through the anointing oil that Samuel poured upon his raven hair, left him, and he stood God-forsaken because he stood God-forsaking. And so David looks back from the 'horrible pit and miry clay' into which he had fallen, where, stained with blood and lust, he lies, to that sad gigantic figure,

remembered so well and loved by him so truly—the great king who sinned away his soul, and bled out his life on the heights of Gilboa. He sees in that blasted pine-tree, towering above the forest but dead at the top, and barked and scathed all down the sides by the lightning scars of passion, the picture of what he himself will come to, if the blessing that was laid upon his ruddy locks and his young head by the aged Samuel's anointing should pass from him too as it had done from his predecessor. God had departed from Saul, because Saul had refused His counsel and departed from Him; and Saul's successor, trembling as he remembers the fate of the founder of the monarchy, and of his vanished dynasty, prays with peculiar emphasis of meaning, 'Take not Thy Holy Spirit from *me*!'

That Holy Spirit, the Spirit of God, had descended upon him when he was anointed king, but it was no mere official consecration which he had thereby received. He had been fitted for regal functions by personal cleansing and spiritual gifts. And it is the man as well as the king, the sinful man much rather than the faulty king, that here wrestles with God, and stays the heavenly Visitant whom his sin has made to seem as if He would depart. What he desires most earnestly, next to that pardon which he has already sought and found, is that his spirit should be made holy by God's Spirit. That is, as I have said, the central petition of his threefold prayer, from which the others come as natural consequences.

And what is this 'holiness' which David so earnestly desires? Without attempting any lengthened analysis of the various shades of meaning in the word, our purpose will be served if I point out that in all probability the primary idea in it is that of separation. God is holy—that is, separated by all the glory of His perfect nature from His creatures. Things are holy—that is, separated from common uses, and appropriated to God's service. Whatever He laid His hand on and claimed in any especial manner for His, became thereby holy, whether it were a ceremony, or a place, or a tool. Men are holy when they are set apart for God's service, whether they be officially consecrated for certain offices, or have yielded themselves by an inward devotion based on love to be His.

The ethical signification which is predominant in our use of the word and has made it little more than a synonym for moral purity is certainly not the original meaning, as is sufficiently clear from the fact that the word is applied to material things which could have no moral qualities, and sometimes to persons who were not pure, but who were in some sense or other set apart for God's service. But gradually that meaning becomes more and more completely attached to the word, and 'holiness' is not only separation for God, but separation from sin. That is what David longs for in this prayer; and the connection of these two meanings of the word is worth pointing out in a sermon, for the sake of the

great truth which it suggests, that the basis of all rightness and righteousness in a human spirit is its conscious and glad devotion to God's service and uses. A reference to God must underlie all that is good in men, and on the other hand, that consecration to God is a delusion or a deception which does not issue in separation from evil.

'Holiness' is a loftier and a truer word than 'morality,' 'virtue,' or the like; it differs from these in that it proclaims that surrender to God is the very essence of all good, while they seek to construct a standard for human conduct, and to lay a foundation for human goodness, without regard to Him. Hence, irreligious moralists dislike the very word, and fall back upon pale, colourless phrases rather than employ it. But these are inadequate for the purpose. Man's duties can never be summed up in any expression which omits man's relation to God. How do I stand to Him? Do I belong to Him by joyous yielding of myself to be His instrument? That, my friends! is the question, the answer to which determines everything about me. Rightly answered, there will come all fruits of grace and beauty in the character as a natural consequence; 'whatsoever things are lovely and of good report,' every virtue and every praise grow from the root of consecration to God. Wrongly answered, there will come only fruits of selfishness and evil, which may simulate virtue, but the blossom shall go up in dust, and the root in stubble. Do you seek purity, nobleness,

strength, and beauty of soul? Learn that all these inhere in and flow from the one act of giving up yourself to God, and in their truest perfection are found only in the spirit that is His. Holiness considered as moral excellence is the result of holiness considered as devotion to God. And learn too that holiness in both aspects comes from the operation and indwelling in our spirits of a divine Spirit, who draws away our love from self to fix it on Him, which changes our blindness into sight, and makes us by degrees like Himself, 'holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners.' The Spirit of the Lord is the energy which produces all righteousness and purity in human spirits.

Therefore, all our desires after what is good and true should shape themselves into the desire for that Spirit. Our prayer should be, 'Make me separate from evil, and that I may be so, claim and keep me for Thine own. As Thou hast done with the Sabbath amongst the days, with the bare summit of the hill of the Lord's house among the mountains, with Israel amidst the nations, so do with me; lay Thine hand upon me for Thine own. Let my spirit, O God! know its destination for Thee, its union with Thee. Then being Thine, it will be clean. Dwell in me, that I may know myself Thine. Seal me with that gracious influence which is the proof that Thou possessest me, and the pledge that I possess Thee. "Take not Thy Holy Spirit from me."'

So much for the chief of these petitions, which

gives the ideal character in its deepest relations. There follow two other elements in the character, which on either side flow from the central source. The *holy* spirit in a man will be a *right* spirit and a *free* spirit. Consider these further thoughts in turn.

'A right spirit.' You will observe that our translators have given an alternative rendering in the margin, and as is not seldom the case, it is a better one than that adopted in the text. 'A constant or firm spirit' is the Psalmist's meaning. He sees that a spirit which is conscious of its relation to God, and set free from the perturbations of sin, will be a spirit firm and settled, established and immovable in its obedience and its faith. For Him, the root of all steadfastness is in consecration to God.

And so this collocation of ideas opens the way for us to important considerations bearing upon the practical ordering of our natures and of our lives. For instance, there is no stability and settled persistency of righteous purpose possible for us, unless we are made strong because we lay hold on God's strength, and stand firm because we are rooted in Him. Without that hold-fast, we shall be swept away by storms of calamity or by gusts of passion. Without that to steady us, our own boiling lusts and desires will make every fibre of our being quiver and tremble. Without that armour, there will not be solidity enough in our character to bear without breaking the steady pressure of the world's weight, still less the fierce hammering of special temptation.

To stand erect, and in that sense to have a right spirit —one that is upright and unbent—we must have sure footing in God, and have His energy infused into our shrinking limbs. If we are to be stable amidst earthquakes and storms, we must be built on the rock, and build rock-like upon it. Build thy strength upon God. Let His Holy Spirit be the foundation of thy life, and then thy tremulous and vagrant soul will be braced and fixed. The building will become like the foundation, and will grow into 'a tower of strength that stands four-square to every wind.' Rooted in God, thou shalt be unmoved by 'the loud winds when they call'; or if still the tremulous leaves are huddled together before the blast, and the swaying branches creak and groan, the bole will stand firm and the gnarled roots will not part from their anchorage, though the storm-giant drag at them with a hundred hands. The spirit of holiness will be a firm spirit.

But there is another phase of connection between these two points of the ideal character—if my spirit is to be holy and to preserve its holiness, it must be firm. That is to say, you can only get and keep purity by resistance. A man who has not learned to say 'No!'—who is not resolved that he *will* take God's way in spite of every dog that can bay or bark at him, in spite of every silvery voice that woos him aside—will be a weak and a wretched man till he dies. In such a world as this, with such hearts as ours, weakness *is* wickedness in the long run. Whoever lets himself be

shaped and guided by anything lower than an inflexible will, fixed in obedience to God, will in the end be shaped into a deformity and guided to wreck and ruin. Dreams however rapturous, contemplations however devout, emotions however deep and sacred, make no man pure and good without hard effort, and that to a large extent in the direction of resistance. Righteousness is not a mere negative idea, and Scripture morality is something much deeper than prohibitions. But there is no law for us without prohibitions, and no righteousness without casting out evil that is strong in us, and fighting against evil that is attractive around us. Therefore we need firmness to guard holiness, to be the hard shell in which the rich fruit matures. We need a wholesome obstinacy in the right that will neither be bribed nor coaxed nor bullied, nor anyhow persuaded out of the road in which we know that we should walk. 'Add to your faith manly vigour.' Learn that an indispensable requisite of holiness is prescribed in that command, 'Whom resist, steadfast in the faith.' And remember that the ground of all successful resistance and the need for it are alike taught in that series of petitions, which makes a holy spirit the foundation of a constant spirit, and a constant spirit the guard of a holy spirit.

Then consider, for a moment, the third element in the character which David longs to possess—a *free* spirit. He who is holy because full of God's Spirit, and constant in his holiness, will likewise be 'free.'

That is the same word which is in other places translated 'willing'—and the scope of the Psalmist's desire is, 'Let my spirit be emancipated from sin by *willing* obedience.' This goes very deep into the heart of all true godliness. The only obedience which God accepts is that which gladly, and almost as by an instinctive inward impulse, harmonises the human will with the divine. 'Lo! I come: in the volume of the book it is written of me, I delight to do Thy will, and Thy law is within my heart.' That is a blessed thought, that we may come to do Him service not because we must, but because we like; not as serfs, but as sons; not thinking of His law as a slave-driver that cracks his whip over our heads, but as a friend that lets us know how we may please Him whom it is our delight to obey. And so the Psalmist prays, 'Let my obedience be so willing that I had rather do what Thou wilt than anything besides.'

'*Then*,' he thinks, 'I shall be free.' Of course—for the correlative of freedom is lawful authority, and the definition of freedom is willing submission. If for us duty is joy, and all our soul's desires flow with an equable motion parallel to the will of God, then there is no sense of restraint in keeping within the limits beyond which we do not seek to go. The willing spirit sets us free, free from the 'ancient solitary reign' of the despot Self, free from the mob rule of passions and appetites, free from the incubus of evil habits, free from the authority of men's voices and examples. Obedience is freedom to them that have

learned to love the lips that command. We are set free that we may serve: 'O Lord! truly I am Thy servant; Thou hast loosed my bonds.' We are set free in serving: 'I will walk at liberty, for I keep Thy precepts.' Let a willing, free spirit uphold me.

II. Observe, too, that desires for holiness should become prayers.

David does not merely long for certain spiritual excellences; he goes to God for them. And his reasons for doing so are plain. If you will look at the former verses of this psalm, you will see that he had found out two things about his sin, both of which make him sure that he can only be what he should be by God's help. He had learned what his crimes were in relation to God, and he had further learned what they indicated about himself. The teaching of his bitter experience as to the former of these two matters lies in that saying which some people have thought strange. 'Against *Thee only* have I sinned.' What! Had he not committed a crime against human law? had he not harmed Uriah and Bathsheba? were not his deeds an offence to his whole kingdom? Yes, he knew all that; but he felt that over and above all that was black in his deed, considered in its bearing upon men, it was still blacker when it was referred to God; and a sadder word than 'crime' or 'fault' had to be used about it. I have done wrong as against my fellows, but worse than that, I have *sinned* against God. The notion of *sin* implies the notion of God. Sin is wilful transgression of the law of *God*. An atheist

can have no conception of sin. But bring God into human affairs, and men's faults immediately assume the darker tint, and become men's sins. Therefore the need of prayer if these evils are to be blotted out. If I had done crime against man only, I should not need to ask God for pardon or cleansing; but I have sinned against Him, and done this evil in His sight, therefore my desires for deliverance address themselves to Him, and my longings for purity must needs break into the cry of entreaty to that God with whom are forgiveness and redemption from all iniquity.

And still further, looking at the one deed, he sees in it something more than an isolated act. It leads him down to its motive; that motive carries him to the state of mind in which it could have power; that state of mind, in which the motive could have power, carries him still deeper to the bias of his nature as he had received it from his parents. And thinking of how he had fallen, how upon his terraced palace roof there the eye had inflamed the heart, and the heart had yielded so quickly to the temptations of the eye, he finds no profounder explanation of the disastrous eclipse of goodness than this: 'Behold! I was shapen in iniquity.'

Is that a confession or a palliation, do you think? Is he trying to shuffle off guilt from his own shoulders? By no means, for these words are the motive for the prayer, 'Purge me, and I shall be clean.' That is to say, he has learned that isolated acts of sin inhere in a common root, and that root a disposition inherited

from generation to generation to which evil is familiar and easy, to which good, alas! is but too alien and unwelcome. None the less is the evil done *his* deed. None the less has he to wail in full consciousness of his individual responsibility: 'Against Thee have *I* sinned.' But the effect of this second discovery, that sin has become so intertwisted with his being that he cannot shake off the venomous beast into the fire and feel no harm, is the same as that of the former—to drive him to God, who alone can heal the nature and separate the poison from his blood.

Dear friends! there are some of you who are wasting your lives in paroxysms of fierce struggle with the evil that you have partially discovered in yourselves, alternating with long languor, fits of collapse and apathy, and who make no solid advance, just because you will not lay to heart these two convictions—your sin has to do with God, and your sins come from a sinful nature. Because of the one fact, you must go to God for pardon; because of the other, you must go to God for cleansing. There, in your heart, like some black well-head in a dismal bog, is the source of all the swampy corruption that fills your life. You cannot stanch it, you cannot drain it, you cannot sweeten it. Ask Him, who is above your nature and without it, to change it by His own new life infused into your spirit. He will heal the bitter waters. He alone can. Sin is against God; sin comes from an evil heart; therefore, if your longings

for that ideal perfectness are ever to be fulfilled, you must make prayers of them, and cry to Him who hears, 'Create in me a clean heart, O God! take not Thy Holy Spirit from me.'

III. Finally, observe that prayers for perfect cleansing are permitted to the lips of the greatest sinners.

Such longings as these might seem audacious, when the atrocity of the crime is remembered, and by man's standard they are so. Let the criminal be thankful for escape, and go hide himself, say men's pardons. But here is a man, with the evil savour of his debauchery still tainting him, daring to ask for no mere impunity, but for God's choicest gifts. Think of his crime, think of its aggravations from God's mercies to him, from his official position, from his past devotion. Remember that this cruel voluptuary is the sweet singer of Israel, who had taught men songs of purer piety and subtler emotion than the ruder harps of older singers had ever flung from their wires. And this man, so placed, so gifted, set up on high to be the guiding light of the nation, has plunged into the filth of these sins, and quenched all his light there. When he comes back penitent, what will he dare to ask? Everything that God can give to bless and gladden a soul. He asks for God's Spirit, for His presence, for the joy of His salvation; to be made once again, as he had been, the instrument that shall show forth His praise, and teach transgressors God's ways. Ought he to have had more humble desires?

Does this great boldness show that he is leaping very lightly over his sin? Is he presumptuous in such prayers? God be thanked—no! But, knowing all his guilt, and broken and contrite in heart (crushed and ground to powder, as the words mean), utterly loathing himself, aware of all the darkness of his deserts, he yet cherishes unconquerable confidence in the pitying love of God, and believes that in spite of all his sin, he may yet be pure as the angels of heaven—ay, even holy as God is holy.

Thank God we have such an example for our heartening! Lay it to heart, brethren! You cannot believe too much in God's mercy. You cannot expect too much at His hands. He is 'able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think.' No sin is so great but that, coming straight from it, a repentant sinner may hope and believe that all God's love will be lavished upon him, and the richest of God's gifts be granted to his desires. Even if our transgression is aggravated by a previous life of godliness, and have given the enemies great occasion to blaspheme, as David's did, yet David's penitence may in our souls lead on to David's hope, and the answer will not fail us. Let no sin, however dark, however repeated, drive us to despair of ourselves, because it hides from us our loving Saviour. Though beaten back again and again by the surge of our passions and sins, like some poor shipwrecked sailor sucked back with every retreating wave and tossed about in the angry surf, yet keep your face towards the beach,

where there is safety, and you will struggle through it all, and though it were but on some floating boards and broken pieces of the ship, will come safe to land. He will uphold you with His Spirit, and take away the weight of sin that would sink you, by His forgiving mercy, and bring you out of all the weltering waste of waters to the solid shore.

So whatever thy evil behaviour, come with it all, and cast thyself before Him, with whom is plenteous redemption. Embrace in one act the two truths, of thine own sin and of God's infinite mercy in Jesus Christ. Let not the one blind you to the other; let not the one lead you to a morbid despondency, which is blind to Christ, nor the other to a superficial estimate of the deadliness of sin, which is blind to thine own self. Let the Cross teach thee what sin is, and let the dark background of thy sin bring into clear prominence the Cross that bringeth salvation. Know that thou art utterly black and sinful. Believe that God is eternally, utterly, inconceivably, merciful. Learn both, in Him who is the Standard by which we can estimate our sin, and the Proof and Medium of God's mercy. Trust thyself and all thy foulness to Jesus Christ; and, so doing, look up from whatsoever horrible pit and miry clay thou mayest have fallen into, with this prayer, 'Create in me a clean heart, O God! and renew a right spirit within me, take not Thy Holy Spirit from me, and uphold me with Thy free Spirit.' Then the answer shall come to you from Him who ever puts the best robe upon His returning

prodigals, and gives His highest gifts to sinners who repent. 'From all your filthiness will I cleanse you, a new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you, and I will put My Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in My statutes.'

FEAR AND FAITH

> 'What time I am afraid, I will trust in Thee. 4. … In God I have put my trust: I will not fear.'—PSALM lvi. 3, 4.

It is not given to many men to add new words to the vocabulary of religious emotion. But so far as an examination of the Old Testament avails, I find that David was the first that ever employed the word that is here translated, *I will trust*, with a religious meaning. It is found occasionally in earlier books of the Bible in different connections, never in regard to man's relations to God, until the Poet-Psalmist laid his hand upon it, and consecrated it for all generations to express one of the deepest relations of man to his Father in heaven. And it is a favourite word of his. I find it occurs constantly in his psalms; twice as often, or nearly so, in the psalms attributed

to David as in all the rest of the Psalter put together; and as I shall have occasion to show you in a moment, it is in itself a most significant and poetic word.

But, first of all, I ask you to notice how beautifully there comes out here the *occasion* of trust. 'What time I am afraid, I will put my trust in Thee.'

This psalm is one of those belonging to the Sauline persecution. If we adopt the allocation in the superscription, it was written at one of the very lowest points of David's fortunes. And there seem to be one or two of its phrases which acquire new force, if we regard the psalm as drawn forth by the perils of his wandering, hunted life. For instance—'Thou tellest my wanderings,' is no mere expression of the feelings with which he regarded the changes of this early pilgrimage, but is the confidence of the fugitive that in the doublings and windings of his flight God's eye marked him. 'Put thou my tears into Thy *bottle*'—one of the few indispensable articles which he had to carry with him, the water-skin which hung beside him, perhaps, as he meditated. So read in the light of his probable circumstances, how pathetic and eloquent does that saying become—'What time I am afraid, I will trust in Thee.' That goes deep down into the realities of life. It is when we are 'afraid' that we trust in God; not in easy times, when things are going smoothly with us. Not when the sun shines, but when the tempest blows and the wind howls about his ears, a man gathers his cloak round him,

and cleaves fast to his supporter. The midnight sea lies all black; but when it is cut into by the oar, or divided and churned by the paddle, it flashes up into phosphorescence, and so it is from the tumults and agitation of man's spirit that there is struck out the light of man's faith. There is the bit of flint and the steel that comes hammering against it; and it is the contact of these two that brings out the spark. The man never knew confidence who does not know how the occasion that evoked and preceded it was terror and need. 'What time I am *afraid*, I will trust.' That is no trust which is only fair weather trust. This principle—first fear, and only then, faith—applies all round the circle of our necessities, weaknesses, sorrows, and sins.

There must, first of all, be the deep sense of need, of exposedness to danger, of weakness, of sorrow, and only then will there come the calmness of confidence. A victorious faith will

> 'rise large and slow
> From out the fluctuations of our souls,
> As from the dim and tumbling sea
> Starts the completed moon.'

And then, if so, notice how there is involved in that the other consideration, that a man's confidence is not the product of outward circumstances, but of his own fixed resolves. 'I *will* put my trust in Thee.' Nature says, 'Be afraid!' and the recoil from that natural fear, which comes from a discernment of

threatening evil, is only possible by a strong effort of the will. Foolish confidence opposes to natural fear a groundless resolve not to be afraid, as if heedlessness were security, or facts could be altered by resolving not to think about them. True faith, by a mighty effort of the will, fixes its gaze on the divine Helper, and there finds it possible and wise to lose its fears. It is madness to say, 'I will not to be afraid!' it is wisdom and peace to say, 'I will trust, and not be afraid.' But it is no easy matter to fix the eye on God when threatening enemies within arm's-length compel our gaze; and there must be a fixed resolve, not indeed to coerce our emotions or to ignore our perils, but to set the Lord before us, that we may not be moved. When war desolates a land, the peasants fly from their undefended huts to the shelter of the castle on the hilltop, but they cannot reach the safety of the strong walls without climbing the steep road. So when calamity darkens round us, or our sense of sin and sorrow shakes our hearts, we need effort to resolve and to carry into practice the resolution, 'I flee unto Thee to hide me.' Fear, then, is the occasion of faith, and faith is fear transformed by the act of our own will, calling to mind the strength of God, and betaking ourselves thereto. Therefore, do not wonder if the two things lie in your hearts together, and do not say, 'I have no faith because I have some fear,' but rather feel that if there be the least spark of the former it will turn all the rest into its own bright substance. Here is the stifling smoke, coming up from some newly-lighted fire of green wood, black

and choking, and solid in its coils; but as the fire burns up, all the smoke-wreaths will be turned into one flaming spire, full of light and warmth. Do you turn your smoke into fire, your fear into faith. Do not be down-hearted if it takes a while to convert the whole of the lower and baser into the nobler and higher. Faith and fear do blend, thank God! They are as oil and water in a man's soul, and the oil will float above, and quiet the waves. 'What time I am afraid'—there speak nature and the heart; 'I will trust in Thee'—there speaks the better man within, lifting himself above nature and circumstances, and casting himself into the extended arms of God, who catches him and keeps him safe.

Then, still further, these words, or rather one portion of them, give us a bright light and a beautiful thought as to the *essence* and inmost centre of this faith or trust. Scholars tell us that the word here translated 'trust' has a graphic, pictorial meaning for its root idea. It signifies literally to cling to or hold fast anything, expressing thus both the notion of a good tight grip and of intimate union. Now, is not that metaphor vivid and full of teaching as well as of impulse? 'I will trust in Thee.' 'And he exhorted them all, that with purpose of heart they should *cleave* unto the Lord.' We may follow out the metaphor of the word in many illustrations. For instance, here is a strong prop, and here is the trailing, lithe feebleness of the vine. Gather up the leaves that are creeping all along the ground, and coil them around that support,

and up they go straight towards the heavens. Here is a limpet in some pond or other, left by the tide, and it has relaxed its grasp a little. Touch it with your finger and it grips fast to the rock, and you will want a hammer before you can dislodge it. There is a traveller groping along some narrow broken path, where the chamois would tread cautiously, his guide in front of him. His head reels, and his limbs tremble, and he is all but over, but he grasps the strong hand of the man in front of him, or lashes himself to him by the rope, and he can walk steadily. Or, take that story in the Acts of the Apostles, about the lame man healed by Peter and John. All his life long he had been lame, and when at last healing comes, one can fancy with what a tight grasp 'the lame man held Peter and John.' The timidity and helplessness of a lifetime made him hold fast, even while, walking and leaping, he tried how the unaccustomed 'feet and ankle bones' could do their work. How he would clutch the arms of his two supporters, and feel himself firm and safe only as long as he grasped them! That is faith, cleaving to Christ, twining round Him with all the tendrils of our heart, as the vine does round its pole; holding to Him by His hand, as a tottering man does by the strong hand that upholds.

And there is one more application of the metaphor, which perhaps may be best brought out by referring to a passage of Scripture. We find this same expression used in that wonderfully dramatic scene

in the Book of Kings, where the supercilious messengers from the king of Assyria came up and taunted the king and his people on the wall. 'What confidence is this wherein thou trustest? Now, on whom dost thou trust, that thou rebellest against me? Now, behold, thou trustest upon the staff of this bruised reed, even upon Egypt, on which, if a man lean, it will go into his hand and pierce it: so is Pharaoh, king of Egypt, unto all that trust on him,' The word of our text is employed there, and as the phrase shows, with a distinct trace of its primary sense. Hezekiah was leaning upon that poor paper reed on the Nile banks, that has no substance, or strength, or pith in it. A man leans upon it, and it runs into the palm of his hand, and makes an ugly festering wound. Such rotten stays are all our earthly confidences. The act of trust, and the miserable issues of placing it on man, are excellently described there. The act is the same when directed to God, but how different the issues. Lean all your weight on God as on some strong staff, and depend upon it that your support will never yield nor crack and no splinters will run into your palms from it.

If I am to cling with my hand I must first empty my hand. Fancy a man saying, 'I cannot stand unless you hold me up; but I have to hold my bank book, and this thing, and that thing, and the other thing; I cannot put them down, so I have not a hand free to lay hold with, you must do the holding.' That is what some of us are saying in effect. Now the prayer, 'Hold

Thou me up, and I shall be safe,' is a right one; but not from a man who will not put his possessions out of his hands that he may lay hold of the God who lays hold of him.

'Nothing in my hand I bring.'

Then, of course, and only then, when we are empty-handed, shall we be free to grip and lay hold; and only then shall we be able to go on with the grand words—

'Simply to Thy Cross I cling,'

as some half-drowned, shipwrecked sailor, flung up on the beach, clasps a point of rock, and is safe from the power of the waves that beat around him.

And then one word more. These two clauses that I have put together give us not only the occasion of faith in fear, and the essence of faith in this clinging, but they also give us very beautifully the *victory* of faith. You see with what poetic art—if we may use such words about the breathings of such a soul—he repeats the two main words of the former verse in the latter, only in inverted order—'What time I am afraid, I will trust in Thee.' He is possessed by the lower emotion, and resolves to escape from its sway into the light and liberty of faith. And then the next words still keep up the contrast of faith and fear, only that now he is possessed by the more blessed mood, and determines that he will not fall back into

the bondage and darkness of the baser. 'In God I have put my trust; I will not fear.' He has confidence, and in the strength of that he resolves that he will not yield to fear. If we put that thought into a more abstract form it comes to this: that the one true antagonist and triumphant rival of all fear is faith, and faith alone. There is no reason why any man should be emancipated from his fears either about this world or about the next, except in proportion as he has faith. Nay, rather it is far away more rational to be afraid than not to be afraid, unless I have this faith in Christ. There are plenty of reasons for dread in the dark possibilities and not less dark certainties of life. Disasters, losses, partings, disappointments, sicknesses, death, may any of them come at any moment, and some of them will certainly come sooner or later. Temptations lurk around us like serpents in the grass, they beset us in open ferocity like lions in our path. Is it not wise to fear unless our faith has hold of that great promise, 'Thou shalt tread upon the lion and adder; there shall no evil befall thee'? But if we have a firm hold of God, then it is wise not to be afraid, and terror is folly and sin. For trust brings not only tranquillity, but security, and so takes away fear by taking away danger.

That double operation of faith in quieting and in defending is very strikingly set forth by an Old Testament word, formed from the verb here employed, which means properly *confidence*, and then in one form comes to signify both *in security* and

in safety, secure as being free from anxiety, safe as being sheltered from peril. So, for instance, the people of that secluded little town of Laish, whose peaceful existence amidst warlike neighbours is described with such singular beauty in the Book of Judges, are said to 'dwell *careless*, quiet, and *secure*.' The former phrase is literally 'in trust,' and the latter is 'trusting.' The idea sought to be conveyed by both seems to be that double one of quiet freedom from fear and from danger. So again, in Moses' blessing, 'The beloved of the Lord shall dwell *in safety* by Him,' we have the same phrase to express the same twofold benediction of shelter, by dwelling in God, from all alarm and from all attack:

> 'As far from danger as from fear,
> While love, Almighty love is near.'

This thought of the victory of faith over fear is very forcibly set forth in a verse from the Book of Proverbs, which in our version runs 'The righteous is bold as a lion.' The word rendered 'is bold' is that of our text, and would literally be 'trusts,' but obviously the metaphor requires such a translation as that of the English Bible. The word that properly describes the act of faith has come to mean the courage which is the consequence of the act, just as our own word *confidence* properly signifies trust, but has come to mean the boldness which is born of trust. So, then, the true way to become brave is to lean on God. That, and that alone, delivers from otherwise reasonable fear, and Faith bears in her one hand the

gift of outward safety, and in her other that of inward peace.

Peter is sinking in the water; the tempest runs high. He looks upon the waves, and is ready to fancy that he is going to be swallowed up immediately. His fear is reasonable if he has only the tempest and himself to draw his conclusions from. His helplessness and the scowling storm together strike out a little spark of faith, which the wind cannot blow out, nor the floods quench. Like our Psalmist here, when Peter is afraid, he trusts. 'Save, Lord! or I perish.' Immediately the outstretched hand of his Lord grasps his, and brings him safety, while the gentle rebuke, 'O thou of little faith! wherefore didst thou doubt?' infuses courage into his beating heart. The storm runs as high as ever, and the waves beat about his limbs, and the spray blinds his eyes. If he leaves his hold for one moment down he will go. But, as long as he clasps Christ's hand, he is as safe on that heaving floor as if his feet were on a rock; and as long as he looks in Christ's face and leans upon His upholding arm, he does *not* 'see the waves boisterous,' nor tremble at all as they break around him. His fear and his danger are both gone, because he holds Christ and is upheld by Him. In this sense, too, as in many others, 'this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith.'

A SONG OF DELIVERANCE

> 'For Thou hast delivered my soul from death: hast Thou not delivered my feet from falling? that I may walk before God in the light of the living.'—PSALM lvi. 13 (R.V.).

According to the ancient Jewish tradition preserved in the superscription of this psalm, it was written at the lowest ebb of David's fortunes, 'when the Philistines took him in Gath,' and as you may remember, he saved himself by adding the fox's hide to the lion's skin, and by pretending to be an idiot, degraded as well as delivered himself. Yet immediately after, if we accept the date given by the superscription, the triumphant confidence and devout hope of this psalm animated his mind. How unlike the true man was to what he appeared to be to Achish and his Philistines! It is strange that the inside and the outside should correspond so badly; but yet, thank God! it is possible. We note,

I. The deliverance realised by faith before it is accomplished in fact.

You will observe that I have made a slight alteration in the translation of the words. In our Authorised Version they stand thus: 'Thou hast delivered my soul from death; *wilt* Thou not deliver

my feet from falling?' as if some prior deliverance was the basis upon which the Psalmist rested his expectation of that which was still to come. But there is no authority in the original for that variation of tenses, and both clauses obviously refer to the same period and the same deliverance. Therefore we must read: 'Thou hast delivered my soul from death: *hast* Thou not delivered,' etc.; the question being equivalent to a strong affirmation, 'Yea, Thou hast delivered my feet from falling.' This reference of both clauses to the same period and the same delivering act, is confirmed by the quotation of these words in a very much later psalm, the 116th, where we read, with an addition, 'Thou hast delivered my soul from death, *mine eyes from tears*, and my feet from falling.'

So, then, the Psalmist is so sure of the deliverance that is coming that he sings of it as past. He is still in the very thick of the trouble and the fight, and yet he says, 'It is as good as over. Thou *hast* delivered.'

How does he come to that confidence? Simply because his future is God; and whoever has God for his future can turn else uncertain hopes into certain confidences, and make sure of this, that however Achish and his giant Philistines of Gath, wielding Goliath's arms, spears like a weaver's beam, and brazen armour, may compass him about, in the name of the Lord he will destroy them. They are all as good as dead, though they are alive and hostile at this moment. In the midst of trouble we can fling ourselves into the future, or rather draw the future

into the present, and say, 'Thou *hast* delivered my soul from death.' It is safe to reckon on to-morrow when we reckon on God. We to-day have the same reasons for the same confidence; and if we will go the right way about it, we, too, may bring June's sun into November's fogs, and bask in the warmth of certain deliverance even when the chill mists of trouble enfold us.

But then note, too, here, the substance of this future intervention which, to the Psalmist's quiet faith, is present:—'My soul from death,' and after that he says, 'My feet from falling,' which looks very like an anticlimax and bathos. But yet, just because to deliver the feet from falling is so much smaller a thing than delivering a life from death, it comes here to be a climax and something greater. The storm passes over the man. What then? After the storm has passed, he is not only alive, but he is standing upright. It has not killed him. No, it has not even shaken him. His feet are as firm as ever they were, and just because that is a smaller thing, it is a greater thing for the deliverance to have accomplished than the other. God does not deliver by halves; He does not leave the delivered man maimed, or thrown down, though living.

Remember, too, the expansion of the text in the psalm to which I have already referred, one of a much later date, which by quoting these words really comments upon them. The later Psalmist adds a clause. 'Mine eyes from tears,' and we may follow on

in the same direction, and note the three spheres in which the later poet hymns the delivering hand of God as spiritualising for us all our deeper Christian experience. 'Thou hast delivered my soul from death,' in that great redemption by which the Son has died that we may never know either the intensest bitterness of physical death, or the true death of which it is the shadow and the emblem. 'Thou hast delivered mine eyes from tears'; God wipes away tears here, even before we come to the time when He wipes away all tears from off all faces, and no eyes are delivered from tears, except eyes that have looked through tears to God. 'And my feet from falling'—redeeming grace which saves the soul; comforting grace which lightens sorrow; upholding grace which keeps us from sins—these are the elements of what God has done for us all, if our poor feeble trust has rested on Him.

How did David get to this confidence? Why, he prayed himself into it. If you will read the psalm, you will see very clearly the process by which a man comes to that serene, triumphant trust that the battle is won even whilst it is raging around him. The previous portion of the psalm falls into two parts, on which I need only make this one remark, that in both we have first of all an obvious disquieting fact, and then a flash of victorious confidence. Let me just read a word or two to you. The Psalmist begins in a very minor key. 'Be merciful unto me, O God! for man would swallow me up'—that is Achish and his

Philistines. 'He fighting daily oppresseth me; mine enemies daily would swallow me up.' He reiterates the same thought with the dreary monotony of sorrow, 'for there be many that fight against me, O Thou most High!' But swiftly his note changes into 'What time I am afraid I will trust in Thee. In God I will praise His word'; that is to say, His promise of deliverance, 'in God I have put my trust.' He has climbed to the height, but only for a moment, for down he drops again, and begins anew the old miserable complaint. The sorrow is too clinging to be cast off at one struggle. It has been dammed out for the moment, but the flood rushes too heavily, and away goes the dam, and back pours the black water. 'Every day they wrest my words; all their thoughts are against me for evil.' And he goes on longer on his depressing key this second time than he did the first, but he rises above it once more in the same fashion, and the refrain with which he had closed the first part of the psalm closes the second. 'In God will I praise His word; in the Lord will I praise His word.' Now he has won the height and keeps it, and breaks into a paean of victory in words of the text.

That is to say, pray yourselves into confidence, and if it does not come at first, pray again. If the consolation seems to glide away, even whilst you are laying hold of it, grasp it once more, and close your fingers more tightly on it. Do not be afraid of going down into the depths a second time, but be sure that you try to rise out of them at the same point as

before, by grasping the assurance that in God, in His strength, and by His grace, you will be able to set your seal to the truth of His great promise. Thus will you rise to this confidence which calleth things that are not as though they were, and brings the to-morrow that is sure to dawn with all its brightness and serenity into the turbulent, tempestuous, and clouded atmosphere of to-day. We shall one day escape from all that burdens, and tries, and tasks us; and until then this blessed assurance, the fruit of prayer, is like the food that the ravens brought to the prophet in the ravine, or the bread and water that the angel awoke him to partake of when he was faint in the wilderness. The true answer to David's prayer was the immediate access of confidence unshaken, though the outward answer was a long time in coming, and years lay between him and the cessation of his persecutions and troubles. So we may have brooks by the way, in quiet confidence of deliverance ere yet the deliverance comes. Then note,

II. The impulse to service which deliverance brings.

'That I may walk before God in the light of the living'; that is God's purpose in all His deliverances, that we may thereby be impelled to trustful and grateful service. And David makes that purpose into a vow, for the words might almost as well be translated, 'I *will* walk before Him.' Let us see to it that God's purpose is our resolve, and that we do not lose the good of any of the troubles or discipline

through which He passes us; for the worst of all sorrows is a wasted sorrow.

'Thou hast delivered my feet that I may walk.' What are feet for? Walking. Further, notice the precise force of that phrase, 'that I may walk *before God*.' It is not altogether the same as the cognate one which is used about Enoch, that 'he walked *with* God.' That expresses communion as with a friend; this, the ordering of one's life before His eye, and in the consciousness of His presence as Judge and as Taskmaster. So you find the expression used in almost the only other occasion where it occurs in the Old Testament, where God says to Abraham, 'Walk before Me, and'—because thou dost order thy life in the consciousness that I am looking at thee—'be thou perfect.' So, to walk before God is to live even in all the distracting activities of daily life, with the clear realisation, and the continued thought burning in our minds that we are doing them all in His presence. Think of what a regiment of soldiers on parade does as each file passes in front of the saluting point where the commanding officer is standing. How each man dresses up, and they pull themselves together, keeping step, sloping their rifles rightly. We are not on parade, but about business a great deal more serious than that. We are doing our fighting with the Captain looking at us, and that should be a stimulus, a joy and not a terror. Realise God's eye watching you, and sin, and meanness, and negligence, and selfishness, and sensuality, and lust, and passion, and

all the other devils that are in you will vanish like ghosts at cockcrow. 'Walk before Me,' and if you feel that I am beside you, you cannot sin. 'Walk before Me, and be thou perfect.' Notice,

III. The region in which that observance of the divine eye is to be carried on.

'In the light of the living,' says the Psalmist. That seems to correspond to the first clause of his hope; just as the previous word that I have been commenting upon, 'walking before Him,' corresponds to the second, where he speaks about his feet. 'Thou hast delivered my soul from death…. I will walk before Thee in the light of the living'—where Thou dost still permit my delivered soul to be. And the phrase seems to mean the sunshine of human life contrasted with the darkness of *Sheol*.

The expression is varied in the 116th Psalm, which reads 'the land of the living.' The really living are they who live in Jesus, and the real light of the living is the sunshine that streams on those who thus live, because they live in Him who not only pours His light upon their hearts, but, by pouring it, turns themselves into 'light in the Lord.' We, too, may have the brightness of His face irradiating our faces and illuminating our paths, as with the beneficence of a better sunshine. The Psalmist points us the way thus to walk in light. He vows that, because his heart is full of the great mercies of his delivering God, he will order all his active life as under the consciousness of

God's eye upon him, and then it will all be lightened as by a burst of sunshine. Our brightest light is the radiance from the face of God whom we try to love and serve, and the Psalmist's confidence is that a life of observance of His commandments in which gratitude for deliverance is the impelling motive to continual realisation of His presence, and an accordant life, will be a bright and sunny career. You will live in the sunshine if you live before His face, and however wintry the world may be, it will be like a clear frosty day. There is no frost in the sky, it does not go above the atmosphere, and high above, in serene and wondrous blue, is the blaze of the sunshine. Such a life will be a guided life. There will still remain many occasions for doubt in the region of belief, and for perplexity as to duty. There will often be need for patient and earnest thought as to both, and there will be no lack of calls for strenuous effort of our best faculties in order to apprehend what our Guide means us to do, and where He would have us go, but through it all there will be the guiding hand. As the Master, with perhaps a glance backwards to these words, said, 'He that followeth Me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.' If He is in the light let us walk in the light, and to us it will be purity and knowledge and joy.

THE FIXED HEART

'My heart is fixed, O God, my heart is fixed; I will sing and give praise.'—PSALM lvii. 7.

It is easy to say such things when life goes smoothly with us. But this Psalmist, whether David or another, says this, and means it, when all things are dark and frowning around him. The superscription attributes the words to David himself, fleeing from Saul, and hiding in the cave. Whether that be so or no, the circumstances under which the Psalmist sings are obviously those of very great difficulty and oppression. But he sings himself into confidence and good cheer. In the dark he believes in the light. There are some flowers that give their perfumes after sunset and are sweetest when the night dews are falling. The true religious life is like these. A heart really based upon God, and at rest in Him, never breathes forth such fragrant and strong perfume as in the darkness of sorrow. The repetition of 'My heart is fixed' adds emphasis to the expression of unalterable determination. The fixed heart is resolved to 'sing and give praise' in spite of everything that might make sobs and tears choke the song.

I. Note the fixed heart.

The Hebrew uses the metaphor of the 'heart' to

cover a great deal more of the inward self than we are accustomed to do. We mainly mean thereby that in us which loves. But the Old Testament speaks of the 'thoughts and intents' as well as the 'affections' of the heart. And so to this Psalmist his 'heart' was not only that in him which loved, but that which purposed and which thought. When he says 'My heart is fixed' he does not merely mean that he is conscious of a steadfast love, but also and rather of a fixed and settled determination, and of an abiding communion of thought between himself and God. And he not only makes this declaration as the expression of his experience for the moment, but he mortgages the future, and in so far as any man dare, he ventures to say that this temper of entire consecration, of complete communion, of fixed resolve to cleave to God, which is his present mood, will be his future whatever may wait his outward life then. The lesson from that resolve is that our religion, if it is worth anything, must be a continuous and uniformly acting force throughout our whole lives, and not merely sporadic and spasmodic, by fits and starts. The lines that a child's unsteady and untrained hand draws in its copy-book are too good a picture of the 'crooked, wandering ways in which we live,' in so far as our religion is concerned. The line should be firm and straight, uniform in breadth, unvarying in direction, like a sunbeam, homogeneous and equally tenacious like an iron rod. Unless it be thus strong and uniform, it will scarcely sustain the weights that it must bear, or resist the

blows that it must encounter.

For a fixed heart I must have a fixed determination, and not a mere fluctuating and soon broken intention. I must have a steadfast affection, and not merely a fluttering love, that, like some butterfly, lights now on this, now on that, sweet flower, but which has a flight straight as a carrier pigeon to its cot, which shall bear me direct to God. And I must have a continuous realisation of my dependence upon God, and of God's sweet sufficiency, going with me all through the dusty day. A firm determination, a steadfast love, a constant thought, these at least are inculcated in the words of my text. 'My heart is fixed, O God! my heart is fixed.'

Ah, brethren! how unlike the broken, interrupted, divergent lines that we draw! Our religious moments are not knit together, and touching one upon the other, but they are like the pools in the bed of a half dried up Australian stream—a pond here, and a stretch of white, blistering pebbles there, and then a little drop of water, and then another reach of dryness. They should all be knit together by one continuous flow of a fixed love, desire, and thought. Is our average Christianity fairly represented by such words as these of my text? Do they not rather make us burn with shame when we think that a man who lived in the twilight of God's revelation, and was weighed upon by distresses such as wrung this psalm out of him, should have poured out this resolve, which we who live in the sunlight and are flooded

with blessings find it hard to echo with sincerity and truth? Fixed hearts are rare amongst the Christians of this day.

II. Notice the manifold hindrances to such a uniformity of our religious life.

They are formidable enough, God knows, we all know it, and I do not need to dwell upon them. There is, for example, the tendency to fluctuation which besets all our feelings, and especially our religious emotions. What would happen to a steam-engine if the stoker now piled on coals and then fell asleep by the furnace door? One moment the boiler would be ready to burst; at another moment there would be no steam to drive anything. That is the sort of alternation that goes on amongst hosts of Christians to-day. Their springtime and summer are followed certainly by an autumn and a bitter winter. Every moment of elevation has a corresponding moment of depression. They never catch a glimpse of God and of His love brighter and more sweet than ordinary without its being followed by long weariness and depression and darkness. That is the kind of life that many of you are contented to live as Christian people.

But is there any necessity for such alternations? Some degree of fluctuation there will always be. The very exercise of emotion tends to its extinction. Varying conditions of health and other externals will affect the buoyancy and clear-sightedness and

vivacity of the spiritual life. Only a barometer that is out of order will always stand at set fair. The vane which never points but to south is rusty and means nothing.

But while there cannot be absolute uniformity, there might and should be a far nearer approach to an equable temperature of a much higher range than the readings of most professing Christians give. There is, indeed, a dismally uniform arctic temperature in many of them. Their hearts are fixed, truly, but fixed on earth. Their frost is broken by no thaw, their tepid formalism interrupted by no disturbing enthusiasm. We do not now speak of these, but of those who have moments of illumination, of communion, of submission of will, which fade all too soon. To such we would earnestly say that these moments may be prolonged and made more continuous. We need not be at the mercy of our own unregulated feelings. We can control our hearts, and keep them fixed, even if they should wish to wander. If we would possess the blessing of an approximately uniform religious life, we must assert the control of ourselves and use both bridle and spur. A great many religious people seem to think that 'good times' come and go, and that they can do nothing to bring or keep or banish them. But that is not so. If the fire is burning low, there is such a thing on the hearth as a poker, and coals are at hand. If we feel our faith falling asleep, are we powerless to rouse it? Cannot we say 'I *will* trust'? Let us learn that

the variations in our religious emotions are largely subject to our own control, and may, if we will govern ourselves, be brought far nearer to uniformity than they ordinarily are.

Besides the fluctuations due to our own changes of mood, there are also the distracting influences of even the duties which God lays upon us. It is hard for a man with the material task of the moment that takes all his powers, to keep a little corner of his heart clear, and to feel that God is there. It is difficult in the clatter of the mill or in the crowds on 'Change, to do our work as for and in remembrance of Christ. It *is* difficult; but it is possible. Distractions are made distractions by our own folly and weakness. There is nothing that it is our duty to do which an honest attempt to do from the right motive could not convert into a positive help to getting nearer God. It is for us to determine whether the tasks of life, and this intrusive external and material world, shall veil Him from us, or shall reveal Him to us. It is for us to determine whether we shall make our secular avocation and its trials, little and great, a means to get nearer to God, or a means to shut Him out from us, and us from Him. There is nothing but sin incompatible with the fixed heart, the resolved will, the continual communion, nothing incompatible though there may be much that makes it difficult to realise and preserve these.

And then, of course, the trials and sorrows which strike us all make this fixed heart hard to keep. It is

easy, as I said, to vow, 'I will sing and give praise,' when flesh is comfortable and prosperity is spreading its bright sky over our heads. It is harder to say it when disappointment and bitterness are in the heart, and an empty place there that aches and will never be filled. It is harder for a man to say it when, like this Psalmist, his soul is 'amongst lions' and he 'lies amongst them that are set on fire.' But still, rightly taken, sorrow is the best ladder to God; and there is no such praise as comes from the lips that, if they did not praise, must sob, and that praise because they are beginning to learn that evil, as the world calls it, is the stepping-stone to the highest good. 'My heart is fixed. I will sing and give praise' may be the voice of the mourner as well as of the prosperous and happy.

III. Lastly, let me say just a word as to the means by which such a uniform character may be impressed upon our religious experience.

There is another psalm where this same phrase is employed with a very important and illuminating addition, in which we read, 'His heart is fixed, trusting in the Lord.' That is the secret of a fixed heart—continuous faith rooted and grounded in Him. This fluttering, changeful, unreliable, emotional nature of mine will be made calm and steadfast by faith, and duties done in the faith of God will bind me to Him; and sorrows borne and joys accepted in the faith of God will be links in the chain that knits Him to me.

But then the question comes, how to get this continuous faith? Brethren! I know no answer except the simple one, by continually making efforts after it, and adopting the means which Christ enjoins to secure it. A man climbing a hill, though he has to look to his feet when in the slippery places, and all his energies are expended in hoisting himself upwards by every projection and crag, will do all the better if he lifts his eye often to the summit that gleams above him. So we, in our upward course, shall make the best progress when we consciously and honestly try to look beyond the things seen and temporal, even whilst we are working in the midst of them, and to keep clear before us the summit to which our faith tends. If we lived in the endeavour to realise that great white throne, and Him that sits upon it, we should find it easier to say, 'My heart is fixed, O God! my heart is fixed.'

But be sure of this, there will be no such uniformity of religious experience throughout our lives unless there be frequent times in them in which we go into our chambers and shut our doors about us, and hold communion with our Father in secret. Everything noble and great in the Christian life is fed by solitude, and everything poor and mean and hypocritical and low-toned is nourished by continual absence from the secret place of the Most High. There must be moments of solitary communion, if there are to be hours of strenuous service and a life of continual consecration.

We need not ask ourselves the question whether the realisation of the ideal of this fixedness in its perfect completeness is possible for us here on earth or not. You and I are a long way on this side of that realisation yet, and we need not trouble ourselves about the final stages until we have got on a stage or two more.

What would you think of a boy if, when he had just been taught to draw with a pencil, he said to his master, 'Do you think I shall ever be able to draw as well as Raphael?' His teacher would say to him, 'Whether you will or not, you will be able to draw a good deal better than now, if you try.' We need not trouble ourselves with the questions that disturb some people until we are very much nearer to perfection than any of us yet are. At any rate, we can approach indefinitely to that ideal, and whether it is possible for us in this life ever to have hearts so continuously fixed as that no attraction shall draw the needle aside one point from the pole or not, it is possible for us all to have them a great deal steadier than in that wavering, fluctuating vacillation which now rules them.

So let us pray the prayer, 'Unite my heart to fear Thy name,' make the resolve, 'My heart is fixed,' and listen obediently to the command, 'He exhorted them all that with purpose of heart they should cleave unto the Lord.'

WAITING AND SINGING

> 'Because of his strength will I wait upon Thee: for God is my defence…. 17. Unto Thee, O my strength, will I sing: for God is my defence, and the God of my mercy.'—PSALM lix. 9, 17.

There is an obvious correspondence between these two verses even as they stand in our translation, and still more obviously in the Hebrew. You observe that in the former verse the words 'because of' are a supplement inserted by our translators, because they did not exactly know what to make of the bare words as they stood. 'His strength, I will wait upon Thee,' is, of course, nonsense; but a very slight alteration of a single letter, which has the sanction of several good authorities, both in manuscripts and translations, gives an appropriate and beautiful meaning, and brings the two verses into complete verbal correspondence. Suppose we read, 'My strength,' instead of 'His strength.' The change is only making the limb of one letter a little shorter, and as you will perceive, we thereby get the same expressions in both verses.

We may then read our two texts thus: 'Upon Thee, O my Strength! I will wait…. Unto Thee, O my Strength, I will sing!' They are, word for word, parallel, with the significant difference that the waiting in the one passes into song, in the other, the

silent expectation breaks into music of praise. And these two words—*wait* and *sing*—are in the Hebrew the same in every letter but one, thus strengthening the impression of likeness as well as emphasising, with poetic art, that of difference. The parallel, too, obviously extends to the second half of each verse, where the reason for both the waiting and the praise is the same—'For God is my defence'—with the further eloquent variation that the song is built not only on the thought that 'God is my defence,' but also on this, that He is 'the God of my mercy.'

These two parallel verses, then, are a kind of refrain, coming in at the close of each division of the psalm; and if you examine its structure and general course of thought, you will see that the first stands at the end of a picture of the Psalmist's trouble and danger, and makes the transition to the second part, which is mainly a prayer for deliverance, and finishes with the refrain altered and enlarged, as I have pointed out.

The heading of the psalm tells us that its date is the very beginning of Saul's persecution, when 'they watched the house to kill' David, and he fled by night from the city. There is a certain correspondence between the circumstances and some part of the picture of his foes here which makes the date probable. If so, this is one of David's oldest psalms, and is interesting as showing his faith and courage, even in the first burst of danger. But whether that be so or not, we have here, at any rate, the voice of a

devout soul in sore sorrow, and we may well learn the lesson of its twofold utterance. The man, overwhelmed by calamity, betakes himself to God. 'Upon Thee, O my Strength! will I wait, for God is my defence.' Then, by dint of *waiting*, although the outward circumstances keep just the same, his temper and feelings change. He began with, 'Deliver me from my enemies, O Lord! for they lie in wait for my soul.' He passes through 'My Strength! I will wait upon Thee,' and so ends with 'My Strength! I will sing unto Thee.' We may then throw our remarks into two groups, and deal for a few moments with these two points—the waiting on God, and the change of waiting into praise.

Now, with regard to the first of these—the waiting on God—I must notice that the expression here, 'I will *wait*,' is a somewhat remarkable one. It means accurately, 'I will watch Thee,' and it is the word that is generally employed, not about our looking up to Him, but about His looking down to us. It would describe the action of a shepherd guarding his flock; of a sentry keeping a city; of the watchers that watch for the morning, and the like. By using it, the Psalmist seems as if he would say—There are two kinds of watching. There is God's watching over me, and there is my watching for God. I look up to Him that He may bless; He looks down upon me that He may take care of me. As He guards me, so I stand expectant before Him, as one in a besieged town, upon the ramparts there, looks eagerly out across the

plain to see the coming of the long-expected succours. God 'waits to be gracious'—wonderful words, painting for us His watchfulness of fitting times and ways to bless us, and His patient attendance on our unwilling, careless spirits. We may well take a lesson from His attitude in bestowing, and on our parts, wait on Him to be helped. For these two things—vigilance and patience—are the main elements in the scriptural idea of waiting on God. Let me enforce each of them in a word or two.

There is no waiting on God for help, and there is no help from God, without watchful expectation on our parts. If ever we fail to receive strength and defence from Him, it is because we are not on the outlook for it. Many a proffered succour from heaven goes past us, because we are not standing on our watch-tower to catch the far-off indications of its approach, and to fling open the gates of our heart for its entrance. He who expects no help will get none; he whose expectation does not lead him to be on the alert for its coming will get but little. How the beleaguered garrison, that knows a relieving force is on the march, strain their eyes to catch the first glint of the sunshine on their spears as they top the pass! But how unlike such tension of watchfulness is the languid anticipation and fitful look, with more of distrust than hope in it, which we turn to heaven in our need! No wonder we have so little living experience that God is our 'strength' and our 'defence,' when we so partially believe that He is,

and so little expect that He will be either. The homely old proverb says, 'They that watch for providences will never want a providence to watch for,' and you may turn it the other way and say, 'They that do *not* watch for providence will never *have* a providence to watch for.' Unless you put out your water-jars when it rains you will catch no water; if you do not watch for God coming to help you, God's watching to be gracious will be of no good at all to you. His waiting is not a substitute for ours, but because He watches therefore we should watch. We say, we expect Him to comfort and help us—well, are we standing, as it were, on tiptoe, with empty hands upraised to bring them a little nearer the gifts we look for? Are our 'eyes ever towards the Lord'? Do we pore over His gifts, scrutinising them as eagerly as a gold-seeker does the quartz in his pan, to detect every shining speck of the precious metal? Do we go to our work and our daily battle with the confident expectation that He will surely come when our need is the sorest and scatter our enemies? Is there any clear outlook kept by us for the help which we know must come, lest it should pass us unobserved, and like the dove from the ark, finding no footing in our hearts drowned in a flood of troubles, be fain to return to the calm refuge from which it came on its vain errand? Alas, how many gentle messengers of God flutter homeless about our hearts, unrecognised and unwelcomed, because we have not been watching for them! Of what avail is it that a strong hand from the beach should fling the

safety-line with true aim to the wreck, if no eye on the deck is watching for it? It hangs there, useless and unseen, and then it drops into the sea, and every soul on board is drowned. It is our own fault—and very largely the fault of our want of watchfulness for the coming of God's help—if we are ever overwhelmed by the tasks, or difficulties, or sorrows of life. We wonder that we are left to fight out the battle ourselves. But are we? Is it not rather, that while God's succours are hastening to our side we will not open our eyes to see, nor our hearts to receive them? If we go through the world with our hands hanging listlessly down instead of lifted to heaven, or full of the trifles and toys of this present, as so many of us do, what wonder is it if heavenly gifts of strength do not come into our grasp?

That attitude of watchful expectation is vividly described for us in the graphic words of another psalm, 'My soul waiteth for the Lord more than they that watch for the morning: I say, more than they that watch for the morning.' What a picture that is! Think of a wakeful, sick man, tossing restless all the night on his tumbled bed, racked with pain made harder to bear by the darkness. How often his heavy eye is lifted to the window-pane, to see if the dawn has not yet begun to tint it with a grey glimmer! How he groans, 'Would God it were morning!' Or think of some unarmed and solitary man, benighted in the forest, and hearing the wild beasts growl and scream and bark all round, while his fire dies down,

and he knows that his life depends on the morning breaking soon. With yet more eager expectation are we to look for God, whose coming is a better morning for our sick and defenceless spirits. If we are not so looking for His help, we need never be surprised that we do not get it. There is no promise and no probability that it will come to men in their sleep, who neither desire it nor wait for it. And such vigilant expectation will be accompanied with patience. There is no impatience in it, but the very opposite. 'If we hope for that we see not, then do we with patience wait for it.' If we know that He will surely come, then if He tarry we can wait for Him. The measure of our confidence is ever the measure of our patience. Being sure that He is always 'in the midst of' Zion, we may be sure that at the right time He will flame out into delivering might, helping her, and that right early. So waiting means watchfulness and patience, both of which have their roots in trust.

Further, we have here set forth not only the nature, but also the object of this waiting. 'Upon Thee, O *my Strength*! will I wait, for God is *my Defence*.'

The object to which faith is directed, and the ground on which it is based, are both set forth in these two names here applied to God. The name of the Lord is Strength, therefore I wait on Him in the confident expectation of receiving of His power. The Lord is 'my Defence,' therefore I wait on Him in the confident expectation of safety. The one name has

respect to our condition of feebleness and inadequacy for our tasks, and points to God as infusing strength into us. The other points to our exposedness to danger and to enemies, and points to God as casting His shelter around us. The word translated 'defence' is literally 'a high fortress,' and is the same as closes the rapturous accumulation of the names of his delivering God, which the Psalmist gives us when he vows to love Jehovah, who has been his Rock, and Fortress, and Deliverer; his God in whom he will trust, his Buckler, and the Horn of his salvation, and his *High Tower*. The first name speaks of God dwelling in us, and His strength made perfect in our weakness; the second speaks of our dwelling in God, and our defencelessness sheltered in Him. 'The name of the Lord is a strong tower; the righteous runneth into it, and is safe.' As some outnumbered army, unable to make head against its enemies in the open, flees to the shelter of some hill fortress, perched upon a crag, and taking up the drawbridge, cannot be reached by anything that has not wings, so this man, hard pressed by his foes, flees into God to hide him, and feels secure behind these strong walls.

That is the God on whom we wait. The recognition of His character as thus mighty and ready to help is the only thing that will evoke our expectant confidence, and His character thus discerned is the only object which our confidence can grasp aright. Trust Him as what He is, and trust Him because of

what He is, and see to it that your faith lays hold on the living God Himself, and on nothing beside.

But waiting on God is not only the recognition of His character as revealed, but it involves, too, the act of laying hold on all the power and blessing of that character for myself. '*My* strength, *my* defence,' says the Psalmist. Think of what He is, and believe that He is that for *you*, else there is no true waiting on Him. Make God thy very own by claiming thine own portion in His might, by betaking thyself to that strong habitation. We cannot wait on God in crowds, but one by one, must say, '*My* strength and *my* defence.'

And now turn to the second verse of our two texts: 'Unto Thee, O my
Strength! will I sing, for God is my defence and the God of my mercy.'

Here we catch, as it were, waiting expectation and watchfulness in the very act of passing over into possession and praise. For remember the aspect of things has not changed a bit between the first verse of our text and the last. The enemies are all round about David just as they were, 'making a noise like a dog,' as he says, and 'going round about the city.' The evil that was threatening him and making him sad remains entirely unlightened. What has altered? He has altered. And how has he altered? Because his waiting on God has begun to work an inward change, and he has climbed, as it were, out of the

depths of his sorrow up into the sunlight. And so it ever is, my friends! There is deliverance in spirit before there is deliverance in outward fact. If our patient waiting bring, as it certainly will bring, at the right time, an answer in the removal of danger, and the lightening of sorrow, it will bring first the better answer, 'the peace of God, which passeth all understanding,' to keep your hearts and minds. That is the highest blessing we have to seek for in our waiting on God, and that is the blessing which we get as soon as we wait on Him. The outward deliverance may tarry, but ever there come before it, as heralds of its approach, the sense of a lightened burden and the calmness of a strengthened heart. It may be long before the morning breaks, but even while the darkness lasts, a faint air begins to stir among the sleeping leaves, the promise of the dawn, and the first notes of half-awakened birds prelude the full chorus that will hail the sunrise.

It is beautiful, I think, to see how in the compass of this one little psalm the singer has, as it were, wrought himself clear, and sung himself out of his fears. The stream of his thought, like some mountain torrent, turbid at first, has run itself bright and sparkling. How all the tremor and agitation have gone away, just because he has kept his mind for a few minutes in the presence of the calm thought of God and His love. The first courses of his psalm, like those of some great building, are laid deep down in the darkness, but the shining summit is away up

there in the sunlight, and God's glittering glory is sparklingly reflected from the highest point. Whoever begins with, 'Deliver me—I will wait upon Thee,' will pass very quickly, even before the outward deliverance comes, into—'O my Strength! unto Thee will I sing!' Every song of true trust, though it may begin with a minor, will end in a burst of jubilant gladness. No prayer ought ever to deal with complaints, as we know, without starting with thanksgiving, and, blessed be God, no prayer need to deal with complaints without ending with thanksgiving. So, all our cries of sorrow, and all our acknowledgments of weakness and need, and all our plaintive beseechings, should be inlaid, as it were, between two layers of brighter and gladder thought, like dull rock between two veins of gold. The prayer that begins with thankfulness, and passes on into waiting, even while in sorrow and sore need, will always end in thankfulness, and triumph, and praise.

If we regard this second verse of our text as the expression of the Psalmist's emotion at the moment of its utterance, then we see in it a beautiful illustration of the effect of faithful waiting to turn complaining into praise. If we regard it rather as an expression of his confidence, that 'I shall yet praise Him for the help of His countenance,' we see in it an illustration of the power of patient waiting to brighten the sure hope of deliverance, and to bring summer into the heart of winter. As resolve, or as prophecy, it is equally a witness of the large reward

of quiet waiting for the salvation of the Lord.

In either application of the words their almost precise correspondence with those of the previous verse is far more than a mere poetic ornament, or part of the artistic form of the psalm. It teaches us this happy lesson—that the song of accomplished deliverance, whether on earth, or in the final joy of heaven, will be but a sweeter, fuller repetition of the cry that went up in trouble from our waiting hearts. The object to which we shall turn with our thankfulness is He to whom we betook ourselves with our prayers. There will be the same turning of the soul to Him; only instead of wistful waiting in the longing look, joy will light her lamps in our eyes, and thankfulness beam in our faces as we turn to His light. We shall look to Him as of old, and name Him what we used to name Him when we were in weakness and warfare,—our 'Strength' and our 'Defence.' But how different the feelings with which the delivered soul calls Him so, from those with which the sorrowful heart tried to grasp the comfort of the names. Then their reality was a matter of faith, often hard to hold fast. Now it is a matter of memory and experience. 'I called Thee my strength when I was full of weakness; I tried to believe Thou wast my defence when I was full of fear; I thought of Thee as my fortress when I was ringed about with foes; I know Thee now for that which I then trusted that Thou wast. As I waited upon Thee that Thou mightest be gracious, I praise Thee now that Thou

hast been more gracious than my hopes.' Blessed are they whose loftiest expectations were less than their grateful memories and their rich experience, and who can take up in their song of praise the names by which they called on God, and feel that they knew not half their depth, their sweetness, or their power!

But the praise is not merely the waiting transformed. Experience has not only deepened the conception of the meaning of God's name; it has added a new name. The cry of the suppliant was to God, his strength and defence; the song of the saved is to the God who is also the God of his mercy. The experiences of life have brought out more fully the love and tender pity of God. While the troubles lasted it was hard to believe that God was strong enough to brace us against them, and to keep us safe in them; it was harder still to think of them as coming from Him at all; it was hardest to feel that they came from His love. But when they are past, and their meaning is plainer, and we possess their results in the weight of glory which they have wrought out for us, we shall be able to look back on them all as the mercies of the God of our mercy, even as when a man looks down from the mountain-top upon the mists and the clouds through which he passed, and sees them all smitten by the sunshine that gleams upon them from above. That which was thick and damp as he was struggling through it, is irradiated into rosy beauty; the retrospective and downward glance confirms and surpasses all that

faith dimly discerned, and found it hard to believe. Whilst we are fighting here, brethren! let us say, 'I will wait for Thee,' and then yonder we shall, with deeper knowledge of the love that was in all our sorrows, sing unto Him who was our strength in earth's weakness, our defence in earth's dangers, and is for ever more the 'God of our mercy,' amidst the large and undeserved favours of heaven.

SILENCE TO GOD

'Truly my soul waiteth upon God…. 5. My soul, wait thou only upon
God.'
PSALM lxii. 1, 5.

We have here two corresponding clauses, each beginning a section of the psalm. They resemble each other even more closely than appears from the English version, for the 'truly' of the first, and the 'only' of the second clause, are the same word; and in each case it stands in the same place, namely, at the beginning. So, word for word, the two answer to each other. The difference is, that the one expresses the Psalmist's patient stillness of submission, and the

other is his self-encouragement to that very attitude and disposition which he has just professed to be his. In the one he speaks of, in the other to, his soul. He stirs himself up to renew and continue the faith and resignation which he has, and so he sets before us both the temper which we should have, and the effort which we should make to prolong and deepen it, if it be ours. Let us look at these two points then—the expression of waiting, and the self-exhortation to waiting.

'Truly my soul waiteth upon God.' It is difficult to say whether the opening word is better rendered 'truly,' as here, or 'only,' as in the other clause. Either meaning is allowable and appropriate. If, with our version, we adopt the former, we may compare with this text the opening of another psalm (lxxiii.), 'Truly God is good to Israel,' and there, as here, we may see in that vehement affirmation a trace of the struggle through which it had been won. The Psalmist bursts into song with a word, which tells us plainly enough how much had to be quieted in him before he came to that quiet waiting, just as in the other psalm he pours out first the glad, firm certainty which he had reached, and then recounts the weary seas of doubt and bewilderment through which he had waded to reach it. That one word is the record of conflict and the trophy of victory, the sign of the blessed effect of effort and struggle in a truth more firmly held, and in a submission more perfectly practised. It is as if he had said, 'Yes! in spite of all its waywardness and

fears, and self-willed struggles, my soul waits upon God. I have overcome these, and now there is peace within.'

It is to be further observed that literally the words run, 'My soul is silence unto God.' That forcible form of expression describes the completeness of the Psalmist's unmurmuring submission and quiet faith. His whole being is one great stillness, broken by no clamorous passions, by no loud-voiced desires, by no remonstrating reluctance. There is a similar phrase in another psalm (cix. 4), which may help to illustrate this: 'For my love they are my adversaries, but I am prayer'—his soul is all one supplication. The enemies' wrath awakens no flush of passion on his cheek, or ripple of vengeance in his heart. He meets it all with prayer. Wrapped in devotion and heedless of their rage, he is like Stephen, when he kneeled down among his yelling murderers, and cried with a loud voice, 'Lord! lay not this sin to their charge.' So here we have the strongest expression of the perfect consent of the whole inward nature in submission and quietness of confidence before God.

That silence is first a silence of the will. The plain meaning of this phrase is resignation; and resignation is just a silent will. Before the throne of the Great King, His servants are to stand like those long rows of attendants we see on the walls of Eastern temples, silent, with folded arms, straining their ears to hear, and bracing their muscles to execute his whispered commands, or even his gesture and his glance. A

man's will should be an echo, not a voice; the echo of God, not the voice of self. It should be silent, as some sweet instrument is silent till the owner's hand touches the keys. Like the boy-prophet in the hush of the sanctuary, below the quivering light of the dying lamps, we should wait till the awful voice calls, and then answer, 'Speak, Lord! for Thy servant heareth.' Do not let the loud utterances of your own wills anticipate, nor drown, the still, small voice in which God speaks. Bridle impatience till He does. If you cannot hear His whisper, wait till you do. Take care of running before you are sent. Keep your wills in equipoise till God's hand gives the impulse and direction.

Such a silent will is a strong will. It is no feeble passiveness, no dead indifference, no impossible abnegation that God requires, when He requires us to put our wills in accord with His. They are not slain, but vivified, by such surrender; and the true secret of strength lies in submission. The secret of blessedness is there, too, for our sorrows come because there is discord between our circumstances and our wills, and the measure in which these are in harmony with God is the measure in which we shall feel that all things are blessings to be received with thanksgiving. But if we will take our own way, and let our own wills speak before God speaks, or otherwise than God speaks, nothing can come of that but what always has come of it—blunders, sins, misery, and manifold ruin.

We must keep our *hearts* silent too. The sweet voices of pleading affections, the loud cry of desires and instincts that roar for their food like beasts of prey, the querulous complaints of disappointed hopes, the groans and sobs of black-robed sorrows, the loud hubbub and Babel, like the noise of a great city, that every man carries within, must be stifled and coerced into silence. We have to take the animal in us by the throat, and sternly say, 'Lie down there and be quiet.' We have to silence tastes and inclinations. We have to stop our ears to the noises around, however sweet the songs, and to close many an avenue through which the world's music might steal in. He cannot say, 'My soul is silent unto God,' whose whole being is buzzing with vanities and noisy with the din of the market-place. Unless we have something, at least, of that great stillness, our hearts will have no peace, and our religion no reality.

There must be the silence of the *mind*, as well as of the heart and will. We must not have our thoughts ever occupied with other things, but must cultivate the habit of detaching them from earth, and keeping our minds still before God, that He may pour His light into them. Surely if ever any generation needed the preaching—'Be still and let God speak'—we need it. Even religious men are so busy with spreading or defending Christianity, that they have little time, and many of them less inclination, for quiet meditation and still communion with God. Newspapers, and

books, and practical philanthropy, and Christian effort, and business, and amusement, so crowd into our lives now, that it needs some resolution and some planning to get a clear space where we can be quiet, and look at God.

But the old law for a noble and devout life is not altered by reason of any new circumstances. It still remains true that a mind silently waiting before God is the condition without which such a life is impossible. As the flowers follow the sun, and silently hold up their petals to be tinted and enlarged by his shining, so must we, if we would know the joy of God, hold our souls, wills, hearts, and minds still before Him, whose voice commands, whose love warms, whose truth makes fair, our whole being. God speaks for the most part in such silence only. If the soul be full of tumult and jangling noises, His voice is little likely to be heard. As in some kinds of deafness, a perpetual noise in the head prevents hearing any other sounds, the rush of our own fevered blood, and the throbbing of our own nerves, hinder our catching His tones. It is the calm lake which mirrors the sun, the least catspaw wrinkling the surface wipes out all the reflected glories of the heavens. If we would mirror God our souls must be calm. If we would hear God our souls must be silence.

Alas, how far from this is our daily life! Who among us dare to take these words as the expression of our own experience? Is not the troubled sea which

cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt, a truer emblem of our restless, labouring souls than the calm lake? Put your own selves by the side of this Psalmist, and honestly measure the contrast. It is like the difference between some crowded market-place all full of noisy traffickers, ringing with shouts, blazing in sunshine, and the interior of the quiet cathedral that looks down on it all, where are coolness and subdued light, and silence and solitude. 'Come, My people! enter thou into thy chambers, and shut thy doors about thee.' 'Commune with your own heart and be still.' 'In quietness and confidence shall be your strength.'

This man's profession of utter resignation is perhaps too high for us; but we can make his *self-exhortation* our own. 'My soul! wait thou only upon God.' Perfect as he ventures to declare his silence towards God, he yet feels that he has to stir himself up to the effort which is needed to preserve it in its purity. Just because he can say, 'My soul waits,' therefore he bids his soul wait.

I need not dwell upon that self-stimulating as involving the great mystery of our personality, whereby a man exalts himself above himself, and controls, and guides, and speaks to his soul. But a few words may be given to that thought illustrated here, of the necessity for conscious effort and self-encouragement, in order to the preservation of the highest religious emotion.

We are sometimes apt to forget that no holy thoughts or feelings are in their own nature permanent, and the illusion that they are so, often tends to accelerate their fading. It is no wonder if we in our selectest hours of 'high communion with the living God' should feel as if that lofty experience would last by virtue of its own sweetness, and need no effort of ours to retain it. But it is not so. All emotion tends to exhaustion, as surely as a pendulum to rest, or as an Eastern torrent to dry up. All our flames burn to their extinction. There is but one fire that blazes and is not consumed. Action is the destruction of tissue. Life reaches its term in death. Joy and sorrow, and hope and fear, cannot be continuous. They must needs wear themselves out and fade into a grey uniformity like mountain summits when the sun has left them.

Our religious experience too will have its tides, and even those high and pure emotions and dispositions that bind us to God can only be preserved by continual effort. Their existence is no guarantee of their permanence, rather is it a guarantee of their transitoriness, unless we earnestly stir up ourselves to their renewal. Like the emotions kindled by lower objects, they perish while they glow, and there must be a continual recurrence to the one Source of light and heat if the brilliancy is to be preserved.

Nor is it only from within that their continuance is menaced. Outward forces are sure to tell upon them

The constant wash of the sea of life undermines the cliffs and wastes the coasts. The tear and wear of external occupations is ever acting upon our religious life. Travellers tell us that the constant friction of the sand on Egyptian hieroglyphs removes every trace of colour, and even effaces the deep-cut characters from basalt rocks. So the unceasing attrition of multitudinous trifles will take all the bloom off your religion, and efface the name of the King cut on the tables of your hearts, if you do not counteract them by constant earnest effort. Our devotion, our faith, our love are only preserved by being constantly renewed.

That vigorous effort is expressed here by the very form of the phrase. The same word which began the first clause begins the second also. As in the former it represented for us, with an emphatic 'Truly,' the struggle through which the Psalmist had reached the height of his blessed experience, so here it represents in like manner the earnestness of the self-exhortation which he addresses to himself. He calls forth all his powers to the conflict, which is needed even by the man who has attained to that height of communion, if he would remain where he has climbed. And for us, brethren! who shrink from taking these former words upon our lips, how much greater the need to use our most strenuous efforts to quiet our souls. If the summit reached can only be held by earnest endeavour, how much more is needed to struggle up to it from the valleys below!

The silence of the soul before God is no mere passiveness. It requires the intensest energy of all our being to keep all our being still and waiting upon Him. So put all your strength into the task, and be sure that your soul is never so intensely alive as when in deepest abnegation it waits hushed before God.

Trust no past emotions. Do not wonder if they should fade even when they are brightest. Do not let their evanescence tempt you to doubt their reality. But always when our hearts are fullest of His love, and our spirits stilled with the sweetest sense of His solemn presence, stir yourselves up to keep firm hold of the else passing gleam, and in your consciousness let these two words live in perpetual alternation: 'Truly my soul waiteth upon God. My soul! wait thou only upon God.'

THIRST AND SATISFACTION

'My soul thirsteth for Thee…. 5. My soul shall be satisfied…. 8.

My soul followeth hard after Thee.'—PSALM lxiii. 1, 5, 8.

It is a wise advice which bids us regard rather what is said than who says it, and there are few regions in which the counsel is more salutary than at present in the study of the Old Testament, and especially the Psalms. This authorship has become a burning question which is only too apt to shut out far more important things. Whoever poured out this sweet meditation in the psalm before us, his tender longings for, and his jubilant possession of, God remain the same. It is either the work of a king in exile, or is written by some one who tries to cast himself into the mental attitude of such a person, and to reproduce his longing and his trust. It may be a question of literary interest, but it is of no sort of spiritual or religious importance whether the author is David or a singer of later date endeavouring to reproduce his emotions under certain circumstances.

The three clauses which I have read, and which are so strikingly identical in form, constitute the three pivots on which the psalm revolves, the three bends in the stream of its thought and emotion. 'My soul thirsts; my soul is satisfied; my soul follows hard after Thee.' The three phases of emotion follow one another so swiftly that they are all wrapped up in the brief compass of this little song. Unless they in some degree express our experiences and emotions, there is little likelihood that our lives will be blessed or noble, and we have little right to call ourselves Christians. Let us follow the windings of the stream, and ask ourselves if we can see our own faces in its

shining surface.

I. The soul that knows its own needs will thirst after God.

The Psalmist draws the picture of himself as a thirsty man in a waterless land. That may be a literally true reproduction of his condition, if indeed the old idea is correct, that this is a work of David's; for there is no more appalling desert than that in which he wandered as an exile. It is a land of arid mountains without a blade of verdure, blazing in their ghastly whiteness under the fierce sunshine, and with gaunt ravines in which there are no pools or streams, and therefore no sweet sound of running waters, no shadow, no songs of birds, but all is hot, dusty, glaring, pitiless; and men and beasts faint, and loll out their tongues, and die for want of water. And, says the Psalmist, such is life, if due regard be had to the deepest wants of a soul, notwithstanding all the abundant supplies which are spread in such rich and loving luxuriance around us—we are thirsty men in a waterless land. I need not remind you how true it is that a man is but a bundle of appetites, desires, often tyrannous, often painful, always active. But the misery of it is—the reason why man's misery is great upon him is—mainly, I suppose, that he does not know what it is that he wants; that he thirsts, but does not understand what the thirst means, nor what it is that will slake it. His animal appetites make no mistakes; he and the beasts know that when they are thirsty they have to drink, and when they are hungry

they have to eat, and when they are drowsy they have to sleep. But the poor instinct of the animal that teaches it what to choose and what to avoid fails us in the higher reaches; and we are conscious of a craving, and do not find that the craving reveals to us the source from whence its satisfaction can be derived. Therefore 'broken cisterns that can hold no water' are at a premium, and 'the fountain of living waters' is turned away from, though it could slake so many thirsts. Like ignorant explorers in an enemy's country, we see a stream, and we do not stop to ask whether there is poison in it or not before we glue our thirsty lips to it. There is a great old promise in one of the prophets which puts this notion of the misinterpretation of our thirsts, and the mistakes as to the sources from which they can be slaked, into one beautiful metaphor which is obscured in our English version. The prophet Isaiah says, according to our reading, 'the parched land shall become a pool.' The word which he uses is that almost technical one which describes the phenomenon known only in Eastern lands, or at least known in them only in its superlative degree; the mirage, where the dancing currents of ascending air simulate the likeness of a cool lake, with palm-trees around it. And, says he, 'the mirage shall become a pool,' the romance shall turn into a reality, the mistakes shall be rectified, and men shall know what it is that they want, and shall get it when they know. Brethren! unless we have listened to the teaching from above, unless we have consulted far more wisely and far

more profoundly than many of us have ever done the meaning of our own hearts when they cry out, we too shall only be able to take for ours the plaintive cry of the half of this first utterance of the Psalmist, and say despairingly, 'My soul thirsteth.' Blessed are they who know where the fountain is, who know the meaning of the highest unrests in their own souls, and can go on to say with clear and true self-revelation, 'My soul thirsteth for God!'

That is religion. There is a great deal more in Christianity than longing, but there is no Christianity worth the name without it. There is moral stimulus to activity, a pattern for conduct, and so on, in our religion, and if our religion is only this longing—well then, it is worth very little; and I fancy it is worth a good deal less if there is none of this felt need for God, and for more of God, in us.

And so I come to two classes of my hearers; and to the first of them I say, Dear friends! do not mistake what it is that you 'need,' and see to it that you turn the current of your longings from earth to God; and to the second of them I say, Dear friends! if you have found out that God is your supreme good, see to it that you live in the good, see to it that you live in the constant attitude of longing for more of that good which alone will slake your appetite.

'The thirst that from the soul doth rise
Doth ask a drink divine,'

and unless we know what it is to be drawn outwards and upwards, in strong aspirations after something—'afar from the sphere of our sorrow,' I know not why we should call ourselves Christians at all.

But, dear friends! let us not forget that these higher aspirations after the uncreated and personal good which is God have to be cultivated very sedulously and with great persistence, throughout all our changing lives, or they will soon die out, and leave us. There has to be the clear recognition, habitual to us, of what is our good. There has to be a continual meditation, if I may so say, upon the all-sufficiency of that divine Lord and Lover of our souls, and there has to be a vigilant and a continual suppression, and often excision and ejection, of other desires after transient and partial satisfactions. A man who lets all his longings go unchecked and untamed after earthly good has none left towards heaven. If you break up a river into a multitude of channels, and lead off much of it to irrigate many little gardens, there will be no force in its current, its bed will become dry, and it will never reach the great ocean where it loses its individuality and becomes part of a mightier whole. So, if we fritter away and divide up our desires among all the clamant and partial blessings of earth, then we shall but feebly long, and feebly longing, shall but faintly enjoy, the cool, clear, exhaustless gush from the fountain of life—'My soul thirsteth for God!'—in the

measure in which that is true of us, and not one hairsbreadth beyond it, in spite of orthodoxy, and professions, and activities, are we Christian people.

II. The soul that thirsts after God is satisfied.

The Psalmist, by the magic might of his desire, changes, as in a sudden transformation scene in a theatre, all the dreariness about him. One moment it is a 'dry and barren land where no water is'; the next moment a flash of verdure has come over the yellow sand, and the ghastly silence is broken by the song of merry birds. The one moment he is hungering there in the desert; the next, he sees spread before him a table in the wilderness, and his soul is 'satisfied as with marrow and with fatness,' and his mouth praises God, whom he possesses, who has come unto him swift, immediate, in full response to his cry. Now, all that is but a picturesque way of putting a very plain truth, which we should all be the happier and better if we believed and lived by, that we can have as much of God as we desire, and that what we have of Him will be enough.

We can have as much of God as we desire. There is a quest which finds its object with absolute certainty, and which finds its object simultaneously with the quest. And these two things, the certainty and the immediateness with which the thirst of the soul after God passes into a satisfied fruition of the soul in God, are what are taught us here in our text; and what you and I, if we comply with the conditions, may

have as our own blessed experience. There is one search about which it is true that it never fails to find. The certainty that the soul thirsting after God shall be satisfied with God results at once from His nearness to us, and His infinite willingness to give Himself, which He is only prevented from carrying into act by our obstinate refusal to open our hearts by desire. It takes all a man's indifference to keep God out of his heart, 'for in Him we live, and move, and have our being,' and that divine love, which Christianity teaches us to see on the throne of the universe, is but infinite longing for self-communication. That is the definition of true love always, and they fearfully mistake its essence, and take the lower and spurious forms of it for the higher and nobler, who think of love as being what, alas! it often is, in our imperfect lives, a fierce desire to have for our very own the thing or person beloved. But that is a second-rate kind of love. God's love is an infinite desire to give Himself. If only we open our hearts—and nothing opens them so wide as longing—He will pour in, as surely as the atmosphere streams in through every chink and cranny, as surely as if some great black rock that stands on the margin of the sea is blasted away, the waters will flood over the sands behind it. So unless we keep God out, by not wishing Him in, in He will come.

The certitude that we possess Him when we desire Him is as absolute. As swift as Marconi's wireless message across the Atlantic and its answer; so

immediate is the response from Heaven to the desire from earth. What a contrast that is to all our experiences! Is there anything else about which we can say 'I am quite sure that if I want it I shall have it. I am quite sure that when I want it I have it'? Nothing! There may be wells to which a man has to go, as the Bedouin in the desert has to go, with empty water-skins, many a day's journey, and it comes to be a fight between the physical endurance of the man and the weary distance between him and the spring. Many a man's bones, and many a camel's, lie on the track to the wells, who lay down gasping and black-lipped, and died before they reached them. We all know what it is to have longing desires which have cost us many an effort, and efforts and desires have both been in vain. Is it not blessed to be sure that there is One whom to long for is immediately to possess?

Then there is the other thought here, too, that when we have God we have enough. That is not true about anything else. God forbid that one should depreciate the wise adaptation of earthly goods to human needs which runs all through every life! but all that recognised, still we come back to this, that there is nothing here, nothing except God Himself, that will fill all the corners of a human heart. There is always something lacking in all other satisfactions. They address themselves to sides, and angles, and facets of our complex nature; they leave all the others unsatisfied. The table that is spread in the

world, at which, if I might use so violent a figure, our various longings and capacities seat themselves as guests, always fails to provide for some of them, and whilst some, and those especially of the lower type, are feasting full, there sits by their side another guest, who finds nothing on the table to satisfy his hunger. But if my soul thirsts for God, my soul will be satisfied when I get Him. The prophet Isaiah modifies this figure in the great word of invitation which pealed out from him, where he says, 'Ho! everyone that thirsteth, come ye to the waters.' But that figure is not enough for him, that metaphor, blessed as it is, does not exhaust the facts; and so he goes on, 'yea, come, buy wine'—and that is not enough for him, that does not exhaust the facts, therefore he adds, 'and milk.' Water, wine, and milk; all forms of the draughts that slake the thirsts of humanity, are found in God Himself, and he who has Him needs seek nowhere besides.

Lastly—

III. The soul that is satisfied with God immediately renews its quest.

'My soul followeth hard after Thee.' The two things come together, longing and fruition, as I have said. Fruition begets longing, and there is swift and blessed alternation, or rather co-existence of the two. Joyful consciousness of possession and eager anticipation of larger bestowments are blended still more closely, if we adhere to the original meaning of

the words of this last clause, than they are in our translation, for the psalm really reads, 'My soul cleaveth after Thee.' In the one word 'cleaveth,' is expressed adhesion, like that of the limpet to the rock, conscious union, blessed possession; and in the other word 'after Thee' is expressed the pressing onwards for more and yet more. But now contrast that with the issue of all other methods of satisfying human appetites, be they lower or be they higher. They result either in satiety or in a tyrannical, diseased appetite which increases faster than the power of satisfying it increases. The man who follows after other good than God, has at the end to say, 'I am sick, tired of it, and it has lost all power to draw me,' or he has to say, 'I ravenously long for more of it, and I cannot get any more.' 'He that loveth silver shall not be satisfied with silver, nor he that loveth abundance with increase.' You have to increase the dose of the narcotic, and as you increase the dose, it loses its power, and the less you can do without it the less it does for you. But to drink into the one God slakes all thirsts, and because He is infinite, and our capacity for receiving Him may be indefinitely expanded; therefore,

> 'Age cannot wither, nor custom stale
> His infinite variety';

but the more we have of God, the more we long for Him, and the more we long for Him the more we possess Him.

Brethren! these are the possibilities of the Christian life; being its possibilities they are our obligations. The Psalmist's words may well be turned by us into self-examining interrogations and we may —God grant that we do!—all ask ourselves; 'Do I thus thirst after God?' 'Have I learned that, notwithstanding all supplies, this world without Him is a waterless desert? Have I experienced that whilst I call He answers, and that the water flows in as soon as I open my heart? And do I know the happy birth of fresh longings out of every fruition, and how to go further and further into the blessed land, and into my elastic heart receive more and more of the ever blessed God?'

These texts of mine not only set forth the ideal for the Christian life here, but they carry in themselves the foreshadowing of the life hereafter. For surely such a merely physical accident as death cannot be supposed to break this golden sequence which runs through life. Surely this partial and progressive possession of an infinite good, by a nature capable of indefinitely increasing appropriation of, and approximation to it is the prophecy of its own eternal continuance. So long as the fountain springs, the thirsty lips will drink. God's servants will live till God dies. The Christian life will go on, here and hereafter, till it has reached the limits of its own capacity of expansion, and has exhausted God. 'The water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water, springing up into everlasting life.'

SIN OVERCOMING AND OVERCOME

> 'Iniquities prevail against me: as for our transgressions, Thou shalt purge them away.'—PSALM. lxv. 3.

There is an intended contrast in these two clauses more pointed and emphatic in the original than in our Bible, between man's impotence and God's power in the face of the fact of sin. The words of the first clause might be translated, with perhaps a little increase of vividness, 'iniquities are too strong for me'; and the 'Thou' of the next clause is emphatically expressed in the original, 'as for our transgressions' (which we cannot touch), '*Thou* shalt purge them away.' Despair of self is the mother of confidence in God; and no man has learned the blessedness and the sweetness of God's power to cleanse, who has not learned the impotence of his own feeble attempts to overcome his transgression. The very heart of Christianity is redemption. There are a great many

ways of looking at Christ's mission and Christ's work, but I venture to say that they are all inadequate unless they start with this as the fundamental thought, and that only he who has learned by serious reflection and bitter personal experience the gravity and the hopelessness of the fact of the bondage of sin, rightly understands the meaning and the brightness of the Gospel of Christ. The angel voice that told us His name, and based His name upon His characteristic work, went deeper into the 'philosophy' of Christianity than many a modern thinker, when it said, 'Thou shalt call His name Jesus, because He shall save His people from their sins.' So here we have the hopelessness and misery of man's vain struggles, and side by side with these the joyful confidence in the divine victory. We have the problem and the solution, the barrier and the overleaping of it; man's impotence and the omnipotence of God's mercy. My iniquities are too strong for me, but Thou art too strong for them. As for our transgressions, of which I cannot purge the stain, with all my tears and with all my work, 'Thou shalt purge them away.' Note, then, these two—first, the cry of despair; second, the ringing note of confidence.

I. The cry of despair.

'Too strong for me,' and yet they *are* me. Me, and *not* me; mine, and yet, somehow or other, my enemies, although my children—too strong for me, yet I give them their strength by my own cowardly

and feeble compliance with their temptations; too strong for me and overmastering me, though I pride myself often on my freedom and spirit when I am yielding to them. Mine iniquities are mine, and yet they are not mine; me and yet, blessed be God! they can be separated from me.

The picture suggested by the words is that of some usurping power that has mastered a man, and laid its grip upon him so that all efforts to get away from the grasp are hopeless. Now, I dare say, that some of you are half consciously thinking that this is a piece of ordinary pulpit exaggeration, and has no kind of application to the respectable and decent lives that most of you live, and that you are ready to say, with as much promptitude and as much falsehood as the old Jews did, even whilst the Roman eagles, lifted above the walls of the castle, were giving them the lie: 'We were never in bondage to any man.' You do not know or feel that anything has got hold of you which is stronger than you. Well, let us see.

Consider for a moment. You are powerless to master your evil, considered as habits. You do not know the tyranny of the usurper until a rebellion is got up against him. As long as you are gliding with the stream you have no notion of its force. Turn your boat and try to pull against it, and when the sweat-drops come on your brow, and you are sliding backwards, in spite of all your effort, you will begin to find out what a tremendous down-sucking energy there is in that quiet, silent flow. So the ready

compliance of the worst part of my nature masks for me the tremendous force with which my evil tyrannises over me, and it is only when I face round and try to go the other way, that I find out what a power there is in its invisible grasp.

Did you ever try to cure some trivial bad habit, some trick of your fingers, for instance? You know what infinite pains and patience and time it took you to do that, and do you think that you would find it easier if you once set yourself to cure that lust, say, or that petulance, pride, passion, dishonesty, or whatsoever form of selfish living in forgetfulness of God may be your besetting sin? If you will try to pull the poison fang up, you will find how deep its roots are. It is like the yellow charlock in a field, which seems only to spread in consequence of attempts to get rid of it—as the rough rhyme says; 'One year's seeding, seven years' weeding'—and more at the end of the time than at the beginning. Any honest attempt at mending character drives a man to this —'My iniquities are too strong for me.'

I do not for a moment deny that there may be, and occasionally is, a magnificent force of will and persistency of purpose in efforts at self-improvement on the part of perfectly irreligious men. But, if by the occasional success of such effort, a man conquers one form of evil, that does not deliver him from evil. You have the usurping dominion deep in your nature, and what does it matter in essence which part of your being is most conspicuously under its control? It may

be some animal passion, and you may conquer that. A man, for instance, when he is young, lives in the sphere of sensuous excitement; and when he gets old he turns a miser, and laughs at the pleasures that he used to get from the flesh, and thinks himself ever so much wiser. Is he any better? He has changed, so to speak, the kind of sin. That is all. The devil has put a new viceroy in authority, but it is the old government, though with fresh officials. The house which is cleared of the seven devils without getting into it the all-filling and sanctifying grace of God and love of Jesus Christ will stand empty. Nature abhors a vacuum, and so does Satan, and the empty house invites the seven ill-tenants, and back they come in their diabolical completeness.

So, dear friends! though you may do a great deal—thank God!—in subduing evil habits and inclinations, you cannot touch, so as to master, the central fact of sin unless you get God to help you to do it, and you have to go down on your knees before you can do that work. 'Iniquities are too strong for me.'

Then, again, consider our utter impotence in dealing with our own evil regarded as guilt. When we do wrong, the judge within, which we call conscience, says to us two things, or perhaps three. It says first, 'That is wrong'; it says secondly, 'You have got to answer for it'; and I think it says thirdly, 'And you will be punished for it.' That is to say, there is a sense of demerit that goes side by side with our evil, as certainly as the shadow travels with the substance.

And though, sometimes, when the sun goes behind a cloud, there is no shadow, and sometimes, when the light within us is darkened, conscience does not cast the black shade of demerit across the mind; yet conscience is there, though silent. When it does speak it says, 'You have done wrong, and you are answerable.' Answerable to whom? To it? No! To society? No! To law? No! You can only be answerable to a person, and that is God. Against Him we have sinned. We do wrong; and if wrong were all that we had to charge ourselves with, it would be because there was nothing but law that we were answerable to. We do unkind things, and if unkindness and inhumanity were all that we had to charge ourselves with, it would be because we were only answerable to one another. We do suicidal things, and if self-inflicted injury were all our definition of evil, it would be because we were only answerable to our conscience and ourselves. But we *sin*, and that means that every wrong thing, big or little, which we do, whether we think about God in the doing of it or no, is, in its deepest essence, an offence against Him.

The judgment of conscience carries with it the solemn looking for of future judgment. It says, 'I am only a herald: *He* is coming.' No man feels the burden of guilt without an anticipation of judgment. What are you going to do with these two feelings? Do you think that *you* can deal with them? It is no use saying, 'I am not responsible for what I did; I

inherited such-and-such tendencies; circumstances are so-and-so. I could not help it; environment, and evolution, and all the rest of it diminish, if they do not destroy, responsibility.' Be it so! And yet, after all, this is left—the certainty in my own convictions that I had the power to do or not to do. That is a fundamental part of a man's consciousness. If it is a delusion, what is to be trusted, and how can we be sure of anything? So that we are responsible for our action, and can no more elude the guilt that follows sin than we can jump off our own shadow. And I want you to consider what you are going to do about your guilt.

One thing you cannot do—you cannot remove it. Men have tried to do so by sacrifices, and false religions. They have swung in the air by means of hooks fastened into their bodies, and I do not know what besides, and they have not managed it. You can no more get rid of your guilt by being sorry for your sin than you could bring a dead man to life again by being sorry for his murder. What is done is done. 'What I have written I have written!' Nothing will ever 'wash that little lily hand white again,' as the magnificent murderess in Shakespeare's great creation found out. You can forget your guilt; you can ignore it. You can adopt some of the easily-learned-by-rote and fashionable theories that will enable you to minimise it, and to laugh at us old-fashioned believers in guilt and punishment. You do not take away the rock because you blow out the

lamps of the lighthouse, and you do not alter an ugly fact by ignoring it. I beseech you, as reasonable men and women, to open your eyes to these plain facts about yourselves, that you have an element of demerit and of liability to consequent evil and suffering which you are perfectly powerless to touch or to lighten in the slightest degree.

Consider, again, our utter impotence in regard to our evil, looked upon as a barrier between us and God. That is the force of the context here. The Psalmist has just been saying, 'O Thou that hearest prayer! unto Thee shall all flesh come.' And then he bethinks himself how flesh compassed with infirmities can come. And he staggers back bewildered. There can be no question but that the plain dictate of common sense is, 'We know that God heareth not sinners.' My evil not only lies like a great black weight of guilt and of habit on my consciousness and on my activity, but it actually stands like a frowning cliff, barring my path and making a barrier between me and God. 'Your hands are full of blood; I hate your vain oblations,' says the solemn Voice through the prophet. And this stands for ever true—'The prayer of the wicked is an abomination.' There frowns the barrier. Thank God! mercies come through it, howsoever close-knit and impenetrable it may seem. Thank God! no sin can shut Him out from us, but it can shut us out from Him. And though we cannot separate God from ourselves, and He is nearer us than our consciousness

and the very basis of our being, yet by a mysterious power we can separate ourselves from Him. We may build up, of the black blocks of our sins flung up from the inner fires, and cemented with the bituminous mortar of our lusts and passions, a black wall between us and our Father. You and I have done it. We can build it—we cannot throw it down; we can rear it—we cannot tunnel it. Our iniquities are too strong for us.

Now notice that this great cry of despair in my text is the cry of a single soul. This is the only place in the psalm in which the singular person is used. 'Iniquities are too strong for us,' is not sufficient. Each man must take guilt to himself. The recognition and confession of evil must be an intensely personal and individual act. My question to you, dear friend! is, Did you ever know it by experience? Going apart by yourself, away from everybody else, with no companions or confederates to lighten the load of your felt evil, forgetting tempters and associates and all other people, did you ever stand, you and God, face to face, with nobody to listen to the conference? And did you ever feel in that awful presence that whether the world was full of men, or deserted and you the only survivor, would make no difference to the personal responsibility and weight and guilt of your individual sin? Have you ever felt, 'Against Thee, Thee only, have I'—solitary—'sinned,' and confessed that iniquities are 'too strong for me'?

II. Now, let me say a word or two about the second

clause of this great verse, the ringing cry of confident hope.

The confidence is, as I said, the child of despair. You will never go into that large place of assured trust in God's effacing finger passed over all your evil until you have come through the narrow pass, where the black rocks all but bar the traveller's foot, of conscious impotence to deal with your sin. You must, first of all, dear friends! go down into the depths, and learn to have no trust in yourselves before you can rise to the heights, and rejoice in the hope of the glory and of the mercy of God. Begin with 'too strong for me,' and the impotent 'me' leads on to the almighty 'Thou.'

Then, do not forget that what was confidence on the Psalmist's part is knowledge on ours. 'As for our transgressions, Thou wilt purge them away.' You and I know why, and know how. Jesus Christ in His great work for us has vindicated the Psalmist's confidence, and has laid bare for the world's faith the grounds upon which that divine power proceeds in its cleansing mercy. 'Thou wilt purge them away,' said he. 'Christ hath borne our sins in His own body on the tree,' says the New Testament. I have spoken about our impotence in regard to our own evil, considered under three aspects. I meant to have said more about Christ's work upon our sins, considered under the same three aspects. But let me just, very briefly, touch upon them.

Jesus Christ, when trusted, will do for sin, as habit, what cannot be done without Him. He will give the motive to resist, which is lacking in the majority of cases. He will give the power to resist, which is lacking in all cases. He will put a new life and spirit into our nature which will strengthen and transform our feeble wills, will elevate and glorify our earthward trailing affections, will make us love that which He loves, and aspire to that which He is, until we become, in the change from glory to glory, reflections of the image of the Lord. As habit and as dominant power within us, nothing will cast out the evil that we have entertained in our hearts except the power of the life of Christ Jesus, in His Spirit dwelling within us and making us clean. When 'a strong man keeps his house, his goods are in peace, but when a stronger than he cometh he taketh from him all his implements in which he trusteth, and divideth his spoil.' And so Christ has bound the strong man, in that one great sacrifice on the Cross. And now He comes to each of us, if we will trust Him, and gives motives, power, pattern, hopes, which enable us to cast out the tyrant that has held dominion over us. 'If the Son make you free, ye shall be free indeed.'

And I tell all of you, especially you young men and women, who presumably have noble aspirations and desires, that the only way to conquer the world, the flesh, and the devil, is to let Christ clothe you with His armour; and let Him lay His hand on your feeble

hands whilst you aim the arrows and draw the bow, as the prophet did in the old story, and then you will shoot, and not miss. Christ, and Christ alone, within us will make us powerful to cast out the evil.

In like manner, He, and He only, deals with sin, considered as guilt. Here is the living secret and centre of all Christ's preciousness and power—that He died on the Cross; and in His spirit, which knew the drear desolation of being forsaken by God, and in His flesh, which bore the outward consequences of sin, in death as a sinful world knows it, 'bare our sins and carried our sorrows,' so that 'by His stripes we are healed.'

If you will trust yourselves to the mighty Sacrifice, and with no reservation, as if you could do anything, will cast your whole weight and burden upon Him, then the guilt will pass away, and the power of sin will be broken. Transgressions will be buried —'covered,' as the original of my text has it—as with a great mound piled upon them, so that they shall never offend or smell rank to heaven any more, but be lost to sight for ever.

Christ can take away the barrier reared by sin between God and the human spirit. Solid and black as it stands, His blood dropped upon it melts away. Then it disappears like the black bastions of the aerial structures in the clouds before the sunshine. He hath opened for us a new and living way, that we might 'have access and confidence,' and, sinners as

we are, that we might dwell for ever more at the side of our Lord.

So, dear brother! whilst humanity cries—and I pray that all of us may cry like the Apostle, 'Oh, wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?'—Faith lifts up, swift and clear, her ringing note of triumph, which I pray God or rather, which I beseech you that you will make your own, 'I thank God! I through Jesus Christ our Lord.'

THE BURDEN-BEARING GOD

'Blessed be the Lord, who daily loadeth us with benefits.'—(A.V.).

'Blessed be the Lord, who daily beareth our burden.'
—PSALM lxviii. 19 (R.V.).

The difference between these two renderings seems to be remarkable, and a person ignorant of any language but our own might find it hard to understand how any one sentence was susceptible of both. But the explanation is extremely simple. The

important words in the Authorised Version, 'with benefits,' are a supplement, having nothing to represent them in the original. The word translated '*loadeth*' in the one rendering and '*beareth*' in the other admits of both these meanings with equal ease, and is, in fact, employed in both of them in other places in Scripture. It is clear, I think, that, in this case, at all events, the Revision is an improvement. For the great objection to the rendering which has become familiar to us all, 'Who daily loadeth us *with benefits*,' is that these essential words are not in the original, and need to be supplied in order to make out the sense. Whereas, on the other hand, if we adopt the suggested emendation, 'Who daily beareth our burdens,' we get a still more beautiful meaning, which requires no forced addition in order to bring it out. So, then, I accept that varied form of our text as the one on which I desire to say a few words now.

I. The first thing that strikes me in looking at it is the remarkable and eloquent blending of majesty and condescension.

It is not without significance that the Psalmist employs that name for God in this clause, which most strongly expresses the idea of supremacy and dominion. Rule and dignity are the predominant ideas in the word 'Lord,' as, indeed, the English reader feels in hearing it; and then, side by side with that, there lies this thought, that the Highest, the Ruler of all, whose absolute authority stretches over all mankind, stoops to this low and servile office, and

becomes the burden-bearer for all the pilgrims who will put their trust in Him. This blending together of the two ideas of dignity and condescension to lowly offices of help and furtherance is made even more emphatic if we glance back at the context of the psalm. For there is no place in Scripture in which there is flashed before the mind of the singer a grander picture of the magnificence and the glory of God, than that which glitters and flames in the previous verses. We read in them of God 'riding through the heavens by His name Jehovah'; of Him as marching at the head of the people, through the wilderness, and of the earth quivering at His tread, and the heavens dropping at His presence. We read of Zion itself being moved at the presence of the Lord. We read of His word going forth so mightily as to scatter armies and their kings. We read of the chariots of God as 'twenty thousand, even thousands of angels.' All is gathered together in the great verse, 'Thou hast ascended on high, Thou hast led captivity captive.' And then, before he has taken breath almost, the Psalmist turns, with most striking and dramatic abruptness, from the contemplation, awe-struck and yet jubilant, of all that tremendous, magnificent, and earth-shaking power to this wonderful thought, 'Blessed be the Lord! who daily beareth our burdens.' Not only does He march at the head of the congregation through the wilderness, but He comes, if I might so say, behind the caravan, amongst the carriers and the porters, and will bear anything that any of the weary pilgrims intrusts to

His care.

Oh, dear brethren! if familiarity did not dull the glory of it, what a thought that is—a God that carries men's loads! People talk much rubbish about the 'stern Old Testament Deity'; is there anything sweeter, greater, more heart-compelling and heart-softening, than such a thought as this? How all the majesty bows itself, and declares itself to be enlisted on our side, when we think that 'He that sitteth on the circle of the heavens, and the inhabitants thereof are as grasshoppers' is the God that 'daily beareth our burdens'!

And that is the tone of the Old Testament throughout, for you will always find braided together in the closest vital unity the representation of these two aspects of the divine nature; and if ever we hear set forth a more than ordinarily magnificent conception of His power and majesty be sure that, if you look, you will find side by side with it a more than ordinarily tender representation of His gentleness and His grace. And if we look deeper, this is not a case of contrast, it is not that there are sharply opposed to each other these two things, the gentleness and the greatness, the condescension and the magnificence, but that the former is the direct result of the latter; and it is just because He is Lord, and has dominion over all, that, therefore, He bears the burdens of all. For the responsibilities of the Creator are in proportion to His greatness, and He that has made man has thereby made it necessary

that He should, if they will let Him, be their Burden-bearer and their Servant. The highest must be the lowest, and just because God is high over all, blessed for ever, therefore is He the Supporter and Sustainer of all. So we may learn the true meaning of elevation of all sorts, and from the example of loftiest, may draw the lesson for our more insignificant varieties of height, that the higher we are, the more we are bound to stoop, and that men are then likest God, when their elevation suggests to them responsibility, and when he that is chiefest becomes the servant.

II. So, then, notice next the deep insight into the heart and ways of
God here.

'He daily beareth our burdens.' If there is any meaning in this word at all, it means that He so knits Himself with us as that all which touches us touches Him, that He takes a share in all our pressing duties, and feels the reflection from all our sorrows and pains. We have no impassive God in the heavens, careless of mankind, nor is His settled and changeless and unshaded blessedness of such a sort as that there cannot pass across it—if I may not say a shadow, I may at least say—a ripple from men's pangs and troubles and cares. Love is the identification of oneself with the beloved object. We call it sympathy, when we are speaking about the fellow feeling between man and man that is kindled of love. But there is something deeper than sympathy in that great Heart, which gathers into itself all hearts, and

in that great Being, whose being underlies all our beings, and is the root from which we all live and grow. God, in all our afflictions, is afflicted; and in simple though profound verity, has that which is most truly represented to men, by calling it a fellow feeling with our infirmities and our sorrows.

'Think not thou canst sigh a sigh,
And thy Maker is not nigh;
Think not thou canst weep a tear,
And thy Maker is not near.'

For want of a better word, we speak of the sympathy of God: but we need something far more intimate and unwearied than we understand by that word, to express the community of feeling between all who trust Him and His own infinite heart. If this bearing of our burden means anything, it gives us a deep insight, too, into His workings, as well as into His heart. For it covers over this great truth that He Himself comes to us, and by the communication of His own power to us, makes us able to bear the burdens which we roll upon Him. The meaning of His 'lifting our load,' in so far as that expression refers to the divine act rather than the divine heart, is that He breathes into us the strength by which we can carry the heavy task of duties, and can endure the crushing pressure of our sorrows. All the endurance of the saints is God in them bearing their burdens.

Notice, too, '*daily* beareth,' or, as the Hebrew has it yet more emphatically because more simply, 'day by day beareth.' He travels with us, in the greatness of His might and the long-suffering of His unwearied patience, through all our tribulation, and as He has 'borne and carried' His people 'all the days of old,' so, at each new recurrence of new weights, He is with us still. Like some river that runs by the wayside and ever cheers the traveller on the dusty path with its music, and offers its waters to cool his thirsty lips, so, day by day, in the slow iteration of our lingering sorrows, and in the monotonous recurrence of our habitual duties, there is with us the ever-present help of the Ancient of Days, who measures out daily strength for the daily load, and never sends the one without proffering the other.

III. So, again, notice here the remarkable anticipation of the very heart of the Gospel.

'The God who daily beareth our burdens,' says the Psalmist. He spoke deeper things than he knew, and was wiser than he understood. For the hope that gleams in these words comes to fulfilment, in Him of whom it was written in prophetic anticipation, so clear and definite that it reads like historical narrative—'He bare our grief and carried our sorrows. The chastisement of our peace was upon Him. The Lord hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all.'

Ah! it were of small avail to know a God that bore

the burden of our sorrows and the load of our duties, if we did not know a God who bore the weight of our sins. For that is the real crushing weight that breaks men's hearts and bows them to the earth. So the New Testament, with its message of a Christ on whom is laid the whole pressure of the world's sin, is the deepest fulfilment of the great words of my text.

IV. Note, lastly, what we should therefore do with our burdens.

First, we should cast them on God, and *let* Him carry them. He cannot unless we do. One sometimes sees a petulant and self-confident little child staggering along with some heavy burden by the parent's side, but pushing away the hand that is put out to help it to carry its load. And that is what too many of us do when God says to us, 'Here, My child! let Me help you, I will take the heavy end of it, and do you take the light one.' 'Cast thy burden upon the Lord'—and do it by faith, by simple trust in Him, by making real to yourselves the fact of His divine sympathy, and His sure presence, to aid and to sustain.

Having thus let Him carry the weight, do not you try to carry it too. As our good old hymn has it—

'Why should I the burden bear?'

It is a great deal more God's affair than yours. We have, indeed, in a sense, to carry it. 'Every man shall

bear his own burden.' The weight of duty is not to be indolently shoved off our shoulders on to His, saying, 'Let Him do the work.' We have indeed to carry the weight of sorrow. There is no use in trying to deny its bitterness and its burden, and it would not be well for us that it should be less bitter and less heavy. In many lands the habit prevails, especially amongst the women, of carrying heavy loads on their heads; and all travellers tell us that the practice gives a dignity and a grace to the carriage, and a freedom and a swing to the gait, which nothing else will do. Depend upon it, that so much of our burdens of work and weariness as is left to us, after we have cast them upon Him, is intended to strengthen and ennoble us. But do not let there be the gnawings of anxiety. Do not let there be the self-torment of aimless prognostications of evil. Do not let there be the chewing of the bitter morsel of irrevocable sorrows; but fling all upon God. And remember what the Master has said, and His servant has repeated: 'Take no anxious care … for your heavenly Father knoweth'; 'Cast your anxiety upon Him, for He careth for you.'

And the last advice that comes from my text is, to see that your tongues are not silent in that great hymn of praise which ought to go up to 'the Lord that daily beareth our burdens.' He wants only our trust and our thanks, and is best paid by the praise of our love, and of our heaping still more upon His ever strong and ready arm. Bless the Lord! who beareth

our burdens, and see that you give Him yours to bear. Listen to Him who hath said, 'Come unto Me all ye that … are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.'

REASONABLE RAPTURE

> 'Whom have I in heaven but Thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire besides Thee. 26. My flesh and my heart faileth; but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever.'
> —PSALM lxxiii. 25, 26.

We have in this psalm the record of the Psalmist's struggle with the great standing difficulty of how to reconcile the unequal distribution of worldly prosperity with the wisdom and providence of God. That difficulty pressed more acutely upon men of the Old Dispensation than even upon us, because the very promise of that stage of revelation was that Godliness brought with it outward well-being. Our Psalmist reaches a solution, not exactly by the same path by which the writers of the Books of Job and Ecclesiastes find an answer to the problem. This man gives up the endeavour to solve the question by reflection and thought, and as he says, 'goes into the

sanctuary of God,' gets into communion with his Father in heaven, and by reason of that communion reaches a conclusion which is, at all events, an approximate solution of his difficulty, viz. the belief of a future life, 'Then understood I their end.' The solemn vision of a life beyond the present, which should be the outcome and retribution of this, rises before him from out of his agitated thoughts, like the moon, pale and phantom-like, from a stormy sea. That truth, if revealed at all to the Psalmist's contemporaries, certainly did not occupy the same position of clearness or of prominence as it does in our religious beliefs. But here we see a soul led up by its wrestlings to apprehend it, and as was said of a statesman, 'calling a new world into existence to redress the balance of the old.' So we get here a soul taught by God, and filled with Him by communion, therefore lifted to the height of a faith in a future life, and so made able to look out upon all the perplexities and staggering mysteries of earth's mingled ill and good, if not with distinct understanding, at least with patient faith.

The words of my text indicate for us the very high-water mark of religious experience, the very apex and climax of what some people would call mystical religion to which this man has climbed, because he fought with his doubts, and by God's grace was able to lay them. To him the world's uncertain ill or good becomes infinitely insignificant, because for the future he has a clear vision of a continued life with

God, and because for the present he knows that to have God in his heart is all that he really needs.

I. We have here, first, a necessity which, misdirected, is the source of man's misery.

'Whom have I in heaven but Thee? there is none upon earth that I desire besides Thee.' If men would interpret the deepest voices of their own souls that is what they would all say, because, from the very make of our human nature there is not one of us, howsoever weak and sinful and small, but is great enough to be too great to be filled with anything smaller than God. Our thoughts, even the thoughts of the least enlightened amongst us, go wandering through eternity; and as the writer of the Book of Ecclesiastes says:—'He hath set eternity in men's hearts.' We all of us need, though, alas! so few of us know that we need, a living possession of a living perfect Person, for mind, for heart, for will. Nothing short of the 'fulness of God' is enough for the smallest amongst us. So, because we do not believe this, because hundreds of you do not know what it is for which your souls are crying out, 'the misery of man is great upon him.' You try to fill that deep and aching void in your hearts, which is a sign of your possible nobleness, and a pledge of your possible blessedness, with all manner of minute rubbish, which can never fill up the gap that is there. Cartload after cartload may be tilted into the bottomless bog, and there is no more solid ground on the surface than there was at the beginning. Oh, my

brother! consult thine own deepest need; listen to that voice, often stifled, often neglected, and by some of you always misunderstood, which speaks in your wills, minds, consciences, hopes, desires, hearts; and is it not this: 'My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God'?

There is none in the heaven, with all its stars and angels, enough for thee but Him. There is none upon earth, with all its flowers, and treasures, and loves, that will calm and still thy soul but only God. The words of my text spring from a necessity felt by every man, misdirected by a tragical majority of men, and therefore the source of restlessness and misery.

II. Secondly, we see here the longing which, rightly directed and cherished, is the very spirit of religion.

He, and only he, is the religious man, who can take these words of my text for the inmost words of his conscious effort and life. Only in the measure in which you and I recognise that God is our sole and all-sufficient good, in that measure have we any business to call ourselves devout or Christian people. That is a sharp test, is it not? Is it not a valid and an accurate one? Is that not what really makes a religious man, namely, the supreme admiration of, and aspiration after, and possession of God, and God alone? What a contrast that forms to our ordinary notions of what religion is! High above all creeds

which are valuable as leading up to this enthusiasm of longing and rapture of possession, high above all preliminaries and preparations in the way of outward services and ceremonial or united acts of worship, which are only helps to this inward possession, rises such a thought of religion as this. You are not a Christian because you believe a creed. The very death of Jesus Christ is a means to this end. In order that we might come into personal, rapturous, and hallowing possession of God, His very Self in our hearts and spirits, Jesus Christ died and rose again. Do not mistake the staircase for the presence-chamber. Do not fancy that you are Christian people because you hold certain opinions or beliefs in regard of certain doctrines. Do not fancy that religion consists in either the mere outward practice of, or abstinence from, certain forms of conduct. Such things are the means to, or the outcome of, this inward devotion, but the true essence of our religion is that we recognise God as our only good, and that in Him we find absolute rest and perfect sufficiency.

Is that your religion, my brother? What a contrast these words of my text present not only to our notions of what constitutes religion, but to our practice! What is the thing that you and I crave most to have? What is the thing that we lament most of all when we lose? Where do our desires go when we take the guiding hand off them, and let them run as they will? For some of us there are dearer hearts on earth than His, Perhaps for some of us there are more

dearly loved faces in heaven than His. Taking the two extreme possible cases, and supposing at the one end of the scale a man that had everything but God, and at the other end a man that had nothing but God, do we live as if we believed that the man that had everything *minus* God is a pauper; and the other who has God *minus* everything is 'rich to all the intents of bliss'? Let us shape our desires, aspirations, efforts, according to that certain truth.

I do not need to remind you that this lofty height of conscious longing, not unblest with contemporaneous fruition, is above the height to which we habitually rise. But what I would now insist upon is only this, that whilst there will be variations, whilst there will be ups and downs, the periods in our lives when we do not consciously recognise Him as our supreme and single good are the periods that drop below duty and blessedness. Acknowledge the imperfections, but Oh, my friends! you Christian men and women, who know that these hours of high communion with a loving God are not diffused through your whole life, do not sit down contented, and say that it must be so; but confess them as being imperfections which are your own fault, and remember that just as much, and not one hairsbreadth more than, we can take these words of my text for ours, so much and no more, have we a right to call ourselves religious men and women.

III. Again, we have here the blessed possession, which deadens earthly desires.

That clause, 'There is none upon earth that I desire besides Thee,' might, I think, be rendered more accurately 'With Thee'—that is to say, 'possessing Thee,'—I desire none 'upon earth.' If we thus have been longing after God, and fuller possession of Him, and if in some measure, in answer to the desire, as is always the case, we have received into mind and heart and will more of His preciousness and sweetness, then that will kill the desires that otherwise would conflict with it. Our great poet, speaking about a supreme earthly love, says—

> 'That rich golden shaft
> Hath killed the flock of all affections else,
> That lived in her.'

And the same thing is true about this higher life. This new affection will deaden, and in some sense destroy, the desires that turn to lower and to earthly things. The sun when it rises quenches the brightest stars that can but fade in his light and die. And so when, in answer to our longing, God lifts the light of His countenance—a better sunrise—upon us, that new affection dims and quenches the brightness of these little, though they be lustrous points, that shed a fragmentary and manifold twinkling over the darkness of our former night. 'Walk in the light,' and your heaven will be naked of all competing brightness.

Only remember that this supreme, and in some sense exclusive, love and longing does not destroy

the sweetness of lower possessions and blessings. A new deep love in a man or a woman's heart does not make their former affections less, but more, sweet and noble and strong. And so when we get to love God best, and to love all other persons and things in Him, and Him in them, then they become sources of dignity and nobleness, of sweetness and strength, in our lives, which they otherwise never would be. If you want to make all your family affections, for instance, more permanent, more lofty, and more blessed, let them be all in God:

> 'I trust he lives in God, and there
> I find him worthier to be loved,'

says the poet about one that had been carried into the other life. It is true about us in our relations to one another, even whilst we remain here. Let God be first, and the second rises higher in the scale than when we thought it first. The more our hearts are knit to Him and all other desires are subordinated to Him, the more do they become precious, and powers for good in our lives.

IV. And so, lastly, we have here the possession which is the pledge of perpetuity.

The Psalmist, in the last verse of my text, supposes an extreme, and in some sense, an impossible case. 'My flesh'—my bodily frame—'and my heart'—some portion of my immaterial being—'faileth.' The clause should probably be taken as hypothetical. 'Even

supposing that it has come to this,' says he, 'that I had been separated from my body, and that along with the body there had also been "consumed" (as is the meaning of the original word) some portion of my spiritual being, even then, though there were only a thin thread of personality left, enough to call "me" and no more, so to speak, I should cling with that to God, and I know that then I should have enough, for "God is the Rock of my heart, and my Portion for ever."'

These two last words are obviously here to be taken in their widest extension. The whole context requires us to suppose that the Psalmist's eye is looking across the black gorge of death to the shining table-land beyond. So here we are admitted to see faith in the future life in the very act of growth. The singer soars to that sunlit height of confidence in the endless blessedness of union with God, just because he feels so deeply the sacredness and the blessedness of his present communion with God.

Next to the resurrection of Jesus Christ the best proof of immortality lies in the present experience of communion with God. Anything is more reasonable than to believe that a soul which can grasp God for its good, which can turn itself to, and be united with, an infinite Being; and itself is capable of indefinite approximation towards that Being, should have its course and career cut short by such a surface thing as death. If there be a God at all, anything is more reasonable than to believe that the union, formed

between Him and me by faith here, can ever come to an end until I have exhausted Him, and drawn all His fulness into myself. This communion, by its 'very sweetness yieldeth proof that it was born for immortality.' And the Psalmist here, just because to-day God is the Rock of his heart, is sure that that relation must last on, through life, through death, ay! and for ever, 'when all that seems shall suffer shock.'

So, my brethren! here is the choice and alternative presented before us. And I ask you which is the wise man, he who clutches at external possessions which cannot abide, or he who hungers for that indwelling God, who sinks into the very substance of his soul, and is more inseparable from him than his very body? Which is the wise man, he of whom it shall one day be said, 'This night thy soul shall be required of thee,' and 'His glory shall not descend after him,' or the man who knows for what his heart hungers, and knowing it turns to God in Christ, by simple faith and lowly aspiration, as his enduring Treasure; and then, and therefore, can look out with a calm smile of security over all the tumbling sea of change, and beyond the dark horizon there where sight fails; and can say, 'I am persuaded that neither things present, nor things to come, nor life, nor death, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate me from the God who is my Treasure, and the Life of my very self'?

NEARNESS TO GOD THE KEY TO LIFE'S PUZZLE

'It is good for me to draw near to God: I have put my trust in the

Lord God, that I may declare all Thy works.'—PSALM lxxiii. 28.

The old perplexity as to how it comes, if God is good and wise and strong, that bad men should prosper and good men should suffer, has been making the Psalmist's faith reel. He does not answer the question exactly as the New Testament would have done, but he does find a solution sufficient for himself in two thoughts, the transiency of that outward prosperity, and the eternal sufficiency of God. 'It was too painful for me until I went into the Sanctuary, then understood I their end'; and on the other hand: 'Thou art the Strength of my life, and my Portion for ever.' So he climbs at last to the calm height where he learns that, whatever be a man's outward prosperity, if he is separated from God he ceases to be. As the context says: 'They that are far from Thee shall perish.' 'Thou hast destroyed'—already, before they die—'all them that go a-whoring from Thee.' And on the other hand, whatever be the outward condition, God is enough. 'It is good for me,' rich or poor harassed or at rest, afflicted or

prosperous, in health or sickness, solitary or compassed about with loving friends, 'it is good for me to draw near to God'; and nothing else is good. Thus the river that has had to fight its way through rocks, and has been chafed in the conflict, and has twisted its path through many a deep, dark, sunless gorge, comes out at last into the open, and flows with a broad sunlit breast, peaceable and full, into the great ocean—'It is good for me to draw near to God.'

But that is not all. The Psalmist goes on to tell how we are to draw near to God: 'I have put my trust in Him.' And that is not all, for he further goes on to tell how, drawing near to God through faith, all these puzzles and mysteries about men's condition cease to perplex, and a beam of light falls upon the whole of them. 'I have put my trust in God, that I may declare all Thy works.' There are no knots in the thread now.

I. So here we have, first the truth of experience that nearness to God is the one good.

Of course, it is so in the Psalmist's view, since he believes, as we profess to believe, that, to quote the words of another Psalmist, 'With Thee is the fountain of life'; and therefore that to 'draw near to Thee' is to carry our little empty pitchers to that great spring that is always flowing with waters ever sweet and clear. Union with God is life, in all senses of the word, according as the creature is capable of union with Him. Why! there is no life in a plant except

God's power is vitalising it. 'Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow' because God makes them grow. There is no bodily life in a man, unless He continually breathes into the nostrils the breath of life. If you stop the flow of the fountain, then all the pools are dry. There is no life intellectual in a man, except by the 'inspiration of the Almighty,' from whom 'all just thoughts do proceed.' Above all these forms of life the real life of a spirit is the life derived from the union with God Himself, whereby He pours Himself into it, and in the deepest sense of the words it is true: 'Because I live ye shall live also.' 'It is good for me to draw near to God,' because, unless I do, and if I am separated from Him, my true self is dead, even whilst I seem to live. All that are parted from Him perish; all that are joined to Him, and only they, do live what is worth calling life. Cut off the sunbeam from the sun, and what becomes of it? It vanishes. Separate a soul from God, and it is dead. What is all the good of the world to you if your true self is dead? And what an absurdity it is to deck a corpse with riches and pomp of various kinds! That is what the men of the world are doing, who have chained themselves to earth, and cut themselves off from God. 'For me it is good to draw near to God.' Do you draw near? Because if you do not, no matter what prosperity you have, you do not know anything about the true life and real good for heart and spirit.

I suppose I need scarcely go on pointing out other aspects of this supreme—or more truly, this solitary

—good. For instance, nothing is really good to me unless I have it within me, so as that it can never be wrenched away from me. The blessings that we cannot incorporate with the very substance of our being are only partial blessings after all; and all these things round us that do minister to our necessities, tastes, affections, and sometimes to our weaknesses, these good things fail just in this, that they stand outside us, and there is no real union between us and them. So, changes come, and we have to unclasp hands, and the footsteps that used to be planted by the side of ours cease, and our track across the sands is lonely; and losses come, and death comes, and all the glory and the good that were only externally possessed by us we leave behind us. As this psalm says: 'I considered their end … how they are brought into desolation, as in a moment!' What is the good of a good that is not incorporated into any being? What is the good of a good about which I cannot say, with a smile of confidence, 'I know that where-ever I may go, and whatever may befall me, that can never pass from me'? There is but one good of that sort. 'I am persuaded that … neither life nor death … nor any other creature, shall separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.' 'It is good for me,' amidst the morasses and quicksands and bogs of life's uncertain and shifting ill and good, to set my feet upon the rock, and to say: 'Here I stand, and my footing will never give way.' Do you, brother! possess a changeless, imperishable, inwrought good like that? You may if you like.

But remember, too, that in regard to this Christian good, it is not only the possession of it, but the aspiration after it, that is blessed. The Psalmist does not only say, 'It is good for me to be near to God,' but he says, 'It is good for me to draw near.' There is one kind of life in which the seeking is all but as blessed as the finding. There is one kind of life in which to desire is all but as full of peace, and power, and joy as to possess. Therefore, another psalm, which begins by celebrating the blessedness of the men that dwell in God's house, and are 'still praising Thee,' goes on to speak of the blessedness, not less blessed, of the men 'in whose heart are the ways.' They who have reached the Temple are at rest, and blessed in their repose. They who are journeying towards it are in action, and blessed in their activity. 'It is good to draw near'; and the seeking after God is as far above the possession of all other good as heaven is above earth.

But then, notice further, how our Psalmist comes down to very plain, practical teaching. He seems to feel that he must explain what he means by drawing near to God. And here is his explanation. 'I have put my trust in the Lord.'

II. The way to nearness to God is twofold.

On the one hand the true path is Jesus Christ, on the other hand the means by which we walk upon that path is our faith. The Apostle puts it all in a nutshell when he says that his prayer for the

Ephesian Church is that 'Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith,' and then, by a linked chain which we have not now to consider, leads up to the final issues of that faith in that indwelling Christ—'that ye may be filled with all the fulness of God.' So to draw near and to possess that good, that only good which is God, all that is needed is—and it is needed—that we should turn with the surrender of our hearts, with the submission of our wills, with the outgoing of our affections, and with the conformity of our practical life, to Jesus. Seeing Him, we see the Father, and having Him near us, we feel the touch of the divine hand, and being joined to the Lord, we are separated from the vanities of life, and united to the Supreme Good.

Dear brethren! this Psalmist shows us how hard it is for us to keep up that continual attitude of faith, how many difficulties there are in daily life, in the way of our continually being true to our deepest convictions, and seeking after Him amidst all the distracting whirl and perplexities of our daily lives. But he shows us, too, how possible it is, even for men constituted as we are, moment by moment, day by day, task by task, to keep vivid the consciousness of our dependence upon Him, and the blessed consciousness of our being beside Him, and how, if we do, strength will come to us for everything. The secret of a joyous walk lies in this, 'I have set the Lord always before me. Because He is at my right hand I shall not be moved.' We draw near to God

when we clutch Christ in faith. Our faith manifests itself, not merely by a lazy reliance upon what He once did, long ago, on the Cross for us; but by daily, effortful revivifying of our consciousness of His presence, of our consciousness of our dependence upon Him, and by the continual reference of thoughts, desires, plans, and actions to Himself.

Keep God beside you so, and then there will follow what this Psalmist reached at last, a peaceful insight into what else are full of perplexity and difficulty, the ways of God in the world.

To myself, to my dear ones, to the nation, to the Church, to the world, there come many perplexing riddles as to God's dealings, that cannot be solved except by getting close to Him. Just as a little child nestling on its mother's bosom, with its mother's arm around it, looks out with peaceful eye and a bright smile, upon everything beyond the safe nest, so they who are near to God can bear to look at difficulties and perplexities, and the mysteries of their own sorrows and of the world's miseries, and say, 'All things work together for good'; 'I have put my trust in the Lord, that I may declare *all* Thy works.' Stand in the sun, and all the planets move around it manifestly in order. Take your place anywhere else, and there is confusion. Get beside God, and look out on the world, and you will see it as He saw it when, 'Behold! it was very good.'

Now, dear friends! my text in its first part may

become the description of our death. One man holds on to the world as it is slipping away from him. I remember a story about a coast-guardsman that was flung over the cliffs once, and when they picked up his dead body, all under the nails was full of chalk that he had scraped off the cliffs in his desperate attempts to clutch at something to hold by. That is like one kind of death. But another kind may be: 'It is good for me to draw near to God.' And when we reach His side, and see all the past from the centre, and in the light of the Eternal Present, to which it has led, we shall be able to declare all His works, and to give thanks 'for all the way by which the Lord our God hath led us' and the world 'these many years in the wilderness.'

MEMORY, HOPE, AND EFFORT

'That they might set their hope in God, and not forget the works of

God, but keep His commandments.'—PSALM lxxviii. 7.

In its original application this verse is simply a statement of God's purpose in giving to Israel the

Law, and such a history of deliverance. The intention was that all future generations might remember what He had done, and be encouraged by the remembrance to hope in Him for the future; and by both memory and hope, be impelled to the discharge of present duty.

So, then, the words may permissibly bear the application which I purpose to make of them in this sermon, re-echoing only (and aspiring to nothing more) the thoughts which the season has already, I suppose, more or less, suggested to most of us. Smooth motion is imperceptible; it is the jolts that tell us that we are advancing. Though every day be a New Year's Day, still the alteration in our dates and our calendars should set us all thinking of that continual lapse of the mysterious thing—the creature of our own minds—which we call time, and which is bearing us all so steadily and silently onwards.

My text tells us how past, present, and future—memory, hope, and effort may be ennobled and blessed. In brief, it is by associating them all with God. It is as the field of His working that our past is best remembered. It is on Him that our hopes may most wisely be set. It is keeping His commandments which is the consecration of the present. Let us, then, take the three thoughts of our text and cast them into New Year's recommendations.

I. First, then, let us associate God with memory by thankful remembrance.

Now I suppose that there are very few of the faculties of our nature which we more seldom try to regulate by Christian principles than that great power which we have of looking backwards. Did you ever reflect that you are responsible for what you remember, and for how you remember it, and that you are bound to train and educate your memory, not merely in the sense of cultivating it as a means of carrying intellectual treasures, but for a religious purpose? The one thing that all parts of our nature need is God, and that is as true about our power of remembrance as it is about any other part of our being. The past is then hallowed, noble, and yields its highest results and most blessed fruits for us when we link it closely with Him, and see in it not only, nor so much, the play of our own faculties, whether we blame or approve ourselves, as rather see in it the great field in which God has brought Himself near to our experience, and has been regulating and shaping all that has befallen us. The one thing which will consecrate memory, deliver it from its errors and abuses, raise it to its highest and noblest power, is that it should be in touch with God, and that the past should be regarded by each of us as it is, in deed and in truth, one long record of what God has done for us.

We can see His presence more clearly when we look back over a long-connected stretch of days, and when the excitement of feeling the agony or rapture have passed, than we could whilst they were hot,

and life was all hurry and bustle. The men on the deck of a ship see the beauty of the city that they have left behind, better than when they were pressing through its narrow streets. And though the view of the receding houses from the far-off waters may be an illusion, our view of the past, if we see God brooding over it all, and working in it all, is no illusion. The meannesses are hidden, the narrow places are invisible, all the pain and suffering is quieted, and we are able to behold more truly than when we were in the midst of them, the bearing, the purpose, and the blessedness alike of our sorrows and of our joys.

Not a few of us are old enough to have had a great many mysteries of our early days cleared up. We have seen at least the beginnings of the harvest which the ploughshare of sorrow and the winter winds were preparing for us, and for the rest we can trust. Brethren! remember your mercies; remember your losses; and 'for all the way by which the Lord our God has led us these many years in the wilderness,' let us try to be thankful, including in our praises the darkness and the storm as well as the light and the calm. Some of us are like people who, when they get better of their sicknesses, grudge the doctor's bill. We forget the mercies as soon as they are past, because we only enjoyed the sensuous sweetness of them whilst it tickled our palate, and did not think, in the enjoyment of them, whose love it was that they spoke of to us. Sorrows and joys,

bring them all in your thanksgivings, and 'forget not the works of God.'

Such a habit of cultivating the remembrance of God's hand as moving in all our past, will not, in the slightest degree, interfere with lower and yet precious exercises of that same faculty. We shall still be able to look back, and learn our limitations, mark our weaknesses, gather counsels of prudence from our failures, tame our ambitions by remembering where we broke down. And such an exercise of grateful God-recognising remembrance will deliver us from the abuses of that great power, by which so many of us turn our memories into a cause of weakness, if not of sin. There are people, and we are all tempted to be of the number, who look back upon the past and see nothing there but themselves, their own cleverness, their own success; 'burning incense to their own net, and sacrificing to their own drag.' Another mood leads us to look back into the past dolefully and disappointedly, to say, 'I have broken down so often; my resolutions have all gone to water so quickly; I have tried and failed over and over again. I may as well give it all up, and accept the inevitable, and grope on as well as I can without hope of self-advancement or of victory.' Never! If only we will look back to God we shall be able to look forward to a perfect self. To-morrow need never be determined by the failures that have been. We may still conquer where we have often been defeated. There is no worse use of the power of

remembrance than when we use it to bind upon ourselves, as the permanent limitations of our progress, the failures and faults of the past. 'Forget the things that are behind.' Your old fragmentary goodness, your old foiled aspirations, your old frequent failures—cast them all behind you!

And there are others to whom remembrance is mainly a gloating over old sins, and a doing again of these—ruminating upon them; bringing up the chewed food once more to be masticated. Some of us gather only poisonous weeds, and carry them about in the *hortus siccus* of our memories. Alas! for the man whose memory is but the paler portraiture of past sins. Some of us, I am sure, have our former evils holding us so tight in their cords that when we look back memory is defiled by the things which defiled the unforgettable past. Brethren! you may find a refuge from that curse of remembrance in remembering God.

And some of us, unwisely and ungratefully, live in the light of departed blessings, so as to have no hearts either for present mercies or for present duties. There is no more weakening and foolish misdirection of that great gift of remembrance than when we employ it to tear down the tender greenery with which healing time has draped the ruins; or to turn again in the wound which is beginning to heal the sharp and poisoned point of the sorrow which once pierced it. For all these abuses—the memory that gloats upon sin; the memory that is proud of

success; the memory that is despondent because of failures; the memory that is tearful and broken-hearted over losses—for all these the remedy is that we should not forget the works of God, but see Him everywhere filling the past.

II. Again, let us live in the future by hope in Him.

Our remembrances and our hopes are closely connected; one might almost even say that the power by which we look backwards and that by which we look forwards are one and the same. At all events, Hope owes to Memory the pigments with which it paints, the canvas on which it paints, and the objects which it portrays there. But in all our earthly hopes there is a feeling of uncertainty which brings alarm as well as expectation, and he whose forward vision runs only along the low levels of earth, and is fed only by experience and remembrance, will never be able to say, 'I hope with certitude, and I know that my hope shall be fulfilled.' For him 'hopes, and fears that kindle hopes,' will be 'an indistinguishable throng'; and there will be as much of pain as of pleasure in his forward glance.

But if, according to my text, we set our hopes on God, then we shall have a certainty absolute. What a blessing it is to be able to look forward to a future as fixed and sure, as solid and as real, as much our possession, as the irrevocable past! The Christian man's hope, if it be set on God, is not a 'may be,' but a 'will be'; and he can be as sure of to-morrow as he

is of yesterday.

They whose hopes are set on God have a certain hope, a sufficient one, and one that fills all the future. All other expectations are fulfilled, or disappointed, as the case may be, but are left behind and outgrown. This one only never palls, and is never accomplished, and yet is never disappointed. So if we set our hopes on Him, we can face very quietly the darkness that lies ahead of us. Earthly hopes are only the mirrors in which the past reflects itself, as in some king's palace you will find a lighted chamber, with a great sheet of glass at each end, which perpetuates in shining rows the lights behind the spectator. A curtain veils the future, and earthly hope can only put a mirror in front of it that reflects what has been. But the hope that is set on God draws back the curtain, and lets us see enough of a fixed, eternal future to make our lives bright and our hearts calm. The darkness remains; what of that, if

'I only know I cannot drift
Beyond His love and care'?

Set your hopes on God, and they will not be ashamed.

III. Lastly, let us live in the present by strenuous obedience.

After all, memory and hope are meant to fit us for work in the flying moment. Both should impel us to

this keeping of the commandments of God; for both yield motives which should incline us thereto. A past full of blessing demands the sacrifice of loving hearts and of earnest hands. A future so fair, so far, so certain, so sovereign, and a hope that grasps it, and brings some of its sweet fragrance into the else scentless air of the poor present, ought to impel to service, vigorous and continual. Both should yield motives which make such service a delight.

If my memory weakens me for present work, either because it depresses my hope of success, or because it saddens me with the remembrance of departed blessings, then it is a curse and not a good. And if I dream myself away in any future, and forget the exigencies of the imperative and swiftly-passing moment, then the faculty of hope, too, is a curse and a weakening. But both are delivered from their possible abuses, if both are made into means of helping us to fill the present with loving obedience. These two faculties are like the two wings that may lift us to God, like the two paddles, one on either side of the ship, that may drive us steadily forward, through all the surges and the tempest. They find their highest field in fitting us for the grinding tasks and the heavy burdens that the moment lays upon us.

So, dear friends! we are very different in our circumstances and positions. For some of us Hope's basket is nearly empty, and Memory's sack is very full. For us older men the past is long, the earthly

future is short. For you younger people the converse is the case. It is Hope whose hands are laden with treasures for you, Memory carries but a little store. Your past is brief; your future is probably long. The grains of sand in some of our hour-glasses are very heaped and high in the lower half, and running very low in the upper. But whichever category we stand in, one thing remains the same for us all, and that is duty, keeping God's commandments. That is permanent, and that is the one thing worth living for. 'Whether we live we live unto the Lord; or whether we die we die unto the Lord.'

So let us front this New Year, with all its hidden possibilities, with quiet, brave hearts, resolved on present duty, as those ought who have such a past to remember and such a future to hope for. It will probably be the last on earth for some of us. It will probably contain great sorrows for some of us, and great joys for others. It will probably be comparatively uneventful for others. It may make great outward changes for us, or it may leave us much as it found us. But, at all events, God will be in it, and work for Him should be in it. Well for us if, when its hours have slidden away into the grey past, they continue to witness to us of His love, even as, while they were wrapped in the mists of the future, they called on us to hope in Him! Well for us if we fill the passing moment with deeds of loving obedience! Then a present of keeping His commandments will glide into a past to be thankfully

remembered, and will bring us nearer to a future in which hope shall not be put to shame. To him who sees God in all the divisions and particles of his days, and makes Him the object of memory, hope, and effort, past, present, and future are but successive calm ripples of that mighty river of Time which bears him on the great ocean of Eternity, from which the drops that make its waters rose, and to which its ceaseless flow returns.

SPARROWS AND ALTARS

> 'Yea, the sparrow hath found an house, and the swallow a nest for herself, where she may lay her young, even Thine altars, O Lord of Hosts, my King, and my God.'—PSALM lxxxiv. 3.

The well-known saying of the saintly Rutherford, when he was silenced and exiled from his parish, echoes and expounds these words. 'When I think,' said he, 'upon the sparrows and swallows that build their nests in the kirk of Anwoth, and of my dumb Sabbaths, my sorrowful, bleared eyes look asquint upon Christ, and present Him as angry.' So sighed the Presbyterian minister in his compelled idleness in a

prosaic seventeenth-century Scotch town, answering his heart's-brother away back in the far-off time, and in such different circumstances. The Psalmist was probably a member of the Levitical family of the Sons of Korah, who were 'doorkeepers in the house of the Lord.' He knew what he was saying when he preferred his humble office to all honours among the godless. He was shut out by some unknown circumstances from external participation in the Temple rites, and longs to be even as one of the swallows or sparrows that twitter and flit round the sacred courts. No doubt to him faith was much more inseparably attached to form than it should be for us. No doubt place and ritual were more to him than they can permissibly be to those who have heard and understood the great charter of spiritual worship spoken first to an outcast Samaritan of questionable character: 'Neither in this mountain nor in Jerusalem shall men worship the Father.' But equally it is true that what he wanted was what the outward worship brought him, rather than the worship itself. And the psalm, which begins with 'longing' and 'fainting' for the courts of the Lord, and pronouncing benedictions on 'those that dwell in Thy house,' works itself clear, if I might so say, and ends with 'O Lord of Hosts! Blessed is the man that trusteth in Thee'—for he shall 'dwell in Thy house,' wherever he is. So this flight of imagination in the words of my text may suggest to us two or three lessons.

I. I take it first as pointing a bitter and significant

contrast.

'The sparrow hath found a house, and the swallow a nest for herself,' while I! We do not know what the Psalmist's circumstances were, but if we accept the conjecture that he may have accompanied David in his flight during Absalom's rebellion, we may fancy him as wandering on the uplands across Jordan, and sharing the agitations, fears, and sorrows of those dark hours, and in the midst of all, as the little company hurried hither and thither for safety, thinking, with a touch of bitter envy, of the calm restfulness and serene services of the peaceful Temple.

But, pathetic as is the complaint, when regarded as the sigh of a minister of the sanctuary exiled from the shrine which was as his home, and from the worship which was his occupation and delight, it sounds a deeper note and one which awakens echoes in our hearts, when we hear in it, as we may, the complaint of humanity contrasting its unrest with the happier lot of lower creatures. Do you remember who it was that said—and on what occasion He said it—'Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have roosting-places, but the Son of Man hath not where to lay His head'? That saying, like our text, has a narrower and a wider application. In the former it pathetically paints the homeless Christ, a wanderer in a land peculiarly 'His own,' and warns His enthusiastic would-be follower of the lot which he was so light-heartedly undertaking to share. But

when Jesus calls Himself 'Son of Man,' He claims to be the realised ideal of humanity, and when, as in that saying, He contrasts the condition of 'the Son of Man' with that of the animal creation, we can scarcely avoid giving to the words their wider application to the same contrast between man's homelessness and the creatures' repose which we have found in the Psalmist's sigh.

Yes! There is only one being in this world that does not fit the world that he is in, and that is man, chief and foremost of all. Other beings perfectly correspond to what we now call their 'environment.' Just as the soft mollusc fits every convolution of its shell, and the hard shell fits every curve of the soft mollusc, so every living thing corresponds to its place and its place to it, and with them all things go smoothly. But man, the crown of creation, is an exception to this else universal complete adaptation. 'The earth, O Lord! is full of Thy mercy,' but the only creature who sees and says that is the only one who has further to say, 'I am a stranger on the earth.' He and he alone is stung with restlessness and conscious of longings and needs which find no satisfaction here. That sense of homelessness may be an agony or a joy, a curse or a blessing, according to our interpretation of its meaning, and our way of stilling it. It is not a sign of inferiority, but of a higher destiny, that we alone should bear in our spirits the 'blank misgivings' of those who, amid unsatisfying surroundings, have blind feelings after 'worlds not

realised,' which elude our grasp. It is no advantage over us that every fly dancing in the treacherous gleams of an April sun, and every other creature on the earth except ourselves, on whom the crown is set, is perfectly proportioned to its place, and has desire and possessions absolutely conterminous.

'The son of man hath not where to lay his head.' Why must he alone wander homeless on the bleak moorland, whilst the sparrows and the swallows have their nests and their houses? Why? Because they *are* sparrows and swallows, and he is man, and 'better than many sparrows.' So let us lay to heart the sure promises, the blessed hopes, the stimulating exhortations, which come from that which, at first sight, seems to be a mystery and half an arraignment of the divine wisdom, in the contrast between the restlessness of humanity and the reposeful contentment of those whom we call the lower creatures. Be true to the unrest, brother! and do not mistake its meaning, nor seek to still it, until it drives you to God.

II. These words bring to us a plea which we may use, and a pledge on which we may rest.

'Thine altars, O Lord of hosts! my King and my God.' The Psalmist pleads with God, and lays hold for his own confidence upon the fact that creatures which do not understand what the altar means, may build beside it, and those which have no notion of who the God is to whom the house is sacred, are yet

cared for by Him. And he thinks to himself, 'If I can say "*My* King and *my* God," surely He that takes care of them will not leave me uncared for.' The unrest of the soul that is capable of appropriating God is an unrest which has in it, if we understand it aright, the assurance that it shall be stilled and satisfied. He that is capable of entering into the close personal relationship with God which is expressed by that eloquent little pronoun and its reduplication with the two words, 'King' and 'God'—such a creature cannot cry for rest in vain, nor in vain grope, as a homeless wanderer, for the door of the Father's house.

'Doth God care for oxen; or saith He it altogether for our sakes?' 'Consider the fowls of the air; your heavenly Father feedeth them.' And the same argument which the Apostle used in the one of these sayings, and our Lord in the other, is valid and full of encouragement when applied to this matter. He that 'satisfies the desires of every living thing,' and fills full the maw of the lowest creature; and puts the worms into the gaping beak of the young ravens when they cry, is not the King to turn a deaf ear, or the back of His hand, to the man who can appeal to Him with this word on his lips, 'My King and my God!' We grasp God when we say that; and all that we see of provident recognition and supply of wants in dealings with these lower creatures should encourage us to cherish calm unshakable confidence that every true desire of our souls after Him is as certain to be satisfied.

And so the glancing swallows around the eaves of the Temple and the twittering sparrows on its pinnacles may proclaim to us, not only a contrast which is bitter, but a confidence which is sweet. We may be sure that we shall not be left uncared for amongst the many pensioners at His table, and that the deeper our wants the surer we are of their supply. Our bodies may hunger in vain—bodily hunger has no tendency to bring meat; but our spirits cannot hunger in vain if they hunger after God; for that hunger is the sure precursor and infallible prophet of the coming satisfaction.

These words not only may hearten us with confidence that our desires will be satisfied if they are set upon Him, but they point us to the one way by which they are so. Say 'My King and my God!' in the deepest recesses of a spirit conscious of His presence, of a will submitting to His authority, of emptiness expectant of His fulness; say that, and you are in the house of the Lord. For it is not a question of place, it is a question of disposition and desire. This Psalmist, though, when he began his song, he was far away from the Temple, and though he finished it sitting on the same hillside on which he began it, when he had ended it was within the curtains of the sanctuary and wrapt about with the presence of his God. He had regained as he sang what for a moment he had lost the consciousness of when he began—viz. the presence of God with him on the lone, dreary expanse of alien soil as truly as

amidst the sanctities of what was called His House.

So, brethren! if we want rest, let us clasp God as ours; if we desire a home warm, safe, sheltered from every wind that blows, and inaccessible to enemies, let us, like the swallows, nestle under the eaves of the Temple. Let us take God for our Hope. They that hold communion with Him—and we can all do that wherever we are and whatever we may be doing—these, and only these, 'dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of their lives.' Therefore, with deepest simplicity of expression, our psalm goes on to describe, as equally recipients of blessedness, 'those that dwell in the house of the Lord,' and those in 'whose heart are the ways' that lead to it, and to explain at last, as I have already pointed out, that both the dwellers in, and the pilgrims towards, that intimacy of abiding with God are included in the benediction showered on those who cling to Him, 'Blessed is the man that trusteth in Thee!'

III. Lastly, we may take this picture of the Psalmist's as a warning.

Sparrows and swallows have very small brains. They build their nests, and they do not know whose altars they are flitting around. They pursue the insects on the wing, and they twitter their little songs; and they do not understand how all their busy, glancing, brief, trivial life is being lived beneath the shadow of the cherubim, and all but in the presence of the veiled God of the Shekinah.

There are too many people who live like that. We are all tempted to build our nests where we may lay our young, or dispose of ourselves or our treasures in the very sanctuary of God, with blind, crass indifference to the Presence in which we move. The Father's house has many mansions, and wherever we go we are in God's Temple. Alas! some of us have no more sense of the sanctities around us, and no more consciousness of the divine Eye that looks down upon us, than if we were so many feathered sparrows flitting about the altar.

Let us take care, brethren! that we give our hearts to be influenced, and awed, and ennobled, and tranquillised by the sense of ever more being in the house of the Lord. Let us see to it that we keep in that house by continual aspiration, cherishing in our hearts the ways that lead to it; and so making all life worship, and every place what the pilgrim found the stone of Bethel to be, a house of God and a gate of heaven. For everywhere, to the eye that sees the things that are, and not only the things that seem—and to the heart that feels the unseen presence of the One Reality, God Himself—all places are temples, and all work may be beholding His beauty and inquiring in His sanctuary; and everywhere, though our heads rest upon a stone, and there be night and solitude around us, and doubt and darkness in front of us, and danger and terror behind us, and weakness within us, as was the case with Jacob, there will be the ladder with its foot at our side and its top in the

heavens; and above the top of it His face, which when we see it look down upon us, makes all places and circumstances good and sweet.

HAPPY PILGRIMS

> 'Blessed is the man whose strength is in Thee; in whose heart are the highways to Zion. 6. Passing through the valley of Weeping they make it a place of springs; yea, the early rain covereth it with blessings. 7. They go from strength to strength, every one of them appeareth before God in Zion.'—PSALM lxxxiv. 5-7.

Rightly rendered, the first words of these verses are not a calm, prosaic statement, but an emotional exclamation. The Psalmist's tone would be more truly represented if we read, 'How blessed is the man,' or 'Oh, the blessednesses!' for that is the literal rendering of the Hebrew words, 'of the man whose strength is Thee.'

There are three such exclamations in this psalm, the consideration of which leads us far into the understanding of its deepest meaning. The first of

them is this, 'How blessed are they that dwell in Thy house!' Of course the direct allusion is to actual presence in the actual Temple at Jerusalem. But these old psalmists, though they attached more importance to external forms than we do, were not so bound by them, even at their stage of development of the religious life, as that they conceived that no communion with God was possible apart from the form, or that the form itself was communion with God. We can see gleaming through all their words, though only gleaming through them, the same truth which Jesus Christ couched in the immortal phrase—the charter of the Church's emancipation from all externalisms—'neither in this mountain, nor yet in Jerusalem, shall men worship the Father.' To 'dwell in the house of the Lord' is not only to be present in bodily form in the Temple—the Psalmist did not think that it was *only* that—but to possess communion with Him, of which the external presence is but the symbol, the shadow, and the means.

But there is another blessing. To be there is blessing, to wish to be there is no less so.—'Blessed are the men in whose heart are the ways.' The joyous company that went up from every corner of the land to the feasts in Jerusalem made the paths ring with their songs as they travelled, and as the prophet says about another matter, 'they went up to Zion with songs and joy upon their heads,' and so the search after is only a shade less blessed—if it be even that—

than the possession of communion with God.

But there is a third blessedness in our psalm. 'Oh! the blessedness of the man that trusteth in Thee.' That includes and explains both the others. It confirms what I have said, that we do great injustice to the beauty and the spirituality of the Old Testament religion, if we conceive of it as slavishly tied to external forms. And it suggests the thought that in trust there lie both the previous elements, for he that trusts possesses, and he that trustingly possesses is thereby impelled as trustingly to seek for, larger gifts.

So, then, I turn to this outline sketch of the happy pilgrims on the road, and desire to gather from it, as simply as may be, the stimulating thoughts which it suggests to us.

I. Let me ask you, then, following the words which I have read to you, to look with me, first at the blessedness of the pilgrims' spirit.

'Blessed are the men in whose heart are the ways.' A singular expression, and yet a very eloquent and significant one! 'The ways' are, of course, the various roads which, from every corner of the land, lead to the Temple, and the thought suggested is that the men whom the Psalmist pronounces blessed, and in whose blessednesses his longing heart desires to share, are the men who are restless till they are on the path, whose eyes are ever travelling to the goal,

who have a 'divine discontent' with distance from God, and who know the impulse and the sting that sends them ever travelling on the path that leads to Him.

On any lower level it is perfectly true that the very salt of life is aspiration after an unattained ideal; that there is nothing that so keeps a man young, strong, buoyant, and fits him for nobilities of action, as that there shall be gleaming for ever before him in the beckoning distance a horizon that moves ever as he moves. When we cease to be the slaves of unattained ideals in any department, it is time for us to die; indeed, we are dead already. There are men in every civilised country, with the gipsy strain in their blood, who never can be at rest until they are in motion, to whom a settled abode is irksome, and to whom the notion of blessedness is that they shall be out in the free plains. '*Amplius*,' the dying Xavier's word, '*further afield*,' is the motto of all noble life—scientist, scholar, artist, man of letters, man of affairs; all come under the same law, that unless there is something before them which has dominated their hearts, and draws their whole being towards it, their lives want salt, want nobility, want freshness, and a green scum comes over the pool. We all know that. To live is to aspire; to cease to aspire is to die.

Well then, looking all round our horizon there stands out one path for aspiration which is clearly blessed to tread—one path, and one path alone. For, oh brethren! there are needs in all our hearts, deep

longings, terrible wounds, dreary solitudes, which can only be appeased and healed and companioned when we are pressing nearer and nearer God, that infinite and divine Source of all blessedness, of all peace and good. To possess God is life; to feel after God is life, too. For that aim is sure, as we shall see, to be satisfied. That aim gives, and it is the only one which does give, adequate occupation for every power of a man's soul; that aim brings, simultaneously with its being entertained, its being satisfied; for, as I have already said, in the one act of faith there lie both these elements of blessedness—the possession of, and the seeking after, God. The religious life is distinguished from all others in two respects; one is the contemporaneousness and co-existence of desire and fruition, and the other is the impossibility that fruition shall ever be so complete and perfect as that desire shall die. And because thus all my nature may reach out its yearnings to Him, and in reaching out may find that after which it feels, and yet, finding it, must feel after it all the more; therefore, high above all other delights of search, high above all other blessednesses of pilgrimage, high above all the buoyancy and concentration of aim and contempt of hindrances which pour into a soul, before which the unattained ideal burns beckoning and inviting, there stands the blessedness of the man 'in whose heart are the ways' which lead to God in Zion.

II. And now notice the blessedness of the pilgrims'

experience.

If you use the Revised Version you will see the changes upon the Authorised which it makes, following the stream of modern critics and commentators, and which may thus be reproduced: 'Passing through the Valley of Weeping, they make it a *place of springs*, the rain also *covereth it with blessings*.' No doubt the poet is referring here to the actual facts of the pilgrimage to Zion, No doubt, on some one of the roads, there lay a gloomy gorge, the name of which was the Valley of Weeping; either because it dimly commemorated some half-forgotten tragedy long ago, or, more probably, because it was arid and frowning and full of difficulty for the travellers on the march. The Psalmist uses that name with a lofty imaginative freedom, which itself confirms the view that I have taken, that there is something deeper in the psalm than the mere external circumstances of the pilgrimages to the Holy City. For, he says, 'passing through the Valley of Weeping, they make it a place of springs.' They, as it were, pour their tears into the wells, and they become sources of refreshment and fertility.

But there are other kinds of moisture than tears and fountains. And so he goes on: 'the rain also' from above 'covereth it with blessings'; the blessings being, I suppose, the waving crops which the poet's imagination conceives of as springing up all over the else arid ground. Irrigated thus by the pilgrims' labour, and rained upon thus by God's gift from

heaven, 'the wilderness rejoices and blossoms as the rose.'

Now, translate that—it scarcely needs translation, I suppose, to anybody who will read the psalm with the least touch of a poetic imagination—translate that, and it just comes to this. If we have in our hearts, as our chief aim, the desire to get closer to God, then our sorrows and our tears will become sources of refreshment and fertility. Ah! how different all our troubles, large and little, look when we take as our great aim in life what is God's great purpose in giving us life—viz. that we should be moulded into His likeness and enriched by the possession of Himself. That takes the sting out of sorrow, and although it leaves us in no morbid condition of insensibility, it yet makes it possible for us to gather our tears into reservoirs which shall be to us the sources of many a blessing, and many a thankfulness. *He* puts them into His bottle; we have to put them into our wells. And be sure of this, that if we understood better the meaning of life, that it was all intended to be our road to God, and if we judged of things more from that point of view, we should less frequently be brought to stand by what we call the mysteries of Providence and more able to wring out of them all the rich honey which is stored in them all for us. Not the least of the blessednesses of the pilgrim heart is its power of transmitting the pilgrim's tears into the pilgrim's wells. Brothers! do you bring such thoughts to bear on the

disappointments, anxieties, sorrows, losses that befall you, be they great or small? If you do, you will have learned, better than I can say it, how strangely grief changes its aspect when it is looked upon as the helper and servant to our progress towards God.

But that is not all. If, with the pilgrims' hearts, we rightly use our sorrows, we shall not be left to find refreshment and fertilising power only in ourselves, but the benediction of the rain from heaven will come down, and the great Spirit of God will fall upon our hearts, not in a flood that drowns, but broken up into a beneficent mist that falls quietly upon us, and brings with itself the assurance of fertility. And so the secret of turning the desert into abundance, and tears into blessings, lies in having the pilgrim's heart.

III. Notice the blessedness of the pilgrims' advance.

'They go from strength to strength.' I do not know whether the Psalmist means to use that word 'strength' in the significance which it also has in old English, of a fortified place, so that the metaphor would be that from one camp of security, one fortress to another, they journey safe always, because of their protection; or whether he means to use it rather in its plain and simple sense, according to which the significance would be that these happy pilgrims do not get worn out on the journey, as is the wont of men that set out, for instance, from some far corner of India to Mecca, and come in battered and travel-stained, and half dead with their privations,

but that the further they go the stronger they become; and on the road gain more vigour than they could ever have gained by ease and indulgence in their homes. But, whichever of these two meanings we may be disposed to adopt, the great thought that comes out of both of them is identical—viz. that this is one of the distinguishing joys of a Christian career of pressing forward to closer communion and conformity with our Lord and Master, in whom God is manifested—viz. that we grow day by day in strength, and that effort does not weaken, but invigorates.

And now I have to put a very plain question. Is that growing strength anything like the general characteristic of us professing Christians? I wonder how many people there are listening to me now that have been members of Christian churches for half a century almost, but are not a bit better than they were away back in the years that they have almost forgotten? I wonder in how many of our cases there has been an arrested development, like that which you will sometimes see in deformed people, the lower limbs all but atrophied? I wonder how many of us are babes of forty years old, and from how many of our minds the very conception of continual growth, as an essential of Christian life, has altogether vanished? Brother! are you any further than you were ten years ago?

I remember once, long ago, when I was on board a sailing ship, that we had baffling winds as we tried

to run up the coast; and morning after morning for a week we used to come up on deck, and *there* were the same windmill, and the same church-tower that we had seen last night, and the night before and the night before that. That is the sort of voyage that a great many of you Christian people are making. There may be motion; there is no progress. Round and round and round you go. That is not the way to get to Zion. 'They go from strength to strength,' and unless you are doing that, you know little about the blessedness of the pilgrim heart.

IV. Lastly, note the blessedness of the pilgrims' arrival.

'Every one of them in Zion appeareth before God.' Then there is one road on which whosoever travels is sure to reach his goal. On all others caravans get lost, overwhelmed in a sandstorm, or slain by robbers; and the bleached bones of men and camels lie there on the sand for centuries. This caravan always arrives. For no man ever wanted God who did not possess Him, and the measure of our desire is the prophecy of our possession. Surely it is worth while, even from the point of view of self-interest, to forsake all these lower aims in which success is absolutely problematical, or, while pursuing them as far as duty and necessity require, in and through them, as well as above and beyond them, to press towards the one aim in which failure is impossible. You cannot say about say other course—'Blessed is the man that enters on it, for he is sure to reach what

he desires.' Other goals are elusive; the golden circlet may never drop upon your locks. But there is one path on which all that you seek you shall have, and you are on it if 'in your hearts are the *ways*.'

I need not say a word about the ultimate fulfilment of this great promise of our text; how that there is not only in our psalm, gleaming through it, a reference to the communion of earth rather than to the external Presence in the sanctuary, but there is also hinted, though less consciously, to the Psalmist himself, yet necessarily from the nature of the case the perfecting of that earthly communion in the higher house of the Lord in the heavenly Zion. Are all these desires, these longings, these efforts after God which make the nobleness and the blessedness of a life on earth, and which are always satisfied, and yet never satiated, to be crushed into nothingness by the accident of bodily dissolution? Then, then, the darkest of all clouds is drawn over the face of God, and we are brought into a state of absolute intellectual bewilderment as to what life, futile and frail, has been for at all. No, brother! God never gives mouths but He sends meat to fill them; and He has not suffered His children to long after Him, to press after Him, only in order that the partial fulfilment of their desires and yearnings which is possible upon earth should be all their experience.

'He thinks he was not made to die,
And Thou hast made him; Thou art just.'

Be sure that 'every one of them in Zion appeareth before God.'

So, brethren! let us take the pilgrim scrip and staff; and be sure of this, that the old blessed word will be fulfilled, that we shall not be lost in the wilderness, where there is no way, nor grope and search after elusive and fleeting good; but that 'the ransomed of the Lord shall return and come to Zion with songs, and everlasting joy shall be upon their heads.'

BLESSED TRUST

'O Lord of Hosts, blessed is the man that trusteth in Thee.'

—PSALM lxxxiv. 12.

In my last sermon from the central portion of this psalm I pointed out that the Psalmist thrice celebrates the blessedness of certain types of character, and that these threefold benedictions constitute, as it were, the keynotes of the portions of the psalm in which they respectively occur. They are these: 'Blessed are they that dwell in Thy house'; 'Blessed is the man in whose heart are the ways'; and this final one, 'Blessed is the man that trusteth in

Thee.'

Now, this last benediction includes, as I then remarked, both of the others; both the blessedness belonging to dwelling in, and that realised by journeying towards, the House of the Lord. For trust is both fruition and longing; both aspiration and possession. But it not only includes the other two: it explains and surpasses them. For they bear, deeply stamped upon them, the impression of the imperfect stage of revelation to which the psalm belongs, and are tied to form in a manner which we ought not to be. But here the Psalmist gets behind all the externals of ceremonial worship, and goes straight to the heart of spiritual religion when, for dwelling in, and journeying towards, any house of the Lord, he substitutes that plain expression, 'the man that trusteth in Thee.'

Now, the other two benedictions of which I have spoken do respectively form the centre of the first and second portions of this psalm; in each case the remainder of the section being an explanation of that central utterance. And here the case is the same; for the verses which precede this final exclamation are various phases of the experience of a man who trusts in God, and are the ground upon which his faith is pronounced 'blessed.'

So I desire now to view these three preceding verses together, as being illustrations of the various blessednesses of the life of trust in God. They are not

exhaustive. There are other tints and flashes of glory sleeping in the jewel which need the rays of light to impinge upon it at other angles, in order to wake them into scintillation and lustre. But there is enough in the context to warrant the Psalmist's outburst into this final rapturous exclamation, and ought to be enough to make us seek to possess that life as our own.

I. First, then, note here how the heart of religion always has been, and is, trust in God.

This Psalmist, nourished amidst the externalisms of an elaborate ceremonial, and compelled, by the stage of revelation at which he stood, to localise worship in an external Temple, in a fashion that we need not do, had yet attained to the conviction that, in the desert or in the Temple, God was near; that no weary pilgrimage was needed to reach His house, but that with one movement of a trusting heart the man clasped God wherever he was. And that is the living centre of all religion. I do not mean merely that our way to be sure of God is not through the understanding only, but through the outgoing of confidence in Him—but I mean that the kernel of a devout life is trust in God. The bond that underlies all the blessedness of human society, the thing that makes the sweetness of the sweetest ties that can knit men together, the secret of all the happy loves of husband and wife, friend and friend, parent and child, is simple confidence. And the more utter the confidence the more tranquilly blessed is the union

and the life that flow from it. Transfer this, then—which is the bond of perfectness between man and man—to our relation to God, and you get to the very heart of the mystery. Not by externalisms of any kind, not by the clear dry light of the understanding, but by the outgoing of the heart's confidence to God, do we come within the clasp of His arms and become recipients of His grace. Trust knits to the unseen, and trust alone.

That has always been the way. This Psalmist is no exception to the devout souls of his time. For though, as I have said, externalisms and ritualisms filled a place then, that it is an anachronism and a retrogression that they should be supposed to fill now, still beneath all these there lay this one ancient, permanent relation, the relation of trust. From the day in which the 'father of the faithful' as he is significantly called Abraham, 'believed God, and it was counted to him for righteousness,' down all through the ages of that ancient Church, every man who laid a real hold upon God clasped Him by the outstretched hand of faith. So the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews was fully warranted in claiming all these ancient heroes, sages, and saints, as having lived by faith, and as being the foremost files in the same army in which the Christians of his day marched. The prophets who cried, 'Trust ye in the Lord for ever, for in the Lord Jehovah is everlasting strength,' were saying the very same thing as the Apostles who preached 'Believe on the

Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.' The contents of the faith were expanded; the faith itself was identical. Like some of those old Roman roads, where to-day the wains of commerce and the chariots of ease and the toiling pedestrians pass over the lava blocks that have been worn by the tramp of legions and rutted by the wheels of their chariots, the way to God that we travel is the way on which all the saints from the beginning of time have passed in their pilgrimage. Trust is, always has been, always will be, the bond that knits men with God.

And trust is blessed, because the very attitude of confident dependence takes the strain off a man. To feel that I am leaning hard upon a firm prop, to devolve responsibility, to put the reins into another's hand, to give the helm into another steersman's grasp, whilst I may lie down and rest, that is blessedness, though there be a storm. In the story of frontier warfare we read how, day by day, the battalion that had been in the post of danger, and therefore of honour, was withdrawn into the centre; and another one was placed in the position that it had occupied. So, when we trust we put Him in the front, and we march more quietly, more blessedly, when we are in the centre, and He has to bear the brunt of the assailing foe.

Christian people! have you got as far past the outsides of religion as this Psalmist had? Do you recognise as clearly as he did that all this outward worship, and a great deal of our theology, is but the

scaffolding; and that the real building lies inside of that; and that it is of value only as being a means to an end? Church membership is all very well; coming to church and chapel is all right; the outsides of worship will be necessary as long as our souls have outsides—their bodies. But you do not get into the house of the Lord unless you go in through 'the door of faith,' which is opened to us all. The heart of the religious life, which makes it blessed, is trust in God.

II. And now, secondly, a life of faith is a blessed life, because it talks with God.

I have already said that my text is expanded in the preceding verses. And I now turn to them to catch the various flashes of the diversely coloured blessedness of this life. The first of them is that which I have just mentioned. The Psalmist has described for us the happy pilgrims passing from strength to strength, and in imagination has landed them in the Temple. And then he goes on to tell us what they did and found there.

The first thing that they did was to speak to Him who was in the Temple. 'Behold! O God our Shield! and look upon the face of Thine anointed.' They had, as he has just said, 'Every one of them appeared before God in Zion.' As they looked up to Him they asked Him to look down upon them. 'Behold! O God our Shield!' 'Shield' here is the designation of God Himself, and is an exclamation addressed to Him —'Thou who art our God and Shield, look down

upon us!' And then comes a singular clause, about which much might be said if time permitted: 'Look upon the face of Thine anointed.' The use of that word 'anointed' seems to suggest that the psalm is either the outpouring of a king, or that it is spoken by some one in the train of a king, who feels that the favour bestowed upon the king will be participated in by his followers. But whilst that, if it be the explanation, might carry with it a hint as to the great truth of the mediation of Jesus Christ, our true King, I pass that by altogether, and fix upon the thought that here one element of the blessedness of the life of faith lies in the desire that God should look upon us. For that look means love, and that look secures protection and wise distribution of gifts. And it is life to have His eye fixed upon me, and to be conscious that He is looking at me. Dear brethren! if we want a lustre to be diffused through all our days, depend upon it, the surest and the only way to secure it is that that Face shall be felt to be turned toward us, 'as the sun shineth in his strength'; and then all the landscape will rejoice, and the birds will sing and the waters will flash. 'Look upon me, and let me sun myself beneath Thine eye'—to have that desire is blessed; and to feel that the desire is accomplished is more blessed still.

Dear friends! it seems to me that the ordinary Christian life of this day is terribly wanting in this experience of frank, free talk with God, and that that is one reason why so many of us professing

Christians know so little of the blessedness of the man that trusts in God. You have religion enough to keep you from doing certain gross acts of sin; you have religion enough to make you uncomfortable in neglected duty. You have religion enough to impel you to certain acts that you suppose to be obligatory upon you. But do you know anything about the elasticity and spring of spirit in getting near God, and pouring out all your hearts to Him? The life of faith is not blessed unless it is a life of frank speaking with God.

III. The life of faith is blessed, because it has fixed its desires on the true good.

The Psalmist goes on—'A day in Thy courts is better than a thousand; I had rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than dwell in the tents of wickedness.' 'A day in Thy courts is better than a thousand.' We all know how strangely elastic time is, and have sometimes been amazed when we remembered what an infinity of joy or sorrow we had lived through in one tick of the pendulum. When men are dreaming, they pass through a long series of events in a moment's space. When we are truly awake, we live long in a short time, for life is measured, not by the length of its moments, but by the depth of its experiences. And when some new truth is flashed upon us, or some new emotion has shaken us as with an earthquake, or when some new blessing has burst into our lives, then we know how 'one day' with men may be as it is with God, in a

deeper sense, 'as a thousand years,' so great is the change that it works upon us. There is nothing that will so fill life to the utmost bounds of its elastic capacity as strong trust in Him. There is nothing that will make our lives so blessed. This Psalmist, speaking with the voice of all them that trust in the Lord, here declares his clear consciousness that the true good for the human soul is fellowship with God.

But the clearest knowledge of that fact is not enough to bring the blessedness. There must be the next step—'I had rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than dwell in the tents of wickedness'—the definite resolve that I, for my part, will act according to my conviction, and believing that the best thing in life is to have God in life, and that that will make life, as it were, an eternity of blessedness even while it is made up of fleeting days, will put my foot down and make my choice, and having made it, will stick to it. It is all very well to say that 'A day in Thy courts is better than a thousand': have I *chosen* to dwell in the courts; and do I, not only in estimate but in feeling and practice, set communion with God high above everything besides?

This psalm, according to the superscription attached to it, is one 'for the sons of Korah.' These sons of Korah were a branch of the Levitical priesthood, to whose charge was committed the keeping of the gates of the Temple, and hence this phrase is especially appropriate on their lips. But passing that, let me just ask you to lay to heart, dear

friends! this one plain thought, that the effect of a real life of faith will be to make us perfectly sure that the true good is in God, and fixedly determined to pursue that. And you have no right to claim the name of a believing Christian, unless your faith has purged your eyes, so that you can see the hollowness of all besides, and has stiffened your will so that you can determine that, for your part, 'the Lord is the Strength of your heart, and your Portion for ever.' The secret of blessedness lies here. 'Seek ye the Kingdom of God and all these things shall be added unto you.'

IV. Lastly, a life of faith is a life of blessedness, because it draws from God all necessary good.

I must not dwell, as I had hoped to do, upon the last words preceding my text, 'The Lord God is a Sun and Shield'—brightness and defence—'the Lord will give grace and glory': 'grace,' the loving gifts which will make a man gracious and graceful; 'glory,' not any future lustre of the transfigured soul and glorified body, but the glory which belongs to the life of faith here on earth. Link that thought with the preceding one. 'The Lord is a Sun … the Lord will give glory'; like a little bit of broken glass lying in the furrows of a ploughed field, when the sun smites down upon it, it flashes, outshining many a diamond. If a man is walking upon a road with the sun behind him, his face is dark. He wheels himself round, and it is suffused with light, as Moses' face shone. 'We all, with unveiled faces beholding, are changed from

glory to glory.' If we walk in the sunshine we shall shine too. If we 'walk in the light' we shall be 'light in the Lord.'

'No good thing will He withhold from them that walk uprightly.' Trust is inward, and the outside of trust is an upright walk; and if a man has these two, which, inasmuch as one is the root and the other is the fruit, are but one in reality, nothing that is good will be withheld from Him. For how can the sun but pour its rays upon everything that lives? 'Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights.' So the life is blessed that talks with God; that has fixed its desires on Him as its Supreme Good; that is irradiated by His light, glorified by the reflection of His brightness, and ministered to with all necessary appliances by His loving self-communication.

We come back to the old word, dear friends! 'Trust in the Lord, and do good, and verily thou shalt be fed.' We come back to the old message that nothing knits a man to God but faith with its child, righteousness. If trusting we love, and loving we obey, then in converse with Him, in fixed desires after Him, in daily and hourly reception from Him of Himself and His gifts, the life of earth will be full of a blessedness more real, more deep, more satisfying, more permanent, than can be found anywhere besides.

Who was it that said, 'I am the Way, the Truth, and

the Life; no man cometh to the Father but by Me'? Tread that path, and you will come into the house of the Lord, and will dwell there all the days of your life. 'Believe in God, believe also in Me.'

'THE BRIDAL OF THE EARTH AND SKY'

> 'Mercy and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other. 11. Truth shall spring out of the earth; and righteousness shall look down from heaven. 12. Yea, the Lord shall give that which is good; and our land shall yield her increase. 13. Righteousness shall go before Him, and shall set us in the way of His steps.'—PSALM lxxxv. 10-13.

This is a lovely and highly imaginative picture of the reconciliation and reunion of God and man, 'the bridal of the earth and sky.'

The Poet-Psalmist, who seems to have belonged to the times immediately after the return from the Exile, in strong faith sees before him a vision of a

perfectly harmonious co-operation and relation between God and man. He is not prophesying directly of Messianic times. The vision hangs before him, with no definite note of time upon it. He hopes it may be fulfilled in his own day; he is sure it will, if only, as he says, his countrymen 'turn not again to folly.' At all events, it will be fulfilled in that far-off time to which the heart of every prophet turned with longing. But, more than that, there is no reason why it should not be fulfilled with every man, at any moment. It is the ideal, to use modern language, of the relations between heaven and earth. Only that the Psalmist believed that, as sure as there was a God in heaven, who is likewise a God working in the midst of the earth, the ideal might become, and would become, a reality.

So, then, I take it, these four verses all set forth substantially the same thought, but with slightly different modifications and applications. They are a four-fold picture of how heaven and earth ought to blend and harmonise. This four-fold representation of the one thought is what I purpose to consider now.

I. To begin with, then, take the first verse:—'Mercy and Truth are met together, Righteousness and Peace have kissed each other.' We have here *the heavenly twin-sisters, and the earthly pair that correspond*.

'Mercy and Truth are met together'—that is one personification; 'Righteousness and Peace have kissed each other' is another. It is difficult to say whether

these four great qualities are here regarded as all belonging to God, or as all belonging to man, or as all common both to God and man. The first explanation is the most familiar one, but I confess that, looking at the context, where we find throughout an interpenetration and play of reciprocal action as between earth and heaven, I am disposed to think of the first pair as sisters from the heavens, and the second pair as the earthly sisters that correspond to them. Mercy and Truth—two radiant angels, like virgins in some solemn choric dance, linked hand in hand, issue from the sanctuary and move amongst the dim haunts of men making 'a sunshine in a shady place,' and to them there come forth, linked in a sweet embrace, another pair, Righteousness and Peace, whose lives depend on the lives of their elder and heavenly sisters. And so these four, the pair of heavenly origin, and the answering pair that have sprung into being at their coming upon earth;—these four, banded in perfect accord, move together, blessing and light-giving, amongst the sons of men. Mercy and Truth are the divine—Righteousness and Peace the earthly.

Let me dwell upon these two couples briefly. 'Mercy and Truth are met together' means this, that these two qualities are found braided and linked inseparably in all that God does with mankind; that these two springs are the double fountains from which the great stream of the 'river of the water of life,' the forthcoming and the manifestation of God,

takes its rise.

'Mercy and Truth.' What are the meanings of the two words? Mercy is love that stoops, love that departs from the strict lines of desert and retribution. Mercy is Love that is kind when Justice might make it otherwise. Mercy is Love that condescends to that which is far beneath. Thus the 'Mercy' of the Old Testament covers almost the same ground as the 'Grace' of the New Testament. And Truth blends with Mercy; that is to say—Truth in a somewhat narrower than its widest sense, meaning mainly God's fidelity to every obligation under which He has come, God's faithfulness to promise, God's fidelity to His past, God's fidelity, in His actions, to His own character, which is meant by that great word, 'He sware by *Himself*!'

Thus the sentiment of mercy, the tender grace and gentleness of that condescending love, has impressed upon it the seal of permanence when we say: 'Grace and Truth, Mercy and Faithfulness, are met together.' No longer is love mere sentiment, which may be capricious and may be transient. We can reckon on it, we know the law of its being. The love is lifted up above the suspicion of being arbitrary, or of ever changing or fluctuating. We do not know all the limits of the orbit, but we know enough to calculate it for all practical purposes. God has committed Himself to us, He has limited Himself by the obligations of His own past. We have a right to turn to Him, and say; 'Be what Thou art, and continue to

be to us what Thou hast been unto past ages,' and He responds to the appeal. For Mercy and Truth, tender, gracious, stooping, forgiving love, and inviolable faithfulness that can never be otherwise, these blend in all His works, 'that by two immutable things, wherein it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation.'

Again, dear brethren! let me remind you that these two are the ideal two, which as far as God's will and wish are concerned, are the only two that would mark any of His dealings with men. When He is, if I may so say, left free to do as He would, and is not forced to His 'strange act' of punishment by my sin and yours, these, and these only, are the characteristics of His dealings. Nor let us forget—'We beheld His glory, the glory as of the Only Begotten of the Father, *full of grace and truth*.' The Psalmist's vision was fulfilled in Jesus Christ, in whom these sweet twin characteristics, that are linked inseparably in all the works of God, are welded together into one in the living personality of Him who is all the Father's grace embodied; and is 'the Way and the Truth and the Life.'

Turn now to the other side of the first aspect of the union of God and man, 'Mercy and Truth are met together'; these are the heavenly twins. 'Righteousness and Peace have kissed each other'—these are the earthly sisters who sprang into being to meet them.

Of course I know that these words are very often applied, by way of illustration, to the great work of Jesus Christ upon the Cross, which is supposed to have reconciled, if not contradictory, at least divergently working sides of the divine character and government. And we all know how beautifully the phrase has often been employed by eloquent preachers, and how beautifully it has been often illustrated by devout painters.

But beautiful as the adaptation is, I think it is an adaptation, and not the real meaning of the words, for this reason, if for no other, that Righteousness and Peace are not in the Old Testament regarded as opposites, but as harmonious and inseparable. And so I take it that here we have distinctly the picture of what happens upon earth when Mercy and Truth that come down from Heaven are accepted and recognised—then Righteousness and Peace kiss each other.

Or, to put away the metaphor, here are two thoughts, first that in men's experience and life Righteousness and Peace cannot be rent apart. The only secret of tranquillity is to be good. He who is, first of all, 'King of Righteousness' is 'after that also King of Salem, which is King of Peace.' 'The effect of righteousness shall be peace,' as Isaiah, the brother in spirit of this Psalmist, says; and on the other hand, as the same prophet says, 'The wicked is like a troubled sea that cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt; there is no peace, saith my God, to the

wicked,' but where affections are pure, and the life is worthy, where goodness is loved in the heart, and followed even imperfectly in the daily practice, there the ocean is quiet, and 'birds of peace sit brooding on the charmed wave.' The one secret of tranquillity is first to trust in the Lord and then to do good. Righteousness and Peace kiss each other.

The other thought here is that Righteousness and her twin sister, Peace, only come in the measure in which the mercy and the truth of God are received into thankful hearts. My brother! have you taken that Mercy and that Truth into your soul, and are you trying to reach peace in the only way by which any human being can ever reach it—through the path of righteousness, self-suppression, and consecration to Him?

II. Now, take the next phase of this union and cooperation of earth and heaven, which is given here in the 11th verse—'Truth shall spring out of the earth, and Righteousness shall look down from heaven.' That is, to put it into other words—God responding to man's truth.

Notice that in this verse one member from each of the two pairs that have been spoken about in the previous verse is detached from its companion, and they are joined so as to form for a moment a new pair. Truth is taken from the first couple; Righteousness from the second, and a third couple is thus formed.

And notice, further, that each takes the place that had belonged to the other. The heavenly Truth becomes a child of earth; and the earthly Righteousness ascends 'to look down from heaven.' The process of the previous verse in effect is reversed. 'Truth shall spring out of the earth, Righteousness shall look down from heaven'; that is to say—man's Truth shall begin to grow and blossom in answer, as it were, to God's Truth that came down upon it. Which being translated into other words is this: where a man's heart has welcomed the Mercy and the Truth of God there will spring up in that heart, not only the Righteousness and Peace, of which the previous verse is speaking, but specifically a faithfulness not all unlike the faithfulness which it grasps. If we have a God immutable and unchangeable to build upon, let us build upon Him immutability and unchangeableness. If we have a Rock on which to build our confidence, let us see that the confidence which we build upon it is rocklike too. If we have a God that cannot lie, let us grasp His faithful word with an affiance that cannot falter. If we have a Truth in the heavens, absolute and immutable, on which to anchor our hopes, let us see to it that our hopes, anchored thereon, are sure and steadfast. What a shame it would be that we should bring the vacillations and fluctuations of our own insincerities and changeableness to the solemn, fixed unalterableness of that divine Word! We ought to be faithful, for we build upon a faithful God.

And then the other side of this second picture is 'Righteousness shall look down from heaven,' not in its judicial aspect merely, but as the perfect moral purity that belongs to the divine Nature, which shall bend down a loving eye upon the men beneath, and mark the springings of any imperfect good and thankfulness in our hearts; joyous as the husbandman beholds the springing of his crops in the fields that he has sown.

God delights when He sees the first faint flush of green which marks the springing of the good seed in the else barren hearts of men. No good, no beauty of character, no meek rapture of faith, no aspiration Godwards is ever wasted and lost, for His eye rests upon it. As heaven, with its myriad stars, bends over the lowly earth, and in the midnight when no human eye beholds, sees all, so God sees the hidden confidence, the unseen 'Truth' that springs to meet His faithful Word. The flowers that grow in the pastures of the wilderness, or away upon the wild prairies, or that hide in the clefts of the inaccessible mountains, do not 'waste their sweetness on the desert air,' for God sees them.

It may be an encouragement and quickening to us to remember that wherever the tiniest little bit of Truth springs upon the earth, the loving eye—not the eye of a great Taskmaster—but the eye of the Brother, Christ, which is the eye of God, looks down. 'Wherefore we labour, that whether present or absent, we may be well-pleasing unto Him.'

III. And then the third aspect of this ideal relation between earth and heaven, the converse of the one we have just now been speaking of, is set forth in the next verse: 'Yea, the Lord shall give that which is good and our land shall yield her increase.' That is to say, Man is here responding to God's gift.

You see that the order of things is reversed in this verse, and that it recurs to the order with which we originally started. 'The Lord shall give that which is good.' In the figure that refers to all the skyey influence of dew, rain, sunshine, passing breezes, and still ripening autumn days; in the reality it refers to all the motives, powers, impulses, helps, furtherances by which He makes it possible for us to serve Him and love Him, and bring forth fruits of righteousness.

And so the thought which has already been hinted at is here more fully developed and dwelt upon, this great truth that earthly fruitfulness is possible only by the reception of heavenly gifts. As sure as every leaf that grows is mainly water that the plant has got from the clouds, and carbon that it has got out of the atmosphere, so surely will all our good be mainly drawn from heaven and heaven's gifts. As certainly as every lump of coal that you put upon your fire contains in itself sunbeams that have been locked up for all these millenniums that have passed since it waved green in the forest, so certainly does every good deed embody in itself gifts from above. No man is pure except by impartation; and every good gift and every perfect gift cometh from the Father of

Lights.

So let us learn the lesson of absolute dependence for all purity, virtue, and righteousness on His bestowment, and come to Him and ask Him ever more to fill our emptiness with His own gracious fulness and to lead us to be what He commands and would have us to be.

And then there is the other lesson out of this phase of the ideal relation between earth and heaven, the lesson of what we ought to do with our gifts. 'The earth yields her increase,' by laying hold of the good which the Lord gives, and by means of that received good quickening all the germs. Ah, dear brethren! wasted opportunities, neglected moments, uncultivated talents, gifts that are not stirred up, rain and dew and sunshine, all poured upon us and no increase—is not that the story of much of all our lives, and of the whole of some lives? Are we like Eastern lands where the trees have been felled, and the great irrigation works and tanks have been allowed to fall into disrepair, and so when the bountiful treasure of the rains comes, all that it does is to swell for half a day the discoloured stream that carries away some more of the arable land; and when the sunshine comes, with its swift, warm powers, all that it does is to bleach the stones and scorch the barren sand? 'The earth which *drinketh in the rain* that cometh oft upon it, and yieldeth herbs meet for them by whom it is dressed, receiveth the blessing of God.' Is it true about you that the earth yieldeth her

increase, as it is certainly true that 'the Lord giveth that which is good'?

IV. And now the last thing which is here, the last phase of the fourfold representation of the ideal relation between earth and heaven is, 'Righteousness shall go before Him and shall set us in the way of His steps.' That is to say, God teaches man to walk in His footsteps.

There is some difficulty about the meaning of the last clause of this verse, but I think that having regard to the whole context and to that idea of the interpenetration of the heavenly with the human which we have seen running through it, the reading in our English Bible gives substantially, though somewhat freely, the meaning. The clause might literally be rendered 'make His footsteps for a way,' which comes to substantially the same thing as is expressed in our English Bible. Righteousness, God's moral perfectness, is set forth here in a twofold phase. First it is a herald going before Him and preparing His path. The Psalmist in these words draws tighter than ever the bond between God and man. It is not only that God sends His messengers to the world, nor only that His loving eye looks down upon it, nor only 'that He gives that which is good'; but it is that the whole heaven, as it were, lowers itself to touch earth, that God comes down to dwell and walk among men. The Psalmist's mind is filled with the thought of a present God who moves amongst mankind, and has His 'footsteps' on earth.

This herald Righteousness prepares God's path, which is just to say that all His dealings with mankind—which, as we have seen, have Mercy and Faithfulness for their signature and stamp—are rooted and based in perfect Rectitude.

The second phase of the operation of Righteousness is that that majestic herald, the divine purity which moves before Him, and 'prepares in the desert a highway for the Lord,'—that that very same Righteousness comes and takes my feeble hand, and will lead my tottering footsteps into God's path, and teach me to walk, planting my little foot where He planted His. The highest of all thoughts of the ideal relation between earth and heaven, that of likeness between God and man, is trembling on the Psalmist's lips. Men may walk in God's ways—not only in ways that please Him, but in ways that are like His. 'Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.'

And the likeness can only be a likeness in moral qualities—a likeness in goodness, a likeness in purity, a likeness in aversion from evil, for His other attributes and characteristics are His peculiar property; and no human brow can wear the crown that He wears. But though His mercy can but, from afar off, be copied by us, the righteousness that moves before Him, and engineers God's path through the wilderness of the world, will come behind Him and nurselike lay hold of our feeble arms and teach us to go in the way God would have us to walk.

Ah, brethren! that is the crown and climax of the harmony between God and man, that His mercy and His truth, His gifts and His grace have all led us up to this: that we take His righteousness as our pattern, and try in our poor lives to reproduce its wondrous beauty. Do not forget that a great deal more than the Psalmist dreamed of, you Christian men and women possess, in the Christ 'who of God is made unto us Righteousness,' in whom heaven and earth are joined for ever, in whom man and God are knit in strictest bonds of indissoluble friendship; and who, having prepared a path for God in His mighty mission and by His sacrifice on the Cross, comes to us, and as the Incarnate Righteousness, will lead us in the paths of God, leaving us an Example, that 'we should follow in His steps.'

A SHEAF OF PRAYER ARROWS

'Bow down Thine ear, O Lord, hear me; for I am poor and needy. 2. Preserve my soul, for I am holy: O Thou my God, save Thy servant that trusteth in Thee. 3. Be merciful unto me, O Lord: for I cry unto Thee daily. 4. Rejoice the soul of Thy servant: for unto Thee, O Lord, do I

> lift up my soul. 5. For Thou, Lord, art good, and ready to forgive; and plenteous in mercy unto all them that call upon Thee.'—PSALM lxxxvi. 1-5.

We have here a sheaf of arrows out of a good man's quiver, shot into heaven. This series of supplications is remarkable in more than one respect. They all mean substantially the same thing, but the Psalmist turns the one blessing round in all sorts of ways, so great does it seem to him, and so earnest is his desire to possess it. They are almost all quotations from earlier psalms, just as our prayers are often words of Scripture, hallowed by many associations, and uniting us with the men of old who cried unto God and were answered.

The structure of the petitions is remarkably uniform. In each there are a prayer and a plea, and in most of them a direct invocation of God. So I have thought that, if we put them all together now, we may get some lessons as to the invocations, the petitions, and the pleas of true prayer; or, in other words, we may be taught how to lay hold of God, what to ask from Him, and how to be sure of an answer.

I. First, the lesson as to how to lay hold upon God.

The divine names in this psalm are very frequent and significant, and the order in which they are used is evidently intentional. We have the great covenant

name of Jehovah set in the very first verse, and in the last verse; as if to bind the whole together with a golden circlet. And then, in addition, it appears once in each of the other two sections of the psalm, with which we have nothing to do at present. Then we have, further, the name of *God* employed in each of the sections; and further, the name of *Lord*, which is not the same as *Jehovah*, but implies the simple idea of superiority and authority. In each portion of the psalm, then, we see the writer laying his hand, as it were, upon these three names—'Jehovah,' 'my God,' 'Lord'—and in all of them finding grounds for his confidence and reasons for his cry.

Nothing in our prayers is often more hollow and unreal than the formal repetitions of the syllables of that divine name, often but to fill a pause in our thoughts. But to 'call upon the Name of the Lord' means, first and foremost, to bring before our minds the aspects of His great and infinite character, which are gathered together into the Name by which we address Him. So when we say 'Jehovah!' 'Lord!' what we ought to mean is this, that we are gazing upon that majestic, glorious thought of Being, self-derived, self-motived, self-ruled, the being of Him whose Name can only be, 'I am that I am.' Of all other creatures the name is, 'I am that I have been made,' or 'I am that I became,' but of Him the Name is, 'I am that I am.' Nowhere outside of Himself is the reason for His being, nor the law that shapes it, nor the aim to which it tends. And this infinite, changeless Rock

is laid for our confidence, Jehovah the Eternal, the Self-subsisting, Self-sufficing One.

There is more than that thought in this wondrous Name, for it not only expresses the timeless, unlimited, and changeless being of God, but also the truth that He has entered into what He deigns to call a Covenant with us men. The name Jehovah is the seal of that ancient Covenant, of which, though the form has vanished, the essence abides for ever, and God has thereby bound Himself to us by promises that cannot be abrogated. So that when we say, 'O Lord!' we summon up before ourselves, and grasp as the grounds of our confidence, and we humbly present before Him as the motives, if we may so call them, for His action, His own infinite being and His covenanted grace.

Then, further, our psalm invokes '*my* God.' That names implies in itself, simply, the notion of power to be reverenced. But when we add to it that little word '*my*,' we rise to the wonderful thought that the creature can claim an individual relation to Him, and in some profound sense a possession there. The tiny mica flake claims kindred with the Alpine peak from which it fell. The poor, puny hand, that can grasp so little of the material and temporal, can grasp all of God that it needs.

Then, there is the other name, 'Lord,' which simply expresses illimitable sovereignty, power over all circumstances, creatures, orders of being, worlds,

and cycles of ages. Wherever He is He rules, and therefore my prayer can be answered by Him. When a child cries 'Mother!' it is more than all other petitions. A dear name may be a caress when it comes from loving lips. If we are the kind of Christians that we ought to be, there will be nothing sweeter to us than to whisper to ourselves, and to say to Him, 'Abba! Father!' See to it that your calling on the Name of the Lord is not formal, but the true apprehension, by a believing mind and a loving heart, of the ineffable and manifold sweetnesses which are hived in His manifold names.

II. Now, secondly, we have here a lesson as to what we should ask.

The petitions of our text, of course, only cover a part of the whole field of prayer. The Psalmist is praying in the midst of some unknown trouble, and his petitions are manifold in form, though in substance, as I have said, they may all be reduced to one. Let me run over them very briefly. 'Bow down Thine ear and hear me.' That is not simply the invocation of the omniscience of a God, but an appeal for loving, attentive regard to the desires of His poor servant. The hearing is not merely the perception in the divine mind of what the creature desires, but it is the answer in fact, or the granting of the petition. The best illustration of what the Psalmist desires here may be found in another psalm, where another Psalmist tells us his experience and says, 'My cry came unto His ears, and the earth

shook and trembled.' You put a spoonful of water into a hydraulic press at the one end, and you get a force that squeezes tons together at the other. Here there is a poor, thin stream of the voice of a sorrowful man at the one end, and there is an earthquake at the other. That is what 'hearing' and 'bowing down the ear' means.

Then the prayers go on to three petitions, which may be all regarded as diverse acts of deliverance or of help. 'Preserve my soul.' The word expresses the guardianship with which a garrison keeps a fortress. It is the Hebrew equivalent of the word employed by Paul—'The peace of God shall *keep* your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.' The thought is that of a defenceless man or thing round which some strong protection is cast. And the desire expressed by it is that in the midst of sorrow, whatever it is, the soul may be guarded from evil. Then, the next petition —'Save Thy servant'—goes a step further, and not only asks to be kept safe in the midst of sorrows, but to be delivered out of them. And then the next petition—'Be merciful unto me, O Lord!'—craves that the favour which comes down to inferiors, and is bestowed upon those who might deserve something far otherwise, may manifest itself, in such acts of strengthening, or help, or deliverance, as divine wisdom may see fit. And then the last petition is —'Rejoice the soul of Thy servant.' The series begins with 'hearing,' passes through 'preserving,' 'saving,' showing 'mercy,' and comes at last to 'rejoice the

soul' that has been so harassed and troubled. Gladness is God's purpose for us all; joy we all have a right to claim from Him. It is the intended issue of every sorrow, and it can only be had when we cleave to Him, and pass through the troubles of life with continual dependence on and aspiration towards Himself.

So these are the petitions massed together, and out of them let me take two or three lessons. First, then, let us learn to make all wishes and annoyances material of prayer. This man was harassed by some trouble, the nature of which we do not know; and although the latter portion of his psalm rises into loftier regions of spiritual desire, here, in the first part of it, he is wrestling with his afflicting circumstances, whatever they were, and he has no hesitation in spreading them all out before God and asking for His delivering help. Wishes that are not turned into prayers irritate, disturb, unsettle. Wishes that are turned into prayers are calmed and made blessed. Stanley and his men lived for weeks upon a poisonous root, which, if eaten crude, brought all manner of diseases, but, steeped in running water, had all the acrid juices washed out of it, and became wholesome food. If you steep your wishes in the stream of prayer the poison will pass out of them. Some of them will be suppressed, all of them will be hallowed, and all of them will be calmed. Troubles, great or small, should be turned into prayers. Breath spent in sighs is wasted; turned into prayers it will

swell our sails. If a man does not pray 'without ceasing,' there is room for doubt whether he ever prays at all. What would you think of a traveller who had a valuable cordial of which he only tasted a drop in the morning and another in the evening; or who had a sure staff on which to lean which he only employed at distant intervals on the weary march, and that only for a short time? Let us turn all that we want into petitions, and all that annoys us let us spread before God.

Learn, further, that earnest reiteration is not vain repetition. 'Use not vain repetitions as the heathen do, for they think they shall be heard for their much speaking,' said the Master. But the same Master 'went away from them and prayed the third time, using the same words.' As long as we have not consciously received the blessing, it is no vain reiteration if we renew our prayers that it may come upon our heads. The man who asks for a thing once, and then gets up from his knees and goes away, and does not notice whether he gets the answer or not, does not pray. The man who truly desires anything from God cannot be satisfied with one languid request for it. But as the heart contracts with a sense of need, and expands with a faith in God's sufficiency, it will drive the same blood of prayer over and over again through the same veins; and life will be wholesome and strong.

Then learn, further, to limit wishes and petitions within the bounds of God's promises. The most of

these supplications of our text may be found in other parts of Scripture, as promises from God. Only so far as an articulate divine word carries my faith has my faith the right to go. In the crooked alleys of Venice there is a thin thread of red stone, inlaid in the pavement or wall, which guides through all the devious turnings to the Piazza, in the centre, where the great church stands. As long as we have the red line of promise on our path, faith may follow it and will come to the Temple. Where the line stops it is presumption, and not faith, that takes up the running. God's promises are sunbeams flung down upon us. True prayer catches them on its mirror, and signals them back to God. We are emboldened to say, 'Bow down Thine ear!' because He has said, 'I will hear.' We are encouraged to cry, 'Be merciful!' because we have our foot upon the promise that He will be; and all that we can ask of Him is, 'Do for us what Thou hast said; be to us what Thou art.'

The final lesson is, Leave God to settle how He answers your prayer. The Psalmist prayed for preservation, for safety, for joy; but he did not venture to prescribe to God *how* these blessings were to be ministered to him. He does not ask that the trouble may be taken away. That is as it may be; it may be better that it shall be left. But he asks that in it he shall not be allowed to sink, and that, however the waves may run high, they shall not be allowed to swamp his poor little cockle-shell of a boat. This is the true inmost essence of prayer—not that we

should prescribe to Him how to answer our desires, but that we should leave all that in His hands. The Apostle Paul said, in his last letter, with triumphant confidence, that he knew that God would 'deliver him and save him into His everlasting kingdom.' And he knew, at the same time, that his course was ended, and that there was nothing for him now but the crown. How was he 'saved into the kingdom' and 'delivered from the mouth of the lion'? The sword that struck off the wearied head that had thought so long for God's Church was the instrument of the deliverance and the means of the salvation. For us it may be that a sharper sorrow may be the answer to the prayer, 'Preserve Thy servant.' It may be that God's 'bowing down His ear' and answering us when we cry shall be to pass us through a mill that has finer rollers, to crush still more the bruised corn. But the end and the meaning of it all will be to 'rejoice the soul of the servant' with a deeper joy at last.

III. Finally, mark the lesson which we have here as to the pleas that are to be urged, or the conditions on which prayer is answered.

'I am poor and needy,' or, as perhaps the words more accurately mean, 'afflicted and poor.' The first condition is the sense of need. God's highest blessings cannot be given except to the men who know they want them. The self-righteous man cannot receive the righteousness of Christ. The man who has little or no consciousness of sin is not capable of receiving pardon. God cannot put His fulness into our

emptiness if we conceit ourselves to be filled and in need of nothing. We must know ourselves to be 'poor and naked and blind and miserable' ere He can make us rich, and clothe us, and enlighten our eyes, and flood our souls with His own gladness. Our needs are dumb appeals to Him; and in regard to all outward and lower things, they bind Him to supply us, because they themselves have been created by Him. He that hears the raven's croak satisfies the necessities that He has ordained in man and beast. But, for all the best blessings of His providence and of His love, the first steps towards receiving them are the knowledge that we need them and the desire that we should possess them.

Then the Psalmist goes on to put another class of pleas derived from his relation to God. These are mainly two—'I am holy,' and 'Thy servant that trusteth in Thee.' Now, with regard to that first word 'holy,' according to our modern understanding of the expression it by no means sets forth the Psalmist's idea. It has an unpleasant smack of self-righteousness, too, which is by no means to be found in the original. But the word employed is a very remarkable and pregnant one. It really carries with it, in germ, the great teaching of the Apostle John. 'We love Him because He first loved us.' It means one who, being loved and favoured by God, answers the divine love with his own love. And the Psalmist is not pleading any righteousness of his own, but declaring that he, touched by the divine love,

answers that love, and looks up; not as if thereby he deserved the response that he seeks, but as knowing that it is impossible but that the waiting heart should thus be blessed. They who love God are sure that the answer to their desires will come fluttering down upon their heads, and fold its white wings and nestle in their hearts. Christian people are a great deal too much afraid of saying, 'I love God.' They rob themselves of much peace and power thereby. We should be less chary of so saying if we thought more about God's love to us, and poked less into our own conduct.

Again, the Psalmist brings this plea—'Thy servant that trusteth in Thee.' He does not say, 'I deserve to be answered because I trust,' but 'because I trust I am sure that I shall be answered'; for it is absurd to suppose that God will look down from heaven on a soul that is depending upon Him, and will let that soul's confidence be put to shame. Dear friend! if your heart is resting upon God, be sure of this, that anything is possible rather than that you should not get from Him the blessings that you need.

The Psalmist gathers together all his pleas which refer to himself into two final clauses—'I cry unto Thee daily,' 'I lift up my soul unto Thee'—which, taken together, express the constant effort of a devout heart after communion with God. To withdraw my heart from the low levels of earth, and to bear it up into communion with God, is the sure way to get what I desire, because then God Himself

will be my chief desire, and 'they who seek the Lord shall not want any good.'

But the true and prevailing plea is not in our needs, desires, or dispositions, but in God's own character, as revealed by His words and acts, and grasped by our faith. Therefore the Psalmist ends by passing from thoughts of self to thoughts of God, and builds at last on the sure foundation which underlies all his other 'fors' and gives them all their force—'For Thou, Lord, art good, and ready to forgive, and plenteous in mercy unto all them that call upon Thee.'

Brethren! turn all your wishes and all your annoyances into prayers. If a wish is not fit to be prayed about, it is not fit to be cherished. If a care is too small to be made a prayer, it is too small to be made a burden. Be frank with God as God is frank with you, and go to His throne, keeping back nothing of your desires or of your troubles. To carry them there will take the poison and the pain out of wasps' stings, and out of else fatal wounds. We have a Name to trust to, tenderer and deeper than those which evoked the Psalmist's triumphant confidence. Let us see to it that, as the basis of our faith is firmer, our faith be stronger than his. We have a plea to urge, more persuasive and mighty than those which he pressed on God and gathered to his own heart. 'For Christ's sake' includes all that he pled, and stretches beyond it. If we come to God through Him who declares His name to us, we shall not draw near to

the Throne with self-willed desires, nor leave it with empty hands. 'If ye ask anything in My Name, I will do it.'

CONTINUAL SUNSHINE

'Blessed is the people that know the joyful sound: they shall walk,
O Lord, in the light of Thy countenance.'—PSALM lxxxix. 15.

The Psalmist has just been setting forth, in sublime language, the glories of the divine character—God's strength, His universal sway, the justice and judgment which are the foundation of His Throne, the mercy and truth which go as heralds before His face. A heathen singing of any of his gods would have gone on to describe the form and features of the god or goddess who came behind the heralds, but the Psalmist remembers 'Thou shalt not make unto thyself any … likeness of God.' A sacred reverence checks his song. He veils his face in his mantle while He whom no man can see and live passes by. Then he breaks into rapturous exclamations which are very prosaically and poorly represented by our

version. For the text is not a mere statement, as it is made to be by reading 'Blessed is the people,' but it is a burst of adoring wonder, and should be read, 'Oh! the blessedness of the people that know the joyful sound.'

Now, the force of this exclamation is increased if we observe that the word that is rendered 'joyful sound' is the technical word for the trumpet blast at Jewish feasts. The purpose of these blasts, like those of the heralds at the coronation of a king, was to proclaim the presence of God, the King of Israel, in the festival, as well as to express the gladness of the worshippers. Thus the Psalmist, when he says, 'Blessed is the people that know the joyful sound,' has no reference, as we ordinarily take him to have, to the preaching of the Gospel, but to the trumpet-blasts that proclaimed the present God and throbbed with the gladness of the waiting worshippers. So that this exclamation is equivalent to 'Oh! how blessed are the people who are sure that they have God with them!' and who, being sure, bow before Him in loving worship. It is to be further noticed that the subsequent words of the text state the first element which it indicates of that blessedness of a devout life, 'They shall walk, O Lord! in the light of Thy countenance.'

I. We deal first with the meaning of this phrase.

Of course, 'the light of Thy countenance' is a very obvious and natural symbol for favour, complacency,

goodwill on the part of Him that is conceived of as looking on any one. We read, for instance, in reference to a much lower subject in the Book of Proverbs, 'In the light of the king's countenance is life, and his favour is as a cloud of the latter rain.' Again we have, in the Levitical benediction, the phrase accompanied in the parallel clauses by what is really an explanation of it, 'The Lord cause His face to shine upon thee and be gracious unto thee.' So that the simple and obvious meaning of the words, 'the light of Thy countenance,' is the favour and lovingkindness of God manifested in that gracious Face which He turns to His servants. As for the other chief word in the clause, 'to walk' is the equivalent throughout Scripture for the conduct of the active life and daily conversation of a man, and to walk in the light is simply to have the consciousness of the divine Presence and the experience of the divine lovingkindness and friendship as a road on which we travel our life's journey, or an atmosphere round us in which all our activities are done and in which we ever remain, as a diver in his bell, to keep evil and sin from us.

There is only one more remark in the nature of explanation which I make, and that is that the expression here for walking is cast in the original into a form which grammarians call intensive, strengthening the simple idea expressed by the word. We may express its force if we read, 'They walk continually in the light of Thy countenance.'

Is not that just a definition of the Christian life as an unbroken realisation of the divine Presence, and an unbroken experience of the lovingkindness and favour of God? Is not that religion in its truest, simplest essence, in its purest expression? The people who are sure that they have their King in their midst, and who feel that He is looking down upon them with tender pity, with loving care, with nothing but friendship and sweetness in His heart, these people, says the Psalmist, are blessed. So much, then, for the meaning of the word.

II. Consider the possibility of such a condition being ours.

Can such a thing be? Is it possible for a man to go through life carrying this atmosphere constantly with him? Can the continuity which, as I remarked, is expressed by the original accurately rendered, be kept up through an ordinary life that has all manner of work to do, or are we only to 'hear the joyful sound,' now and then, at rare intervals, on set occasions, answering to these ancient feasts? Which of the two is it to be, dear brethren? There is no need whatever why any amount of hard work, or outward occupations of the most secular character, or any amount of distractions, should break for us the continuity of that consciousness and of that experience. We may carry God with us wherever we go, if only we remember that where we cannot carry Him with us we ought not to go. We may carry Him with us into all the dusty roads of life; we may

always walk on the sunny side of the street if we like. We may always bear our own sunshine with us. And although we are bound to be diligent in business, and some of us have had to take a heavy lift of a great deal of hard work, and much of it apparently standing in no sort of relation to our religious life, yet for all that it is possible to bend all to this one direction, and to make everything a means of bringing us nearer to God and fuller of the conscious enjoyment of His presence. And if we have not learned to do that with our daily work, then our daily work is a curse to us. If we have allowed it to become so absorbing or distracting as that it dims and darkens our sense of the divine Presence, then it is time for us to see what is wrong in the method or in the amount of work which is thus darkening our consciences. I know it is hard, I know that an absolute attainment of such an ideal is perhaps beyond us, but I know that we can approach—I was going to say infinitely, but a better word is indefinitely—nearer it than any of us have ever yet done. As the psalm goes on to say in the next clause, it is possible for us to 'rejoice in His Name all the day.' Ay, even at your tasks, and at your counters, and in your kitchens, and in my study, it is possible for us; and if our hearts are what and where they ought to be, the possibility will be realised. Earthly duty has no necessary effect of veiling the consciousness of God.

Nor is there any reason why our troubles, sorrows,

losses, solitude should darken that sunshine. I know that that is hard, too, perhaps harder than the other. It is more difficult to have a sense of the sunshine of the divine Presence shining through the clouds of disaster and sorrow than even it is to have it shining through the dust that is raised by traffic and secular occupation. But it *is* possible. There is nothing in all the sky so grand as clouds smitten by sunshine, and the light is never so glorious as when it is flashed back from them and dyes their piled bosoms with all celestial colours. There is no experience of God's Presence so blessed as that of a man who, in the midst of sorrow, has yet with him the assurance of the Father's friendship and favour and love, and so can say 'as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing.' This sunshine shines in the foulest corners, and the most thunder-laden clouds only flash back its glories in new forms.

There is only one thing that breaks the continuity of that blessedness, and that is our own sin. We carry our own weather with us, whether we will or no, and we can bring winter into the middle of summer by flinging God away from us, and summer into the midst of winter by grappling Him to our hearts. There is only one thing that necessarily breaks our sense of His Presence, and that is that our hearts should turn away from His face. A man can work hard and yet feel that God is with him. A man can be weighed upon by many distresses and yet feel that God is with him and loves him; but a man cannot

commit the least tiny sin and love it, and feel at the same time that God is with him. The heart is like a sensitive photographic plate, it registers the variations in the sunshine; and the one hindrance that makes it impossible for God's light to fall upon my soul with the assurance of friendship and the sense of sweetness, is that I should be hugging some evil to my heart. It is not the dusty highway of life nor the dark vales of weeping and of the shadow of death through which we sometimes have to pass that make it impossible for this sunlight to pour down upon us, but it is our gathering round ourselves of the poisonous mists of sin through which that light cannot pierce; or if it pierce, pierces transformed and robbed of all its beauty.

III. Let me note next the blessedness which draws out the Psalmist's rapturous exclamation.

The same phrase is employed in one of the other psalms, which, I think, bears in its contents the confirmation of the attribution of it to David. When he was fleeing before his rebellious son, at the very lowest ebb of his fortunes, away on the uplands of Moab, a discrowned king, a fugitive in danger of death at every moment, he sang a psalm in which these words occur: 'There be many that say, Who will show us any good?' 'Lord, lift up the light of Thy countenance upon us'; and then follows, 'Thou hast put gladness into my heart more than when their corn and wine abound.' The speech of the many, 'Who will show us any good?' is contrasted with the

prayer of the one, 'Lord, lift Thou up the light of Thy countenance upon us.' That is blessedness. It is the only thing that makes the heart to be at rest. It is the only thing that makes life truly worth living, the only thing that brings sweetness which has no after taint of bitterness and breeds no fear of its passing away. To have that unsetting sunshine streaming down upon my open heart, and to carry about with me whithersoever I go, like some melody from hidden singers sounding in my ears, the Name and the Love of my Father God—that and that only, brother, is true rest and abiding blessedness. There are many other joys far more turbulent, more poignant, but they all pass. Many of them leave a nauseous taste in the mouth when they are swallowed; all of them leave us the poorer for having had them and having them no more. For one who is not a Christian I do not know that it *is*

'Better to have loved and lost
Than never to have loved at all.'

But for those to whom God's Face is as a Sun, life in all its possibilities is blessed; and there is no blessedness besides. So let us keep near Him, 'walking in the light,' in our changeful days, 'as He is in the light' in His essential and unalterable being; and that light will be to us all which it is taken in Scripture to symbolise—knowledge and joy and purity; and in us, too, there will be 'no darkness at all.'

But there is one last word that I must say, and that is that a possible terror is intertwined with this blessedness. The next psalm to this says, with a kind of tremulous awe in the Psalmist's voice: 'Thou hast set our iniquities before Thee, our secret sins in the light of Thy countenance.' In that sense all of us, good and bad, lovers of God and those that are careless about Him, walk all the day long in the light of His face, and He sees and marks all our else hidden evil. It needs something more than any of us can do to make the thought that we do stand in the full glaring of that great searchlight, not turned occasionally but focussed steadily on us individually, a joy and a blessing to us. And what we need is offered us when we read, 'His countenance was as the sun shineth in his strength, and I fell at His feet as dead. And He laid His hand upon me and said, Fear not! I am He that liveth and was dead; and behold! I am alive for ever more.' If we put our poor trust in the Eternal Light that was manifest in Christ, then we shall walk in the sunshine of His face on earth, and that lamp will burn for us in the darkness of the grave and lead us at last into the ever-blazing centre of the Sun itself.

THE CRY OF THE MORTAL TO

THE UNDYING

> 'Let the beauty of the Lord our God be upon us: and establish Thou the work of our hands upon us; yea, the work of our hands establish Thou it.—PSALM xc. 17.

If any reliance is to be placed upon the superscription of this psalm, it is one of the oldest, as it certainly is of the grandest, pieces of religious poetry in the world. It is said to be 'A prayer of Moses, the man of God,' and whether that be historically true or no, the tone of the psalm naturally suggests the great lawgiver, whose special task it was to write deep upon the conscience of the Jewish people the thought of the wages of sin as being death.

Hence the sombre magnificence and sad music of the psalm, which contemplates a thousand generations in succession as sliding away into the dreadful past, and sinking as beneath a flood. This thought of the fleeting years, dashed and troubled by many a sin, and by the righteous retribution of God, sent the Psalmist to his knees, and he found the only refuge from it in these prayers. These two petitions of our text, the closing words of the psalm, are the cry forced from a heart that has dared to look Death in the eyes, and has discovered that the world after all is a place of graves.

'Let the beauty of the Lord our God be upon us, and establish Thou the work of our hands upon us.' There are two thoughts there—the cry of the mortal for the beauty of the Eternal; and the cry of the worker in a perishable world for the perpetuity of his work. Look at these two thoughts briefly.

I. We have here, first, the yearning and longing cry of the mortal for the beauty of the Eternal.

The word translated 'beauty' in my text is, like the Greek equivalent in the New Testament, and like the English word 'grace,' which corresponds to them both susceptible of a double meaning. 'Grace' means both *kindness* and *loveliness*, or, as we might distinguish both graciousness and gracefulness. And that double idea is inherent in the word, as it is inherent in the attribute of God to which it refers. For that twofold meaning of the one word suggests the truth that God's lovingkindness and communicating mercy *is* His beauty, and that the fairest thing about Him, notwithstanding the splendours that surround His character, and the flashing lights that come from His many-sided glory, is that He loves and pities and gives Himself. God is all fair, but the central and substantial beauty of the divine nature is that it is a stooping nature, which bows to weak and unworthy souls, and on them pours out the full abundance of its manifold gifts. So the 'beauty of the Lord' means, by no quibble or quirk, but by reason of the essential loveliness of His lovingkindness, both God's loveliness and God's goodness; God's graciousness

and God's gracefulness (if I may use such a word).

The prayer of the Psalmist that this beauty may be *upon* us conceives of it as given to us from above and as coming floating down from heaven, like that white Dove that fell upon Christ's head, fair and meek, gentle and lovely, and resting on our anointed heads, like a diadem and an aureole of glory.

Now that communicating graciousness, with its large gifts and its resulting beauty, is the one thing that we need in view of mortality and sorrow and change and trouble. The psalm speaks about 'all our years' being 'passed away in Thy wrath,' about the very inmost recesses of our secret unworthiness being turned inside out, and made to look blacker than ever when the bright sunshine of His face falls upon them. From that thought of God's wrath and omniscience the poet turns, as we must turn, to the other thought of His gentle longsuffering, of His forbearing love, of His infinite pity, of His communicating mercy. As a support in view both of our dreary and yet short years, and our certain mortality, and in the contemplation of the evils within and suffering from without, that harass us all, there is but one thing for us to do—namely, to fling ourselves into the arms of God, and in the spirit of this great petition, to ask that upon us there may fall the dewy benediction of His gentle beauty.

That longing is meant to be kindled in our hearts by all the discipline of life. Life is not worth living

unless it does that for us; and there is no value nor meaning either in our joys or in our sorrows, unless both the one and the other send us to Him. Our gladness and our disappointments, our hopes fulfilled and our hopes dissipated and unanswered are but, as it were, the two wings by which, on either side, our spirits are to be lifted to God. The solemn pathos of the earlier portion of this psalm—the funeral march of generations—leads up to the prayerful confidence of these closing petitions, in which the sadness of the minor key in which it began has passed into a brighter strain. The thought of the fleeting years swept away as with a flood, and of the generations that blossom for a day and are mown down and wither when their swift night falls, is saddening and paralysing unless it suggests by contrast the thought of Him who, Himself unmoved, moves the rolling years, and is the dwelling-place of each succeeding generation. Such contemplations are wholesome and religious only when they drive us to the eternal God, that in Him we may find the stable foundation which imparts its own perpetuity to every life built upon it. We have experienced so many things in vain, and we are of the 'fools' that, being 'brayed in a mortar,' are only brayed fools after all, unless life, with its sorrows and its changes, has blown us, as with a hurricane, right into the centre of rest, and unless its sorrows and changes have taught us this as the one aspiration of our souls: 'Let the beauty of the Lord our God be upon us,' and then, let what may come, come, let what can pass, pass, we shall have all that

we need for life and peace.

And then, note further, that this gracious gentleness and long-suffering, giving mercy of God, when it comes down upon a man, makes him, too, beautiful with a reflected beauty. If the beauty of the Lord our God be upon us, it will cover over our foulness and deformity. For whosoever possesses in any real fashion God's great mercy will have his spirit moulded into the likeness of that mercy. We cannot have it without reflecting it, we cannot possess it without being assimilated to it. Therefore, to have the grace of God makes us both gracious and graceful. And the true refining influence for a character is that into it there shall come the gift of that endless pity and patient love, which will transfigure us into some faint likeness of itself, so that we shall walk among men, able, in some poor measure, after the manner of our Master, to say, 'He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father.' He said it in a sense and in a measure which we cannot reach, but the assimilation to and reflection of the divine character is our aim, or ought to be, if we are Christians. 'Let the beauty of the Lord our God be upon us,' and 'change us into the same image from glory to glory.'

II. We have here the cry of the worker in a fleeting world for the perpetuity of his work.

'Establish,' or make firm, 'the work of our hands upon us, yea the work of our hands establish Thou

it.' The thought that everything is passing away so swiftly and inevitably, as the earlier part of the psalm suggests, might lead a man to say, 'What is the use of my doing anything? I may just as well sit down here, and let things slide, if they are all going to be swallowed up in the black bottomless gulf of forgetfulness.' The contemplation has actually produced two opposite effects, 'Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die,' is quite as fair an inference from the fact as is 'Awake to righteousness and sin not,' if the fact itself only be taken into account. There is nothing religious in the clearest conviction of mortality, if it stands alone. It may be the ally of profligate and cynical sensuality quite as easily as it may be the preacher of asceticism. It may make men inactive, from their sense of the insignificant and fleeting nature of all human works, or it may stimulate to intensest effort, from the thought, 'I must work the works of Him that sent me while it is day. The night cometh.' All depends on whether we link the conviction of mortality with that of eternity, and think of our perishable selves as in relationship with the unchanging God.

This prayer expresses a deep longing, natural to all men, and which yet seems incompatible with the stern facts of mortality and decay. We should all like to have our work exempted from the common lot. What pathetically futile attempts to secure this are pyramids, and rock-inscriptions, and storied tombs, and posthumous memoirs, and rich men's wills! Why

should any of us expect that the laws of nature should be suspended for our benefit, and our work made lasting while everything beside changes like the shadows of the clouds? Is there any way by which such exceptional permanence can be secured for our poor deeds? Yes, certainly. Let us commit them to God, praying this prayer, 'Establish Thou the work of our hands upon us.'

Our work will be established if it is His work. This prayer in our text follows another prayer (verse 16) —namely, 'Let *Thy* work appear unto Thy servants.' That is to say, My work will be perpetual when the work of my hands is God's work done through me. When you bring your wills into harmony with God's will, and so all your effort, even about the little things of daily life, is in consonance with His will, and in the line of His purpose, then your work will stand. If otherwise, it will be like some slow-moving and frail carriage going in the one direction and meeting an express train thundering in the other. When the crash comes, the opposing motion of the weaker will be stopped, reversed, and the frail thing will be smashed to atoms. So, all work which is man's and not God's will sooner or later be reduced to impotence and either annihilated or reversed, and made to run in the opposite direction. But if our work runs parallel with God's, then the rushing impetus of His work will catch up our little deeds into the swiftness of its own motion, and will carry them along with itself, as a railway train will lift

straws and bits of paper that are lying by the rails, and give them motion for a while. If my will runs in the line of His, and if the work of my hands is 'Thy work,' it is not in vain that we shall cry 'Establish it upon us,' for it will last as long as He does.

In like manner, all work will be perpetual that is done with 'the beauty of the Lord our God' upon the doers of it. Whosoever has that grace in his heart, whosoever is in contact with the communicating mercy of God, and has had his character in some measure refined and ennobled and beautified by possession thereof, will do work that has in it the element of perpetuity.

And our work will stand if we quietly leave it in His hands. Quietly do it to Him, never mind about results, but look after motives. You cannot influence results, let God look after them; you can influence motives. Be sure that they are right, and if they are, the work will be eternal.

'Eternal? What do you mean by eternal? how can a man's work be that?' Part of the answer is that it may be made permanent in its issues by being taken up into the great whole of God's working through His servants, which results at last in the establishment of His eternal kingdom. Just as a drop of water that falls upon the moor finds its way into the brook, and goes down the glen and on into the river, and then into the sea, and is there, though undistinguishable, so in the great summing up of everything at the end,

the tiniest deed that was done for God, though it was done far away up amongst the mountain solitudes where no eye saw, shall live and be represented, in its effects on others and in its glad issues to the doer.

In the highest fashion the Psalmist's cry for the perpetuity of the fleeting deeds of dying generations will be answered in that region in which his dimmer eye saw little but the sullen flood that swept away youth and strength and wisdom, but in which we can see the solid land beyond the river, and the happy company who rejoice with the joy of harvest, and bear with them the sheaves, whereof the seed was sown on this bank, in tears and fears. 'Blessed are the dead that die in the Lord. Their works do follow them.' 'The world passeth away, and the fashion thereof, but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever.'

THE SHELTERING WING

> 'He shall cover thee with His feathers, and under His wings shalt thou trust: His truth shall be thy shield and buckler.' —PSALM xci. 4.

We remember the magnificent image in Moses'

song, of God's protection and guidance as that of the eagle who stirred up his nest, and hovered over the young with his wings, and bore them on his pinions. That passage may possibly have touched the imagination of this psalmist, when he here employs the same general metaphor, but with a distinct and significant difference in its application. In the former image the main idea is that of training and sustaining. Here the main idea is that of protection and fostering. *On* the wing and *under* the wing suggest entirely different notions, and both need to be taken into account in order to get the many-sided beauties and promises of these great sayings. Now there seems to me here to be a very distinct triad of thoughts. There is the covering wing; there is the flight to its protection; and there is the warrant for that flight. 'He shall cover thee with His pinions'; that is the divine act. 'Under His wings shalt thou trust'; that is the human condition. 'His truth shall be thy shield and buckler'; that is the divine manifestation which makes the human condition possible.

I. A word then, first, about the covering wing.

Now, the main idea in this image is, as I have suggested, that of the expanded pinion, beneath the shelter of which the callow young lie, and are guarded. Whatever kites may be in the sky, whatever stoats and weasels may be in the hedges, the brood are safe there. The image suggests not only the thought of protection but those of fostering, downy warmth, peaceful proximity to a heart that throbs

with parental love, and a multitude of other happy privileges realised by those who nestle beneath that wing. But while these subsidiary ideas are not to be lost sight of, the promise of protection is to be kept prominent, as that chiefly intended by the Psalmist.

This psalm rings throughout with the truth that a man who dwells 'in the secret place of the Most High' has absolute immunity from all sorts of evil; and there are two regions in which that immunity, secured by being under the shadow of the Almighty, is exemplified here. The one is that of outward dangers, the other is that of temptation to sin and of what we may call spiritual foes. Now, these two regions and departments in which the Christian man does realise, in the measure of his faith, the divine protection, exhibit that protection as secured in two entirely different ways.

The triumphant assurances of this psalm, 'There shall no evil befall thee, neither shall any plague come nigh thy dwelling,'—'the pestilence shall smite thousands and ten thousands beside thee, but not come nigh thee,'—seem to be entirely contradicted by experience which testifies that 'there is one event to the evil and the good,' and that, in epidemics or other widespread disasters, we all, the good and the bad, God-fearers and God-blasphemers, do fare alike, and that the conditions of exemption from physical evil are physical and not spiritual. It is of no use trying to persuade ourselves that that is not so. We shall understand God's dealings with us, and get to

the very throbbing heart of such promises as these in this psalm far better, if we start from the certainty that whatever it means it does *not* mean that, with regard to external calamities and disasters, we are going to be God's petted children, or to be saved from the things that fall upon other people. No! no! we have to go a great deal deeper than that. If we have felt a difficulty, as I suppose we all have sometimes, and are ready to say with the half-despondent Psalmist, 'My feet were almost gone, and my steps had well-nigh slipped,' when we see what we think the complicated mysteries of divine providence in this world, we have to come to the belief that the evil that is in the evil will never come near a man sheltered beneath God's wing. The physical external event may be entirely the same to him as to another who is not covered with His feathers. Here are two partners in a business, the one a Christian man, and the other is not. A common disaster overwhelms them. They become bankrupts. Is insolvency the same to the one as it is to the other? Here are two men on board a ship, the one putting his trust in God, the other thinking it all nonsense to trust anything but himself. They are both drowned. Is drowning the same to the two? As their corpses lie side by side among the ooze, with the weeds over them, and the shell-fish at them, you may say of the one, but only of the one, 'There shall no evil befall thee, neither any plague come nigh thy dwelling.'

For the protection that is granted to faith is only to be understood by faith. It is deliverance from the evil in the evil which vindicates as no exaggeration, nor as merely an experience and a promise peculiar to the old theocracy of Israel, but not now realised, the grand sayings of this text. The poison is all wiped off the arrow by that divine protection. It may still wound but it does not putrefy the flesh. The sewage water comes down, but it passes into the filtering bed, and is disinfected and cleansed before it is permitted to flow over our fields.

And so, brethren! if any of you are finding that the psalm is not outwardly true, and that through the covering wing the storm of hail has come and beaten you down, do not suppose that that in the slightest degree impinges upon the reality and truthfulness of this great promise, 'He shall cover thee with His feathers.' Anything that has come through *them* is manifestly not an 'evil.' 'Who is he that will harm you if ye be followers of that which is good?' 'If God be for us who can be against us?' Not what the world calls, and our wrung hearts feel that it rightly calls, 'sorrows' and 'afflictions,'—these all work for our good, and protection consists, not in averting the blows, but in changing their character.

Then, there is another region far higher, in which this promise of my text is absolutely true—that is, in the region of spiritual defence. For no man who lies under the shadow of God, and has his heart filled with the continual consciousness of that Presence, is

likely to fall before the assaults of evil that tempt him away from God; and the defence which He gives in that region is yet more magnificently impregnable than the defence which He gives against external evils. For, as the New Testament teaches us, we are kept from sin, not by any outward breastplate or armour, nor even by the divine wing lying above us to cover us, but by the indwelling Christ in our hearts. His Spirit within us makes us 'free from the law of sin and death,' and conquerors over all temptations.

I say not a word about all the other beautiful and pathetic associations which are connected with this emblem of the covering wing, sweet and inexhaustible as it is, but I simply leave with you the two thoughts that I have dwelt upon, of the twofold manner of that divine protection.

II. And now a word, in the second place, about the flight of the shelterless to the shelter.

The word which is rendered in our Authorised Version, 'shalt thou trust,' is, like all Hebrew words for mental and spiritual emotions and actions, strongly metaphorical. It might have been better to retain its literal meaning here instead of substituting the abstract word 'trust.' That is to say, it would have been an improvement if we had read with the Revised Version, not, 'under His wings shalt thou trust,' but 'under His wings shalt thou take refuge.' For that is the idea which is really conveyed; and in

many of the psalms, if you will remember, the same metaphor is employed. 'Hide me beneath the shadow of Thy wings'; 'Beneath Thy wings will I take refuge until calamities are overpast'; and the like. Many such passages will, no doubt, occur to your memories.

But what I wish to signalise is just this, that in this emblem of flying into a refuge from impending perils we get a far more vivid conception, and a far more useful one, as it seems to me, of what Christian faith really is than we derive from many learned volumes and much theological hair-splitting. 'Under His wings shalt thou flee for refuge.' Is not that a vivid, intense, picturesque, but most illuminative way of telling us what is the very essence, and what is the urgency, and what is the worth, of what we call faith? The Old Testament is full of the teaching—which is masked to ordinary readers, but is the same teaching as the New Testament is confessedly full of—of the necessity of faith as the one bond that binds men to God. If only our translators had wisely determined upon a uniform rendering in Old and New Testament of words that are synonymous, the reader would have seen what is often now reserved for the student, that all these sayings in the Old Testament about 'trusting in God' run on all fours with 'Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved.'

But just mark what comes out of that metaphor; that 'trust,' the faith which unites with God, and brings a man beneath the shadow of His wings, is

nothing more or less than the flying into the refuge that is provided for us. Does that not speak to us of the urgency of the case? Does that not speak to us eloquently of the perils which environ us? Does it not speak to us of the necessity of swift flight, with all the powers of our will? Is the faith which is a flying into a refuge fairly described as an intellectual act of believing in a testimony? Surely it is something a great deal more than that. A man out in the plain, with the avenger of blood, hot-breathed and bloody-minded, behind him might believe, as much as he liked, that there would be safety within the walls of the City of Refuge, but unless he took to his heels without loss of time, the spear would be in his back before he knew where he was. There are many men who know all about the security of the refuge, and believe it utterly, but never run for it; and so never get into it. Faith is the gathering up of the whole powers of my nature to fling myself into the asylum, to cast myself into God's arms, to take shelter beneath the shadow of His wings. And unless a man does that, and swiftly, he is exposed to every bird of prey in the sky, and to every beast of prey lurking in wait for him.

The metaphor tells us, too, what are the limits and the worth of faith. A man is not saved because he believes that he is saved, but because by believing he lays hold of the salvation. It is not the flight that is impregnable, and makes those behind its strong bulwarks secure. Not my outstretched hand, but the

Hand that my hand grasps, is what holds me up. The power of faith is but that it brings me into contact with God, and sets me behind the seven-fold bastions of the Almighty protection.

So, brethren! another consideration comes out of this clause: 'Under His wings shalt thou trust.' If you do not flee for refuge to that wing, it is of no use to you, however expanded it is, however soft and downy its underside, however sure its protection. You remember the passage where our Lord uses the same venerable figure with modifications, and says: 'How often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen doth gather her brood under her wings, *and ye would not*.' So our 'would not' thwarts Christ's 'would.' Flight to the refuge is the condition of being saved. How can a man get shelter by any other way than by running to the shelter? The wing is expanded; it is for us to say whether we will 'flee for refuge to the hope set before us.'

III. Now, lastly, the warrant for this flight.

'His truth shall be thy shield.' Now, 'truth' here does not mean the body of revealed words, which are often called God's truth, but it describes a certain characteristic of the divine nature. And if, instead of 'truth,' we read the good old English word 'troth,' we should be a great deal nearer understanding what the Psalmist meant. Or if 'troth' is archaic, and conveys little meaning to us; suppose we substitute a somewhat longer word, of the same meaning, and

say, 'His faithfulness shall be thy shield.' You cannot trust a God that has not given you an inkling of His character or disposition, but if He has spoken, then you 'know where to have him.' That is just what the Psalmist means. How can a man be encouraged to fly into a refuge, unless he is absolutely sure that there is an entrance for him into it, and that, entering, he is safe? And that security is provided in the great thought of God's troth. 'Thy faithfulness is like the great mountains.' 'Who is like unto Thee, O Lord! or to Thy faithfulness round about Thee?' That faithfulness shall be our 'shield,' not a tiny targe that a man could bear upon his left arm; but the word means the large shield, planted in the ground in front of the soldier, covering him, however hot the fight, and circling him around, like a wall of iron.

God is 'faithful' to all the obligations under which He has come by making us. That is what one of the New Testament writers tells us, when he speaks of Him as 'a faithful Creator.' Then, if He has put desires into our hearts, be sure that somewhere there is their satisfaction; and if He has given us needs, be sure that in Him there is the supply; and if He has lodged in us aspirations which make us restless, be sure that if we will turn them to Him, they will be satisfied and we shall be at rest. 'God never sends mouths but He sends meat to fill them.' 'He remembers our frame,' and measures His dealings accordingly. When He made me, He bound Himself to make it possible that I should be blessed for ever; and He has done it.

God is faithful to His word, according to that great saying in the Epistle to the Hebrews, where the writer tells us that by 'God's counsel,' and 'God's oath,' 'two immutable things,' we might have 'strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us.' God is faithful to His own past. The more He has done the more He will do. 'Thou hast been my Help; leave me not, neither forsake me.' Therein we present a plea which God Himself will honour. And He is faithful to His own past in a yet wider sense. For all the revelations of His love and of His grace in times that are gone, though they might be miraculous in their form, are permanent in their essence. So one of the Psalmists, hundreds of years after the time that Israel was led through the wilderness, sang: 'There did *we*'—of this present generation—'rejoice in Him.' What has been, is, and will be, for Thou art 'the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever.' We have not a God that lurks in darkness, but one that has come into the light. We have to run, not into a Refuge that is built upon a 'perhaps,' but upon 'Verily, verily! I say unto thee.' Let us build rock upon Rock, and let our faith correspond to the faithfulness of Him that has promised.

THE HABITATION OF THE SOUL

> 'Because thou hast made the Lord, which is my refuge, even the most High, thy habitation; there shall no evil befall thee, neither shall any plague come nigh thy dwelling.'—PSALM xci. 9, 10.

It requires a good deal of piecing to make out from the Hebrew the translation of our Authorised Version here. The simple, literal rendering of the first words of these verses is, 'Surely, Thou, O Lord! art my Refuge'; and I do not suppose that any of the expedients which have been adopted to modify that translation would have been adopted, but that these words seem to cut in two the long series of rich promises and blessings which occupy the rest of the psalm. But it is precisely this interruption of the flow of the promises which puts us on the right track for understanding the words in question, because it leads us to take them as the voice of the devout man, to whom the promises are addressed, responding to them by the expression of his own faith.

The Revised Version is much better here than our Authorised Version, for it has recognised this breach of continuity of sequence in the promises, and translated as I have suggested; making the first words of my text, 'Thou, O Lord! art my Refuge,' the voice of one singer, and 'Because thou hast made the

Most High thy habitation, there shall no evil befall thee, neither shall any evil come nigh thy dwelling,' the voice of another.

Whether or no it be that in the Liturgical service of the Temple this psalm was sung by two choirs which answered one another, does not matter for our purpose. Whether or no we regard the first clause as the voice of the Psalmist speaking to God, and the other as the same man speaking to himself, does not matter. The point is that, first, there is an exclamation of personal faith, and that then that is followed and answered, as it were, by the further promise of continual blessings. One voice says, 'Thou, Lord! art my Refuge,' and then another voice —not God's, because that speaks in majesty at the end of the psalm—replies to that burst of confidence, 'Thou hast made the Lord thy habitation' (as thou hast done by this confession of faith), 'there shall no evil come nigh thy dwelling.'

I. We have here the cry of the devout soul.

I observed that it seems to cut in two the stream of promised blessings, and that fact is significant. The psalm begins with the deep truth that 'He that dwelleth in the secret place of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty.' Then a single voice speaks, 'I will say of the Lord, He is my Refuge and my Fortress, my God, in Him will I trust.' Then that voice, which thus responds to the general statement of the first verse, is answered by a stream

of promises. The first part of our text comes in as the second speech of the same voice, repeating substantially the same thing as it said at first.

Now, notice that this cry of the soul, recognising God as its Asylum and Home, comes in response to a revelation of God's blessing, and to large words of promise. There is no true refuge nor any peace and rest for a man unless in grasping the articulate word of God, and building his assurance upon that. Anything else is not confidence, but folly; anything else is building upon sand, and not upon the Rock. If I trust my own or my brother's conception of the divine nature, if I build upon any thoughts of my own, I am building upon what will yield and give. For all peaceful casting of my soul into the arms of God there must be, first, a plain stretching out of the hands of God to catch me when I drop. So the words of my text, 'Thou art my Refuge,' are the best answer of the devout soul to the plain words of divine promise. How abundant these are we all know, how full of manifold insight and adaptation to our circumstances and our nature we may all experience, if we care to prove them.

But let us be sure that we *are* hearkening to the voice with which He speaks through our daily circumstances as well as by the unmistakable revelation of His will and heart in Jesus Christ. And then let us be sure that no word of His, that comes fluttering down from the heavens, meaning a benediction and enclosing a promise, falls at our feet

ungathered and unregarded, or is trodden into the dust by our careless heels. The manna lies all about us; let us see that we gather it. 'When Thou saidst, Seek ye My Face, my heart said unto Thee, Thy Face, Lord, will I seek.' When Thou saidst, 'I will be thy Strength and thy Righteousness,' have I said, 'Surely, O Jehovah! Thou art my Refuge'? Turn His promises into your creed, and whatever He has declared in the sweet thunder of His voice, loud as the voice of many waters, and melodious as 'harpers harping with their harps,' do you take for your profession of faith in the faithful promises of your God.

Still further, this cry of the devout soul suggests to me that our response ought to be the establishment of a close personal relation between us and God. 'Thou, O Lord! art my Refuge.' The Psalmist did not content himself with saying 'Lord! Thou hast been *our* Dwelling-place in all generations,' or as one of the other psalmists has it, 'God is *our* Refuge and *our* Strength.' That thought was blessed, but it was not enough for the Psalmist's present need, and it is never enough for the deepest necessities of any soul. We must isolate ourselves and stand, God and we, alone together—at heart-grips—we grasping His hand, and He giving Himself to us—if the promises which are sent down into the world for all who will make them theirs can become ours. They are made payable to your order; you must put your name on the back before you get the proceeds. There must be what our good old Puritan forefathers used to call, in

somewhat hard language, 'the appropriating act of faith,' in order that God's richest blessings may be of any use to us. Put out your hand to grasp them, and say, 'Mine,' not 'Ours.' The thought of others as sharing in them will come afterwards, for he who has once realised the absolute isolation of the soul and has been alone with God, and in solitude has taken God's gifts as his very own, is he who will feel fellowship and brotherhood with all who are partakers of like precious faith and blessings. The 'ours' will come; but you must begin with the 'mine'—'*my* Lord and *my* God.' 'He loved *me*, and gave Himself for *me*.'

Just as when the Israelites gathered on the banks of the Red Sea, and Miriam and the maidens came out with songs and timbrels, though their hearts throbbed with joy, and music rang from their lips for national deliverance, their hymn made the whole deliverance the property of each, and each of the chorus sang, 'The Lord is my Strength and my Song, He also is become my Salvation,' so we must individualise the common blessing. Every poor soul has a right to the whole of God, and unless a man claims all the divine nature as his, he has little chance of possessing the promised blessings. The response of the individual to the worldwide promises and revelations of the Father is, 'Thou, O Lord! art my Refuge.'

Further, note how this cry of the devout soul recognises God as He to whom we must go because

we need a refuge. The word 'refuge' here gives the picture of some stronghold, or fortified place, in which men may find security from all sorts of dangers, invasions by surrounding foes, storm and tempest, rising flood, or anything else that threatens. Only he who knows himself to be in danger bethinks himself of a refuge. It is only when we know our danger and defencelessness that God, as the Refuge of our souls, becomes precious to us. So, underlying, and an essential part of, all our confidence in God, is the clear recognition of our own necessity. The sense of our own emptiness must precede our grasp of His fulness. The conviction of our own insufficiency and sinfulness must precede our casting ourselves on His mercy and righteousness. In all regions the consciousness of human want must go before the recognition of the divine supply.

II. Now, note the still more abundant answer which that cry evokes.

I said that the words on which I have been commenting thus far, seem to break in two the continuity of the stream of blessings and promises. But there may be observed a certain distinction of tone between those promises which precede and those which follow the cry. Those that follow have a certain elevation and depth, completeness and fulness, beyond those that precede. This enhancing of the promises, following on the faithful grasp of previous promises, suggests the thought that, when God is giving, and His servant thankfully accepts and

garners up His gifts, He opens His hand wider and gives more. When He pours His rain upon the unthankful and the evil, and they let the precious, fertilising drops run to waste, there comes after a while a diminution of the blessing; but they who store in patient and thankful hearts the faithful promises of God, have taken a sure way to make His gifts still larger and His promises still sweeter, and their fulfilment more faithful and precious.

But now notice the remarkable language in which this answer is couched. 'Thou hast made the Most High thy Habitation, there shall no evil befall thee, neither shall any plague come nigh thy dwelling.'

Did you ever notice that there are two dwelling-places spoken of in this verse? 'Thou hast made the Most High thy Habitation'; 'There shall no plague come nigh thy dwelling.' The reference of the latter word to the former one is even more striking if you observe that, literally translated, as in the Revised Version, it means a particular kind of abode—namely, a tent. 'Thou hast made the Most High thy habitation.' The same word is employed in the 90th Psalm: 'Lord, Thou hast been our Dwelling-place in all generations.' Beside that venerable and ancient abode, that has stood fresh, strong, incorruptible, and unaffected by the lapse of millenniums, there stands the little transitory canvas tent in which our earthly lives are spent. We have two dwelling-places. By the body we are brought into connection with this frail, evanescent, illusory outer world, and we try to

make our homes out of shifting cloud-wrack, and dream that we can compel mutability to become immutable, that we may dwell secure. But fate is too strong for us, and although we say that we will make our nest in the rocks, and shall never be moved, the home that is visible and linked with the material passes and melts as a cloud. We need a better dwelling-place than earth and that which holds to earth. We have God Himself for our true Home. Never mind what becomes of the tent, as long as the mansion stands firm. Do not let us be saddened, though we know that it is canvas, and that the walls will soon rot and must some day be folded up and borne away, if we have the Rock of Ages for our dwelling-place.

Let us abide in the Eternal God by the devotion of our hearts, by the affiance of our faith, by the submission of our wills, by the aspiration of our yearnings, by the conformity of our conduct to His will. Let us abide in the Eternal God, that 'when the earthly house of this tabernacle is dissolved,' we may enter into two buildings 'eternal in the heavens'—the one the spiritual body which knows no corruption, and the other the bosom of the Eternal God Himself. 'Because thou hast made Him thy Habitation,' that Dwelling shall suffer no evil to come near it or its tenant.

Still further, notice the scope of this great promise. I suppose there is some reference in the form of it to the old story of Israel's exemption from the Egyptian

plagues, and a hint that that might be taken as a parable and prophetic picture of what will be true about every man who puts his trust in God. But the wide scope and the paradoxical completeness of the promise itself, instead of being a difficulty, point the way to its true interpretation. 'There shall no plague come nigh thy dwelling'—and yet we are smitten down by all the woes that afflict humanity. 'No evil shall befall thee'—and yet 'all the ills that flesh is heir to' are dealt out sometimes with a more liberal hand to them who abide in God than to them who dwell only in the tent upon earth. What then? Is God true, or is He not? Did this psalmist mean to promise the very questionable blessing of escape from all the good of the discipline of sorrow? Is it true, in the unconditional sense in which it is often asserted, that 'prosperity is the blessing of the Old Testament, and adversity of the New'? I think not, and I am sure that this psalmist, when he said, 'there shall no evil befall thee, nor any plague come nigh thy dwelling,' was thinking exactly the same thing which Paul had in his mind when he said, 'All things work together for good to them that love God, to them that are called according to His purpose.' If I make God my Refuge, I shall get something a great deal better than escape from outward sorrow—namely, an amulet which will turn the outward sorrow into joy. The bitter water will still be given me to drink, but it will be filtered water, out of which God will strain all the poison, though He leaves plenty of the bitterness in it; for bitterness is a tonic. The evil that is in the evil will

be taken out of it, in the measure in which we make God our Refuge, and 'all will be right that seems most wrong' when we recognise it to be 'His sweet will.'

Dear brother! the secret of exemption from every evil lies in no peculiar Providence, ordering in some special manner our outward circumstances, but in the submission of our wills to that which the good hand of the Lord our God sends us for our good; and in cleaving close to Him as our Refuge. Nothing can be 'evil' which knits me more closely to God; and whatever tempest drives me to His breast, though all the four winds of the heavens strive on the surface of the sea, it will be better for me than calm weather that entices me to stray farther away from Him.

We shall know that some day. Let us be sure of it now, and explain by it our earthly experience, even as we shall know it when we get up yonder and 'see all the way by which the Lord our God has led us.'

THE ANSWER TO TRUST

'Because he hath set his love upon Me, therefore will I deliver him:
I will set him on high, because he hath known My name.'
—PSALM xci. 14.

There are two voices speaking in the earlier part of this psalm: one that of a saint who professes his reliance upon the Lord, his Fortress; and another which answers the former speaker, and declares that he shall be preserved by God. In this verse, which is the first of the final portion of the psalm, we have a third voice—the voice of God Himself, which comes in to seal and confirm, to heighten and transcend, all the promises that have been made in His name. The first voice said of himself, '*I* will trust'; the second voice addresses that speaker, and says, '*Thou* shalt not be afraid'; the third voice speaks of him, and not to him, and says, 'Because *he* hath set his love upon Me, therefore will I deliver him.'

Why does this divine voice speak thus indirectly of

this blessing of His servant? I think partly because it heightens the majesty of the utterance, as if God spake to the whole universe about what He meant to do for His friend who trusts Him; and partly because, in that general form of speech, there is really couched an 'whosoever'; and it applies to us all. If God had said, 'Because thou hast set thy love upon Me, I will deliver thee,' it had not been so easy for us to put ourselves in the place of the man concerning whom this great divine voice spoke; but when He says, 'Because *he* hath set *his* love upon Me,' in the 'he' there lies 'everybody'; and the promise spoken before the universe as to His servants is spoken universally to His servants.

So, then, these words seem to me to carry two thoughts: the first, what God delights to find in a man; and the second, what God delights to give to the man in whom He finds it.

I. Note, first, what God delights to find in man.

There is, if we may reverently say so, a tone of satisfaction in the words, 'Because he hath set his love upon Me,' and 'because he hath known My name.' Thus, then, there are two things that the great Father's heart seeks, and wheresoever it finds them, in however imperfect a degree, He is glad, and lavishes upon such a one the most precious things in His possession.

What are these two things? Let us look at each of

them. Now the word rendered 'set his love' includes more than is suggested by that rendering, beautiful as it is. It implies the binding or knitting oneself to anything. Now, though love be the true cement by which men are bound to God, as it is the only real bond which binds men to one another, yet the word itself covers a somewhat wider area than is covered by the notion of love. It is not my love only that I am to fasten upon God, but my whole self that I am to bind to Him. God delights in us when we cling to Him. There is a threefold kind of clinging, which I would urge upon you and upon myself.

Let us cling to Him in our thoughts, hour by hour, moment by moment, amidst all the distractions of daily life. Whilst there are other things that must legitimately occupy our minds, let us see to it that, ever and anon, we turn ourselves away from these, and betake ourselves, with a conscious gathering in of our souls, to Him, and calm and occupy our hearts and minds with the bright and peaceful thoughts of a present God ever near us, and ever gracious to us. Life is but a dreary stretch of wilderness, unless all through it there be dotted, like a chain of ponds in a desert, these moments in which the mind fixes itself upon God, and loses sorrows and sins and weakness and all other sadnesses in the calm and blessed contemplation of His sweetness and sufficiency. The very heavens are bare and lacking in highest beauty, unless there stretch across them the long lines of rosy-tinted clouds. And so across our skies let us cast

a continuous chain of thoughts of God, and as we go about our daily work, let us try to have our minds ever recurring to Him, like the linked pools that mirror heaven in the midst of the barren desert, and bring a reflection of life into the midst of its death. Cleave and cling to God, brother! by frequent thoughts of Him, diffused throughout the whole continuity of the busy day.

Then again, we might say, let us cleave to Him by our love, which is the one bond of union, as I said, between man and God, as it is the one bond of union between man and man. 'Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength,' was from the beginning the Alpha, and until the end will be the Omega, of all true religion; and within the sphere of that commandment lie all duty, all Christianity, all blessedness, and all life. The heart that is divided is wretched; the heart that is consecrated is at rest. The love that is partial is nought; the love that is worth calling so is total and continuous. Let us cling to Him with our thoughts; let us cling to Him with the tendrils of our hearts.

Let us cleave to Him, still further, by the obedient contact of our wills with His, taking no commandments from men, and no overpowering impressions from circumstances, and no orders from our own fancies and inclinations and tastes and lusts, but receiving all our instructions from our Father in heaven. There is no real contact between us and God,

no real cleaving to Him, howsoever the thought of God may be in our minds, and some kind of imperfect love to Him may be supposed to be in our hearts, unless there be the absolute submission of our wills to His authority; and only in the measure in which we are able to say, What He commands I do, and what He sends I accept, and my will is in His hands to be moulded, do we really get close and keep close to our Father in the heavens. He that hath brought himself into loving touch with God, and clings to Him in that threefold fashion, by thought, love, and submission, he, and only he, is so joined to the Lord as to be one Spirit.

Now that is not a state to be won and kept without much vigorous, conscious effort. The nuts in a machine work loose; the knots in a rope 'come untied,' as the children say. The hand that clasps anything, by slow and imperceptible degrees, loses muscular contraction, and the grip of the fingers becomes slacker. Our minds and affections and wills have that same tendency to slacken their hold of what they grasp. Unless we tighten up the machine it will work loose; and unless we make conscious efforts to keep ourselves in touch with God, His hand will slip out of ours before we know that it is gone, and we shall fancy that we feel the impression of the fingers long after they have been taken away from our negligent palms.

Besides our own vagrancies, and the waywardness and wanderings of our poor, unreliable natures, there

come in, of course, as hindrances, all the interruptions and distractions of outside things, which work in the same direction of loosening our hold on God. If the shipwrecked sailor is not to be washed off the raft he must tie himself on to it, and must see that the lashings are reliable and the knots tight; and if we do not mean to be drifted away from God without knowing it, we must make very sure work of anchor and cable, and of our own hold on both. Effort is needed, continuous and conscious, lest at any time we should slide away from Him. And this is what God delights to find: a mind and will that bind themselves to Him.

There is another thing in the text which, as I take it, is a consequence of that close union between man in his whole nature and God: 'I will set him on high because he hath known My name.' Notice that the knowledge of the name comes after, and not before, the setting of the love or the fixing of the nature upon God. God's 'name' is the same thing as His self-revelation or His manifested character. Then, does not every one to whom that revelation is made know His name? Certainly not. The word 'know' is here used in the same deep sense in which it is employed all but uniformly in the New Testament—the same sense in which it is used in the writings of the Apostle John. It describes a knowledge which is a great deal more than a mere intellectual acquaintance with the facts of divine revelation. Or, to put the thought into other words, this is a

knowledge which comes after we have set our love upon God, a knowledge which is the child of love. We forget sometimes that it is a Person, and not a system of truth, whom the Bible tells us we are to know. And how do you know people? Only by familiar acquaintance with them. You might read a description of a man, perfectly accurate, sufficiently full, but you would not therefore say you knew him. You might know about him, or fancy you did, but if you knew him, it would be because you had summered and wintered with him, and lived beside him, and were on terms of familiar acquaintance with him. As long as it is God and not theology, the knowledge of whom makes religion, so long it will not be the head, but the heart or spirit, that is the medium or organ by which we know Him. You have to become acquainted with Him and be very familiar with Him—that is to say, to fix your whole self upon Him—before you 'know' Him; and it is only the knowledge which is born of love and familiarity that is worth calling knowledge at all. Just as with our earthly relationships and acquaintances, only they who love a man or a woman know such a one right down to the very depth of their being, so the one way to know God's name is to bind myself to Him with mind and heart and will, as friends cleave to one another. Then I shall know Him and be known of Him.

Still further, this knowledge which God delights to find in us men, is a knowledge which is experience.

There is all the difference between reading about a foreign country and going to see it with your own eyes. The man that has been there knows it; the man that has not knows about it. And only he knows God to whom the commonplaces of religion have turned into facts which he verifies by his own experiences.

It is a knowledge, too, which influences life. Obviously the words of my text look back to what the saint was represented as saying in an earlier portion of the psalm. Why does God declare that the man has set his love upon Him, and knows His name? Because the saint professed this, 'I will say of the Lord, He is my Refuge and my Fortress.' These are His name. The man knows it; he has it not only upon his lips, but in his heart, and feels that it is true, and acts accordingly. 'He is my Refuge and my Fortress; my God, in Him will I trust.' The knowledge which God regards as knowledge of Him is one based upon experience and upon familiar acquaintance, and issuing in joyful recognition of my possession of Him as mine, and the outgoing of my confidence to Him. These are the things that God desires and delights to find in men.

II. Note, secondly, what God gives to the man in whom He finds such things.

'I will deliver him'; 'I will set him on high.' These two clauses are substantially parallel, and yet there is a difference between them, as is the nature of the parallelism of Hebrew poetry, where the same ideas

are repeated with a shade of modification, and the second of them somewhat surpassing the first. 'I will deliver him,' says the promise. That confirms the view that the promise in the previous verse, 'There shall no plague come nigh thy dwelling,' does not mean exemption from sorrow and trial because, if so, there would be no relevancy or blessedness in the promise of deliverance. He who needs 'deliverance' is the man who is surrounded by evils, and God's promise is not that no evil shall come to the man who trusts Him, but that he shall be delivered out of the evil that does come, and that it will not be truly evil.

And why is he to be delivered? 'Because he has bound himself to Me,' says God, 'therefore will I deliver him.' Of course, if I am fastened to God, nothing that does not hurt Him can hurt me. If I am knit to Him as closely as this psalm contemplates, it is impossible but that out of His fulness my emptiness shall be filled, and with His rejoicing strength my weakness will be made strong. It is just the same idea as is given to us in the picture of Peter upon the water, when the cold waves are up to his knees, and the coward heart says, 'I am ready to sink,' but yet, with the faith that comes with the fear, he puts out his hand and grasps Christ's hand, and as soon as he does, and the two are united, he is buoyant, and rises again, and the water is beneath the soles of his feet. 'He sent from above, He took me; He drew me out of many waters.' Whoever is

joined to God is lifted above all evil, and the evil that continues to eddy about him will change its character, and bear him onwards to his haven. For he who is thus knit to God in the living, pulsating bond of thought and affection and submission, will be delivered from sin.

When a boy first learns to skate, he needs some one to go behind him and hold him up whilst he uses his unaccustomed limbs; and so, when we are upon the smooth, treacherous ice of this wicked world, it is by leaning on God that we are kept upright. 'He hath set himself close to Me, I will deliver him,' says God. 'Yea! he shall not fall, for the Lord is able to make him stand.'

Still further, we have another great promise, which is the explanation and extension of the former, 'I will set him on high, because he hath known My name.' That is more than lifting a man up above the reach of the storms of life by means of any external deliverance. There is a better thing than that—namely, that our whole inward life be lived loftily. If it is true of us that we know His name, then our lives are 'hid with Christ in God,' and far below our feet will be all the riot of earth and its noise and tumult and change. We shall live serene and uplifted lives on the mount, if we know His name and have bound ourselves to Him, and the troubles and cares and changes and duties and joys of this present will be away down below us, like the lowly cottages in some poor village, seen from the mountain top, the squalor

out of sight, the magnitude diminished, the noise and tumult dimmed to a mere murmur that interrupts not the sacred silence of the lofty peak where we dwell with God. 'I will set him on high because he knows My name.'

Then, perhaps, there is a hint in the words, as there is in subsequent words of the verse, of an elevation even higher than that, when, life ended and earth done, He shall receive into His glory those whom He hath guided by His counsel. 'I will set him on high, because he hath known My name,' says the Jehovah of the Old Covenant. 'To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with Me on My throne,' says the Jesus of the New, who is the Jehovah of the Old.

WHAT GOD WILL DO FOR US

> 'He shall call upon Me, and I will answer him: I will be with him in trouble; I will deliver him, and honour him. 16. With long life will I satisfy him, and show him My salvation.'—PSALM xci. 15, 16.

When considering the previous verses of this

psalm, I pointed out that at its close we have God's own voice coming in to confirm and expand the promises which, in the earlier portion of it, have been made in His name to the devout heart. The words which we have now to consider cover the whole range of human life and need, and may be regarded as being a picture of the sure and blessed consequences of keeping our hearts fixed upon our Father, God. He Himself speaks them, and His word is true.

The verses of the text fall into three portions. There are promises for the suppliant, promises for the troubled, promises for mortals. 'He shall call upon Me and I will answer him'; that is for the suppliant. 'I will be with him in trouble; I will deliver him and honour him'; that is for the distressed. 'With long life will I satisfy him, and show him My salvation'; that is for the mortal. Now let us look at these three.

I. The promise to the suppliant.

'He will call upon Me and I will answer.' We may almost regard the first of these two clauses as part of the promise. It is not merely a Hebrew way of putting a supposition, 'If he calls upon Me, then I will answer him,' nor merely a virtual commandment, 'Call, if you expect an answer,' but itself is a part of the blessing and privilege of the devout and faithful heart. 'He shall call upon Me'; the King opens the door of His chamber and beckons us within.

In these great words we may see set forth both the instinct, as I may call it, of prayer, and the privilege of access to God. If a man's heart is set upon God, his very life-breath will be a cry to His Father. He will experience a need which is not degraded by being likened to an instinct, for it acts as certainly as do the instincts of the lower creatures, which guide them by the straightest possible road to the surest supply of their need. Any man who has learned in any measure to love God and trust Him will, in the measure in which he has so learned, live in the exercise and habit of prayer; and it will be as much his instinct to cry to God in all changing circumstances as it is for the swallows to seek the sunny south when the winter comes, or the cold north when the sunny south becomes torrid and barren. So, then, 'He shall call upon Me' is the characteristic of the truly God-knowing and God-loving heart, which was described in the previous verse. 'Because he has clung to Me in love, therefore will I deliver him; because he has known My name, therefore will I set him on high,' and because he has clung and known therefore it is certain that He will 'call upon Me.'

My friend! do you know anything of that instinctive appeal to God? Does it come to your heart and to your lips without your setting yourself to pray, just as the thought of dear ones on earth comes stealing into our minds a hundred times a day, when we do not intend it nor know exactly how it has

come? Does God suggest Himself to you in that fashion, and is the instinct of your hearts to call upon Him?

Again, we see here not only the unveiling of the very deepest and most characteristic attribute of the devout soul, but also the assurance of the privilege of access. God lets us speak to Him. And there is, further, a wonderful glimpse into the very essence of true prayer. 'He shall call upon Me.' What for? No particular object is specified as sought. It is God whom we want, and not merely any things that even He can give. If asking for these only or mainly is our conception of what prayer is, we know little about it. True prayer is the cry of the soul for the living God, in whom is all that it needs, and out of whom is nothing that will do it good. 'He shall call upon Me,' that is prayer.

'I will answer him.' Yes! Of course the instinct is not all on one side. If the devout heart yearns for God, God longs for the devout heart. If I might use such a metaphor, just as the ewe on one side of the hedge hears and answers the bleating of its lamb on the other, so, if my heart cries out for the living God, anything is more credible than that such a cry should not be answered. You may not get this, that, or the other blessing which you ask, for perhaps they are not blessings. You may not get what you fancy you need. We are not always good at translating our needs into words, and it is a mercy that there is Some One that understands what we do want a great

deal better than we do ourselves. But if below the specific petition there lies the cry of a heart that calls for the living God, then whether the specific petition be answered or dispersed into empty air will matter comparatively little. 'He shall call upon Me,' and that part of his prayer 'I will answer' and come to him and be in him. Is that our experience of what it is to pray, and our notion of what it is to be answered?

II. Further, here we have a promise for suppliants.

I take the next three clauses of the text as being all closely connected. 'I will be with him in trouble. I will deliver him and honour him'—in trouble, His presence; from trouble, His deliverance; after trouble, glorifying and refining. There are the whole theory and process of the discipline of the devout man's life.

'I will be with him in trouble.' The promise is not only that, when trials of any kind, larger or smaller, more grave or more slight, fall upon us, we shall become more conscious, if we take them rightly, of God's presence, but that all which is meant by God's presence shall really be more fully ours, and that He is, if I may say so, actually nearer us. Though, of course, all words about being near or far have only a very imperfect application to our relation to Him, still the gifts that are meant by His presence—that is to say, His sympathy, His help, His love—are more fully given to a man who in the darkness is groping for his Father's hand, and yet not so much groping

for as grasping it. He *is* nearer us as well as *felt* to be nearer us, if we take our sorrows rightly. The effect of sorrow devoutly borne, in bringing God closer to us, belongs to it, whether it be great or small; whether it be, according to the metaphor of an earlier portion of this psalm, 'a lion or an adder'; or whether it be a buzzing wasp or a mosquito. As long as anything troubles me, I may make it a means of bringing God closer to myself.

Therefore, there is no need for any sorrowful heart ever to say, 'I am solitary as well as sad.' He will always come and sit down by us, and if it be that, like poor Job upon his dunghill, we are not able to bear the word of consolation, yet He will wait there till we are ready to take it. He is there all the same, though silent, and will be near all of us, if only we do not drive Him away. 'He will call upon Me and I will answer him'; and the beginning of the answer is the real presence of God with every troubled heart.

Then there follows the next stage, deliverance from trouble; 'I will *deliver* him.' That is not the same word as is employed in the previous verse, though it is translated in the same way in our Bibles. The word here means lifting up out of a pit, or dragging up out of the midst of anything that surrounds a man, and so setting him in some place of safety. Is this promise always true, about people who in sorrow of any kind cast themselves upon God? Do they always get deliverance from Him? There are some sorrows from the pressure of which we shall never escape. Some of

us have to carry such. Has this promise no application to the people for whom outward life can never bring an end of the sorrows and burdens that they carry? Not so. He will deliver us not only by taking the burden off our backs, but by making us strong to carry it, and the sorrow, which has changed from wild and passionate weeping into calm submission, is sorrow from which we have been delivered. The serpent may still wound our heel, but if God be with us He will give us strength to press the wounded heel on the malignant head, and we can squeeze all the poison out of it. The bitterness remains; be it so, but let us be quite sure of this, that though sorrow be lifelong, that does not in the least contradict the great and faithful promise, 'I will be with him in trouble and deliver him,' for where He is *there* is deliverance.

Lastly, there is the third of these promises for the troubled. 'I will honour him.' The word translated 'honour' is more correctly rendered 'glorify.' Is not that the end of a trouble which has been borne in company with Him; and from which, because it has been so borne, a devout heart is delivered even whilst it lasts? Does not all such sorrow hallow, ennoble, refine, purify the sufferer, and make him liker his God? 'He for our profit, that we should be partakers of His holiness.' Is not that God's way of glorifying us before heaven's glory? When a blunt knife is ground upon a wheel, the sparks fly fast from the edge held down upon the swiftly-revolving emery

disc, but that is the only way to sharpen the dull blade. Friction, often very severe friction, and heat are indispensable to polish the shaft and turn the steel into a mirror that will flash back the sunshine. So when God holds us to His grindstone, it is to get a polish on the surface. 'I will deliver him and I will glorify him.'

III. Last of all, we have the promise for mortals.

'With long life will I satisfy him, and show him My salvation.' I do not know whether by that first clause the Psalmist meant, as people who sometimes like to make the Psalmist mean as little as possible tell us that he did mean, simply 'length of days.' For my own part I do not believe that he did. He meant that, no doubt, for longevity was part of the Old Testament promises for this life. But 'length of days' does not 'satisfy' all old people who attain to it, and that 'satisfaction' necessarily implies something more than the prolongation of the physical life to old age. The idea contained in this promise may be illustrated by the expression which is used in reference to a select few of the Old Testament saints, of whom it is recorded that they died 'full of days.' That does not merely mean that they had many days, but that, whatever the number, they had as many as they wished, and departed unreluctantly, having had enough of life. They looked back, and saw that all the past had been very good, and that goodness and mercy had determined and accompanied all their days, and so they did not wish to linger longer here,

but closed their eyes in peace, with no hungry, vain cravings for prolonged life. They had got all out of the world which it could give, and were contented to have done with it all.

So this promise assures us that, if we are of those who, in the midst of fleeting days, lay hold on the 'Ancient of Days' and live by Him, we shall find a table spread in the wilderness, and like travellers in an inn, having eaten enough, shall willingly obey the call to leave the meal provided on the road, and pass into the Father's house, and sit at the bountiful feast there.

The heart that lives near God, whether its years be few or many, will find in life all that life is capable of giving, and when the end comes will not be unwilling that it should come, nor hold on desperately to the last fag-end and fragment of life that it can keep within its clutches, but will be satisfied to have lived and be contented to die.

Nor is this all, for says the Psalmist, 'I will show him My salvation.' That sight comes after he is satisfied with length of days here. And so I think the fair interpretation of the words, in their place in this psalm, is, that however dimly, yet certainly, here the Psalmist saw something beyond. It was not a black curtain which dropped at death. He believed that, yonder, the man who here had been living near God, calling to Him, realising His presence, and satisfied with the fatness of His house upon earth, would see

something that would satisfy him more. 'I shall be satisfied when I awake in Thy likeness.' That is satisfaction indeed, and the vision, which is possession, of that perfected salvation is the vision that makes the blessedness of heaven.

So, dear friends! we, if we will, may have access to God's chamber at every moment, and may have His presence, which will make it impossible that we should ever be alone. We may have Him to deliver us from all the evil that is in evil, and to turn it into good. We may have Him to purge, and cleanse, and uplift, and change us into His likeness, even by the ministry of our trials. We may get out of life the last drop of the sweetness that He has put in it; and when it comes to a close, may say, 'It is enough! Let Thy servant depart in peace; for mine eyes have seen Thy salvation,' and then we may go to see it better in that world where we shall all, if we attain thither, be 'satisfied' when we 'awake in His likeness.'

FORGIVENESS AND RETRIBUTION

'Thou wast a God that forgavest them, though

> Thou tookest vengeance of their inventions.'—
> PSALM xcix. 8.

When the prophet Isaiah saw the great vision which called him to service, he heard from the lips of the seraphim around the Throne the threefold ascription of praise: 'Holy! holy! holy! Lord God of hosts.' This psalm seems to be an echo of that heavenly chorus, for it is divided into three sections, each of which closes with the refrain, 'He is holy,' and each of which sets forth some one aspect or outcome of that divine holiness. In the first part the holiness of His universal dominion is celebrated; in the second, the holiness of His revelations and providences to Israel, His inheritance; in the third, the holiness of His dealings with them that call upon His name, both when He forgives their sins and when He scourges for the sins that He has forgiven.

Two remarks of an expository character will prepare the way for what I have further to say. The first is that the word 'though' in my text, which holds together the two statements that it contains, is commentary rather than translation. For the original has the simple 'and,' and the difference between the two renderings is this, that 'though' implies some real or apparent contrariety between forgiveness and taking vengeance, which makes their co-existence remarkable, whereas 'and' lays the two things down side by side. The Psalmist simply declares that they are both there, and puts in no such fine distinction as is represented by the words 'though,' or 'but,' or 'yet.'

To me it seems a great deal more eloquent in its simplicity and reticence that he should say, 'Thou forgavest them and tookest vengeance,' than that he should say 'Thou forgavest them though Thou tookest vengeance.'

Then there is another point to be noted, viz. we must not import into that word 'vengeance,' when it is applied to divine actions, the notions which cluster round it when it is applied to ours. For in its ordinary use it means retaliation, inflicted at the bidding of personal enmity or passion. But there are no turbid elements of that sort in God. His retribution is a great deal more analogous to the unimpassioned, impersonal action of public law than it is to the 'wild justice of revenge.' When we speak of His 'vengeance' we simply mean—unless we have dropped into a degrading superstition—the just recompense of reward which divinely dogs all sin. There is one saying in Scripture which puts the whole matter in its true light, 'Vengeance is Mine; I will repay,' saith the Lord; the last clause of which interprets the first. So, then, with these elucidations, we may perhaps see a little more clearly the sequence of the Psalmist's thought here—God's forgiveness, and co-existing with that, God's scourging of the sin which He forgives; and both His forgiveness and the scourging, the efflux and the manifestation of the divine holiness. Now just let us look at these thoughts. Here we have—

I. The adoring contemplation of the divine

forgiveness.

I suppose that is almost exclusively a thought due to the historical revelation, through the ages, to Israel, crowned, as well as deepened, by the culmination and perfecting of the eternal revelation of God in Jesus Christ our Lord. I suppose the conception of a forgiving God is the product of the Old and of the New Testament. But familiar as the word is to us, and although the thing that it means is embodied in the creed of Christendom, 'I believe … in the forgiveness of sins,' I think that a great many of us would be somewhat put to it, if we were called upon to tell definitely and clearly what we mean when we speak of the forgiveness of sins. Many of us, prior to thinking about the matter, would answer 'the non-infliction or remission of penalty.' And I am far from denying that that is an element in forgiveness, although it is the lowest and the most external, in both the Old Testament and the New Testament conception of it. But we must rise a great deal higher than that. We are entitled, by our Lord's teaching, to parallel God's forgiveness and man's forgiveness; and so perhaps the best way to understand the perfect type of forgiveness is to look at the imperfect types which we see round us. What, then, do we mean by human forgiveness? It is seen in multitudes of cases where there is no question at all of penalty. Two men get alienated from one another. One of them does something which the other thinks is a sin against friendship or loyalty, and he who is sinned against

says, 'I forgive you.' That does not mean that he does not inflict a penalty, because there is no penalty in question. Forgiveness is not a matter of conduct, then, primarily, but it is a matter of disposition, of attitude, or, to put it into a shorter word, it is a matter of the heart; and even on the lower level of the human type, we see that remission of penalty may be a part, sometimes is and sometimes is not, but is always the smallest part of it, and a derivative and secondary result of something that went before. An unconscious recognition of this attitude of mind and heart, as being the essential thing in forgiveness, brings about an instance of the process by which two words that originally mean substantially the same thing come to acquire each its special shade of meaning. What I refer to is this—when a judicial sentence on a criminal is remitted, we never hear any one speak about the criminal being 'forgiven.' We keep the word 'pardon,' in our daily conventional intercourse, for slight offences or for the judicial remission of a sentence. The king pardons a criminal; you never hear about the king 'forgiving' a criminal. And that, as I take it, is just because people have been groping after the thought that I am trying to bring out, viz. that the remission of penalty is one thing, and purging the heart of all alienation and hatred is another; and that the latter is forgiveness, whilst the former has to be content with being pardon.

The highest type of forgiveness is the paternal.

Every one of us who remembers our childhood, and every one of us who has had children of his own, knows what paternal forgiveness is. It is not when you put away the rod that the little face brightens again and the tears cease to flow, but it is when *your* face clears, and the child knows that there is no cloud between it and the father, or still more the mother, that forgiveness is realised. The immediate effect of our transgressions is that we, as it were, thereby drop a great, black rock into the stream of the divine love, and the channel is barred by our action; and God's forgiveness is when, as was the case in another fashion in the Deluge, the floods rise above the tops of the highest hills; and as the good old hymn that has gone out of fashion nowadays, says, over sins:

'Like the mountains for their size,
The seas of sovereign grace arise.'

When the love of God flows over the black rock, as the incoming tide does over some jagged reef, then, and not merely when the rod is put on the shelf, is forgiveness bestowed and received.

But, as I have said, the remission of penalty *is* an element in forgiveness. Some people say: 'It is a very dangerous thing, in the interests of Christian truth, to treat that relation of a loving Father as if it expressed all that God is to men.' Quite so; God is King as well as Father. There are analogies, both in paternal and regal government, which help us to understand the

divine dealings with us; though, of course, in regard to both we must always remember that the analogies are remote and not to be pressed too far. But even in recognising the fact that an integral part of forgiveness is remission of penalty, we come back, by another path, to the same point, that the essence of forgiveness is the uninterrupted flow of love. Remission of penalty;—yes, by all means. But then the question comes, what *is* the penalty of sin? And I suppose that the deepest answer to that is, separation from God. But if the true New Testament conception of the penalty of sin is the eternal death which is the result of the rending of a man away from the Source of life, then the remission of the penalty is precisely identical with the uninterrupted flow of the divine love. The mists of autumnal mornings drape the sky in gloom, and turn the blessed sun itself into a lurid ball of fire. Sweep away the mists, and its rays again pour out beneficence. The man who sins, piles up, as it were, a cloud-bank between himself and God, and forgiveness, which is the remission of the penalty, is the sweeping away of the cloud-bank, and the pouring out of sunshine upon a darkened heart. So, brethren! the essence of forgiveness is that God shall love me all the same, though I sin against Him.

But now turn, in the next place, to

II. God's scourging of the sin which He forgives.

Look at the instances in our psalm, 'Moses and Aaron among His priests…. They called upon the

Lord and He answered them. Thou wast a God that forgavest them, and Thou tookest vengeance of their doings.' Moses dies on Pisgah, Aaron is stripped of his priestly robes by his brother's hand and left alone amongst the clouds and the eagles, on the solitary summit of the mountain, and yet Moses and Aaron knew themselves forgiven the sins for which they died those lonely deaths. And these are but instances of what is universally true, that the sin which is pardoned is also 'avenged' in the sense of having retribution dealt out to it.

I need not dwell upon this at any length, but let me just remind you how there are two provinces of human experience in which this is abundantly true: one, that of outward consequences, and another that of inward consequences. Take, for instance, two men, boon companions, who together have wasted their substance in riotous living. One of them is converted, as we call it, becomes a Christian, knows himself forgiven. The other one is not. Is the one less certain to have a corrugated liver than the other? Will the disease, the pauperism, the ruined position in life, the loss of reputation be any different in the cases of him who is pardoned and of him who is not? No; the two will suffer in a similar fashion, and the different attitude that the one has to the divine love from that which the other has, will not make a hair of difference as to the results that follow. The consequences are none the less divine retribution because they are the result of natural laws, and none

the less penal because they are automatically inflicted.

There is another department in which we see the same law working, and that is the inward consequences. A man does change his attitude to his former sins, when he knows that he is pardoned; but the results of these sins will follow all the same, whether he is forgiven or not. Memory will be tarnished, habits will be formed and chain a man, capacities will be forfeited, weaknesses will ensue. The wounds may be healed, but the scars will remain, and when we consider how certainly, and as I said, divinely, such issues dog all manner of transgression, we can understand what the Psalmist meant when, not thinking about a future retribution, but about the present life's experiences, he said, 'Thou wast a God that forgavest them, and Thou tookest vengeance of their inventions.' 'The sluggard will not plough by reason of the cold, therefore shall he beg in harvest, and have nothing,' and that will be his case whether he is forgiven, or not forgiven, by the divine love.

So, dear friends! do not let us confound the two things which are so widely separated, the flow of the divine love to us irrespective of our sins, which is the true forgiveness, and the remission of the penalty, the infliction of which may itself be a part of forgiveness. 'Whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap,' and he will reap it whether he has sown darnel and tares and poisonous seeds, of which he is

now ashamed, and for which he has received forgiveness, or whether he has not asked nor received it.

Only remember that if we humbly realise the great fact that God has forgiven us, we can, as they say, 'take our punishment' in an altogether different spirit and temper, and it comes to be, not judicial penalty, but paternal chastisement, the token of love, and of which we can say that 'We are judged of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world.'

Lastly, my text leads us to think of—

III. Forgiveness and scourging as both issues of holy love.

Some people, in their narrow and altogether superficial view of Christianity, would divide between the two, and say forgiveness comes from God's love, and scourging comes from His holiness. But this psalm puts the two together, just as we must put together as inseparable from each other the two conceptions of holiness and of love. Now our modern notions of what is meant by the love of God are a great deal too sentimental and gushing and limp. Love is degraded unless there be holiness in it. It becomes immoral good nature, much more than anything that deserves the name of love. A God who is all love, so much so that it makes no difference to Him whether a man is a saint or a sinner, is not a God to be worshipped, and scarcely a God to be

admired. He is lower than we, not higher. But His holy love is like a sea of glass mingled with fire; the love being shot all through, as it were, with streams of flame.

This holy love underlies the forgiveness of sins. To forgive may sometimes be profoundly right; it may sometimes be profoundly immoral. A general gaol delivery simply sets the scoundrels free; a universal amnesty is a failure of justice, and a very doubtful benefit. But the forgiveness, which is the issue of holy love, is a means to an end, and the end which it has in view is that, drawn by answering love to a pardoning God, we may be drawn from the sins which alienate us from Him. There is no such sure way of making a man forsake his sins as to give him the assurance that God has forgiven them. 'Thou shalt be ashamed and confounded, and never open thy mouth any more, because of thy sins, when'—I smite? no—'I am pacified towards thee for all that thou hast done.' 'Thou wast a God that forgavest them,' and in the very act of forgiving, didst draw them from their sins.

That holy love, in like manner, underlies retribution. I have been speaking of retribution mainly as it is seen in the working of natural law. It is none the less God's act, because it is the operation of the laws which He impressed upon His creation at the beginning. You have weaving machines in your mills that whenever a thread breaks, stop dead. Is it the machine or the maker that is to get the credit of

that? God has set us in an order of things wherein, and has given us a nature whereby, automatically, every sin, as it were, stops the loom, and 'every transgression and disobedience receives its just recompense of reward.' But men sometimes say 'that is Nature; that is not God.' God lies at the back of Nature, and works through Nature. Although Nature is not God, God is Nature. Therefore it is 'Thou' that 'takest vengeance of their inventions.' Let us, then, remember that retribution is a token of love, meant to drive us from our sins, just as forgiveness is meant to draw us from them. Our Psalmist had come the length of putting these two things together, forgiveness and retribution. We have reached further, and here is the New Testament enlargement and deepening and explanation of the Old Testament thought: 'If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins,' and in the very act, 'to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.' 'If any man sin, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the Righteous.'

INVIOLABLE MESSIAHS AND PROPHETS

> 'He reproved kings for their sakes; 15. Saying, Touch not Mine anointed, and do My prophets no harm.'—PSALM cv. 14, 15.

The original reference of these words is to the fathers of the Jewish people—the three wandering shepherds, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The Psalmist transfers to them the great titles which properly belong to a later period of Jewish history. None of the three were ever in the literal sense of the word 'anointed,' but all the three had what anointing symbolised. None of them were in the literal or narrow sense of the word 'prophets'—that is to say, predicters of future events—but one of them was called a 'prophet' even in his lifetime. And they all possessed that intimacy of communion with God which imparted the power of *forth-speaking for* Him. Insignificant as they were, they were bigger than the Pharaohs and Abimelechs and the other kinglets that strutted their little day beside them. Astonished as the monarch of Egypt would have been, or the king of the Philistines either, if he had been told that the wandering shepherd was of far more importance for the world than he was, it was true. 'He suffered no man to do them wrong: yea, He reproved kings for their sakes, saying, Touch not Mine anointed, and do My prophets no harm.'

Further, as Judaism, with its anointings and prophecies was a narrower system following upon a wider one, so a wider one has succeeded it; and we step into the position occupied by these patriarchs—

on whose heads no anointing oil had been poured, and into whose lips no supernatural gifts of prediction had been infused. It is no arrogance, but the simplest recognition of the essential facts of the case, if we take these words of the Psalmist's and transfer them bodily to the whole mass of Christian people, and to each individual atom that makes up the mass. All are anointed; all are prophets; of all it is true that God suffers no man nor thing to do them wrong. And kings and dynasties and the politics of the world are all in the hands of One whose supreme purpose is that through men there may be made known to all mankind the significant tidings of His love. Therefore, His Church is founded upon a rock, and earth is the servant of the servants of God.

I. Every Christian is a 'messiah.'

You know that the word 'anointed' is a translation of the Hebrew word 'Messiah,' or of the Greek word 'Christ.' The meaning of the symbolic 'anointing' was simply consecration to office by the divine will, and endowment with the capacity for that office by the divine gift. In the ancient system it was mainly employed—though not, perhaps, exclusively—as a means of designating, and when received in humble dependence on God, of fitting, a man for the two great offices of king and priest.

Oil was an appropriate symbol. Its gentle flow, its soothing, suppling effect, and in another aspect, its value as a means of invigoration and sustenance, and

in yet another, as a source of light, peculiarly adapted it to be an emblem of the bestowment on a patient and trustful and submissive heart that was saying, 'Lord, take me, and use me as Thou wilt,' of that divine Spirit by whose silent, sweet, soft-flowing, strong influences men were prepared for God's service.

Jesus was the Christ, the Messias, because that Divine Spirit dwelt in Him without measure. If we are Christians in the real sense of the word, then, however imperfectly, yet really, and by God's grace increasingly, there is such a union between us and our Saviour as that into us there does flow the anointing of His Spirit. There being a community of life derived from the Source of Life, it is no presumption to say that every Christian man is a Christ.

The word has been used of late with unwise significations, but the truth that has been inadequately expressed by such uses is the great truth of Scripture; 'He that is joined to the Lord is one Spirit,' and there does flow the anointing oil from the head of the High Priest to the skirts of the garments. Every man and woman who has any hold of Jesus Christ at all, in the measure of his or her hold, is drawing from Him this 'unction of the Holy One.' So, brethren, rise to the solemnity, the awfulness, the joyfulness of your true position, and understand that you, too, are anointed, though not for the same purposes (and in humbler and derived

fashion), for which the Spirit dwelt without measure upon 'the First-born among many brethren.'

Kings were anointed; and when that divine gift comes into a man's heart, it, and as I believe, only it, makes him lord of himself, of circumstances, of time, and of the world. 'All things are yours, and ye are Christ's.' There is one real royalty—the royalty of the man who rules because he submits. Every Christian soul may be described as Gideon's brethren were described, 'As thou art, so were they: each one resembled the children of a king,' for if Christ's Spirit is in the Christian's spirit, the disciple will grow like his Master, and it will be growingly true of us, that 'as He is, so are we in this world.'

Priests were anointed. And we, if we are Christian people, have the prerogative of direct access to the Divine Presence, and need neither Church nor sacraments to intervene or mediate between us and Him. The true democracy of Christianity lies in that word 'Mine anointed.'

II. Further, every Christian man is a prophet.

I have already said that there is no historical warrant for supposing that the gift of prophecy, in its narrower sense, was ever bestowed upon any of these patriarchs. But prediction is only one corner of the prophetic office. The word is connected with a root which means 'to boil, or bubble like a fountain,' and it expresses, not so much the theme of the

utterance as its nature. The welling up, from a full heart, of God's thoughts and God's truth, that is prophecy. The patriarchs were prophets, not in the sense that they had the gift of beholding and foretelling visions of the future, and all the wonder that should be, but in the higher sense—for it is the higher as well as broader—of being bearers of a divine word, breathed into them by that anointing Spirit, that it might be uttered forth by them. That sort of prophetic inspiration belongs to all Christians. It is the result of the relationship between Christ and Christians of which we have been speaking. Every one who has been anointed will be thus gifted.

God's 'messiahs' will be God's prophets. If we are in touch with God, and have our hearts and whole spiritual natures drawn and kept so near Him as that we are ever receiving from Him of His transcendent and mysterious life, then silence will be impossible. The lips will not be able to contain themselves, but will speak forth that of which the heart is full. And thus every Christian man, in the measure of his true Christianity, will be a prophet of the most High.

I do not need to point the lesson. A silent Christian is an anomaly, a contradiction in terms, as much as black light, or dark stars. If Christ is in you He will come out of you. If your hearts are full the crystal treasure will flow over the brim. It is easy to be dumb when you have nothing to say, and that is the condition of hundreds of people who fancy themselves to be, and are called by others,

'Christians.' 'Mine anointed' cannot help being 'My prophets.' If you are not prophets, if there never is any bubbling up of the fountain demanding utterance, ask yourselves whether there is any fountain there at all.

III. And so, lastly, every Christian man, in his double capacity of anointed and prophet, is watched over by God.

One is tempted to diverge into wider considerations, and speak of the relative importance of things secular and sacred (to adopt a doubtful distinction) in the history of the world, and how the former are for the sake of the latter. But I do not yield to the temptation. Let me rather take the thought here as it applies to our own little lives.

Abraham more than once in his lifetime, though sometimes by his own fault, was brought into very perilous places. There are one or two incidents which are familiar to most of us, I dare say, in his life which are evidently referred to in the phrase 'He reproved kings for their sakes.' The principle remains in full force to-day, and God says to every thing and person, Death included, 'Do My prophets no harm.' They may slay; they cannot harm. If I might use a very homely metaphor, sportsmen train retriever dogs to bring their game without ruffling a feather. God trains evils and sorrows to lay hold of us, and bring us to, and lay us down at, His feet untouched.

There is no real harm in so-called evil. That is the interpretation that Christianity gives to such words as this of my text, not because it is forced to weaken them by the obstinate facts of life, but because it has learned to strengthen them by the understanding of what is harm and what is good; what is gain and what is loss. Peter shall be delivered out of prison by the skin of his teeth when they are hammering at the scaffold on the other side of the wall, and the dawn is just beginning to show itself in the sky; whilst James shall have his head cut off. Was that because God loved Peter better than James? Was one harmed and the other not? Ah! Peter's turn came all in good time. Peter and his brother Paul had both to bow their necks to the headsman's sword one day, although one of them said, 'Who shall harm you if ye be followers of that which is good?' and the other said, when within sight of his death, 'He shall deliver me from every evil work.' Were they disappointed? Let us hear how Paul ends the same verse: 'and shall save me into His heavenly kingdom.' Ay! and he *was* 'saved into the heavenly kingdom' when outside the walls of Rome; where a gaudy church stands now, he died for his Master. No harm came to him. God said to Death, 'Do My prophet no harm!' and Death docilely did him good, and brought him to his Lord.

Only, dear friends! let us remember that the inviolableness of the ambassador depends on his function, and not on his person; and that if we want to be kept from all evil, we must do the work for

which we have been sent here. So let us understand the meaning of our difficulties and sorrows. Let us set ourselves to our tasks, live up to the level of the high names which we have a right to claim, and be sure that there is no harm in the harm that befalls us; and that all evil things 'work together for good to them that love God.'

GOD'S PROMISES TESTS

'Until the time that his word came, the word of the Lord tried him.'

—PSALM cv. 19.

I do not think I shall be mistaken if I affirm that these words do not convey any very clear idea to most readers. They were spoken with reference to Joseph, during the period of his imprisonment. For the understanding of them I think we must observe that there is a contrast drawn between two 'words,' 'his' (*i.e.* Joseph's) and God's. If we lay firm hold of that clue, I think it will lead us into clear daylight, and it will be obvious that Joseph's word, which delayed its coming, or fulfilment, was either his boyish narrative of the dreams that foreshadowed his

exaltation, or less probably, his words to his fellow-prisoners in the interpretation of their dreams. In either case, the *terminus ad quem*, the point to which our attention is directed, is the period when that word came to be fulfilled, and what my text says is that during that long season of unfulfilled hope, the 'word of God,' which was revealed in Joseph's dream, and was the ground on which his own 'word' rested —did what? Encouraged, heartened, strengthened him? No, that unfulfilled promise might encourage or discourage him; but the Psalmist fixes our thoughts on another effect which, whether it encouraged or discouraged, it certainly had, namely, that it tested him, and found out what stuff he was made of, and whether there was staying power enough in him to hold on, in unconquerable faith, to a promise made long since, communicated by no more reliable method than a dream, and of the fulfilment of which not the faintest sign had, for all these weary years, appeared. His circumstances, judged by appearances, shattered his early visions, and bade him believe them to be no more than the boyish aspirations which grown men dismiss or find melt away of themselves when life's realities wake the dreamer. We might either say that the non-fulfilment of the promise tested Joseph, or that the promise, by its non-fulfilment, tested him. The Psalmist chooses the latter more forcible and half paradoxical mode of speech. It proved the depth and vitality of his faith, and his ability to see things that are not as though they were. Will this man be able

continually through years of poverty and imprisonment to keep his eye on the light beyond, to see his star through clouds? Will he despise the 'light affliction,' in the potent and immovable belief that it is 'but for a moment?'

Thus, for all these years the great blessed word, or the hope that was built upon it, tested Joseph in the very depths of his soul. And is not that just what our anticipations, built upon God's assurances, whether they are in regard to earthly matters that seem long in coming, or whether they, as they ought to do, travel beyond the bounds of the material, to grasp *the* hope which is *the* promise, 'the hope of eternal life,' ought to do for us, test us and find out what sort of people we are? And they do!

Let us go back to the man in our text. According to some commentators, he was imprisoned for something like ten years. We do not know how long his Egyptian bondage had lasted, nor how long before that his endurance of the active ill-will of his surly brothers had gone on. But at all events his chrysalis stage was very long, and one would not have wondered if he had said to himself, down in that desert pit or in that Egyptian dungeon, 'Ah, yes! they *were* dreams, and *only* dreams,' or if he had, as so many of us do, turned his back on his youthful visions, and gained the sad power of being able to smile at his old hopes and ambitions. Brethren! especially you young men and women, cherish your youthful dreams. They are often the prophecies of

capacities and possibilities, signs of what God means you to make yourselves. But that is apart from my subject. Suppose we had clear before us, with unwavering confidence in its reality, the great promise which God has given us, do you not think that its presence would purify our souls, and give power and dignity to our lives?

The promise was a test, says my text. The word which it employs to designate the manner of testing or trying, is one drawn from the smelting operations of the goldsmith, by which, heat being applied, the mass is made fluid and the dross is run off, and as the result of the trial, there flows out gold refined by fire.

'Having these promises, dearly beloved! let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit.' 'Every man who hath this hope in Him purifieth himself, even as He is pure.' The result of the great promise of eternal life and of the hope that it kindles is meant to be that it shall purge our spirits from meanness, from sense, from undue dependence upon the miserable trivialities of to-day, that it shall emancipate us from slavery to the moment, and lead us into the liberty of the eternities, 'while we look not at the things that are seen, but at the things which are not seen.' Oh! if we would only see clearly and habitually before us—for we could if we would —what God's heart inclines Him to do for us, and what He certainly will do for us, in the far-off future, if we will only let Him, do you not think that these

trifles that put us off our equanimity this morning would have been borne with a little more composure? Do you not think that the things that looked so huge when we were down abreast of them would, by the laws of perspective, diminish in their proportions as we rose steadily above them, until all the hubbub in the valley was unheard on the mountain peak, and the great trees that waved their giant branches below and shut out the sky from our eyes while we were among them would dwindle to a green smear on the plain, and all the foes 'show scarce so gross as beetles,' from the height from which we look down upon them? Get up beside God's promise, if you would take the true dimensions of cares and tasks, and burdens and sorrows. Then, brother! you will learn the truth of the paradox, 'light … but for a moment'; though often they all but crush the burden-bearing shoulder and seem to last through slow years.

'The word of the Lord tried him,' and because it tried him, it purified him. If we give credence, as we ought to, to that word, it will purify *us*, and it will test of what contexture our faith is. The further away the object of any hope is, the more noble the cherishing of it makes a life. The trivial, short-lived anticipations which do not look beyond the end of next week are far less operative in making strong and noble characters than are those, of whatever kind they may be otherwise, which look far ahead and need years for their realisation. It is a blessing to

have the mark far, far away, because that means that the arm that pulls the bow must draw more strongly, and the eye that sees the goal must gaze more intently. Be thankful for the promise that cannot be fulfilled in this world because it lifts us above the low levels, and already makes us feel as if we were endowed with immortality.

The word will test our patience, and it will test our willingness, though we be heirs of the kingdom, to do humble tasks. Christian men in this world are sons of a King, and look forward to a royal inheritance, but in the meantime they have, as it were, to keep a little huckster's shop in a back alley. But if we adequately realised the promise of our inheritance, the meanness of our surroundings and the triviality of our occupations would not make us mean or trivial, but our souls would be 'like stars' and 'dwell apart' while we travelled 'on life's common way in cheerful godliness,' and did small duties in such a manner as to make them great.

Because Joseph was sure that God's long-lingering word would be fulfilled, he did not mind though he had to be the lackey of his brothers, the Midianites' chattel, Potiphar's slave, Pharaoh's prisoner, and a servant of servants in his dungeon. So with us, the measure of our willing acceptance of our present tasks, burdens, humiliations, and limitations is the measure of our firm faith in the promise that tarries.

'If we hope for what we see not, then do we with

patience wait for it,' says the Apostle, though most of us would have said exactly the opposite. We generally suppose that the more ardent the hope, the more is it impatient of delay. Paul had learned better. The more certain the assurance, the better we can tolerate the procrastination of its fulfilment.

So, brethren! God's greatest gift to us, like all His other gifts, has in it the quality of testing us; and we can come to a pretty fair approximation to an estimate of what sort of Christian people we are, by observing how we deal with God's promises of help according to our need here and of heaven hereafter. How do we deal with them? Why, a sadly large number of us never think about them at all; and a large proportion of the others would a great deal rather stay working in the huckster's shop in the back alley, than go home to the King. I am quite sure that if the inmost sentiments of the bulk of professing Christians about a future life were dragged into light, these would be a revelation of a faith all honeycombed with insincerity. God tests us, and it is a sharp test if we submit ourselves to it; He tests us by His promises. 'Child, wilt thou believe?' is the first testing question put to us by these. 'Wilt thou keep them hid in thy heart?' is the next. 'Wilt thou go out towards them in desire?' is the next. 'Wilt thou live worthy of them?' is the last. 'The word of the Lord tried him.'

So let us be thankful for the delays of love, for the wide gap between promise and realisation. It was for

Joseph's sake that the slow years were multiplied between the first gleam of his future and the full sunshine of his exaltation. And it is for our sakes that God in like manner protracts the period of anticipation and non-fulfilment. 'If the vision tarry, wait for it.' 'Jesus loved Mary and Martha and Lazarus their brother' very dearly. 'When He heard, therefore, that he was sick, He abode still two days'—to give time for Lazarus to die—'in the same place where He was.' Ay, and when each sister came to Him with her most natural and yet most faithless 'Lord! if Thou hadst been here my brother had not died,' He only said, 'If thou wouldst believe thou shouldst see the glory of God.' Was not Lazarus dearer, restored from the grave, than he would have been, raised from his sickbed? Is not the delaying of the blessing a means of increase of the blessing? And shall not we be sure that however long 'He that shall come' may seem to tarry ere He comes, when He *has* come they who have waited for His coming more than they that watch for the morning and have sometimes been ready to cry out: 'Hath the Lord forgotten? Doth His promise fail for ever more?' will be ashamed of their impatient moments and will humbly and thankfully exclaim: 'He came at the very right time and did *not* tarry.' 'Until the time that his word came, the word of the Lord tried him,' and the coming of that word was all the more blessed for every heavy-laden hour of hope deferred, which, by God's grace, did not make the heart sick, but prepared it for fuller possession of the blessings

enhanced by the delays of love.

SOLDIER PRIESTS

> 'Thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power, in the beauties of holiness from the womb of the morning: thou hast the dew of thy youth.'—PSALM cx. 3.

It is no part of my present purpose to establish the reference of this psalm to our Lord. We have Christ's own authority for that.

It does not seem to be typical—that is to say, it does not appear to have had a lower application to a king of Israel who was a shadow of the true monarch, but rather to refer only to the coming Sovereign, whom David was helped to discern, indeed, by his own regal office, but whose office and character, as here set forth, far surpass anything belonging to him or to his dynasty. The attributes of the King, the union in His case of the royal and priestly dignities, His seat at the right hand of God, His acknowledged supremacy over the greatest Jewish ruler, who here calls him 'my Lord,' His eternal dominion, His conquest of many nations, and

His lifting up of His head in triumphant rule that knows no end—all these characteristics seem to forbid the possibility of a double reference, and to demand the acknowledgment of a distinct and exclusive prophecy of Christ.

Taking that for granted without more words, it strikes one as remarkable that this description of the subjects of the Priest-King should be thus imbedded in the very heart of the grand portraiture of the monarch Himself. It is the anticipation of the profound New Testament thought of the unity of Christ and His Church. By simple faith a union is brought about so close and intimate that all His is theirs, and the picture of His glory is incomplete without the vision of 'the Church, which is His body, the fulness of Him that filleth all in all.' Therefore, between the word of God which elevates Him to His right hand, and the oath of God which consecrates Him a priest for ever, is this description of the army of the King.

The full force of the words will, I hope, appear as we advance. For the present it will be enough to say that there are really in our text three co-ordinate clauses, all descriptive of the subjects of the monarch, regarded as a band of warriors—and that the main ideas are these:—the subjects are willing soldiers; the soldiers are priests; the priest-soldiers are as dew upon the earth. Or, in other words, we have here the very heart of the Christian character set forth as being willing consecration; then we have

the work which Christian men have to do, and the spirit in which they are to do it, expressed in that metaphor of their priestly attire; and then we have their refreshing and quickening influence upon the world.

I. The subjects of the Priest-King are willing soldiers.

In accordance with the warlike tone of the whole psalm, our text describes the subjects as an army. That military metaphor comes out more clearly when we attach the true meaning to the words, 'in the day of Thy power.' The word rendered, and rightly rendered, 'power,' has the same ambiguity which that word has in the English of the date of our translation, and for a century later, as you may find in Shakespeare and Milton, who both used it in the sense of 'army.' Singularly enough we do not employ 'powers' in that meaning, but we do another word which means the same thing—and talk of 'forces,' meaning thereby 'troops.' By the way, what a melancholy sign it is of the predominance of that infernal military spirit, that it should have so leavened language, that the 'forces' of a nation means its soldiers, its embattled energies turned to the work of destruction. But the phrase is so used here. 'The day of Thy power' is not a mere synonym for 'the time of Thy might,' but means specifically 'the day of Thine army,' that is, 'the day when Thou dost muster Thy forces and set them in array for the war.'

The King is going forth to conquest. But He goes not alone. Behind Him come His faithful followers, all pressing on with willing hearts and high courage. Then, to begin with, the warfare which He wages is one not confined to Him. Alone He offers the sacrifice by which He atones; but, as we shall see, we too are priests. He rules, and His servants rule with Him. But ere that time comes, they are to be joined with Him in the great warfare by which He wins the earth for Himself. 'As Captain of the Lord's host am I now come.' He wins no conquests for Himself; and now that He is exalted at God's right hand, He wins none by Himself. We have to do His work, we have to fight His battles as good soldiers of Jesus Christ. By power derived from Him, but wielded by ourselves; with courage inspired by Him, but filling our hearts; not as though He needed us, but inasmuch as He is pleased to use us, we have to wage warfare for and to please Him who hath chosen us to be soldiers. The Captain of our salvation sits at the right hand of God, expecting till His enemies be made His footstool. He has bidden us to keep the field and fight the fight. From His height He watches the conflict—nay, He is with us while we wage it. So long as we strike for Him, so long is it His power that teaches our hands to war. Our King's flag is committed to our care; but we are not left to defend it alone. In indissoluble unity, the King and the subjects, the Chief and His vassals, the Captain and His soldiers, are knit together—and wheresoever His people are, in all the danger and hardships of the

long struggle, there is He, to keep their heads in the day of battle, and make them more than conquerors.

Then, again, that warfare is shared in by all the subjects. It is a levy *en masse*—an armed nation. The whole of the people are embodied for the battle. It is not the work of a select few, but of every one who calls Christ 'Lord,' to be His faithful servant and soldier. Whatever varieties of occupation may be set us by Him, one purpose is to be kept in view and one end to be effected by them all. Every Christian man is bound to strive for the reduction of all human hearts under Christ's dominion. The tasks may be different, but the result should be one. Some of us have to toil in the trenches, some of us to guard the camp, some to lead the assault, some to stay by the stuff and keep the communications open. Be it so. We are all soldiers, and He alone has to determine our work. We are responsible for the spirit of it, He for its success.

Again, there are no *mercenaries* in these ranks, no pressed men. The soldiers are all volunteers. 'Thy people shall be willing.' Pause for a moment upon that thought.

Dear brethren! there are two kinds of submission and service. There is submission because you cannot help it, and there is submission because you like it. There is a sullen bowing down beneath the weight of a hand which you are too feeble to resist, and there is a glad surrender to a love which it would be a pain

not to obey. Some of us feel that we are shut in by immense and sovereign power which we cannot oppose. And yet, like some raging rebel in a dungeon, or some fluttering bird in a cage, we beat ourselves, all bruised and bloody, against the bars in vain attempts at liberty, alternating with fits of cowed apathy as we slink into a corner of our cell. Some of us, thank God! feel that we are enclosed on every side by that mighty Hand which none can resist, and from which we would not stray if we could, and we joyfully hide beneath its shelter, and gladly obey when it points. Constrained obedience is no obedience. Unless there be the glad surrender of the will and heart, there is no surrender at all. God does not want compulsory submission. He does not care to rule over people who are only crushed down by greater power. He does not count that those serve who sullenly acquiesce because they dare not oppose. Christ seeks for no pressed men in His ranks. Whosoever does not enlist joyfully is not reckoned as His. And the question comes to us, brethren!—What is my relation to that loving Lord, to that Redeemer King? Do I submit because His love has won my heart, and it would be a pang not to serve Him; or do I submit because I know Him strong, and am afraid to refuse? If the former, all is well; He calls us 'not servants but friends.' If the latter, all is wrong; we are not subjects, but enemies.

There is another idea involved in this description. The soldiers are not only marked by glad obedience,

but that obedience rests upon the sacrifice of themselves. The word here rendered 'willing' is employed throughout the Levitical law for 'freewill offerings.' And if we may venture to bring that reference in here, it carries us a step farther in this characterisation of the army. This glad submission comes from self-consecration and surrender. It is in that host as it was in the army whose heroic self-devotion was chaunted by Deborah under her palm-tree, 'The people willingly offered themselves.' Hence came courage, devotion, victory. With their lives in their hands they flung themselves on the foe, and nothing could stand against the onset of men who recked not of themselves. There is one grand thing even about the devilry of war—the transcendent self-abnegation with which, however poor and unworthy may be the cause, a man casts himself away, 'what time the foeman's line is broke.' The poorest, vulgarest, most animal natures rise for a moment into something like nobility, as the surge of the strong emotion lifts them to that height of heroism. Life is then most glorious when it is given away for a great cause. That sacrifice is the one noble and chivalrous element which gives interest to war—the one thing that can be disentangled from its hideous associations, and can be transferred to higher regions of life. That spirit of lofty consecration and utter self-forgetfulness must be ours, if we would be Christ's soldiers. Our obedience will then be glad when we feel the force of, and yield to, that gentle, persuasive entreaty, 'I beseech you, brethren! by the mercies of

God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice.' There is 'one Sacrifice for sin for ever'—which never can be repeated, nor exhausted, nor copied. And the loving, faithful acceptance of that sacrifice of propitiation leads our hearts to the response of thank-offering, the sacrifice and surrender of ourselves to Him who has given Himself not only to, but for us. It cannot be recompensed, but it may be acknowledged. Let us give ourselves to Christ, for He has died for us. Let us give ourselves to Christ, for only in such surrender do we truly find ourselves. Let us give ourselves to Christ, for such a sacrifice makes all life fair and noble, and that altar sanctifies the gift. Let us give ourselves to Christ, for without such sacrifice we have no place in the host whom He leads to victory. 'Thy people shall be willing offerings in the day of Thy power.'

Still further, another remarkable idea may be connected with this word. By a natural transition, of which illustrations may be found in other languages, it comes to mean '*free*,' and also '*noble*.' As, for instance, it is used in the fifty-first Psalm, 'Uphold me with Thy *free* Spirit'—and in the forty-seventh, 'The *princes* of the people are gathered together.' And does not this shading of significations—willing sacrifices, free, princely—remind us of another distinctly evangelical principle, that the willing service which rests upon glad consecration raises him who renders it to true freedom and dominion? Every man enlisted in His body-guard is noble. The Prince's servants are

every other person's master. The King's livery exempts from all other submission. As in the old Saxon monarchies, the monarch's domestics were nobles, the men of Christ's household are ennobled by their service. They who obey Him are free from every yoke of bondage—'free indeed.' All things serve the soul that serves Christ. 'He hath made us kings unto God.'

II. The soldiers are priests.

That expression, 'in the beauties of holiness,' is usually read as if it belonged either to the words immediately preceding, or to those immediately following. But in either case the connection is somewhat difficult and obscure. It seems better regarded as a distinct and separate clause, adding a fresh trait to the description of the army, and what that is we need not find any difficulty in ascertaining. 'The beauties of holiness' is a frequent phrase for the sacerdotal garments, the holy festal attire of the priests of the Lord. So considered, how beautifully it comes in here! The conquering King whom the psalm hymns is a Priest for ever; and He is followed by an army of priests. The soldiers are gathered in the day of the muster, with high courage and willing devotion, ready to fling away their lives; but they are clad not in mail, but in priestly robes—like those who wait before the altar rather than like those who plunge into the fight—like those who compassed Jericho with the ark for their standard, and the trumpets for all their weapons. We can

scarcely fail to remember the words which echo these and interpret them: 'The armies which were in heaven followed Him on white horses, clothed in fine linen, white and clean'—a strange armour against sword-cut and spear-thrust.

The main purpose, then, of this part of our text seems to be to bring out the priestly character of the Christian soldier—a thought which carries with it many important considerations, on which I can barely touch.

Mark, then, how the warfare which we have to wage is the same as the priestly service which we have to render. The conflict is with our own sin and evil; the sacrifice we have to offer is ourselves. As soldiers, we have to fight against our selfish desires and manifold imperfections; as priests, we have to lay our whole selves on His altar. The task is the same under either emblem. We have a conflict to wage in the world, and in the world we have a priestly work to do, and these are the same. We have to be God's representatives in the world, bringing Him nearer to men's apprehensions and hearts by word and work. We have to bring men to God by entreaty, and by showing the path which leads to Him. That priestly service for men is in effect identical with the merciful warfare which we have to wage in the world. The Church militant is an army of priests. Its warfare is its sacerdotal function. It fights for Christ when it opposes the message of His grace and the power of His blood to its own and the

world's sins—and when it intercedes in the secret place for the coming of His kingdom.

Does not this metaphor teach us also, what is to be our defence and our weapon in this warfare? Not with garments rolled in blood, nor with brazen armour do they go forth, who follow Him that conquered by dying. Their uniform is the beauties of holiness, 'the fine linen clean and white, which is the righteousness of saints.' Many great thoughts lie in such words, which I must pass over. But this one thing is obvious—that the great power which we Christian men are to wield in our loving warfare is—*character*. Purity of heart and life, transparent simple goodness, manifest in men's sight—these will arm us against dangers, and these will bring our brethren glad captives to our Lord. We serve Him best, and advance His kingdom most, when the habit of our souls is that righteousness with which He invests our nakedness. Be like your Lord, and as His soldiers you will conquer, and as His priests you will win some to His love and fear. Nothing else will avail without that. Without that dress no man finds a place in the ranks.

The image suggests, too, the spirit in which our priestly warfare is to be waged. The one metaphor brings with it thoughts of strenuous effort, of discipline, of sworn consecration to a cause. The other brings with it thoughts of gentleness and sympathy and tenderness, of still waiting at the shrine, of communion with Him who dwells between

the Cherubim. Whilst our work demands all the courage and tension of every power which the one image presents, it is to be sedulously guarded from any tinge of wrath or heat of passion, such as mingles with conflict, and is to be prosecuted with all the pity and patience, the brotherly meekness of a true priest. 'The wrath of men worketh not the righteousness of God.' If we forget the one character in the other, we shall bring weakness into our warfare, and pollution into our sacrifice. 'The servant of the Lord must not strive.' We must not be animated by mere pugnacious desire to advance our principles, nor let the heat of human eagerness give a false fervour to our words and work. We cannot scold nor dragoon men to love Jesus Christ. We cannot drive them into the fold with dogs and sticks. We are to be gentle, long-suffering, not doing our work with passion and self-will, but remembering that gentleness is mightiest, and that we shall best 'adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour' when we go among men with the light caught in the inner sanctuary still irradiating our faces, and our hands full of blessings to bestow on our brethren. We are to be soldier-priests, strong and gentle, like the ideal of those knights of old who were both, and bore the cross on shield and helmet and sword-hilt.

He, our Lord, is our pattern for both; and from Him we derive the strength for each. He is the Captain of our salvation, and we fight beneath His banner, and by His strength. He is a merciful and

faithful High Priest, and He consecrates His brethren to the service of the sanctuary. To Him look for your example of heroism, of fortitude, of self-forgetfulness. To Him look for your example of gentle patience and dewy pity. Learn in Christ how possible it is to be strong and mild, to blend in fullest harmony the perfection of all that is noble, lofty, generous in the soldier's ardour of heroic devotion; and of all that is calm, still, compassionate, tender in the priest's waiting before God and mediation among men. And remember, that by faith only do we gain the power of copying that blessed example, to be like which is to be perfect—not to be like which is to fail wholly, and to prove that we have no part in His sacrifice, nor any share in His victory.

III. The final point in this description must now engage us for a few moments. The soldier-priests are as dew upon the earth.

'From the womb of the morning thou hast the dew of thy youth.' These words are often misunderstood, and taken to be a description of the fresh, youthful energy attributed by the psalm to the Priest-King of this nation of soldier-priests. The misunderstanding, I suppose, has led to the common phrase, 'The dew of one's youth.' But the reference of the expression is to the army, not to its leader. 'Youth' here is a collective noun, equivalent to 'young men.' The host of His soldier-subjects is described as a band of young warriors whom He leads, in their fresh strength and countless numbers and gleaming beauty, like the

dew of the morning.

There are two points in this last clause which may occupy us for a few moments—that picture of the army as a band of youthful warriors; and that lovely emblem of the dew as applied to Christ's servants.

As to the former—there are many other words of Scripture which carry the same thought, that he who has fellowship with God, and lives in the constant reception of the supernatural life and grace which come from Jesus Christ, possesses the secret of perpetual youth. The world ages us, time and physical changes tell on us all, and the strength which belongs to the life of nature ebbs away, but the life eternal is subject to no laws of decay and owes nothing to the external world. So we may be ever young in heart and spirit. It is possible for a man to carry the freshness, the buoyancy, the elastic cheerfulness, the joyful hope of his earliest days, right on through the monotony of middle-aged maturity, and even into old age, unshadowed by the lonely reflection of the tombs which the setting sun casts over the path. It is possible for us to get younger as we get older, because we drink more full draughts of the fountain of life: and so to have to say at the last, 'Thou hast kept the good wine until now.' 'Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall. But they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength.' If we live near Christ, and draw our life from Him, then we may blend the hopes of youth with the experience and

memory of age; be at once calm and joyous, wise and strong, preserving the blessedness of each stage of life into that which follows, and thus at last possessing the sweetness and the good of all at once. We may not only bear fruit in old age, but have blossoms, fruit, and flowers—the varying product and adornment of every stage of life, united in our characters.

Then, with regard to the other point in this final clause—that emblem of the dew leads to many considerations upon which I can but inadequately touch.

It comes into view here, I suppose, mainly for the sake of its effect upon the earth. It is as a symbol of the refreshing which a weary world will receive from the conquests and presence of the King and His host, that the latter are likened to the glittering morning dew. Another prophetic Scripture gives us the same emblem when it speaks of Israel being 'in the midst of many people as a dew from the Lord.' Such ought to be the effect of our presence. We are meant to gladden, to adorn, to refresh, this parched, prosaic world, with a freshness brought from the chambers of the sunrise.

It is worth while to notice how we may discern a sequence of thought in these successive features of description in our text. It began with that inmost spirit and motive of the Christian life, the submission of will and consecration of self to Christ. It advanced

to the function and character of His servants in the world. And now it deals finally with the influence which they are to exert by this their soldier-like obedience and priestly ministration.

There is progress of thought, too, in another way. We began with a symbol that had in it something almost harsh and stern. We advanced to one in which there was a predominance of gentle and gracious thoughts and images. And now all that was severe, and all that reminded either of opposition or of effort, has melted away into this sweet emblem. Instead of the 'confused noise' of the battle of the warrior, we have the silence of the dawn, and the noiseless falling of the dew amid the solitudes of the wildernesses, or the recesses of the mountains. So the highest thought of our Christian influence, is that it comes with silent footfall and refreshes men's souls, like His, who will come down as 'rain upon the mown grass,' who will not strive nor cry, but in gentle omnipotence and meek persistence of love, 'will not fail nor be discouraged till He have set judgment in the earth.'

Remember other symbols by which the same general thought of Christian influence upon the world is set forth with very remarkable variation. 'Ye are the light of the world.'—'Ye are the salt of the earth.' The light guides and gladdens; the salt preserves and purifies; the dew freshens and fertilises; the light, conspicuous; the salt, working concealed; and the dew, visible like the former, but

yet unobtrusive and operating silently like the latter. Some of us had rather be light than salt; prefer to be conspicuous rather than to diffuse a wholesome silent influence around us. But these three types must all be blended, both in regard to the manner of working, and in regard to the effects produced. We shall refresh and beautify the world only in proportion as we save it from its rottenness and corruption, and we shall do either only in proportion as we bear abroad the name of Christ, in whom is 'life; and the life is the light of men.'

Nor need we omit allusions to other associations connected with this figure. The dew, formed in the silence of the darkness while men sleep, falling as willingly on a bit of dead wood as anywhere, hanging its pearls on every poor spike of grass, and dressing everything on which it lies with strange beauty, each separate globule tiny and evanescent, but each flashing back the light, and each a perfect sphere, feeble one by one, but united, mighty to make the pastures of the wilderness rejoice—so, created in silence by an unseen influence, weak when taken singly, but strong in their myriads, glad to occupy the lowliest place, and each 'bright with something of celestial light,' Christian men and women are to be in the midst of many people as a dew from the Lord.

Brethren! that characteristic, like all else which is good, belongs to us in proportion as we keep near to Christ Jesus, and are filled with His fulness. All these

emblems which have been occupying us now, originally belonged to Him, and we receive from Him the grace that makes us as He is in the world. He Himself is the Warrior King, the Captain of the Lord's host, the true Joshua, whose last word ere His Cross was a shout of victory, 'I have overcome the world'—whose promises from the throne seven times crown the conqueror who overcomes as He overcame. He makes us His soldiers and strengthens us for the war, if we live by faith in Him. He Himself is the Priest—the only Eternal Priest of the world—who wears on His head the mitre and the diadem, and bears in His hand the sceptre and the censer; and He makes us priests, if faith in His only sacrifice and all-prevalent intercession be in our souls. He is the dew unto Israel—and only by intercourse with Him shall we be made gentle and refreshing, silent blessings to all the weary and the parched souls in the wilderness of the world.

Everything worth being or doing comes from Jesus Christ. Heroic courage; then hold His hand, and He will strengthen your heart. Glad surrender; then think of His sacrifice for us until ours to Him be our answering gift. Priestly power; then let Him bring us nigh by His blood, that we too may be able to have compassion on the ignorant and to draw them to God. Dewy purity and freshness; then open your hearts for the reception of His grace, for all the invigoration that we can impart to the world is but the communication of that refreshing wherewith we

ourselves are refreshed of Christ. In every aspect of our relations to the world, we draw all our fitness for all our offices from that Lord, who is and gives everything that we can be or do. Then let us seek by humble faith and habitual contact with Him and His truth, to have our emptiness filled by His fulness, and our unfitness made ready for all service by His all-sufficiency.

And let me close by reiterating what I have said already. There is a twofold manner of subjection—the spurious and the real. The involuntary is nought; the glad and cheerful surrender alone is counted submission. This psalm shows us Christ surrounded by His friends who are glad to obey. But it also shows us Christ ruling in the midst of His enemies. They cannot help obeying; His dominion is established over them, but they do not wish to have Him to reign over them, and therefore they are enemies—even though they be subjects. Which is it with you, my brother? Do you serve because you love—and love because He died for you? or do you serve because you must? Then, remember, constrained service is no service; and subjects without loyalty are rebel traitors. Our psalm shows us Christ gathering His army in array. He is calling each of us to a place there, in this day of His power, and day of His grace. Take heed lest the day of His power should for you darken into that other day of which this psalm speaks—the day of His wrath, when He strikes through kings, and bruises the head over

many countries. Put your trust in that Saviour, my friend! cleave to that Sacrifice, then you will not be amongst those whom He treads down in His march to victory, but one of that happy band of priestly warriors who follow Him as He goes forth 'conquering and to conquer.'

GOD AND THE GODLY

'His righteousness endureth for ever.'—PSALMS cxi. 3; cxii. 3.

These two psalms are obviously intended as a pair. They are identical in number of verses and in structure, both being acrostic, that is to say, the first clause of each commences with the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet, the second clause with the second, and so on. The general idea that runs through them is the likeness of the godly man to God. That resemblance comes very markedly to the surface at several points in the psalms, and pervades them traceably even where it is less conspicuous. The two corresponding clauses which I have read as my text are the first salient instances of it. But I propose to deal not only with them, but with a couple of others

which occur in the course of the psalms, and will appear as I proceed.

The general underlying thought is a noteworthy one. The worshipper is to be like his God. So it is in idolatry; so it should be with us. Worship is, or should be, adoration of and yearning after the highest conceivable good. Such an attitude must necessarily lead to imitation, and be crowned by resemblance. Love makes like, and they who worship God are bound to, and certainly will, in proportion to the ardour and sincerity of their devotion, grow like Him whom they adore. So I desire to look with you at the instances of this resemblance or parallelism which the Psalmist emphasises.

I. The first of them is that in the clauses which I have read as our starting-point, viz. God and the godly are alike in enduring righteousness.

That seems a bold thing to say, especially when we remember how lofty and transcendent were the Old Testament conceptions of the righteousness of God. But, lofty as these were, this Psalmist lifts an unpresumptuous eye to the heavens, and having said of Him who dwells there, 'His righteousness endureth for ever,' is not afraid to turn to the humble worshipper on this low earth, and declare the same thing of him. Our finite, frail, feeble lives may be really conformed to the image of the heavenly. The dewdrop with its little rainbow has a miniature of the great arch that spans the earth and rises into the

high heavens. And so, though there are differences, deep and impassable, between anything that can be called creatural righteousness, and that which bears the same name in the heavens, the fact that it does bear the same name is a guarantee to us that there is an essential resemblance between the righteousness of God in its lustrous perfectness, and the righteousness of His child in its imperfect effort.

But how can we venture to run any kind of parallelism between the eternity of the one and that of the other? God's righteousness we can understand as enduring for ever, because it is inseparable from His very being; because it is manifested unbrokenly in all the works that for ever pour out from that central Source, and because it and its doings stand fast and unshaken amidst the passage of ages, and the 'wreck of matter and the crash of worlds.' But may there not be, if not an eternity, yet a perpetuity, in our reflection of the divine righteousness which shall serve to vindicate the application of the same mighty word to both? Is it not possible that, unbroken amidst the stress of temptation, and running on without interruptions, there may be in our hearts and in our lives conformity to the divine will? And is it not possible that the transiencies of our earthly doings may be sublimed into perpetuity if there is in them the preserving salt of righteousness?

'The actions of the just
Smell sweet, and blossom in the dust.'

And may it not be, too, that though this Psalmist may have had no clear articulate doctrine of eternal life beyond, he may have felt, and rightly felt, that there were things that were too fair to die, and that it was inconceivable that a soul which had been, in some measure, tinged with the righteousness of God could ever be altogether a prey to the law of transiency and decay which seizes upon things material and corporeal? That which is righteous is eternal, be it manifested in the acts of the unchanging God or in the acts of a dying man, and when all else has passed away, and the elements have melted with fervent heat, 'he that doeth the will of God,' and the deeds which did it, 'shall abide for ever.' 'His righteousness endureth for ever.'

Now, brethren! there are two ways in which we may look at this parallelism of our text: the one is as containing a stringent requirement; the other as holding forth a mighty hope. It contains a stringent requirement. Our religion does not consist in assenting to any creed. Our religion is not wholly to consist of devout emotions and loving and joyous acts of communion and friendship with God. There must be more than these; these things there must be. For if a man is to be guided mainly by reason, there must, first of all, be creed; then there must be corresponding emotions. But creed and emotions are both meant to be forces which shall drive the wheels of life, and conduct is, after all, the crown of religion and the test of godliness. They that hold communion

with God are bound to mould their lives into the likeness of His. 'Little children, let no man deceive you,' and let not your own hearts deceive you. You are not a Christian because you believe the truths of the Gospel. You are not such a Christian as you ought to be, if your religion is more manifest in loving trust than in practical obedience which comes from trust. 'He that doeth righteousness is righteous,' and he is to be righteous 'even as He is righteous.' If you are God's, you will be like God. Apply the touchstone to your lives, and test your Christianity by this simple and most stringent test.

But again, we may look at the thought as holding forth a great hope. I do not wish to force upon Old Testament writers New Testament truth. It would be an anachronism and an absurdity to make this Psalmist responsible for anything like a clear evangelistic statement of the way by which a man may be made righteous. That waited for coming days, and eminently for Jesus Christ. But it would be quite as great a mistake to eviscerate the words of their plain implications. And when they put side by side the light and the reflection, God and the godly, it seems to me to be doing violence to their meaning for the sake of trying to make them mean less than they do, if we refuse to recognise that they have at any rate an inkling of the thought that the Original and Pattern of human righteousness was likewise the Source of it. This at least is plain, that the Psalmist thought that 'the fear of the Lord' was not only, as he

calls it at the close of the former of the two psalms, 'the beginning of wisdom,' but also the basis of goodness, for he begins his description of the godly with it.

I believe that he felt, what is assuredly true, that no man, by his own unaided effort, can ever work out for himself a righteousness which will satisfy his own conscience, and that he must, first of all, be in touch with God, in order to receive from Him that which he cannot create. Ah, brethren! the 'fine linen, clean and white, which is the righteousness of saints,' is woven in no earthly looms; and the lustrous light with which it glistens is such as 'no fuller on earth can white' men's characters into. Another Psalmist has sung of the man who can stand in the holy place, 'He shall *receive* the blessing from the Lord, even righteousness from the God of his salvation,' and our psalms hint, if they do not articulately declare, how that reception is possible for us, when they set forth waiting upon God as the condition of being made like Him. We translate the Psalmist's feeling after the higher truth which we know, when we desire 'that we may be found in Him, not having our own righteousness which is of the law, but that which is of God by faith.' So much, then, for the first point of correspondence in these two psalms.

II. God and the godly are alike in gracious compassion.

If you will turn to the two psalms for a moment,

and look at the last clauses of the two fourth verses, you will see how that thought is brought out. In the former psalm we read, 'The Lord is gracious and full of compassion': in the latter we find, 'he' (the upright man) 'is gracious and full of compassion, and righteous.'

I need not trouble you with any remarks about certain difficulties that lie in the rendering of that latter verse. Suffice it to say that they are such as to make more emphatic the intentional resemblance between the godly as there described, and God as described in the previous one. Of both it is said 'gracious and full of compassion.'

Now that great truth of which I have been speaking, the divine righteousness, is like white Alpine snow, sublime, but cold, awful and repellent, when taken by itself. Our hearts need something more than a righteous God if we are ever to worship and draw near. Just as the white snow on the high peak needs to be flushed with the roseate hue of the morning before it can become tender, and create longings, so the righteousness of the great white Throne has to be tinged with the ruddy heart-hue of gracious compassion if men are to be moved to adore and to love. Each enhances the other. 'What God hath joined together,' in Himself, 'let not man put asunder'; nor talk about the stern Deity of the Old Testament, and pit Him against the compassionate Father of the New. He is righteous, but the proclaimers of His righteousness in old days never

forgot to blend with the righteousness the mercy; and the combination heightens the lustre of both attributes.

The same combination is absolutely needful in the copy, as is emphatically set forth in our text by the addition of 'and righteous,' in the case of the man. For whilst with God the tyro attributes do lie, side by side, in perfect harmony, in us men there is always danger that the one shall trench upon the territory of the other, and that he who has cultivated the habit of looking upon sorrows and sins with compassion and tenderness shall somewhat lose the power of looking at them with righteousness. So our text, in regard to man, proclaims more emphatically than it needs to do in regard to the perfect God, that ever his highest beauty of compassion must be wedded to righteousness, and ever his truest strength of righteousness must be softened with compassion.

But beyond that, note how, wherever there is the loving and childlike contemplation of God, there will be an analogy in our compassion, to His perfectness. We are transformed by beholding. The sun strikes a poor little pane of glass in a cottage miles away, and it flashes with some likeness of the sun and casts a light across the plain. The man whose face is turned Godwards will have beauty pass into his face, and all that look upon him will see 'as it had been the countenance of an angel.'

If we have, in any real and deep measure, received

mercy we shall reflect mercy. Remember the parable of the unmerciful debtor. The servant that cast himself at his lord's feet, and got the acquittal of his debt, and went out and gripped his fellow-servant by the throat, leaving the marks of his fingernails on his windpipe, with his 'Pay me that thou owest!' had all the pardon cancelled, and all the debt laid upon his shoulders again. If we owe all our hope and peace to a forgiving God, how can we make anything else the law of our lives than that, having received mercy, we should show mercy? The test of your being a forgiven man is your forgivingness. There is no getting away from that plain principle, which modifies the declaration of the freedom of God's full pardon.

But I would have you notice, further, as a very remarkable illustration of this correspondence between the gracious and compassionate Lord and His servant, that in the verses which follow respectively the two about which I am now speaking, the same idea is wrought out in another shape. In the psalm dealing with the divine character and works we read, immediately after the declaration that He is 'gracious and full of compassion,' this—'He hath given meat to them that fear Him'; and the corresponding clause in the second of our psalms is followed by this—to translate accurately—'It is well with the man who showeth favour and lendeth.' So man's open-handedness in regard to money is put down side by side with God's open-handedness in

regard to giving meat unto them that fear Him. And again, in the ninth verse of each psalm, we have the same thought set forth in another fashion. 'He sent redemption unto His people,' says the one; 'He hath dispersed, He hath given to the poor,' says the other. That is to say, our paltry giving may be paralleled with the unspeakable gifts which God has bestowed, if they come from a love which is like His. It does not matter though they are so small and His are so great; there is a resemblance. The tiniest crystal may be like the hugest. God gives to us the possession of things in order that we may enjoy the luxury, which is one of the elements in the blessedness of the blessed God, who is blessed because He is the giving God, the luxury of giving. Poor though our bestowments must be, they are not unlike His. The little burn amongst the heather carves its tiny bed, and impels its baby ripples by the same laws which roll the waters of the Amazon, and every fall that it makes over a shelf of rock a foot high is a miniature Niagara.

III. So, lastly, we have still another point, not so much of resemblance as of correspondence, in the firmness of God's utterances and of the godly heart.

In the first of our two psalms we read, in the seventh verse, 'All His commandments are *sure*.' In the second we read, in the corresponding verse, 'his heart is *fixed*, trusting in the Lord.' The former psalm goes on, 'His commandments *stand fast* for ever and ever; and the next psalm, in the corresponding verse,

says 'his heart is *established*,' the original employing the same word in both cases, which in our version is rendered, in the one place, 'stand fast,' and in the other 'established.' So that the Psalmist is thinking of a correspondence between the stability of God's utterances and the stability of the heart that clasps them in faith.

His commandments are not only precepts which enjoin duty. All which God says is law, whether it be directly in the nature of guiding precept, or whether it be in the nature of revealing truth, or whether it be in the nature of promise. It is sure, reliable, utterly trustworthy. We may be certain that it will direct us aright, that it will reveal to us absolute truth, that it will hold forth no flattering and false promises. And it is 'established.' The one fixed point amidst the whirl of things is the uttered will of God.

Therefore, the heart that builds there builds safely. And there should be a correspondence, whether there is or no, between the faithfulness of the Speaker and the faith of the hearer. A man who is doubtful about the solidity of the parapet which keeps him from toppling over into the abyss will lean gingerly upon it, until he has found out that it is firm. The man that knows how strong is the stay on which he rests ought to lean hard upon it. Lean hard upon God, put all your weight upon Him. You cannot put too much, you cannot lean too hard. The harder the better; the better He is pleased, and the more He breathes support and strength into us. And, brethren! if thus

we build an established faith on that sure foundation, and match the unchangeableness of God in Christ with the constancy of our faith in Him, then, 'He that believeth shall never make haste,' and as my psalm says, 'He shall not be afraid of evil tidings; his heart is fixed, trusting in the Lord.'

The upshot of the whole matter is—we cannot work out for ourselves a righteousness that will satisfy our own consciences, nor secure for ourselves a strength that will give peace to our hearts, and stability to our lives, by any other means than by cleaving fast to God revealed in Jesus Christ.

We have borne the image of the earthly long enough; let us open our hearts to God in Christ. Let us yield ourselves to Him; let us gaze upon Him with fixed eyes of love, and labour to make our own what He bestows upon us. Thus living near Him, we shall be bathed in His light, and show forth something of His beauty. Godliness is God-likeness. It is of no use to say that we are God's children if we have none of the family likeness. 'If ye were Abraham's sons ye would do the works of Abraham,' said Christ to the Jews. If we are God's sons we shall do the works of God. 'Be ye therefore perfect, as your Father in heaven is perfect;' be ye merciful as your Father is merciful. And if thus we here, dwelling with Christ, are being conformed to the image of His Son, we shall one day 'be satisfied' when we 'awake in His likeness.'

EXPERIENCE, RESOLVE, AND HOPE

> 'Thou hast delivered my soul from death, mine eyes from tears, and my feet from falling. 9. I will walk before the Lord in the land of the living.'—PSALM cxvi. 8, 9.

This is a quotation from an earlier psalm, with variations which are interesting, whether we suppose that the Psalmist was quoting from memory and made them unconsciously, or whether, as is more probable, he did so, deliberately and for a purpose. The variations are these. The words in the original psalm (lvi.) according to the Revised Version, read, 'Thou hast delivered my soul from death; hast Thou not delivered my feet from falling?' The writer of this psalm felt that that did not say all, so he put in another clause: 'Thou hast delivered my soul from death, *mine eyes from tears*, and my feet from falling.' It is not enough to keep a man alive and upright. God will wipe away his tears; and will often keep him from shedding them.

Then the original psalm goes on: 'Thou hast delivered … my feet from falling, that I may walk before God,' but the later Psalmist goes a step further than his original. The first singer had seen what it is always a blessing to see—what God meant by all the varieties of His providences, viz. that the recipient

might walk as in His presence; but the later poet not only discerns, but accords with, God's purpose, yields himself to the divine intention, and instead of simply saying 'That was what God meant,' he says, 'That is what I am going to do—I will walk before the Lord.' There is still another variation which, however, does not alter the sense. The original psalm says, 'in the light of the living'; the other uses another word, a little more intelligible, perhaps, to an ordinary reader, and says, 'in the land of the living.'

Now, noting these significant variations, I would draw attention to this expression of the Psalmist's acceptance of the divine purpose, and the vision that it gave him of his future. It is hard to say whether he means 'I will walk' or 'I shall walk'; whether he is expressing a hope or giving utterance to a fixed resolve. I think there is an element of both in the words. At all events, I find in them three things: a sure anticipation, a firm resolve, and a far-reaching hope.

I. A sure anticipation.

'Thou hast'—'I will.' The past is for this Psalmist a mirror in which he sees reflected the approaching form of the veiled future. God's past is the guarantee of God's future. Godless people, who get wearied of the monotony of life, begin to say before they have gone far in it, 'Oh! there is nothing new. That which is to be hath already been. It is just one continual repetition of the same sort of thing.' But that is only

partially true. There is only one man in the world who can truly and certainly say, 'To-morrow shall be as this day, and much more abundant'; and that is the man who says; 'He delivered my soul from death, mine eyes from tears, and my feet from falling.' For the continuance of things here is not guaranteed to us by the fact that they have lasted for so long. Why, nobody knows whether the sun will rise to-morrow or not—whether there will be a to-morrow or not. There will come one day when the sun sets for the last time. What people call the 'uniformity of nature' affords no ground on which to build certainty as to the future. We all do it, but we have no right to do it. But when we bring God into the future, that makes all the difference. His past is the guarantee and the revelation of His future, and every person that grasps Him in faith has the right to pray with assurance, 'Thou hast been my Helper; leave me not, neither forsake me,' and to declare triumphantly, 'The Lord will perfect that which concerneth me.'

So, brethren! all the past, as it is recorded for us in Scripture, lives and throbs with faithful promises for us to-day. Though the methods of the manifestation may alter, the essence of it remains the same. As one of the Apostles says, 'Whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our advantage, that we, through the encouragement ministered by the Scriptures, might have hope'; and looking forward into all the future, might discern its wastes unknown, all lighted up by the one glad certainty that He that

is 'the same yesterday and to-day and for ever' will be there, and we shall be beside Him. What God has done, He will keep on doing. 'The Lord hath delivered mine eyes from tears, and my feet from falling,' and therefore 'I shall walk before the Lord in the land of the living.'

Our experience yields fuel for our faith. We have been near death many a time; we have never fallen into it. Our eyes have been wet many a time; God has dried them. Our feet have been ready to fall many a time, and if at the moment when we were tottering on the edge of the precipice, we have cried to Him and said, 'My feet have well-nigh slipped,' a strong Hand has been held out to us. 'The Lord upholdeth them that are in the act of falling,' as the old psalm, rightly rendered, has it, and if we have pushed aside His hand, and gone down, then the next clause of the same verse applies, for He 'raiseth up those that have fallen,' and are lying prostrate.

As it has been, so it will be. 'Thou hast been with me in six troubles,' therefore 'in the seventh Thou wilt not forsake me.' We can wear out men; and we cannot argue that because a man has had long patience with some unworthy recipient of his goodness, his patience will never give out. But it is safe to argue thus about God. 'I say not unto thee, until seven times, but until seventy times seven'—the two perfect numbers multiplied into each other, and the product again multiplied by one of them, to give the measureless measure of the exhaustless divine

love, and the sure guarantee that to His servant 'to-morrow shall be as this day, and much more abundant.'

Then, again, if we put a little different meaning into the Psalmist's words (and as I said, I think both meanings lie in them), they suggest that he did not look forward into the future only with expectation, but that along with expectation there was resolve. So we have here

II. A firm resolve.

'I will walk before the Lord.' What does 'walking before the Lord' mean? There are two or three expressions very like each other, yet entirely different from each other, in the Old and in the New Testament, about this matter. We read of 'walking with God,' and of 'walking before God,' and of 'walking after God.' And whilst there is much that is common to all the expressions, they look at the same idea from different angles. 'Walking with God,' communion, fellowship, and companionship are implied there. 'Walking after God,' guidance, direction, and example, and our poor imitation and obedience, are most conspicuous there. And 'walking before God' means, I suppose, mainly, feeling always that we are in His presence, and have the light of His face, and the glance of His all-seeing eye, falling upon us. 'If I take the wings of the morning, and fly into the uttermost parts of the sea, Thou art there.' 'Thou art acquainted with all my ways, search me, O

God!' That is walking before God. To put it into colder words, it means the habitual—I do not say unbroken, but habitual—effort to feel in our conscious hearts that we are in His sight; not only that we are with Him, but that we are 'naked and open to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do.' And that is to be the result, says our psalm, as it is the intention, of all that God has been doing with us in His merciful providence, in His quickening, sustaining, and comforting influences in the past. He sent all these varying conditions, kept the psalmist alive, kept him from weeping, or dried his tears, kept him from falling, with the intention that he should be continually blessed in the continuous sunshine of God's presence, and should open out his heart in it and for it, like a flower when the sunbeams strike it. Oh! how different life would look if we habitually took hold of all its incidents by that handle, and thought about them, not as we are accustomed to do, according to whether they tended to make us glad or sorry, to disappoint or fulfil our hopes and purposes, but looked upon them all as stages in our education, and as intended, if I might so say, to force us, when the tempests blow, close up against God; and when the sunshine came, to woo us to His side. Would not all life change its aspect if we carried that thought right into it, and did not only keep it for Sundays, or for the crises of our lives, but looked at all the trifles as so many magnets brought into action by Him to attract us to Himself? Dear brother, it is not enough to recognise God's purpose, we must fall in with it,

accept the intention, and co-operate with God in fulfilling it. It is a matter of purity and of piety, to say, 'Thou hast delivered my soul from death, that I may walk before Thee.'

But there has to be something more. There have to be a firm resolve, and effort without which the firmest resolve will all come to nothing, and be one more paving-stone for the road that is 'paved with good intentions.' That firm resolve finds utterance in the not vain vow, 'I will'—in spite of all opposition and difficulties—'I will walk before the Lord,' and keep ever bright in my mind the thought, 'Thou God seest me.'

Ay! and just in the measure in which we do so shall we have joy. In some of those inhuman prisons where they go in for solitary confinement, there is a little hole somewhere in the wall—the prisoner does not know where—at which at any moment in the four-and-twenty hours the eye of the gaoler may be, and they say that the thought of that unseen eye, glaring in upon the felons, drives some of them half mad. The thought that poor Hagar found to be her only comfort in the wilderness—and so christened the well after it—'Thou God seest me,' must be the source of our purest joy; or it must be a ghastly dread. When He comes at last, some men will lift up their faces to the sunshine and have their faces irradiated by the light; and some will call on the rocks and the hills to cover them from His face, and prefer rather to be crushed than to be blasted by the

brightness of His countenance. If we are right with God, then the gladdest of thoughts is, 'Thou knowest me altogether, and Thou hast beset me behind and before.' If we are right with God, 'Thou hast laid Thine hand upon me' will mean for us support and blessing. If we are wrong, it will mean a weight that crushes to the earth.

And if we are right with Him, that same thought brings with it security and companionship. Ah! we do not need ever to say 'I am alone' if we are walking before God. It brings with it, of course, an armour against temptation. What mean, lustful, worldly seduction has any power when a man falls back on the thought, 'God sees me, and God is with me'? Do you remember the very first instance in Scripture of the use of this phrase? The Lord said unto Abraham, 'Walk before Me, and be thou perfect.' That was not only a commandment, but it was a promise, and we might as truly, for the sense of the passage, read, 'Walk before Me, and thou shalt be perfect.' That thought of the present God draws the teeth of all raging lions, and takes the stings out of all serpents, and paralyses and reduces to absolute nothingness every temptation. Clasp God's hand, and you will not fall.

III. There is lastly here, a far-reaching hope.

I do not know whether the Psalmist had any notion of any land of the living except the land of Earth, where men pass their natural lives. I almost

think that both he and his brother, whose words he was imitating, had some glimpse of a future life of closer union, when eyes should no more weep nor feet fall. At any rate, you and I cannot help reading that hope into his words. When we read, 'I will walk before the Lord in the land of the living,' we cannot but think of the true and perfect deliverance, when it shall be said, with a depth and a fulness of meaning with which it is never said here, 'Thou hast delivered my soul from death,' and the black dread that towered so high, and closed the vista of all human expectation of the future, is now away back in the past, hull-down on the horizon as they say about ships scarcely visible, and no more to be feared. We cannot but think of the perfect deliverance of 'mine eyes from tears,' when 'God shall wipe away the tears from off all faces, and the rebuke of His people from off all the earth.' We cannot but think of the perfect deliverance of 'my feet from falling' when the redeemed of the Lord shall stand firm, and walk at liberty on the golden pavements, and no more dread the stumbling-blocks of earth. We cannot but think of the perfect presence of God, the perfect consciousness that we are near Him, when He shall 'present us faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy.' We cannot but think of the perfect activity of that future state when we 'shall walk with Him in white,' and 'follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth.' And one guarantee for all that far-reaching hope is in the tiny experiences of the present; for He who hath delivered our souls

from death, our eyes from tears, and our feet from falling, is not going to expose Himself to the scoff, 'This "God" began to build, and was not able to finish.' But He will complete that which He has begun, and will not stay His hand until all His children are perfectly redeemed and perfectly conscious of His perfect Presence.

REQUITING GOD

> 'What shall I render unto the Lord for all His benefits toward me? 13. I will take the cup of salvation, and call upon the name of the Lord.'—PSALM cxvi. 12, 13.

There may possibly be a reference here to a part of the Passover ritual. It seems to have become the custom in later times to lift high the wine cup at that feast and drink it with solemn invocation and glad thanksgiving. So we find our Lord taking the cup—the 'cup of blessing' as Paul calls it—and giving thanks. But as there is no record of the introduction of that addition to the original Paschal celebration, we do not know but that it was later than the date of this psalm. Nor is there any need to suppose such an

allusion in order either to explain or to give picturesque force to the words. It is a most natural thing, as all languages show, to talk of a man's lot, either of sorrow or joy, as the cup which he has to drink; and there are numerous instances of the metaphor in the Psalms, such as 'Thou art the Portion of mine inheritance and of my cup, Thou maintainest my lot.' 'My cup runneth over.' That familiar emblem is all that is wanted here.

Then one other point in reference to the mere words of the text may be noticed. 'Salvation' can scarcely be taken in its highest meaning here, both because the whole tone of the psalm fixes its reference to lower blessings, and because it is in the plural in the Hebrew. 'The cup of salvation' expresses, by that plural form, the fulness and variety of the manifold and multiform deliverances which God had wrought and was working for the Psalmist. His whole lot in life appears to him as a cup full of tender goodness, loving faithfulness, delivering grace. It runs over with divine acts of help and sustenance. As his grateful heart thinks of all God's benefits to him, he feels at once the impulse to requite and the impossibility of doing so. With a kind of glad despair he asks the question that ever springs to thankful lips, and having nothing to give, recognises the only possible return to God to be the acceptance of the brimming chalice which His goodness commends to his thirst.

The great thought, then, which lies here is that we

best requite God by thankfully taking what He gives.

Now I note to begin with—how deep that thought goes into the heart of
God.

Why is it that we honour God most by taking, not by giving? The first answer that occurs to you, no doubt, is—because of His all-sufficiency and our emptiness. Man receives all. God needs nothing. We have all to say, after all our service, 'Of Thine own have we given Thee.' No doubt that is quite true; and rightly understood that is a strengthening and a glad truth. But is that all which can be said in explanation of this principle? Surely not. 'If I were hungry I would not tell thee; for the world is mine and the fulness thereof,' is a grand word, but it does not give all the truth. When Paul stood on Mars Hill, and, within sight of the fair images of the Parthenon, shattered the intellectual basis of idolatry, by proclaiming a God 'not worshipped with men's hands as though He needed anything, seeing He giveth to all men all things,' that truth, mighty as it is, is not all. We requite God by taking rather than by giving, not merely because He needs nothing, and we have nothing which is not His. If that were all, it might be as true of an almighty tyrant, and might be so used as to forbid all worship before the gloomy presence, to give reverence and love to whom were as impertinent as the grossest offerings of savage idolaters. But the motive of His giving to us is the deepest reason why our best recompense to Him is

our thankful reception of His mercies. The principle of our text reposes at last on 'God is love and wishes our hearts,' and not merely on 'God has all and does not need our gifts.'

Take the illustration from our own love and gifts. Do we not feel that all the beauty and bloom of a gift is gone if the giver hopes to receive as much again? Do we not feel that it is all gone if the receiver thinks of repaying it in any coin but that of the heart? Love gives because it delights in giving. It gives that it may express itself and may bless the recipient. If there be any thought of return it is only the return of love. And that is how God gives. As James puts it, He is 'the giving God,—who gives,' not as our version inadequately renders, 'liberally,' but 'simply'—that is, I suppose, with a single eye, without any ulterior view to personal advantage, from the impulse of love alone, and having no end but our good. Therefore it is, because of that pure, perfect love, that He delights in no recompense, but only in the payment of a heart won to His love and melted by His mercies. Therefore it is that His hand is outstretched, 'hoping for nothing again.' His Almighty all-sufficiency needs nought from us, and to all heathen notions of worship and tribute puts the question: 'Do ye requite the Lord, O foolish people and unwise?' But His deep heart of love desires and delights in the echo of its own tones that is evoked among the rocky hardnesses of our hearts, and is glad when we take the full cup of His blessings and, as we raise it to our

lips, call on the name of the Lord. Is not that a great and a gracious thought of our God and of His great purpose in His mercies?

But now let us look for a moment at the elements which make up this requital of God in which He delights. And, first I put a very simple and obvious one, let us be sure that we recognise the real contents of our cup. It *is* a cup of salvations, however hard it is sometimes to believe it. Of how much blessing and happiness we all rob ourselves by our slowness to feel that! Some of us by reason of natural temperament; some of us by reason of the pressure of anxieties, and the aching of sorrows, and the bleeding of wounds; some of us by reason of mere blindness to the true character of our present, have little joyous sense of the real brightness of our days. It seems as if joys must have passed and be seen in the transfiguring light of memory, before we can discern their fairness; and then, when their place is empty, we know that we were entertaining angels unawares. Many men and women live in the gloom of a lifelong regret for the loss of some gift which, when they had it, seemed nothing very extraordinary, and could not keep them from annoyance with trifles. Common sense and reasonable regard for our own happiness and religious duty unite, as they always do, in bidding us take care that we know our blessings. Do not let custom blind you to them. Do not let tears so fill your eyes that you cannot see the goodness of the

Lord. Do not let thunderclouds, however heavy their lurid piles, shut out from you the blue that is in your sky. Do not let the empty cup be your first teacher of the blessings you had when it was full. Do not let a hard place here and there in the bed destroy your rest. Seek, as a plain duty, to cultivate a buoyant, joyous sense of the crowded kindnesses of God in your daily life. Take full account of all the pains, all the bitter ingredients, remembering that for us weak and sinful men the bitter is needful. If still the cup seem charged with distasteful draught, remember whose lip has touched its rim, leaving its sacred kiss there, and whose hand holds it out to you while He says, 'Do this in remembrance of Me.' The cup which my Saviour giveth me, can it be anything but a cup of salvations?

Then, again, another of the elements of this requital of God is—be sure that you take what God gives.

There can be no greater slight and dishonour to a giver than to have his gifts neglected. You give something that has, perhaps, cost you much, or which at any rate has your heart in it, to your child, or other dear one; would it not wound you if a day or two after you found it tossing about among a heap of unregarded trifles? Suppose that some of those Rajahs who received presents on a royal visit to India had gone out from the durbar and flung them into the kennel, that would have been insult and disaffection, would it not? But these illustrations are

trivial by the side of our treatment of the 'giving God.' Surely of all the follies and crimes of our foolish and criminal race, there is none to match this —that we will not take and make our own the things that are freely given to us of God. This is the height of all madness; this is the lowest depth of all sin. He spares not His own Son, the Son spares not Himself, the Father gives up His Son for us all because He loves, the Son loves us, and gives Himself to us and for us, and we stand with our hands folded on our breasts, will not condescend so much as to stretch them out, or hold our blessings with so slack a grasp that at any time we may let them slip through our careless fingers. He prays us with much entreaty to receive the gift, and neglect and stolid indifference are His requital. Is there anything worse than that? Surely Scripture is right when it makes the sin of sins that unbelief, which is at bottom nothing else than a refusal to take the cup of salvation. Surely no sharper grief can be inflicted on the Spirit of God than when we leave His gifts neglected and unappropriated.

In the highest region of all, how many of these there are which we treat so! A Saviour and His pardoning blood; a Spirit and His quickening energies; that eternal life which might spring in our souls a fountain of living waters—all these are ours. Are we as strong as we might be if we used the strength which we have? How comes it that with the fulness of God at our sides we are empty; that with the word of God in our hands we know so little; that

with the Spirit of God in our hearts we are so fleshly; that with the joy of our God for our portion we are so troubled; that with the heart of God for our hiding-place we are so defenceless? 'We have all and abound,' and yet we are poor and needy, like some infatuated beggar, in rags and wretchedness, to whom wealth had been given which he would not use.

In the lower region of daily life and common mercies the same strange slowness to take what we have is found. There are very few men who really make the best of their circumstances. Most of us are far less happy than we might be, if we had learned the divine art of wringing the last drop of good out of everything. After our rude attempts at smelting there is a great deal of valuable metal left in the dross, which a wiser system would extract. One wonders when one gets a glimpse of how much of the raw material of happiness goes to waste in the manufacture in all our lives. There is so little to spare, and yet so much is flung away. It needs a great deal of practical wisdom, and a great deal of strong, manly Christian principle, to make the most of what God gives us. Watchfulness, self-restraint, the power of suppressing anxieties and taking no thought for the morrow, and most of all, the habitual temper of fellowship with God, which is the most potent agent in the chemistry that extracts its healing virtue from everything—all these are wanted. The lesson is worth learning, lest we should wound that

most tender Love, and lest we should impoverish and hurt ourselves. Do not complain of your thirsty lips till you are sure that you have emptied the cup of salvation which God gives.

One more element of this requital of God has still to be named, the thankful recognition of Him in all our feasting—'call on the name of the Lord.' Without this the preceding precept would be a piece of pure selfish Epicureanism—and without this it would be impossible. Only he who enjoys life in God enjoys it worthily. Only he who enjoys life in God enjoys it at all. This is the true infusion which gives sweetness to whatever of bitter, and more of sweetness to whatever of sweet, the cup may contain, when the name of the Lord is pronounced above it. The Jewish father at the Passover feast solemnly lifted the wine cup above his head, and drank with thanksgiving. The meal became a sacrament. So here the word rendered 'take' might be translated 'raise,' and we may be intended to have the picture as emblematical of our consecration to all our blessings by a like offering of them before God and a like invoking of the Giver.

Christ gave us not only the ritual of an ordinance, but the pattern for our lives, when He 'took the cup and gave thanks.' So common joys become sacraments, enjoyment becomes worship, and the cup which holds the bitter or the sweet skilfully mingled for our lives becomes the cup of blessing and salvation drank in remembrance of Him. If we

carried that spirit with us into all our small duties, sorrows, and gladnesses, how different they would all seem! We should then drink for strength, not for drunkenness. We should not then find that God's gifts hid Him from us. We should neither leave any of them unused nor so greedily grasp them that we let His hand go. Nothing would be too great for us to attempt, nothing too small for us to put our strength into. There would be no discord between earthly gladness and heavenly desires, nor any repugnance at what He held to our lips. We should drink of the cup of His benefits, and all would be sweet—until we drew nearer and slaked our thirst at the river of His pleasures and the Fountain-head itself.

One more word. There is an old legend of an enchanted cup filled with poison, and put treacherously into a king's hand. He signed the sign of the Cross and named the name of God over it, and it shivered in his grasp. Do you take that name of the Lord as a test. Name Him over many a cup of which you are eager to drink, and the glittering fragments will lie at your feet, and the poison be spilled on the ground. What you cannot lift before His pure eyes and think of Him while you enjoy is not for you. Friendships, schemes, plans, ambitions, amusements, speculations, studies, loves, businesses—can you call on the name of the Lord while you put these cups to your lips? If not, fling them behind you—for they are full of poison which, for all its sugared sweetness, at the last will 'bite like a serpent and sting like an

adder.'

A CLEANSED WAY

> 'Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed thereto according to Thy word.'—PSALM cxix. 9.

There are many questions about the future with which it is natural for you young people to occupy yourselves; but I am afraid that the most of you ask more anxiously 'How shall I *make* my way?' than 'How shall I *cleanse* it?' It is needful carefully to ponder the questions: 'How shall I get on in the world—be happy, fortunate?' and the like, and I suppose that that is the consideration which presses with special force upon a great many of you. Now I want you to think of another question: 'How shall I *cleanse* my way?' For purity is the best thing; and to be good is a wiser as well as a nobler object of ambition than any other. So my object is just to try and urge upon my dear young friends before me the serious consideration for a while of this grave question of my text, and the answers which are given to it.

If I can get you once to be smitten with a passion for purity, all but everything is gained. But I shall not be content if even that is the issue of my pleading with you now, for I want to have you all Christians. And that is why I have asked you to listen to what I have to say to you on this occasion.

I. So, first, we have here the great practical problem for life:
'Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way?'
Or, in other words,
'How may I live a pure and a noble life?'

It is a question, of course, for everybody: it is *the* question for everybody, but it is more especially one for you young people. And I wish to urge it upon you for two or three reasons, which I very briefly specify.

First, I desire to press upon you this question, because, as I have said, you are under special temptations not to ask it. There are so many other points in your future unresolved, that you are only too apt to put aside the consideration of this one in favour of those which seem to be of more pressing and immediate importance. And you have the other temptation, common to us all, but especially attending you as young people, of living without any plan of life at all. The sin and the misery of half the world are that they live from hand to mouth, knowing why they do each single action at the moment, but never looking a dozen inches beyond their noses to see where all the actions taken

together tend; and so being just like weathercocks, whirled round by every wind of temptation that comes to them. If they are good or pure they are so by accident, by impulse, or because they have never been tempted. They have no definite plan or theory of life which they could put into words if anybody asked them on what principles, and for what end, and towards what objects they were living. And as everybody is tempted into such an unreflecting way of life, so you especially are tempted to it, because at your age judgment and experience are not so strong as inclination and passion; and everything has got the fresh gloss of novelty upon it, and it seems to be sometimes sufficient delight to live and get hold of the new joys that are flooding in upon you. And therefore I want you to stop and for a moment think whether you have any plan of life that bears being put into words, whether you can tell God and your own consciences what you are living for.

And I urge this question upon you for another reason—because it is worth while for *you* to ask it. For you have still the prerogative that some of us have lost, of determining the shape that your life's course is to take. The path that you are going to tread lies all unmarked out across the plain of life. You may be pretty nearly what you like. Life is before you, with great blessed possibilities; it is behind some of us. All the long years which you may probably have are all plastic in your hands yet; they are moulded into a rigid shape for men like me. We

have made our beds, and we must lie on them. You have your life in your own hands; therefore, I beseech you, while you have not to ask this question with the bitter meaning with which old men that have made their paths, and made them filthy, have to ask it—'How shall an *old* man cleanse his way, and get rid of the filth?'—consider how you may secure that your way in the untrodden future shall be clean, and do not rest till you get an answer.

And I press it upon you for another reason, because you have special temptations to make your ways unclean. It is a fearful ordeal that every young man and woman has to face, as he or she steps across the dividing boundary between childhood and youth, when parental authority is weakened, and the leading-strings are loosened, and the young swimmer is as it were cut away from the buoys, and has to battle with the waves alone. There are hundreds of young men in Manchester, there are many of them here now, who have come up into this great city from quiet country homes where they were shielded by the safeguards of a father's and a mother's love and care, and have been flung into this place, with its every street swarming with temptation, and companions on the benches of the university, at the desks, in the warehouses, and the workshops, leading them away into evil and teaching them the devil's alphabet—young men with their evenings vacant and with no home. Am I speaking to any such standing in slippery places? Oh, my young friend! there is

nothing in all these temptations, the fascinations of which you are beginning to find out, there is nothing in them all worth soiling your fingers for; there is nothing in them all that will pay you for the loss of your innocence. There is nothing in them all except a fair outside with poison at the core. You see the 'primrose path'; you do not see, to use Shakespeare's solemn words, 'the everlasting burnings' to which it leads. And so I plead with you all, young men and women, to lay this question to heart; and I beseech you to credit me when I say to you that you have not yet touched the gravest and the most pressing problem of life unless you have asked yourselves in a serious mood of deep reflection, 'Wherewithal shall I cleanse my way?'

II. So much for the first point to which I ask your attention. Now, secondly, look at this answer, which tells us that we can only make our way clean on condition of constant watchfulness. 'By taking heed thereto.'

That seems a very plain, simple, common-sense answer. The best made road wants looking after if it is to be kept in repair. What would become of a railway that had no surfacemen and platelayers going along the line and noticing whether anything was amiss? I remember once seeing a bit of an old Roman road; the lava blocks were there, but for want of care, here a young sapling had grown up between two of them and had driven them apart; there they were split by the frost, here was a great ugly gap full

of mud; and the whole thing ended in a jungle. How shall a man keep his road in repair? 'By taking heed thereto.' Things that are left to go anyhow in this world have a strange knack of going one how. You do not need anything else than negligence to ensure that things will come to grief.

And so, at first sight, my text simply seems to preach the plain truth: if you want to keep your road right, look after it. But if you look at your Bibles, you will see that the word 'thereto' is a supplement, and that all that the Psalmist really says is 'by taking heed.' And perhaps it is to himself rather than to his 'way' that a man is exhorted to 'take heed.' 'Take heed to thyself' is the only condition of a pure and noble life.

That such a condition is necessary, will appear very plain from two considerations. First, it is clear that there must be constant watchfulness, if we consider what sort of a world this is that we have got into And it is also plain, if we consider what sort of creatures we are that have got into it.

First, it is plain if we consider what sort of a world this is that we have got into. It is a world a great deal fuller of inducements to do wrong than of inducements to do right; a world in which there are a great many bad things that have a deceptive appearance of pleasure; a great many circumstances in which it seems far easier to follow the worse than to follow the better course. And so, unless a man has

learned the great art of saying 'No!' 'So did not I because of the fear of the Lord'; he will come to rack and ruin without a doubt. There are more things round about you that will tempt you downwards than will draw you upwards, and your only security is constant watchfulness. As George Herbert says:—

'Who keeps no guard upon himself is slack,
And rots to nothing at the next great thaw.'

And that is what will happen to you, as sure as you are living, in spite of all your good resolutions, unless you back up those resolutions with perpetual jealous watchfulness over yourselves. 'Keep thy heart with all diligence.'

And the same lesson is pealed out to us if we consider what sort of creatures we are that have got into this world all full of wickedness. We are creatures evidently made for self-government. Our whole nature is like a monarchy. There are things in each of us that are never meant to rule, but to be kept well down under control, such as strong passions, desires rooted in the flesh which are not meant to get the mastery of a man, and there are parts of our nature which are as obviously intended to be supreme and sovereign: the reason, the conscience, the will.

There is a deal of pestilent talk which one sometimes hears, amongst young men especially, about 'following nature.' Yes! I say, 'Follow nature!'

and nature says, 'Let the man govern the animal!' and 'Do not set beggars on horseback,' nor allow your passions to guide you, but keep a tight hand on them, suppress them, scourge them, rule them by your reason, by your conscience, and by your will.

Suppose a man were to say about a steamship, 'The structure of this vessel shows that it is meant that we should get a roaring fire up in the furnaces, and set the engines going at full speed, and let her go as she will.' Would he not have left out of account that there was a steering apparatus, which was as plainly meant to guide as are the engines to drive? What are the rudder and the wheel for?—do they not imply a pilot? and is not the make of our souls as plainly suggestive of subordination and control? Doth not nature itself teach you that you do not follow, but outrage, nature, when you let your passions rule, and that you only then follow nature when you bow the whole man under the dominion of the conscience, and when conscience stands waiting for the voice of God?

'Unless above himself he can erect
Himself, how mean a thing is man!'

You are called upon by the very world that you have come into, and by the very sort of person that you yourself are, to exercise that perpetual watchfulness which is the only condition of cleansing your way. There must be a strong guard on the frontier, which shall examine all the thoughts and

purposes and desires that would pass out, and all the temptations and seductions that would pass in; and take care that none shall pass which cannot bring the King's warrant, 'Keep thy heart with diligence.' 'Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed thereto.'

III. This constant watchfulness, to be of any use, must be regulated by
God's Word. 'Taking heed thereto, according to Thy word.'

The guard on the frontier who is to keep the path must have instructions from headquarters, and not choose and decide according to their own phantasy, but according to the King's orders. Or to use another metaphor, it is no use having a guard unless the guard has a lantern, and the lantern and light is the Word of God.

That brings me to say, and only in a word or two, how inadequate for the task of regulating our own lives our own watchfulness is. Conscience is the captain of the guard, and there is only one judgment in which conscience is always and infallibly right, and that is when it says, 'It is right to do right; and it is wrong to do wrong.' But when you begin to ask conscience, 'And, pray, what *is* right and what *is* wrong?' it is by no means invariably to be trusted; for you can educate conscience up or down to almost anything; and you can warp conscience, and you can bribe conscience, and you can stifle conscience. And

so it is not enough that we should exercise the most watchful care over our course, and decide upon the right and the wrong of it by our own judgments; we may be fearfully wrong notwithstanding it all. It is not enough for a man to have a good watch in his pocket unless now and then he can get Greenwich time by which he can set it, and unless that has been secured by taking an observation of the sun. And so you cannot trust to anything in yourselves for the guidance of your own way or for the determination of your duty, but you must look to that higher Wisdom that has condescended to speak to us, and give us in this Book the revelation of its will. Men rebel against the moral law of the Bible, and speak of it as if it were a restraint and a sharp taskmaster. Ah, no! It is one of the greatest tokens of God's infinite love to us that He has not left us to grope our way amidst the illusions of our own judgments, and the questionable shapes of human conceptions of right and wrong, but that He has declared to us His own character for the standard of all perfection, and given us in the human life of the Son of His love the all-sufficient pattern for every life.

So I need not dwell at any length upon the thought that in that word of God, in its whole sweep, and eminently and especially in Christ, who is the Incarnate Word, we have an all-sufficient Guide. A guide of conduct must be plain—and whatever doubts and difficulties there may be about the doctrines of Christianity there is none about its

morality. A guide of conduct must be decisive—and there is no faltering in the utterance of the Book as to right and wrong. A guide of conduct must be capable of application to the wide diversities of character, age, circumstance—and the morality of the New Testament especially, and of the Old in a measure, secures that, because it does not trouble itself about minute details, but deals with large principles. The morality of the Gospel, if I may so say, is a morality of centres, not of circumferences; of germinal principles, not of special prescriptions. A guide for morals must be far in advance of the followers, and it has taken generations and centuries to work into men's consciences, and to work out in men's practice, *a portion* of the morality of that Book. People tell us that Christianity is worn out. Ah! it will not be worn out until all its moral teaching has become part of the practice of the world, and that will not be for a year or two! The men that care least about Christian doctrines are foremost to admit that the Sermon on the Mount is the noblest code of morality that has ever been promulgated. If the world kept the commandments of the New Testament, the world would be in the Millennium; and all the sin and crime, and ninety-nine-hundredths of all the sorrow, of earth would have vanished like an ugly dream. Here is the guide for you, and if you take it you will not err.

My dear young friend! did you ever try to measure one day's actions by the standard of this Book? Let

me press upon you this: Cultivate the habit—the habit of bringing all that you do side by side with this light; as a scholar in some school of art will take his feeble copy, and hold it by the side of the masterpiece, and compare line for line, and tint for tint. Take your life, and put it by the side of the Great Life, and you will begin to find out how 'according to Thy word' is the only standard by which to set your lives.

IV. And now I have one last thing to say. All this can only be done effectually if you are a Christian. My psalm does not go to the bottom; it goes as far as the measure of revelation granted to its author admitted; but if a person had no more to say than that, it would be a weary business. It is no use to tell a man, 'Guard yourself, guard yourself,' nor even to tell him, 'Guard yourself according to God's word,' if God's word is only a *law*.

The fatal defect of all attempts at keeping my heart by my own watchfulness is that keeper and kept are one and the same, and so there may be mutiny in the garrison, and the very forces that ought to subdue the rebellion may have gone over to the rebels. You want a power outside of you to steady you. The only way to haul a boat up the rapids is to have some fixed point on the shore to which a man may fasten a rope and pull at that. You get that eternal guard and fixed point by which to hold in Jesus Christ, the dear Son of God's love, who has died for you.

You want another motive to be brought to bear upon your conduct, and upon your convictions and your will mightier than any that now influence them; and you get that if you will yield yourself to the love that has come down from heaven to save you, and says to you, 'If you love Me, keep My commandments.' You want for keeping yourself and cleansing your way reinforcements to your own inward vigour, and you will get these if you will trust to Jesus Christ, who will breathe into you the Spirit of His own life, which will make you 'free from the law of sin and death.'

You want, if your path is to be cleansed—the youngest of you, the most tenderly nurtured, the purest, the most innocent wants—forgiveness for a past path, which is in some measure stained and foul, as well as strength for the future, to deliver you from the dreadful influence of the habit of evil. And you get all these, dear friends! in the blood of Jesus Christ that cleanses from all sin.

So, standing as you do in the place where two ways meet, and with your choice yet in your power, I beseech you, turn away from the broad, easy road that slopes pleasantly downwards, and choose the narrow, steep path that climbs. Better rocks than mud, better the painful life of self-restraint and self-denial than the life of pleasing self.

Oh! choose the better portion, choose Christ for your Leader, your Law, your Lord! Trust yourselves

to that great sacrifice which He made on the Cross, that all the past for you may be cleansed, and the future may be swept clear; and, so trusting, be sure He will be with you, to keep you and to guide you into the path which His own hand has raised above the filth of the world; the path of holiness, along which you may walk with feet and garments unstained till you come to Zion, 'with songs and everlasting joy upon your heads,' and bless Him there for all the way by which He led you home.

LIFE HID AND NOT HID

'Thy word have I hid in my heart.'—PSALM cxix. 11.

'I have not hid Thy righteousness in my heart.'—PSALM xl. 10.

Then there are two kinds of hiding—one right and one wrong: one essential to the life of the Christian, one inconsistent with it. He is a shallow Christian who has no secret depths in his religion. He is a cowardly or a lazy one, at all events an unworthy one, who does not exhibit, to the utmost of his power, his religion. It is bad to have all the goods in the shop window; it is just as bad to have them all in

the cellar. There are two aspects of the Christian life —one between God and myself, with which no stranger intermeddles; one patent to all the world. My two texts touch these two.

I. 'I have hid Thy word within my heart.' There we have the word hidden, or the secret religion of the heart.

Now, I have often had occasion to remind you that the Old Testament use of the word 'heart' is much wider than our modern one, which limits it to being the seat and organ of love, affection, or emotion; whereas in the Old Testament the 'heart' is the very vital centre of the personal self. As the Book of Proverbs has it, 'out of it are the issues of life,' all the outgoings of activity of every kind, both that which we ascribe to the head, and that which we ascribe to the heart. These come, according to the Old Testament idea, from this central self. And so, when the Psalmist says, 'I have hid Thy word within my heart,' he means 'I have buried it deep in the very midst of my being, and put it down at the very roots of myself, and there incorporated it with the very substance of my soul.'

Now, I venture to take that expression, 'Thy word,' in a somewhat wider sense than the Psalmist employed it. There are three ideas conveyed by that expression in Scripture; and two of them are distinctly found in this psalm.

First, there is the plain, obvious one, which means by 'the word,' written revelation. The Bible of the Psalmist was a very small volume compared with ours. The Pentateuch, and perhaps some of the historical books, possibly also one or two of the prophets—and these were about all. Yet this fragmentary word he 'hid in his heart.' Now, dear brethren! I wish to say a very practical thing or two, and I begin with this. If you want to be strong Christian people, hide the Bible in your heart. When I was a boy the practice of good Christian folk was to read a daily chapter. I wonder if that is kept up. I gravely suspect it is not. There are, no doubt, a great many causes contributing to the comparative decay amongst professing Christians, of Bible reading and Bible study. There is modern 'higher criticism,' which has a great deal to say about how and when the books were made, especially the books that composed this Psalmist's Bible. But I want to insist that no theories, were they ever so well established—as I take leave to say they are not—no theories about these secondary questions touch the value of Scripture as a factor in the development of the Christian life. Whatever a man may think about these, he will be none the less alive, if he is wise, to the importance of the daily devotional study of Scripture.

Then there is another set of reasons for the neglect of Scripture, in the multiplication of other forms of literature. People have so many other books to read

now, that they have not much time for reading their Bibles, or if they have, they think they have not. No literature will ever take the place of the old Book. Why, even looked at as a mere literary product there is nothing in the world like it! And no religious literature, sermons, treatises, still less magazines and periodicals, will do for Christian men what the Bible will do for them. You make a tremendous mistake, for your own souls' sake, if your religious reading consists in what people have said and thought about Scripture, more than in the Scripture itself. Why should you dip your pitchers into the reservoir, when you can take them up to where the spring comes gushing out of the hillside, pure and limpid and living?

Then there is the drive of our modern life which crowds out the word. Get up a quarter of an hour earlier and you will have time to read your Bible. It will be well worth the sacrifice, if it is a sacrifice. I do not mean by reading the Bible what, I am afraid, is far too common, reading a scrap of Scripture as if it were a kind of charm. But I would most earnestly press upon you that muscle and fibre will distinctly atrophy and become enfeebled, if Christian people neglect the first plain way of hiding the word in their heart, which is to make the utterances of Scripture as if incorporated with their very being, and part of their very selves.

But there is another use of the expression, 'Thy word,' which is not without example in this great

psalm of praise of the word. In one place in it we read, 'For ever, O Lord! Thy word is settled in heaven'; that is not the Bible. 'Thy faithfulness is unto all generations. They continue this day according to Thy ordinances'; these are not the Bible —'for all are Thy servants.' 'Unless Thy law had been my delight, I should have perished in my afflictions'; I think that is not the Bible either, but it is the utterance of God's will, as expressed in the Psalmist's affliction. God's word comes to us in His providences and in many other ways. It is the declaration of His character and purposes, however they are declared, and the expression of His will and command, however expressed. In that wider sense of the phrase, I would say, 'Hide that manifested will of God in your hearts.' Let us cultivate the habit of bringing all 'the issues of life'—the streams that bubble up from that fountain in the centre of our being—into close relation to what we know to be God's will concerning us. Let the thought of the will of God sit sovereign arbiter, enthroned in the very centre of our personality, ruling our will, bending it and making it yielding and conformed to His, governing our affections, regulating our passions, restraining our desires, stimulating our slothfulness, quickening our aspirations, lifting heavenwards our hopes, and bringing the whole of the activities that well up from our hearts into touch with the will of God. Cast the healing branch into the very eye of the fountain, and then all the streams will partake of the cleansing. Let that known will of God be as the leaven hid in three

measures of meal till the whole was leavened. A fanciful interpretation of that emblem makes the three measures to mean the triple constituents of humanity, body, soul, and spirit. We may smile at the fantastic exposition, but let us take heed to obey the exhortation. When God's will is deeply planted within, it will work quickening change on the heavy dough of our sluggish natures. It is when we bring the springs of our actions—namely, our motives, which are our true selves—into touch with His uttered will, that our deeds become conformed to it. Look after the motives, and the deeds will look after themselves. 'I have hid Thy word within my heart.'

And now I venture upon a further application of this phrase, of which the Psalmist had no notion, but which, in God's great mercy, in the progress of revelation, we can make. There is a better word of God than the Bible; there is a better word of God than any will uttered in His providences and the like. There is the Incarnate Word of God, who 'was from the beginning with God, and was God,' and is manifested in these last times unto us. I am keeping well within the analogy of Scripture teaching when I see the perfecting of revelation by the spoken Word as reached in the revelation by the personal word; and when, in addition to the exhortation, to hide the Scripture in your hearts, and to hide the uttered will of God, however uttered, in your hearts, I add, let us hide Christ in our hearts. For He will 'dwell in our hearts by faith,' and if He is shrined within the

curtains of the secret place within us, which is 'the secret place of the Most High,' then, in the courts of the sanctuary, there will be a pure sacrifice and a priest clad 'in the beauties of holiness.'

II. The word not hidden, or the religion of the outward life.

Our second text brings into view the outer side of the devout life, that which is turned to the world. The word is to be hidden in the heart, for this very end of being then revealed in the life. For what other purpose is it to be set in the centre of our being and applied to the springs of action, than to mould action, and so to be displayed in conduct? It is not to be hid like some forgotten and unused treasure in a castle vault, but to be buried deep in a living person, that it may affect all that person's character and acts. 'There is nothing hidden, but that it should come abroad.' The deepest, sacredest, most secret Christian experiences are to be operative on the outward life. A man may be caught up into the third heavens and there hear words which mortal speech cannot utter, but the incommunicable vision should tell on his patience and fortitude, and influence his Christian work. Nor is our manifestation of the springs of our action to be confined to conduct. However eloquent it is, it will be all the more intelligible for the commentary supplied by confession with the mouth. Speech for Christ is a Christian obligation. 'What ye hear in the ear, that proclaim ye on the housetops.' True, there is a legitimate reticence as to the depths

of personal religion, which needs very strong reasons to warrant its being broken through. Peter told Mark nothing of the interview which he had with Christ on the Resurrection morning, but he must have told the fact. We shall do well to be silent as to what passes between Jesus and us in secret; but we shall not do well if, coming from our private communion with Him, we do not 'find' some to whom we can say, 'We have found the Messiah,' and so bring them to Jesus.

The word, if hid in the heart, will certainly be manifest in the life. For not only is it impossible for a man who deeply and continually realises God's will, and lives in touch with Jesus Christ, to prevent these experiences from visibly affecting His life and conduct, but also in the measure in which we have that conscious inward possession of the divine word and the divine Christ we shall be impelled to manifest them to our fellows by every means in our power. What, then, is the inference to be drawn from the fact that there are thousands of professing Christian people in Manchester, who never felt the slightest touch of a necessity to make known the Master whom they say they serve? They must be very shallow Christians, having no depth of experience, or that experience would insist on coming out. True Christian emotion is like a fire smouldering within some substance, that never rests till it burns its way to the outside. As one of the prophets puts it, 'I said I will speak no more in Thy name'; he goes on to tell how his resolve of silence

gave way under the pressure of the unuttered speech —'Thy word shut up in my bones was like a fire, and I was weary of forbearing and I could not stay.' So it will always be. Every genuine conviction demands utterance. A full heart needs the relief of speech. If you feel no need to show your allegiance and love to Christ by speech as well as by life, I shrewdly suspect you have little love or allegiance to hide.

Further, the more we show it, the more need there is for us to cultivate the hidden element in our religion. If I were talking to ministers I should have a great deal to say about that. There are preachers who preach away their own religion. The two attitudes of mind in imparting and in receiving are wholly different; and if one is allowed to encroach upon the other, nothing but harm can come. 'As thy servant was busy here and there, he was gone,'—that is the short account of the decay of personal religion in many a life outwardly diligent in Christian work. If there is a proportionate cultivation of the hidden self, then the act of manifesting will tend to strengthen it. It is meant that our Christian convictions and affections should grow in strength and in transforming power upon ourselves, by reason of utterance; just as when you let air in, the fire burns brighter. But it is quite possible that we may dissipate and scatter our feeble religion by talking about it; and some of us may be in danger of that. The loftier you mean to build your tower, the deeper must be the foundation that you dig. The more any

of us are trying to do for Jesus Christ, the more need there is that we increase our secret communion with Jesus Christ.

We may wrongly hide our religion so that it evaporates. Too many professing Christians put away their religion as careless housewives might do some precious perfume, and when they go to take it out, they find nothing but a rotten cork, a faint odour, and an empty flask. Take care of burying your religion so deep, as dogs do bones, that you cannot find it again, or if you do discover, when you open the coffin, that it holds only a handful of dry dust. The heart has two actions. In one it opens its portals and expands to receive the inflowing blood which is the life. In the other it contracts to drive the life through the veins. For health there must be both motions; the receptiveness, in the secret 'hiding of the word in the heart'; the expulsive energy in the 'not hiding Thy righteousness in my heart.'

A STRANGER IN THE EARTH

'I am a stranger in the earth: hide not Thy commandments from me.... 64. The earth, O

> Lord, is full of Thy mercy: teach me Thy statutes.' —PSALM cxix. 19, 64.

There is something very remarkable in the variety-in-monotony of this, the longest of the psalms. Though it be the longest it is in one sense the simplest, inasmuch as there is but one thought in it, beaten out into all manner of forms and based upon all various considerations. It reminds one of the great violinist who out of one string managed to bring such music and melody.

The one thought is the infinite preciousness of God's law, by which, of course, is not meant the written record of that law which lies in Scripture, but the utterances of God's law in any form, by which men may receive it. You will find that that wider signification of the word 'law,' 'commandment,' 'statute,' is essential to the understanding of every portion of this psalm.

And now these two petitions which I have put together base the prayer, which they both offer, in slightly varied form ('Teach me Thy statutes,' or 'Hide not Thy commandments from me,') upon two diverse considerations, which, taken in conjunction, are extremely interesting.

The two facts on which the one petition rests, are like two great piers on two opposite sides of a river, each of which holds one end of the arch. 'The earth is full of Thy mercy'; ay! but 'I am a stranger upon the

earth.' These two things are both true, and from each of them, and still more from both of them taken together, rises up this petition. Let us look then at the facts, and then at the prayer that is built upon them.

Take first that thought of the rejoicing earth, full of God's mercy as some cup is full of rich wine, or as the flowers in the morning are filled with dew. The Bible does not look at the external world, the material universe, from a scientific point of view, nor does it look at it from a poetical point of view, but from a simply religious one. Nothing that modern science has taught us to say about the world in the least affects this principle which the Psalmist lays down, that it is all full of God's mercy. The thought is intended to exclude man and man's ways and all connected with him, as we shall see presently, but the Psalmist looks out upon the earth and all the rest of its inhabitants, and he is sure of two things: one, that God's direct act is at work in it all, so as that every creature that lives, and everything that is, lives and is because God is there, and working there; and next, that everything about us is the object of loving thoughts of God's; and has, as it were, some reflection of God's smile cast across it like the light of flowers upon the grass. Spring days with life 're-orient out of dust,' and the annual miracle beginning again all round, with the birds in the trees, that even dwellers in towns can hear singing as if their hearts would burst for very mirth and hopefulness, the

blossoms beginning to push above the frosty ground, and the life breaking out of the branches that were stiff and dry all through the winter, proclaim the same truth as the Psalmist was contemplating when he spoke thus. He looks all round, and everywhere sees the signature of a loving divine Hand.

The earth is full to brimming of Thy mercy. It takes faith to see that; it takes a deeper and a firmer hold of the thought of a present God than most men have, to feel that. For the most of us, the world has got to be very empty of God now. We hear rather the creaking of the wheels of a great machine, or see the workings of a blind, impersonal force. But I believe that all that is precious and good in the growth of knowledge since the old days when this Psalmist wrote may be joyfully accepted by us, and deep down below all we may see the deeper, larger truth of the living purpose and will of God Himself. And I know no reason why twentieth-century men, full to the fingertips of modern scientific thought, may not say as heartily as the old Psalmist said, 'The earth, O Lord! is full of Thy mercy.'

But then there is another side to all this. Amidst all this sunny play of gladness, and apocalypse of blessing, there stands one exception. Hearken to the other word of my texts, 'I am a stranger upon the earth.' Man is out of joint with the great whole, out of harmony with the music, the only hungry one at the feast. All other creatures are admirably adapted for the place they fill, and the place they fill is

sufficient for them. But I stand here, knowing that I do not belong to this goodly fellowship, feeling that I am an exception to the rule. As Colonel Gardiner said, 'I looked at the dog, and I wished that *I* was a dog.' Ah! many another man has felt, Why is it that whilst every creature, the motes that dance in the sunbeam, and the minutest living things, however insignificant, are all filled to the very brim of their capacity—why is it that I, the roof and crown of things, stand here, a sad and solitary stranger, having made acquaintance with grief; having learned what they know not, the burden of toil and care, cursed with forecast and anticipation, saddened by memory, torn by desires? 'We look before and after, and pine for what is not.' All other beings fit their place, and their place fits them like a glove upon a fair hand, but I stand here 'a stranger upon the earth.' And the more I feel, or at least the more I am convinced that it is full of God's mercy, the more I feel that there is something else which I need to make me, in my fashion, as really and as completely blessed as the lowest of His creatures.

The Psalmist tells us what that something more is: 'I am a stranger upon the earth; hide not Thy commandments from me.' That is my food, that is what I need; that is the one thing that will make our souls feel at rest, that we shall have not merely a Bible in our hands, but the will of God, the knowledge and the love of the will of God, in our hearts. When we can say 'I delight to do Thy will,

and my whole being seeks to lay itself beneath the mould of Thine impressing purpose, and to be shaped accordingly'; Oh! then, then the care and the toil and the sorrow and the restlessness and the sense of transiency, all change. Some of them pass away altogether; those of them that survive are transfigured from darkness to glory. Just as some gloomy cliff, impending over the plain, when the rising sun smites upon it, is changed into a rosy and golden glory, so the frowning peaks that look down upon us, are all transmuted and glorified, when once the light of God's recognised will falls upon them.

'All is right that seems most wrong,
If it be His sweet will.'

And when He has not hidden His commandments from us, but we have them in our hearts, for the joy and the strength of our lives, then, then it does not matter, though we have to say, 'foxes have holes, and birds of the air have their roosting-places,' and I only, in creation, have 'not where to lay my head.' If we have His will in our hearts, and are humbly and yet lovingly trying to do it, then toil becomes easy, and work becomes blessedness. If we have His will in our hearts, and are seeking to cleave to it, then and only then, do we cease to feel that it is sad that we should be strangers upon the earth, because then and then only can we say 'we seek for a better country, that is, a heavenly.'

Oh, dear friends! we shall be cursed with

restlessness and 'weighed upon with sore distress'; and a fleeting world will, by its very fleetingness, be a misery to us, until we have learned to yield our wills to God, and to drink in His law as the joy and the rejoicing of our hearts. A stranger upon the earth needs the statutes of the Lord, he needs no more, and then they will be as the Psalmist says in another place, 'his song in the house of his pilgrimage.'

But the first of our two texts suggests further to us the certainty that this petition shall not be in vain. If the thought, 'I am a stranger in the earth,' teaches us our need of God's commandments, the thought, 'the earth is full of Thy mercies,' assures us that we shall get what we need.

Surely it is not going to be the case that we only are to be left hungry when all other creatures sit at His table and feast there. Surely He who knows what each living thing requires, and opens His hand, and satisfies their desires, is not going to leave the nobler famishing of an immortal soul uncared for.

Surely if all through the universe besides, we see that the measure of a creature's capacity is the measure of God's gift to it, there is not going to be, there need not be, any disproportion between what we require and what we possess. Surely if His ear can hear and translate, and His loving hand can open to satisfy, the croaking of the young raven when it cries, He will neither mistake nor neglect the voice of a man's heart, when it is asking what is so in

accordance with His will as that He should let him know and love His statutes.

It is not meant to be the case that we lie in the middle of His creation, the one exception to the universal law, like Gideon's fleece, dry and dusty, while every poor bit of bush and grass round about is soaked with His dew. If 'the earth is full of Thy mercy,' Thou thereby hast pledged Thyself that my heart shall be full of Thy law and Thy grace, if I desire it.

And so, dear brethren! whilst the one of these twin considerations should send us to our knees, the other should hearten and wing our prayers. And if, on the one hand, we feel that to bring us up to the level of the poorest of His creatures, we need a firm grasp and a hearty love of His law deep in our spirits, on the other hand, the fact that the feeblest and the poorest of His creatures is saturated and soaked with as much of God's goodness as it can suck in, may make us quite sure that our souls will not vainly pant after Him in a 'dry and thirsty land where no water is.' 'The earth, O Lord! is full of Thy mercy.' Am I to be empty of the highest mercy, the knowledge of Thy will? Never! never!

And so, 'Say not, Who shall ascend up into the heavens? say not, Who shall pass over the sea to bring Thy law near, that we may hear and do it? Behold! the word is very nigh thee.' The law, the will of God, and the power to perform it are braided

together, in inextricable union, in Jesus Christ Himself; and the prayer of my psalm most deeply understood, turns itself all into this:—Give me Christ, more of the knowledge of Him who is my law and Thine uttered will; more of the love of Him whom to love is to be at home everywhere, and to be filled with Thy mercy; more of the likeness to Him whom to imitate is holiness; whom to resemble is perfection. 'The earth is full of Thy mercy.' 'The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us; and we beheld His glory, full of grace and truth.' And of that fulness can all we receive. Then will we be strangers here no longer; and our hearts will be replenished with a better mercy than all the universe beside is capable of containing.

'TIME FOR THEE TO WORK'

> 'It is time for Thee, Lord, to work; for they have made void Thy Law. 127. Therefore I love Thy commandments above gold, yea, above fine gold. 128. Therefore I esteem all Thy precepts concerning all things to be right; and I hate every false way.' —PSALM cxix. 126-128.

If much that we hear be true, a society to circulate Bibles is a most irrational and wasteful expenditure of energy and money. We cannot ignore the extent and severity of the opposition to the very idea of revelation, even if we would; we should not if we could. We are told with some exaggeration—the wish being father to the thought—that the educated mind of the country has broken with Christianity, a statement which is equally remarkable for its accuracy and for its modesty. But it has a basis of truth in the widespread disbelief diffused through the literary and so-called cultivated classes. There is no need to spend time in referring at length to facts which are only too familiar to most of us. Every sphere of knowledge, every form of literature, is enlisted in the crusade. Periodicals that lie on all our tables, works of imagination that your daughters read, newspapers that go everywhere, are full of it. Poetry, forgetting her lineage and her sweetness, strains *her* voice in rhapsodies of hostility. Science, leaping the hedge beyond which *she* at all events is a trespasser,—or in finer language, 'prolonging its gaze backwards beyond the boundary of experimental evidence,' or in still plainer terms, *guessing*, affirms that she discerns in matter the promise and potency of every form of life; or presently, in a devouter mood, looking on the budding glories of the spring, declines to *profess* the creed of Atheism. Learned criticism demonstrates the impossibility of supernatural religion. The leader of an influential school leaves behind him a voice hollow and sad, as

from the great darkness, in which we seem to hear the echoes of a life baffled in the attempt to harmonise the logical and the spiritual elements of a large soul: 'There may be a God. The evidence is insufficient for proof. It only amounts to one of the lower degrees of probability. He may have given a revelation of His will. There are grounds sufficient to remove all antecedent improbability. The question is wholly one of evidence; but the evidence required has not been, and cannot be, forthcoming. There is room to hope for a future life, but there is no assurance whatever. Therefore cultivate in the region of the imagination merely those hopes which can never become certainties, for they are infinitely precious to mankind.'

Ah, brethren! do we not hear in these dreary words the cry of the immortal hunger of the soul for God, for the living God? The concessions they make to Christian apologists are noteworthy, but that unconscious confession of need is the most noteworthy. Surely, as the eye prophesies light, so the longing of the soul and the capacity for forming such ideals are the token that He is for whom heart and flesh do thus yearn. And how blessed is it to set over against these dreary ghosts that call themselves hopes, and that pathetic vain attempt to find refuge in the green fields of the imagination from the choking dust of the logical arena, the old faithful words: 'This is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and that this life is in His Son'!

But my object in referring to these forms of opinion was merely to prepare the way for my subsequent observations; I have no intention of dealing with any of them by way of criticism or refutation. This is not the place nor the audience, nor am I the person, for that task. But I have thought that it might not be inappropriate to this occasion if I were to ask you to consider with me, from these words, the attitude of mind and heart to God's word which becomes the Christian in times of opposition.

The Psalmist was surrounded, as would appear, by widespread defection from God's law. But instead of trembling as if the sun were about to expire, he turns himself to God, and in fellowship with Him sees in all the antagonism but the premonition that He is about to act for the vindication of His own work. That confidence finds expression in the sublime invocation of our text. Then with another movement of thought, the contemplation of the departures makes him tighten his own hold on the law of the Lord, and the contempt of the gainsayers quickens his love: '*Therefore* I love,' etc. And as must needs be the case, that love is the measure of his abhorrence of the opposite; and because God's commandments are so dear to him, therefore he recoils with healthy hatred from false ways. So, I think, we have a fourfold representation here of our true attitude in the face of existing antagonism—calm confidence in God's work for His law; earnest prayer, which secures the forthputting of the divine energy; an increased

intensity of cleaving to the word; and a decisive opposition to the ways which make it void.

I ask your attention to some remarks on each of these in their order.
So, then, we have—

I. Calm confidence that times of antagonism evoke God's work for His word.

Now I dare say that some of you feel that is not the first thought that should be excited by the opposition around us. 'We have no sort of doubt,' you may say, 'that God will take care of His own word, if there be such a thing; but the question that presses is, Have we it in this book? Answer that for us, and we will thank you; but platitudes about God watching over His truth are naught. The first thing to do is to meet these arguments and establish the origin of Scripture. Then it will follow of itself that it will not perish.'

But I take leave to think we, as Christians, arc not bound to revise the foundation belief of our lives at the call of every new antagonist. Life is too short for that. There is too much work waiting, to suspend our activity till we have answered each denier. We do not hold our faith in the word of God, as the winners at a match do their cups and belts, on condition of wrestling for them with any challenger. It is a perfectly legitimate position to say, We hold a ground of certitude, from which none of this strife of tongues is able to dislodge us. 'We have heard Him

ourselves, and know that this is the Christ.' The Scriptures which we have received, not without knowledge of the grounds on which controversialists defend them, have proved themselves to us by their own witness. The light is its own proof. We have the experience of Christ and His law. He has saved our souls, He has changed our lives. We know in whom we have believed, and we are neither irrational nor obstinate when we avow that we will not pretend to suspend these convictions on the issue of any debate. We decline to dig up the piles of the bridge that carries us over the abyss because voices tell us that it is rotten. It is shorter and perfectly reasonable to answer, 'Rotten, did you say? Well, we have tried it, and it bears'; which, being translated into less simple language, is just the assertion of certitude built on facts and experience which leaves no place for doubt. All the opposition will be broken into spray against that rock bulwark: 'Thy words were found, and I did eat them, and they are the joy and rejoicing of my heart.'

So I venture to think that, speaking to Christian men and women, I have a right to speak on the basis of our common belief, and to encourage them to cherish it notwithstanding gainsayers. I am not counselling stolid indifference to the course of modern thought, nor desertion of the duty of defence. We are not to say, 'God will interfere; I need do nothing.' But the task of controversy is not for all Christians, nor the duty of following the flow of

opinion. There is plenty of more profitable work than that for most of us. The temper which our text enjoins *is* for us all; and this calm confidence, that at the right time God will work for His word, is its first element.

This confidence rests upon our belief in a divine providence that governs the world, and on the observed laws of its working. It is ever His method to send His succour *after* the evil has been developed, and *before* it has triumphed. Had it come sooner, the priceless benefits of struggle, the new perceptions won in controversy of the many-sided meaning and value of His truth, the vigour from conflict, the wholesome sense of our weakness, had all been lost. Had it come later, it had come too late. So He times His help, in order that we may derive the greatest possible benefit from both the trial and the aid. We have all been dealt with so in our personal histories, whereof the very motto might be, 'When I said my foot slippeth, Thy mercy, O Lord! held me up.' The same law works on the wider platform. The enemy shall be allowed to pass through the breadth of the land, to spread dread and sorrow through village and hamlet, to draw his ranks round Jerusalem, as a man closes his hand on some insect he would crush. *To-morrow*, and the assault will be made; but *to-night* 'the angel of the Lord went forth and smote the camp; and when they arose in the morning,' expecting to hear the wild war-cry of the conquerors as they stormed across the undefended walls, 'they

were all dead corpses.' Then, as it would appear, a psalmist, moved by that mighty victory, cast it into words, which remain for all generations the law of the divine aid, and imply all that I am urging now: 'The Lord is in the midst of her, she shall not be moved; the Lord shall help her at the dawning of the morning.' True, we are no judges of the time. Our impatience is ever outrunning His calm deliberation. An illusion besets us all that *our* conflicts with unbelief are the severest the world has ever seen; and there is a great deal of exaggeration on both sides at present as to the real extent and importance of existing antagonism to God's revelation. A widespread literature provides so many—I would not say empty—spaces for any voice to reverberate in, that both the shouters and the listeners are apt to fancy the assailants are an army, when they are only a handful, armed mainly with trumpets and pitchers. There have been darker days of antagonism than these. 'He that believeth shall not make haste.' This confidence in the punctual wisdom of His working involves the other belief, that if He does not 'work,' it is because the time is not yet ripe; the negations and contradictions have still an office to fulfil, and no hurt that cannot be repaired has been done to the faith of the Church or the power of the word.

Nor can we forecast the manner of His working. He can call forth from the solitary sheepfolds the defenders of His word, as has ever been His wont, raising the man when the hour had come, even as He

sent His son in the fulness of time. He can lead science on to deeper truth; He can quicken His Church into new life; He can guide the spirit of the age. We believe that the history of the world is the unfolding of His will, and the course of opinion guided in its channel by the Voice which the depths have obeyed from of old. Therefore we wait for His working, expecting no miracle, prescribing no time, hurried by no impatience, avoiding no task of defence or confession; but knowing that, unhasting and unresting He will arise when the storm is loudest, and somehow will say, 'Peace! be still.' Then they who had not cast away their confidence for any fashion of unbelief that passeth away will rejoice as they sing, 'Lo! this is our God; we have waited for Him, and He will save us.'

This confidence is confirmed by the history of all the past assaults on
Scripture.

The whole history of the origin, collection, preservation, transmission, diffusion, and present influence of the Bible involves so much that is surprising and unique, as to amount to at least a strong presumption of a divine care. Among all the remarkable things about the Book, nothing is more remarkable than that there it is, after all that has happened. When we think of the gaps and losses in ancient literature, and the long stormy centuries that lie between us and its earlier pages, we can faintly estimate the chances against their preservation. It is

strange that the Jewish race should have so jealously preserved books which certainly did not flatter national pride, which put a mortifying explanation on national disasters, which painted them and their fathers in dark colours, which proclaimed truths they never loved, and breathed a spirit they never caught. It is stranger still, that in the long years of dispersion the very vices and limitations of the people subserved the same end, and that stiff pedantry and laborious trifling—the poorest form of intellectual activity—should have guarded the letter of the word, as the coral insects painfully build up their walls round some fair island of the Southern Sea. When one thinks of the great gulf of language between the Old and New Testaments, of the variety of authors, periods, subjects, literary form, the animosities of Christian and Jew, it *is* strange that we have the Book here *one*, and that all these parts should blend into unity, unless the source and theme were one, and one Hand had shaped each, and cared for the gathering together of all.

It has been demonstrated over and over again to have no pretensions to be a divine revelation; and yet here it is, believed by millions, and rooted so firmly in European language and thought, that no revolution short of a return to barbarism can abolish it. It has been proved to be a careless, unauthenticated collection of works of different periods, styles, and schools of thought, having no unity but what is given by the bookbinder: and lo!

here it is still, not disintegrated, much less dissolved. Each age brings its own destructive criticism to play on it, confessing thereby that its predecessors have effected nothing; for as the Bible says about sacrifices, so we may say about assaults on Scripture, 'If they had done their work, would they not have ceased to be offered?' And the effect of the heaviest artillery that can be brought into position is as transient as the boom of their report and the puff of their smoke. Why, who knows anything about the world's wonders of books that a hundred years ago made good men's hearts tremble for the ark of God? You may find them in dusty rows on the top shelves of great libraries. But if their names had not occurred in the pages of Christian apologists, flies in amber, nobody in this generation would ever have heard of them. And still more conspicuously is it so with earlier examples of the same kind. Their work is as hopelessly dead as they. And the Book seems none the worse for all the shot—like the rock that a ship fired at all night, taking it for an enemy, and could not provoke to answer nor succeed in sinking. Surely some dim suspicion of the hopelessness of the attempt might creep into the hearts of men who know what *has* been. Surely the signal failure and swift fading away of all former efforts to dethrone the Bible might lead to the question, 'Does it not lay its deep foundations in the heart of man and the purpose of God, too deep to be reached by the short tools of mere criticism, too massive to be overthrown by all the weight of materialistic science?' It is with

the Bible as it was with the Apostle, on whose hand, as he crouched over the newly-lit flame, the viper fastened, 'and he shook off the beast into the fire, and felt no harm.' The barbarous people, who changed their minds after they had looked a great while and saw no harm come to him, were not altogether wrong, and might teach a lesson to some modern wise men, that, among the other facts which they deal with, they should try to estimate this fact of the continued existence and influence of Scripture, and the failure thus far of all attempts to shake its throne or break the sweet influences of its bands.

Brethren! we, at all events, should learn the lesson of historical experience. The Gospel and the Book which is its record, have met with eager, eloquent, learned antagonists before to-day, and they have passed. Little more than a generation has sufficed to sweep them to oblivion. So it will be again. The forms of opinion, the tendencies of thought, which now seem to some of its enemies so certain to conquer, will follow these forgotten precursors into the dim land. May we not see them—these ancient discrowned kings that ruled over men and rebelled against Christ, these beliefs that no man now believes—rising from their shadowy thrones in the underworld to meet the now living and ruling unbelief, when it, too, shall have gone down to them; 'All they shall speak and say unto thee, Art thou also become weak as we? art thou become like unto us?' Yes, each in its turn 'becomes but a noise' when he

'passes the time appointed'—the time when God arises to do His act and vindicate His word.

II. We have here, secondly, earnest prayer which brings that divine energy.

The confidence that God *will* work underlies and gives energy to the prayer that God *would* work. The belief that a given thing is in the line of the divine purpose is not a reason for saying, 'We need not pray; God means to do it,' but is a reason for saying on the contrary, 'God means to do it; let us pray for it.' And this prayer, based upon the confidence that it is His will, is the best service that any of us can render to the Gospel in troublous times.

I shall have a word to say presently on the *sort* of outflow of the divine energy which we should principally expect and desire; but let me first remind you, very briefly, how the prayers of Christian men do condition—I had almost said regulate—that outflow.

I need not put this matter on its abstract and metaphysical side. Two facts are enough for my present purpose—one, a truth of faith, that the actual power wherewith God works for His word remains ever the same; one, a truth of observation and experience, that there are variations in the intensity of its operations and effects in the world. Wherefore? Surely because of the variations in the human recipients and organs of the power. Here at one end

is the great fountain, ever brimming. Draw from it ever so much, it sinks not one hair's-breadth in its pure basin. Here, on the other side, is an intermittent flow, sometimes in scanty driblets, sometimes in painful drops, sometimes more full and free on the pastures of the wilderness. Wherefore these jerks and spasms? It must be something stopping the pipe. Yes, of course. God's might is ever the same, but our capacity of receiving and transmitting that might varies, and with it varies the energy with which that unchanging power is exerted in the world. Our faith, our earnestness of desire, our ardour and confidence of prayer, our faithfulness of stewardship and strenuousness of use, measure the amount of the unmeasured grace which we can receive. So long as our vessels are brought, the golden oil does not cease to flow. When they are full, it stays. The principle of the variation in actual manifestation of the unvarying might of God is found in the Lord's words: 'According to your faith be it unto you.' So, then, we may expect periods of quickened energy in the forth-putting of the divine power. And these will correspond to, and be consequent on, the faithful prayers of Christian men. See to it, brethren! that you keep the channels clear, that the flow may continue full and increase. Let no mud and ooze of the world, no big blocks of sin nor subtler accumulations of small negligences, choke them again. Above all, by simple, earnest prayer keep your hearts, as it were, wide open to the Sun, and His light will shine on you, and His grace fructify

through you, and His Spirit will work in you mightily.

The tenor of these remarks presupposes a point on which I wish to make one or two observations now, viz. that the manner of the divine working which we should most earnestly desire in a time of diffused unbelief is the elevation of Christian souls to a higher spiritual life.

I do not wish to exclude other things, but I believe that the true antidote to a widespread scepticism is a quickened Church. We may indeed desire that in other ways the enemy should be met. We ought to pray that God would work by sending forth defenders of the truth, by establishing His Church in the firm faith of disputed verities, and by all the multitude of ways in which He can sway the thoughts and tendencies of men. But I honestly confess that I, for my part, attach but secondary importance to controversial defences of the faith. No doubt they have their office; they may confirm a waverer, they may establish a believer, they may show onlookers that the Christian position is tenable; they may, in some rare cases of transcendent power, prevent a heresy from spreading and from descending to another generation. But oftenest they are barren of result, and where they do their work, it is not to be forgotten that there may remain as true a making void of God's law by an evil heart of unbelief as by an understanding cased in the mail of denial. You may hammer ice on an anvil, or bray it in a

mortar. What then? It is pounded ice still, except for the little portion melted by heat of percussion, and it will soon all congeal again. Melt it in the sun, and it flows down in sweet water, which mirrors that light which loosed its bonds of cold. So hammer away at unbelief with your logical sledge-hammers, and you will change its shape, perhaps; but it is none the less unbelief because you have ground it to powder. It is a mightier agent that must melt it—the fire of God's affection, of all lower, howsoever tender, loves that once filled the whole heart. Such surrender is not pain but gladness, inasmuch as the deeper well that has been sunk dries the surface springs, and gathers all their waters into itself. The new treasure that has filled the heart compels, by glad compulsion, the surrender or, at least, the subordination, of all former affections to the constraint of all-mastering love.

The same thing is true in regard to the union of the soul with Christ. The description of the bride's abandonment of former duties and ties may be transferred, without the change of a word, to our relations to Him. If love to Him has really come into our hearts, it will master all our yearnings and tendencies and affections, and we shall feel that we cannot but yield up everything besides, by reason of the sovereign power of this new affection. Christ demands from us (if I may use the word 'demand' for the beseeching of love), for His sake, and for our sakes, the entire surrender of ourselves to Him. And that new affection will deal with the old loves, just

as the new buds upon the beech-trees in the spring deal with the old leaves that still hang withered on some of the branches. It will push them from their hold, and they will drop. If a river should be turned into some dark cave where unclean beasts have herded and littered for years, the bright waters would sweep out on their bosom all the filth and rottenness. So, when the love of Christ comes surging and flashing into a heart, it will bear out on its broad surface all conflicting and subordinate inclinations, with the passions and lusts that used to rule and befoul the spirit. Christ demands complete surrender, and, if we are Christians, that absolute abandonment will not be a pain nor unwelcome. We epidemic. That is a doctrine which one influential school of modern disbelievers, at all events, cannot but admit.

What then? Why this—that to change the opinions you must change the atmosphere; or, in other words, the true antagonist of a diffused scepticism is a quickened Christian life. Brethren! if we had been what we ought, would such an environment have ever been possible as that which produces this modern unbelief? Even now, depend upon it, we shall do more for Christ by catching and exhibiting more of His Spirit than by many arguments—more by words of prayer to God than by words of reasoning to men. A higher tone of spiritual life would prove that the Gospel was mighty to mould and ennoble character. If our own souls were gleaming with the glory of God, men would believe

that we had met more than the shadow of our own personality in the secret place. If the fire of faith were bright in us, it would communicate itself to others, for nothing is so contagious as earnestness. If we believed, and therefore spoke, the accent of conviction in our tones would carry them deep into some hearts. If we would trust Christ's Cross to stand firm without our stays, and arguing less about it, would seldomer try to *prop* it, and oftener to *point* to it, it would draw men to itself. When the power and reality of Scripture as the revelation of God are questioned, the best answer in the long-run will be a Church which can adduce itself as the witness, and can say to the gainsayers, 'Why, herein is a marvellous thing, that ye know not from whence He is, and yet He hath opened mine eyes!' Brethren! do you see to it that your life be thus a witness that you have heard His voice; and make it your contribution to the warfare of this day, if you do not bear a weapon, that you lift your hands and heart to God. Moses on the mount helped the struggling ranks below in their hand-to-hand combat with Amalek. Hezekiah's prayer, when he spread the letter of the invader before the Lord, was more to the purpose than all his munitions of war. Let your voice rise to heaven like a fountain, and blessings will fall on earth. 'Arise, O Lord! plead Thine own cause. The tumult of those that rise up against Thee increaseth continually.'

III. We have here, thirdly, as the fitting attitude in

times of widespread unbelief, a love to God's word made more fervid by antagonism.

There may be a question what reason for the Psalmist's love is pointed at in this 'therefore.' We shall hardly be satisfied with the slovenly and not very reverent explanation, that the word is introduced, without any particular meaning, because it begins with the initial letter proper to this section; nor does it seem enough to suppose a mere general reference to the excellences of the law of the Lord, which are the theme of the whole psalm. Such an interpretation blunts the sharp edge of the thought, and has nothing in its favour but the general want of connection between the separate verses. There are, however, one or two other instances where a thought is pursued through more than one verse, and the usual mere juxtaposition gives place to an interlocking, so that the construction is not unexampled. It is most natural to take the plain meaning of the words, and to suppose that when the Psalmist said, 'They have made void Thy law, therefore I love Thy commandments,' he meant, 'The prevailing opposition is the reason why I, for my part, grasp Thy law more strongly.' The hostility of others evokes my warmer love. The thought, so understood, is definite, true, and important, and so I venture to construe it, and enforce it as containing a lesson for the day.

And here I would first observe that I desire not to be understood as urging the substitution of feeling

for reason, nor as trying to enlist passion in a crusade against the opponent's logic. Still less do I desire to counsel the exaggeration of opinions because they are denied—that besetting danger of all controversy.

But surely the emotions have a place and an office, if not indeed in the search for, and the submission to, the truth of God, yet in the defence and adherence to that truth when found. The heart may not be the organ for the investigation and apprehension of truth, though it has a part to play even there; but the tenacity with which I cleave to truth, when apprehended, is far more an affair of the will than of the understanding—it is the heart's love steadying the mind, and holding it fixed to the rock. And love has also a place in the defence of the truth. It gives weight to blows, and wings to the arrows. It makes arguments to be wrought in fire rather than in frost. It lights the enthusiasm which cannot despair, the diligence that will not weary, the fervour that often goes farther to sway other minds than the sharpest dialectics of a passionless understanding. There *are* causes in which an unimpassioned advocacy is worse than silence; and this is one of them. The word of the living God which has saved our souls and brought to us all that makes our natures rich and strong, and all that peoples the great darkness with fair hopes solid as certainties, demands and deserves fervour in its soldiers, and loyal love in its subjects.

And while it is weakness to over-emphasise our beliefs *merely* because they are denied, and one of

the saddest issues of controversy, that both sides are apt to be hurried into exaggerated statements which calmer thoughts would repudiate; on the other hand, there *is* a legitimate prominence which ought to be given to a truth *precisely* because it is denied. The time to underline and accentuate strongly our convictions is, when society is slipping away from them, provided it be done without petulance, passion, or the falsehood of extremes.

If ever there was a period when such general considerations as these had a practical application, this is the time. Would that all such as my voice now reaches would take these grand words for theirs: 'They make void Thy law, therefore I love Thy commandments above gold; yea, above fine gold!'

Such increase of affection because of gainsayers is the natural instinct of loyal and chivalrous love. If your mother's name were defiled, would not your heart bound to her defence? When a prince is a dethroned exile, his throne is fixed deeper in the hearts of his adherents 'though his back be at the wall' and common souls become heroes because their devotion has been heightened to sublimity of self-sacrifice by a nation's rebellion. And when so many voices are proclaiming that God has never spoken to men, that our thoughts of His Book are dreams, and its long empire over men's spirits a waning tyranny, does cool indifference become us? Will not fervour be sobriety, and the glowing emotion of our whole nature our reasonable service?

Such increase of affection because of gainsayers is the fitting end and main blessing of the controversy which is being waged. We never fully hold our treasures till we have grasped them hard, lest they should be plucked from us. No truth is established till it has been denied and has survived. Antagonism to the word of God should have, and will have, to those who use it rightly, a blessing in its train, in bringing out yet more of the preciousness and manifoldness, the all-sufficiency and the universality of the Book. 'The more 'tis shook, the more it shines.' The fiercer the blast, the firmer our confidence in the inexpugnable solidity of that tower of strength that stands four square to every wind that blows. 'The word of the Lord is tried, therefore Thy servant loveth it.'

Such increase of attachment to the word of God because of gainsayers, is the instinct of self-preservation. The sight of so many making void the law makes a man bethink himself of what his own standing is. We, as they, are the children of the age. The tendencies to which they have yielded operate on us too, and our only strength is, 'Hold Thou me up, and I shall be safe!' The present condition of opinion remands us all to our foundations, and should teach us that nothing but firm adherence to God revealed in His word, and to the word which reveals God, will prevent us, too, from drifting away to shoreless, solitary seas of doubt, barren as the foam, and changeful as the crumbling, restless wave.

Such strength of affection in the presence of diffused doubt is not to be won without an effort. All our churches afford us but too many examples of men and women who have lost the warmth of their first love, if not their love itself, for no better reason than because so many others have lost it. The effect of popular unbelief stretches far beyond those who are directly affected by its arguments, or avowedly adopt its conclusions. It is hard to hold by a creed which so many influential voices tell you it is a sign of folly and of being behind the age to believe. The consciousness that Christian truth is denied, makes some of you falter in its profession, and fancy that it is less certain simply because it is gainsaid. The mist wraps you in its folds, and it is difficult to keep warm in it, or to believe that love and sunshine are above it all the same. 'Because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold.'

Therefore, brethren! do you consciously endeavour that the tempest shall make you tighten your hold on Christ and His word. He appeals to us, too, with that most pathetic question, in which yearning for our love and sorrow over the departed disciples blend so wondrously, as if He cast Himself on our loyalty: 'Will ye also go away?' Let us answer, not with the self-confidence that was so signally put to shame, 'Though all should forsake Thee, yet will not I'; but with the resolve that draws its firmness from His fulness and from our knowledge of the power of His truth, 'Lord! to whom shall we go? Thou hast the

words of eternal life.'

IV. And lastly, we have here, as the final trait in the temper which becomes such times, healthy opposition to the ways which make void the word of the Lord.

That is the Psalmist's last movement of feeling, and you see that it comes second, not first, in the order of his emotions. It is the consequence of his love, the recoil of his heart from the practices and theories which contradicted God's law.

Now, far be it from me to say a word which should fan the embers of the *odium theologicum* into a blaze against either men or opinions. But there is a truth involved which seems to be in danger of being forgotten at present, and that to the detriment of large interests as well as of the forgetters. The correlative of a hearty love for any principle or belief is—we may as well use the obnoxious word—a healthy hatred for its denial and contradiction. They are but two aspects of one thing, like that pillar of old which, in its single substance, was a cloud and darkness to the foes, and gave light by night to the friends of Him who dwelt in it. Nay, they are but two names for the very same thing viewed in the very same motion, which is love as it yearns towards and cleaves to its treasure; and hatred, as by the identical same act it recoils and withdraws from the opposite: 'He will hold to the one, and therefore and therein despise the other.'

Much popular teaching as to Christian truth seems to me to ignore this plain principle, and to be working harm, especially among our younger cultivated men and women, whom it charms by an appearance of liberality, which in their view, contrasts very favourably with the narrowness of us sectarians. I am free to admit that in our zeal about small matters (and in a certain 'provincialism,' so to speak, which characterised the type of English Christianity till within a recent period) we needed, and still need, the lesson, and I will thankfully accept the rebuke that reminds me of what I ever tend to forget, that the golden rod, wherewith the divine Builder measures from jewel to jewel in the walls of the New Jerusalem, takes in wider spaces than we have meted with our lines. But that is a very different matter from the tone which vitiates and weakens so much modern adherence to Christ's Gospel and Christ's Church. The old principle, 'in essentials unity, in non-essentials liberty,' made no attempt to determine what belonged to these two classes, and in practice their bounds may often have been wrongly set, so as to include many of the latter among the former; but it at all events recognised the distinction as the basis of its next clause, 'in all things, charity.' But nowadays, to listen to some liberal teachers, one would think that nothing was necessary, except the great sacred principle, that nothing is necessary; and that charity could not exist, unless that distinction were effaced.

I pray you, and if I may venture so far, I would especially pray my younger hearers, to take note, that however fair this way of looking at varying forms of Christian opinion may be, it really reposes on a basis which they will surely think twice before accepting, the denial that there is such a thing as intellectual certitude in religion which can be cast into definite propositions. If there be any truth at all, to confess *it* is to deny its opposite, to cleave to *this* is to reject that, to love the one is to hate the other. I fear—I know—that there are many minds among us who began with simply catching this tone of tolerance, and who have been insensibly borne along to an enfeebled belief that there is such a thing as religious truth at all, and that the truth lies in the word of God. Dear friends! let me beseech you to take heed lest, while you are only conscious of your hearts expanding with the genial glow of liberality, by little and little you lose your power of discerning between things that differ, your sense of the worth of the Scripture as the depository of divine truth, and from your slack hand the hem of the vesture in which its healing should fall away.

As broad a liberality as you please within the limits that are laid down by the very nature of the case. 'These things are written that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing, ye might have life through His name.' Wheresoever that record is accepted, that divine Name confessed, that faith exercised, and that life

possessed, there, with all diversities, own a brother. Wheresover these things are not, loyalty to your Lord demands that the strength of your love for His word should be manifested in the strength of your recoil from that which makes it void. 'I love Thy commandments, and I hate every false way.'

I am much mistaken if times are not rapidly coming on us when a decisive election of his side will be forced on every man. The old antagonists will be face to face once more. Compromises and hesitations will not serve. The country between the opposing forces will be stripped of every spot that might serve as cover for neutrals. On the one side a mighty host, its right the Pharisees of ecclesiasticism and ritual, with their banner of authority, making void the law of God by their tradition; its left, and never far away from their opposites on the right with whom they are strangely leagued, working into each other's hands, the Sadducees denying angel and spirit, with their war-cry of unfettered freedom and scientific evidence; and in the centre, far rolling, innumerable, the dusky hosts of mere animalism, and worldliness, and self, making void the law by their sheer godlessness. And on the other side, 'He was clothed with a vesture dipped in blood, and His name is called the Word of God, and they that were with Him were called, and chosen, and faithful.' The issue is certain from of old. Do you see to it that you are of those who were valiant for the truth upon the earth.

Let not the contradiction of many move you from your faith; let it lift your eyes to the hills from whence cometh our help. Let it open your desires in prayer to Him who keeps His own word, that it may keep His Church and bless the world. Let it kindle into fervent enthusiasm, which is calm sobriety, your love for that word. Let it make decisive your rejection of all that opposes. Driftwood may float with the stream; the ship that holds to her anchor swings the other way. Send that word far and wide. It is its own best evidence. It will correct all the misrepresentation of its foes, and supplement the inadequate defences of its friends. Amid all the changes of attacks that have their day and cease to be, amid all the changes of our representations of its endless fulness, it will live. Schools of thought that assail and defend it pass, but it abides. Of both enemy and friend it is true, 'The grass withereth, and the flower thereof passeth away.' How antique and ineffectual the pages of the past generations of either are, compared with the ever-fresh youth of the Bible, which, like the angels, is the youngest and is the oldest of books. The world can never lose it; and notwithstanding all assaults, we may rest upon *His* assurance, whose command is prophecy, when He says, 'Write it before them in a table, and note it in a book, that it may be for the time to come for ever and ever.'

SUBMISSION AND PEACE

'Great peace have they which love Thy law; and nothing shall offend
them.'
PSALM cxix. 165.

The marginal note says 'they shall have no stumbling block.'

We do great injustice to this psalm—so exuberant in its praises of 'the law of the Lord'—if we suppose that that expression means nothing more than the Mosaic or Jewish revelation. It does mean that, of course, but the psalm itself shows that the writer uses the expression and its various synonyms as including a great deal more than any one method by which God's will is made known to man. For he speaks, for instance, in one part of the psalm of God's 'word,' as being settled for ever in the heavens, and of the heavens and earth as continuing to this day, 'according to Thine ordinances.'

So we are warranted in giving to the thought of

our text the wider extension of taking the divine 'law' to include not only that directory of conduct contained in Scripture, but the expressed will of God, involving duties for us, in whatever way it is made known. The love of that uttered will, the Psalmist declares, will always bring peace. Such an understanding of the text does not exclude the narrower reference, which is often taken to be the only thought in the Psalmist's mind, nor does it obliterate the distinction between the written law of God and the disclosures of His will which we collect by the exercise of our faculties on events around and facts within us. But it widens the horizon of our contemplations, and bases the promised peace on its true foundation, the submission of the human to the divine will.

Let us then consider how true love to the will of God, however it is made known to us, either in the Book or in our consciousness, or in daily providences, or by other people's hints, is the talisman that brings to us, in all circumstances, and in every part of our nature, a tranquillity which nothing can disturb.

Of course, by 'love' here is meant, not only delight in the expression of, but the submission of the whole being to, God's will; and we love the law only when, and because, we love the Lawgiver.

I. Thus loving the law of God, not only with delight in the vehicle of its expression, but with

inward submission to its behests, we shall have, first of all, the peacefulness of a restful heart.

Such a heart has found an adequate and worthy object for the outgoings of its affections. Base things loved always disturb. Noble things loved always tranquillise. And he to whom his judgment declares that the best of all things is God's manifested will, and whose affections and emotions and actions follow the dictate of his judgment, has a love which grasps whatsoever things are noble and fair and of good report, and is lifted to a level corresponding with the loftiness of its objects. For our hearts are like the creatures in some river, of which they tell us that they change their colour according to the hue of the bed of the stream in which they float and of the food of which they partake. The heart that lives on the will of God will be calm and steadfast, and ennobled into reposeful tranquillity like that which it grasps and grapples.

Little boats which are made fast to the sides of a ship rise and fall with the tide, as does that to which they are attached. And our hearts, if they be roped to the fleeting, the visible, the creatural, the finite, partake of the fluctuations, and finally are involved in the destruction, of that which they have made their supreme good. And contrariwise, they who love that which is eternal shine with a light thrown by reflection from the object of their love, and 'he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever,' like the will which he doeth. 'Great peace'—the peace of a restful

heart—'have they that love Thy law.'

II. Then again, such love brings the calm of a submitted will.

Brethren! it is not sorrow that troubles us so much as resistance to sorrow. It is not pain that lacerates; it cuts, and cuts clean when we keep ourselves still and let it do its merciful ministry upon us. But it is the plunging and struggling under the knife that makes the wounds jagged and hard to heal. The man who bows his will to the Supreme, in quiet acceptance of that which He sends, is never disturbed. Resistance distracts and agitates; acquiescence brings a great calm. Submission is peace. And when we have learned to bend our wills, and let God break them, if that be His will, in order to bend them, then 'nothing shall by any means hurt us'; and nothing shall by any means trouble us.

If you were ever on board a sailing-ship you know the difference between its motion when it is beating up against the wind and when it is running before it. In the one case all is agitation and uneasiness, in the other all is smooth and frictionless and delicious. So, when we go with the great stream, in not ignoble surrender, then we go quietly. It is God's great intention, in all that befalls us in this life, to bring our wills into conformity with His. Blessed is the ministry of sorrow and of pain and of loss, if it does that for us, and disastrous and accursed is the ministry of joy and success if it does not. There is no

joy but calm, and there is no calm but in—not the annihilation, but—the intensest activity of will, in the act of submitting to that higher will, which is discerned to be 'good,' and is gratefully taken as 'acceptable,' and will one day be seen to have been 'perfect.' The joy and peace of a submitted will are the secret of all true tranquillity.

III. Then again, there comes by such a love the peace of an obedient life.

When once we have taken it (and faithfully adhere to the choice) as our supreme desire to do God's will, we are delivered from almost all the things that distract and disturb us. Away go all the storms of passion, and we are no more at the mercy of vagrant inclinations. We are no longer agitated by having to consult our own desires, and seeking to find in them compass and guide for our lives—a hopeless attempt! All these sources of agitation are dried up, and the man who has only this desire, to do his duty because God has made it such, has an ever powerful charm, which makes him tranquil whatever befalls.

And as thus we may be delivered from all the agitations and cross-currents of conflicting wishes, inclinations, aims, which otherwise would make a jumble and a chaos of our lives, so, on the other hand, if for us the supreme desire is to obey God, then we are delivered from the other great enemy to tranquillity—namely, anxious forecasting of possible consequences of our actions, which robs so many of

us of so many quiet days. 'I do the little I can do,' said Faber, 'and leave the rest with Thee,' and that will bring peace. Instead of wondering what is to come of this step and that, whether our plans will turn out as we hope, and so being at the mercy of contingencies impossible to be forecasted, we cast all upon Him and say, 'I have nothing to do with the far end of my actions. Thou givest them a body as it has pleased Thee. I have to do with this end of my actions—their motive; and I will make that right, and then it is Thy business to make the rest right.' And so, 'great peace have they which love Thy law.'

An obedient life not only delivers us from the distractions of miscellaneous desires, and from the anxiety of unforeseen results, but it contributes to tranquillity in another way. The thing that makes us most uneasy is either sin done or duty neglected. Either of these, however small it may appear, is like a horse-hair upon the sheets of a bed, or a little wrinkle in that on which a man lies, disturbing all his repose. No man is really at rest unless his conscience is clear. 'The wicked is like the troubled sea, which cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt.' But if the uttered will of the Lord is our supreme object, then in this direction, too, tranquillity is ours.

IV. Lastly, such a love gives the peace of freedom from temptations.

'Nothing shall offend them.' 'There shall be no

stumbling-block to them.' The higher love casts out the lower. It is well, when, by reinforcing conscience by considerations of duty, or even sometimes by the lower thoughts of consequences, a man is able to pass by a temptation which appeals to him, and conquers the inclination to go wrong. But it is far better—and it is possible—to be lifted up into such a region as that the temptation does not appeal to him any more.

To take a very homely illustration, whether is it better for a man to steel himself, and walk past the door of a public-house, though the fumes appeal to his sense, and stir his inclinations; or to go past, and never know any attraction to enter? Which is best, to overcome our temptations, or to live away up in the high regions to which the malaria of the swamps never climbs, and where no disease-germs can ever reach?

That elevation is possible for us, if only we keep in close touch with God, and love the law because our hearts are knit to the Law-giver. 'There shall be no occasion of stumbling in him,' as the Apostle John varies the expression of my text. Within, there will be no traitors to surrender the camp to the enemy without. So Paul in the letter to the Philippians attributes to 'the peace of God which passeth understanding' a military function, and says that it will 'garrison the heart and mind,' and keep them 'in Christ Jesus,' which is but the Christian way of saying, 'Great peace have they which love Thy law;

and there is no occasion of stumbling in them.'

LOOKING TO THE HILLS

> 'I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help. 2. My help cometh from the Lord, which made heaven and earth.'
> —PSALM cxxi. 1, 2.

The so-called 'Songs of Degrees,' of which this psalm is one, are usually, and with great probability, attributed to the times of the Exile. If that be so, we get an appropriate background and setting for the expressions and emotions of this psalm. We see the exile, wearied with the monotony of the long-stretching, flat plains of Babylonia, summoning up before his mind the distant hills where his home was. We see him wondering how he will be able ever to reach that place where his desires are set; and we see him settling down, in hopeful assurance that his effort is not in vain, since his help comes from the Lord. 'I will lift up my eyes unto the hills'; away out yonder westwards, across the sands, lie the lofty summits of my fatherland that draws me to itself. Then comes a turn of thought, most natural to a

mind passionately yearning after a great hope, the very greatness of which makes it hard to keep constant. For the second clause of my text cannot possibly be, as it is translated in our Authorised Version, an affirmation, but must be taken as the Revised Version correctly gives it, a question: 'I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills. From whence cometh my help?' How am I to get there? And then comes the final turn of thought: 'My help cometh from the Lord, which made heaven and earth.'

So then, there are three things here—the look of longing, the question of weakness, the assurance of faith.

I. The look of longing.

'I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills'—a resolution, and a resolution born of intense longing. Now the hills that the Psalmist is thinking about were visible from no part of that long-extended plain where he dwelt; and he might have looked till he wore his eyes out, ere he could have seen them on the horizon of sense. But although they were unseen, they were visible to the heart that longed for them. He directs his desires further than the vision of his eyeballs can go. Just as his possible contemporary, Daniel, when he prayed, opened his window towards the Jerusalem that was so far away; and just as Mohammedans still, in every part of the world, when they pray, turn their faces to the *Kaabah* at Mecca, the sacred place to which their prayers are directed;

and just as many Jews still, north, east, south or west though they be, face Jerusalem when they offer their supplications—so this psalmist in Babylon, wearied and sick of the low levels that stretched endlessly and monotonously round about him, says, 'I will look at the things that I cannot see, and lift up my eyes above these lownesses about me, to the loftinesses that sense cannot behold, but which I know to be lying serene and solid beyond the narrowing horizon before me.'

There was the look of longing, and the longing which made non-vision into a look; and there was the effort to divert his attention from the things around him to the things afar off; and there was the realisation, by reason of the effort, of these distant but most certain realities.

Now this Psalmist's home-sickness, if I may so call it, had nothing at all religious about it. It was simply that he wanted to get to his own country—his own, though he had been born in exile; and there was nothing more devout or spiritual or refining about his longing than there is about the wish to return to his native country that any foreigner in a distant land feels. But when we take these words, as we all ought to do, as the motto of our lives, we must necessarily attach the loftiest religious meaning to them. And here start up the plain, simple, but tight-gripping and stimulating questions, 'Do I see the Unseen? Does that far-off, dim land assume substance and reality to me? Do I walk in the light of

it raying out to me through earth's darkness? Do I dwell contented with never a glimpse of it?' It comes to be a very sharp question with us professing Christians, whether the horizon of our inward being is limited by, and coterminous with, the horizon of our senses, or whether, far beyond the narrow limits to which these can reach, our spirits' desire stretches boundless. Are, to us, the things unseen the solid things, and the things visible the shadows and the phantoms? The Apocalyptic seer, in his rocky Patmos, was told that he was to be shown 'the things which *are*'; and what was it that he saw? A set of what people call unreal and symbolic visions. 'The things which are,' the world would have said, 'are the rocks that you are standing on, and the sea that is dashing upon them, and all the solid-seeming Roman world, and the power that has got you in its grip. These are the realities, and these things that you think you see, these are the dreams.' But it is exactly the other way. The world and all that is about us, Manchester and its hubbub, warehouses crammed with cloth, and mills full of jennies and throstles—these are the shadows; and the things that only the believing eye beholds, that are wrapped in the invisibility of their own greatness, these, and these only, are the realities. We see with the bodily eyes the shadows on the wall, as it were, but we have to turn round and see with the eyes of our minds the light that flings the shadows. 'I will lift up my eyes' from the mud-flats where I live to the hills that I cannot see, and, seeing them, I shall be blessed.

Further, do we know anything of that longing that the Psalmist had? He was perfectly comfortable in Babylon. There was abundance of everything that he wanted for his life. The Jews there were materially quite as well off, and many of them a great deal better off, than ever they had been in their narrow little strip of mountain land, shut in between the desert and the sea. But for all that, fat, wealthy Babylon was not Palestine. So amidst the lush vegetation, the wealth of water and the fertile plains, the Psalmist longed for the mountains, though the mountains are often bare of green things. It was that longing that led to his looking to the hills. Do we know anything of that longing which makes us 'that are in this tabernacle to groan, being burdened'? 'Absent from the Lord,' and 'present in the body,' we should not be at ease, nor at home. Unless our Christianity throws us out of harmony and contentment with the present, it is worth very little. And unless we know something of that immortal longing to be nearer to God, and fuller of Christ, and emancipated from sense, and from the burdens and trivialities of life, we have yet to learn what the meaning of 'walking not after the flesh but after the Spirit' really is.

Further, do we make any effort like that of this Psalmist, who encourages and stimulates himself by that strong 'I *will* lift up my eyes'? You will not do it unless you make a dead lift of effort. It is a great deal easier for a man to look at what is at his feet than to

crane his neck gazing at the stars.

And so, unless we take up and persevere in maintaining a habitual attitude of stirring up and lifting up ourselves, gravitation will be too much for us, and down will go the head, and down the eyes; and down will go the desires, and we shall be like men that live in some mountainous country, who never lift their gaze to the solemn white summits that travellers come across half Europe to see. Christian men and women too often walk beneath the very peaks of the mountains of God, and rarely lift their vision there. They perhaps do so for an hour and a half on a Sunday morning, or an hour on a Wednesday evening, when there is no other engagement, or for a minute or two in the morning before they hurry down to breakfast, or a minute or two at night when they are dead beat and unfit for anything. For the rest of the time, *there* are the mountains and *here* is the saint, and he seldom or never turns his head to look at them! Is that the sort of Christianity that is likely to be a power in the world, or a blessing to its possessor?

II Further, notice the question of weakness.

'From whence cometh my help?' The loftier our ideal, the more painful ought to be our conviction of incapacity to reach it. The Christian man's one security is in feeling his peril, and the condition of his strength is his acknowledgment and vivid consciousness always of his weakness. The exile in

Babylon had a dreary desert, peopled by wild Arab tribes hostile to him, stretching between his present home and that where he desired to be, and it would be difficult for him to get away from the dominion that held him captive, unless by consent of the power of whom he was the vassal. So the more the thought of the mountains of Israel drew the Psalmist, the more there came into his mind the thought, 'How am I to be made able to reach that blessed soil?' And surely, if *we* saw, with anything like a worthy apprehension and vision, the greatness of that blessedness that lies yonder for Christian souls, we should feel far more deeply than we do the impossibility, as far as we are concerned, of our ever reaching it. The sense of our own weakness and the consciousness of the perils upon the path ought ever to be present with us all.

Brethren! if, on the one hand, we have to cultivate, for a healthy, vital Christianity, a vision of the mountains of God, on the other hand we have to try to deepen in ourselves the wholesome sense of our own impotence, and the conviction that the dangers on the road are far too great for us to deal with. 'Blessed is the man that feareth always.' 'Pride goeth before destruction.' Remember the Franco-German war, and how the French Prime Minister said that they were going into it 'with a light heart,' and how some of the troops went out of Paris in railway carriages labelled 'for Berlin'; and when they reached the frontier they were doubled up and crushed in a

month. Unless we, when we set ourselves to this warfare, feel the formidableness of the enemy and recognise the weakness of our own arms, there is nothing but defeat for us.

III. Finally, notice the assurance of faith.

The Psalmist asks himself, 'From whence cometh my help?' and then the better self answers the questioning, timid self: 'My help cometh from the Lord, which made heaven and earth.' There will be no reception of the divine help unless there is a sense of the need of the divine help. God cannot help me before I am brought to despair of any other help. It is only when a man says, 'There is none other that fighteth for us, but only Thou, O God!' that God comes to help.

There is a story in the Book of Chronicles, about one battle in which Judah engaged, of a very singular kind. The first step in the campaign was that the king of Judah gathered all his people together, and prayed to God, and said, 'We know not what we shall do. We have no strength against this great multitude that cometh against us, but our eyes are unto Thee.' Then a prophet came and assured him of victory, and next day they arrayed the battle. It was set in this strange fashion: in the forefront were put the priests and Levites, with their instruments of music, and not soldiers with spears and bows, and they marched out to battle with this song, 'The Lord is gracious and merciful. His mercy endureth for

ever.' Then, without the stroke of sword or thrust of spear, God fought for them and scattered their foes.

'Which things are an allegory.' If we recognise our helplessness, God is our help. If we conceit ourselves to be strong, we are weak; if we know ourselves to be impotent, Omnipotence pours itself into us. We read once that Jesus Christ healed 'them that had need of healing.' Why does the Evangelist not say, without that periphrasis, 'healed the sick'? Because he would emphasise, I suppose, amongst other things, the thought that only the sense of need fits for the reception of healing and help.

If, then, we desire that God should be 'the Strength of our hearts, and our Portion for ever,' the coming of His help must be wooed and won by our sense of our own impotence, and only they who say, 'We have no might against this great multitude that cometh against us,' will ever hear from Him the blessed assurance, 'The Lord will fight for you.' 'Stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord!' So, brethren! the assurance of faith follows the consciousness of weakness, and both together will lead, and nothing else will lead, to the realisation of the vision of faith, and bring us at last, weak as we are, to the hills where the weary and foot-sore flock 'shall lie down in a good fold, and on fat pasture shall they feed upon the mountains of Israel.'

MOUNTAINS ROUND MOUNT ZION

> 'They that trust in the Lord shall be as Mount Zion, which cannot be removed, but abideth for ever. 2. As the mountains are round about Jerusalem, so the Lord is round about His people from henceforth, even for ever.'—PSALM cxxv. 1, 2.

The so-called 'Songs of Degrees,' of which this psalm is one, are probably a pilgrim's song-book, and possibly date from the period of the restoration of Israel from the Babylonish captivity. In any case, this little psalm looks very much like a record of the impression that was made on the pilgrim, as he first topped the crest of the hill from which he looked on Jerusalem. Two peculiarities of its topographical position are both taken here as symbols of spiritual realities, for the singularity of the situation of the city is that it stands on a mountain and is girdled by mountains. There is a tongue of land or peninsula cut off from the surrounding country by deep ravines, on which are perched the buildings of the city, while across the valley on the eastern side is Olivet, and, on the south, another hill, the so-called 'Hill of Evil Counsel'; but upon the west and north sides there are no conspicuous summits, though the ground rises.

Thus, really, though not apparently, there lie all round the city encircling defences of mountains. Similarly, says the Psalmist, set and steadfast as on a mountain, and compassed about by a protection, like the bastions of the everlasting hills, are they whose trust is in the Lord. Faith, then, gives inward stability, and faith secures an encircling defence.

But, more than that, notice that the mountains encompass a mountain. Faith, in some measure, makes the protected like the Protector. And then, beyond that, notice the two 'for evers.' Zion cannot be moved, it 'abideth for ever,' and 'the Lord is about His people from henceforth and for ever.' To trust in God gives the transitory creature a kind of share in the uncreated eternity of that in which he trusts. Now these are four thoughts worth carrying away with us.

I. The simple act of trust in God brings inward stability.

The word here that is rightly translated 'trust,' like most expressions in the Old Testament for religious emotion, has a distinctly metaphorical colouring about it. It literally means to 'hang upon' something, and so, beautifully, it tells us what faith is—just hanging upon God. Whoever has laid his tremulous hand on a fixed something, partakes, in the measure in which he does grasp it, of the fixity of that on which he lays hold; so 'they that trust in the Lord shall be as Mount Zion,' that stands there summer

and winter, day and night, year out and year in, with its strong buttresses and its immovable mass, the very emblem of solidity and stability.

Ay! and this is true about these tremulous hearts of ours. There is one way to make them stable, and only one; and that is that they shall be fastened, as it were, to that which is stable, and so be steadfast because they hold by what is steadfast. There is no other means by which any heart can be made immovable, except in so far as it may be moved by holy impulses and sweet drawings of love and loftinesses of aspiration towards God; there is no other means by which a heart, with all its inward perturbations and all its outward sources of agitation, can be made calm and still, except by living, deep, continual fellowship with Him who is the Eternal Calm, and from whose stable Being we mutable men can derive serenity which is a faint likeness of His immutability. 'We which have believed do enter into rest.'

How can I still these hot desires of mine, this self-asserting will, all these various passions and emotions which sweep through my soul, and which must not be made mute and dead—or else there will come corruption and stagnation—but must be made so to move as that in their very motion shall be rest? How can I do that? By one way, and one only. Live in fellowship with God, and that will quiet perturbations within and tumults without. The foot of the Master on the midnight stormy sea will

smooth the waves which the moonbeams have not power to still, but only to reveal their heavings. 'They that trust in the Lord shall be like Mount Zion, which cannot be moved,' and yet is not torpid in its immobility, but full of fertility and of beauty wedded to its steadfastness.

In like manner, the only way by which not only the inward storms can be quieted, but the outward assaults of perturbing circumstances, disasters, changes, difficult duties, and the like, can ever be received with tranquillity is, that they should be received in quiet faith. And, in like manner, the only way by which men can be made steadfast and immovable in brave, pertinacious adherence to the simple law of right, whatsoever temptations may try to draw them aside, and whatsoever frowns may gather upon the face of affairs so as to frighten them from the path of rectitude—the only way by which they can conquer evil, so as not to be hurried into forbidden paths, is this same making sure of their hold upon God, and carrying with them day by day, and moment by moment, into all the little difficulties and small temptations that would lead to trivial faults, the one solemn thought that bids all these back into their lairs—God is near me and I am with Him.

Oh, brethren! if we could live in touch with Him and, as this great word for 'trust' suggests, be fastened to Him, as a man, swinging from a cliff over the crawling sea, fathoms below him, clutches the

rope that is his safety—then we should live in tranquillity, and be steadfast, immovable.

They say that in the great church of St. Peter there is only one temperature in summer and winter; that the fiercest heat may be pouring down in the colonnades, or the sharpest frost may have silenced the tinkling fall of the fountains in the Piazza; but within the great portal the thermometer stands the same. Thus, if we live in the Temple, and keep inside its doors, the thermometer in our hearts will be fixed; and the anemometer—the measurer of the wind—will point to calm all the year round. 'They that trust in the Lord shall be as Mount Zion, which cannot be moved.'

II. Again, this same attitude of realising the divine Presence, Will, and Help, will bring around us encircling defences.

I have already said that one peculiarity of the topography of the sacred city is that, at first sight, the metaphor of my text seems to break down, for nobody, looking at the situation of the city with uninstructed eye, would say that it was compassed all around with mountains. On two sides it manifestly is; on two sides it apparently is not, though the land rises on the north and west till it is higher than the tops of the houses. We may not be fanciful in taking that as a parable. 'As the mountains are round about Jerusalem, so the Lord is round about His people'—a very real defence, but a defence

that it takes an instructed eye to see; no obvious protection, palpable to the vulgar touch, and manifest to the sensuous eye, but something a great deal better than that—a real protection, through which we may be sure that nothing which is evil can ever pass.

Whatsoever does get over the encircling mountains, and reaches us, we may be sure, is not an evil but a very real good. Only we have to interpret the protection on the principles of faith, and not on those of sense. When, then, there come down upon us—as there do upon us all, thank God!—dark days, and sad days, and solitary days, and losses and bitternesses of a thousand kinds, do not let us falter in the belief that if we have our hearts set on God, nothing has come to us but what He has let through. Our sorrows are His angels, though their faces are dark, and though they bear a sword that flames and turns every way. It is hard to believe; it is certainly true, and if we could carry the confidence of it as a continual possession into our ordinary lives, they would be very different from what they are to-day.

III. And then, remember the other thing that I said. My text suggests that—

Simple trust in God, in some measure, assimilates the protected to the
Protector.

The mountains girdle a mountain, and so my trust

opens my heart to the entrance into my heart of something akin to God. As the Apostle Peter, in his brave way, is not afraid to say, it makes us 'partakers of the divine nature.' The immovableness of the trustful man is not all unlike the calmness of the trusted God; and the steadfastness of the one is a reflex of the unchangeableness of the other. We have not understood the meaning of faith, nor have we risen to the experience of its best effects upon ourselves, unless we understand that its great blessing and fruit, and the purpose for which we are commanded to cherish it, is that thereby we may become like Him in whom we trust. 'They that make them are like unto them; so is every one that trusteth in them.' That is the key to the degradations that inhere in idolatrous worship, and that principle is true about all worship—as the god so is every one that trusteth in it. 'As the mountains are round about Mount Zion,' God is round about the people that are becoming Godlike.

IV. Mark further the significant repetition of the same expression in reference to the stability of the man protected and the continuance of the protection. Both are 'for ever'. That is to say, if it is true that God is round about me, and that, in some humble measure, my heart has been opening to be calmed and steadied by the influx of His own life, then His 'for ever' is my 'for ever,' and it cannot be that He should live and I should die. The guarantee of the eternal being of the trustful soul is the experience to-

day of the reality of the divine protection. And thus we may face everything—life, death, whatsoever may come, assured that nothing touches the continuity and the perpetuity of the union between the trusting soul and the trusted God. 'The mountains shall depart and the hills be removed, but My lovingkindness shall not depart from thee; nor shall the covenant of My peace be removed, saith the Lord.' The earthquake comes. It shatters a continent and changes the face of nature; makes valleys where there were mountains, and mountains where there were vales, and open seas where there were fertile plains and covers everything with ruin and with rubbish. But there emerge from the cloudy and chaotic confusion the city perched on the hill and its encompassing heights. 'The world passeth away, and the fashion thereof, but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever.'

THE CHARGE OF THE WATCHERS IN THE TEMPLE

'Behold, bless ye the Lord, all ye servants of the Lord, which by night stand in the House of the Lord. 2. Lift up your hands in the Sanctuary,

and bless the Lord. 3. The Lord that made Heaven and earth bless thee out of Zion.'—PSALM cxxxiv.

This psalm, the shortest but one in the whole Psalter, will be more intelligible if we observe that in the first part of it more than one person is addressed, and in the last verse a single person. It begins with 'Bless *ye* the Lord'; and the latter words are, 'The Lord bless *thee*.' No doubt, when used in the Temple service, the first part was chanted by one half of the choir, and the other part by the other. Who are the persons addressed in the first portion? The answer stands plain in the psalm itself. They are, 'All ye servants of the Lord, which by night stand in the House of the Lord.' That is to say, the priests or Levites whose charge it was to patrol the Temple through the hours of night and darkness, to see that all was safe and right there, and to do such other priestly and ministerial work as was needful; they are called upon to 'lift up their hands in'—or rather *towards*—'the Sanctuary, and to bless the Lord.'

The charge is given to these watching priests, these nightly warders, by some single person—we know not whom. Perhaps by the High Priest, perhaps by the captain of their band. They listen to the exhortation to praise, and answer, in the last words of this little psalm, by invoking a blessing on the head of the unnamed speaker who gave the charge. So we have in this antiphonal choral psalm a little snatch of musical ritual falling into two parts—the

charge to the watchers and the answering invocation. We may find a good deal of practical teaching in it. Let us look, then, at this choral charge and the response to it.

The charge to the watchers.

We do not know what the office of these watchers was, but in the second Temple, to the period of which this psalm may possibly belong, their duties were carefully defined, and Rabbinical literature has preserved a minute account of the work of the nightly patrol.

According to the authorities, two hundred and forty priests and Levites were the nightly guard, distributed over twenty-one stations. The captain of the guard visited these stations throughout the night with flaming torches before him, and saluted each with 'Peace be unto thee.' If he found the sentinel asleep he beat him with his staff, and had authority to burn his cloak (which the drowsy guard had rolled up for a pillow). We all remember who warned His disciples to watch, lest coming suddenly He should find them asleep. We may remember, too, the blessing pronounced in the Apocalypse on 'Him who watcheth and keepeth his garments, lest he walk naked.' Shortly before daybreak the captain of the guard came, as the Talmud says: 'All times were not equal. Sometimes he came at cockcrow, or near it, before or after it. He went to one of the posts where the priests were stationed, and opened a wicket

which led into the court. Here the priests, who marched behind him torch in hand, divided into two companies which went one to the east, and one to the west, carefully ascertaining that all was well. When they met each company reported "It is peace." Then the duties of the watch were ended, and the priests who were to prepare for the daily sacrifice entered on their tasks.'

Our psalm may be the chant and answering chant with which the nightly charge was given over to the watchers, or it may be, as some commentators suppose, 'the call and counter-call with which the watchers greeted each other when they met.'

Figure then, to yourselves, the band of white-robed priests gathered in the court of the Temple, their flashing torches touching pillar and angle with strange light, the city sunk in silence and sleep, and ere they part to their posts the chant rung in their ears:—'Bless ye the Lord, all ye servants of the Lord which by night stand in the House of the Lord! Lift up your hands to the Sanctuary, and bless the Lord!'

Notice, then, that the priests' duty is to praise. It is because they are the servants of the Lord that, therefore, it is their business to bless the Lord. It is because they stand in the House of the Lord that it is theirs to bless the Lord. They who are gathered into His House, they who hold communion with Him, they who can feel that the gate of the Father's dwelling, like the gate of the Father's heart, is always

open to them, they who have been called in from their wanderings in a homeless wilderness, and given a place and a name in His House better than of sons and daughters, have been so blessed in order that, filled with thanksgiving for such an entrance into God's dwelling and of such an adoption into His family, their silent lips may be filled with thanksgiving and their redeemed hands be uplifted in praise.

So for us Christians. We are servants of the Lord—His priests. That we 'stand in the House of the Lord' expresses not only the fact of our great privilege of confiding approach to Him and communion with Him, whereby we may ever abide in the very Holy of Holies and be in the secret place of the Most High, even while we are busy in the world, but it also points to our duty of ministering; for the word 'stand' is employed to designate the attendance of the priests in their office, and is almost equivalent to 'serve.' 'To bless the Lord,' then, is the work to which we are especially called. If we are made a 'royal priesthood,' it is that we 'should show forth the praises of Him who has called us out of darkness into His marvellous light.' The purpose of that full horn of plenty, charged with blessings which God has emptied upon our heads, is that our dumb lips may be touched into thankfulness, because our selfish hearts have been wooed and charmed into love and life.

The Rabbis had a saying that there were two sorts

of angels: the angels that served, and the angels that praised; of which, according to their teaching, the latter were the higher in degree. It was only a half-truth, for true service is praise.

But whatever the form in which praise may come, whether it be in the form of vocal thanksgiving, or whether it be the glad surrender of the heart, manifested in the conscious discharge of the most trivial duties, whether we 'lift up our hands in the Sanctuary, and bless the Lord' with them, or whether we turn our hands to the tools of our daily occupation and handle them for His sake, alike we maybe praising Him. And the thing for us to remember is that the place where we, if we are Christians, stand, and the character which we, if we are Christians, sustain, bind us to live blessing and praising Him whilst we live. 'Behold!'—as if He would point to all the crowded list of God's great mercies—'Bless ye the Lord, all ye servants of the Lord that … stand in the house of the Lord.'

And then there is another point that comes out of this charge to the watchers, viz. the necessity of strenuously trying to unite together service of God and communion with God. These priests might have said—'When we go our rounds through the empty and echoing corridors of the dark Temple, we perform the charge which God gave us; and it needs not that we pray. We are working for Him and doing the work which He appointed us; and that is better than all external ritual.' But this unknown speaker

who charges them knew better than that. The priests' service under the Old Covenant was very unspiritual service. Their work was sometimes very repulsive and always purely external work, which might be done without one trace of religion or devotion in it. And so the speaker here warns them, as it were, against the temptation which besets all men that are concerned in the outward service of the house of God, to confound the mere outward service with inward devotion. The charge bids us remember that the more sedulously our hands and thoughts are employed about the externals of religious duties, the more must we see to it that our inmost spirits are baptized into fellowship with God.

It is not enough to patrol the Temple courts unless we 'lift up our hands to the sanctuary,' and with our hearts 'bless the Lord.' And all we who in any degree and any department are officially or semi-officially connected with the work of the Christian Church have very earnestly and especially to lay this to heart. We ministers, deacons, Sunday-school teachers, tract distributors, have much need to take care that we do not confound watching in the courts of the Temple with lifting up our own hands and hearts to our Father that is in heaven; and remember that the more outward work we do, the more inward life we ought to have. The higher the stem of the tree grows and the broader its branches spread the deeper must strike and the wider must extend its underground roots, if it is not to be blown over and

become a withered ruin.

And so all you Christian men and women! will you take the plain lesson that is here? All ye that stand ready for service, and doing service, all 'ye that stand in the house of the Lord, behold' your peril and your duty—and 'bless ye the Lord,' and remember that the more work the more prayer to keep it from rotting; the more effort the more communion; and that at the end we shall discover with alarm, and with shame confess 'I kept others' vineyards and my own vineyard have I not kept'; unless, like our Master, we prepare for a day of work and toil in the Temple by a night of quiet communion with our Father on the mountainside.

And then there is another lesson here which I only touch, and that is that all times are times for blessing God. 'Ye who *by night* stand in the house of the Lord, bless the Lord': so though no sacrifice was smoking on the altar, and no choral songs went up from the company of praising priests in the ritual service; and although the nightfall had silenced the worship and scattered the worshippers, yet some low murmur of praise would be echoing through the empty halls all the night long, and the voice of thanksgiving and of blessing would blend with the clank of the priests' feet on the marble pavements as they went their patrolling rounds; and their torches would send up a smoke not less acceptable than the wreathing columns of the incense that had filled the day. And so as in some convents you will find a monk kneeling

on the steps of the altar at each hour of the four-and-twenty, adoring the Sacrament exposed upon it, so (but in inmost reality and not in a mere vulgar outside form that means nothing) in the Christian heart there should be a perpetual adoration and a continual praise—a prayer without ceasing. What is it that comes first of all into your minds when you wake in the middle of the night? Yesterday's business, to-morrow's vanities, or God's present love and your dependence upon Him?

In the night of sorrow, too, do our songs go up, and do we hear and obey the charge which commands not only perpetual adoration, but bids us fill the night with music and with praise? Well for us if it be, anticipating the time when 'they rest not day nor night saying, Holy! Holy! Holy!'

Now, that is the priests' charge. Look for a moment at the answering blessing: 'The Lord that made heaven and earth bless thee out of Zion.'

'Thee?' Whom? Him who gave the solemn charge. Their obedience to it is implied in the blessing which the priests invoke on the head of the unnamed speaker. So they express their joyful consent to his charge, and their desires for his welfare whose clear voice has summoned them to their high duty and privilege. They obey, and their first prayer is a prayer for him.

May we venture to draw from this interchange of

counsel and benediction a simple lesson as to the best form in which mutual goodwill and friendship may express itself? It is by the interchange of stimulus to God's service and praise, and of grateful prayer. He is my best friend who stirs me up to make my whole life a strong sweet song of thanksgiving to God for all His numberless mercies to me. Even if the exhortation becomes rebuke, faithful are such wounds. It is but a shallow affection which can be eloquent on other subjects of common interests, but is dumb on this, the deepest of all; which can counsel wisely and rebuke gently in regard to other matters, but has never a word to say to its dearest concerning duty to the God of all mercies.

And the true response to any loving exhortation to bless God, or any religious impulse which we receive from one another, is to invoke God's blessing on faithful lips that have given us counsel.

This is the best recompense to Christian teachers. If any poor words of ours have come to any of your hearts with power for conviction, or instruction, or encouragement, let your response be, I beseech you, 'The Lord that hath made heaven and earth bless *thee*.' We need your prayers. We are weak, often sad, often discouraged. We are tempted ever to handle God's truth professionally, instead of living on it for ourselves. We are tempted to think that our work is in vain, and to lose heart because we do not see the spiritual results which we would fain reap. And in many an hour of languor and despondency, when the

wheels of life turn heavily and the sky seems very far away, and our message seems to have lost its grandeur and certainty to ourselves, and our handling of it looks as if it had been one long failure, then we need and may be helped by the voice of cheer coming through the night from those whom we have tried to counsel: 'The Lord that made heaven and earth bless thee.'

But observe, further, the two kinds of blessing which answer to one another—God's blessing of man, and man's blessing of God. The one is communicative, the other receptive and responsive. The one is the great stream which pours itself over the precipice; the other is the basin into which it falls and the showers of spray which rise from its surface, rainbowed in the sunshine, as the cataract of divine mercies comes down upon it. God blesses us when He gives. We bless God when we thankfully take, and praise the Giver. God's blessing then, must ever come first. 'We love Him because He first loved us.' Ours is but the echo of His, but the acknowledgment of the divine act, which must precede our recognition of it as the dawn must come in order that the birds may wake to sing.

Our highest service is to take the gifts of God, and with glad hearts to praise the Giver.

Our blessings are but words. God's blessings are realities. We wish good to one another when we bless each other. But He does good to men when He

blesses them. Our wishes may be deep and warm, but, alas! how ineffectual. They flutter round the heads of those whom we would bless, but how seldom do they actually rest upon their brows. But God's blessings are powers. They never miss their mark. Whom He blesses are blessed indeed.

That experience of the ineffectual emptiness of blessings from the most loving hearts gives point to the emphatic designation here of 'the Lord which made heaven and earth,' a formula which is common in this connection. It brings before the eye of faith the mighty Name, and the mighty work of Him in whose blessing we shall be rich. He is the Lord, the Eternal and the Covenant King. He has made heaven and earth. If He who lives above all limitations of time, the Source of life, who has the fulness of life in Himself, He who has revealed Himself to Israel and bound Himself to fulfil His covenant with all who plead it, He whose sovereign effortless power willed and spake into being the azure deeps of heaven with all its stars, and the solid earth with its tribes—if He, with such infinite resources to bestow on us as we need, if He blesses us, it will be with no vain wishes nor with the invoking of the goodwill of a higher power, but with the veritable communication of good, and we shall be blessed indeed.

Observe, too, the channel through which God's blessings come—'out of Zion.' For the Jew, the fulness of divine glory dwelt between the Cherubim, and the richest of the divine blessings were bestowed

on the waiting worshippers there, and no doubt it is still true that God dwells in Zion, and blesses men from thence. The New Testament analogue to the Old Testament Temple is no outward building. That would be absurd confusing of the very nature of type and antitype. A material type must have a spiritual fulfilment. A rite cannot correspond to a rite, nor a building to a building. But the correspondence in Christianity to the Temple where God dwelt, and from which He scattered His blessings is twofold—one proper and original, the other secondary and derived. In the true sense, Jesus Christ is the Temple. In Him God dwelt; in Him, man meets God; in Him was the place of revelation; in Him the place of sacrifice. 'In this place is one greater than the Temple,' and the abiding of Jehovah above the mercy-seat was but a material symbol, shadowing and foretelling the true indwelling of all the fulness of the Godhead bodily in that true Tabernacle which the Lord hath pitched and not man. So the great fountain of all possible good and benediction which was opened for the believing Jew in 'Zion,' is opened for us in Jesus Christ who stood in the very court of the Temple, and called in tones of clear, loud invitation: 'If any man thirst let him come unto Me and drink.' We may each pass through the rent veil into the holiest of all, and there, laying our hand on Jesus, touch God, and opening our empty palm extended to Him, can receive from Him all the blessing that we need.

There is another application of the Temple symbol in the New Testament—a derivative and secondary one—to the Church, that is, to the aggregate of believers. In it God dwells through Christ. Receiving His Spirit, instinct with His life, it is His Body, and as in His earthly life 'He spake of the Temple of His "literal" body,' so now that Church becomes the Temple of God, being builded through the ages. In that Zion all God's best blessings are possessed and stored, that the Church may, by faithful service, impart them to the world. Whosoever desires to possess these blessings must enter thither—not by any ceremonial act, or outward profession, but by becoming one of those who put their whole heart's confidence in Jesus Christ. Within that sacred enclosure we receive whatever divine love and power can give. If we are knit to Christ by our faith, we share in proportion to our faith in all the wealth of blessing with which God has blessed Him. We possess Christ and in Him all. The ancient benediction, which came from the lips of the priestly watchers, and rang through the empty corridors of the darkened Temple, asked for much: 'The Lord who made heaven and earth bless thee out of Zion.' But the Apostolic assurance sounds a yet deeper and more wonderful note of confidence when it proclaims that already, however to ourselves we may seem sad and needy, and however little we may have counted our treasures or made them our own, 'God hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ Jesus.'

GOD'S SCRUTINY LONGED FOR

> 'Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my thoughts; 24. And see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.'—PSALM cxxxix. 23, 24.

This psalm begins with perhaps the grandest contemplation of the divine Omniscience that was ever put into words. It is easy to pour out platitudes upon such a subject, but the Psalmist does not content himself with generalities. He gathers all the rays, as it were, into one burning point, and focusses them upon himself: 'Oh, Lord! Thou hast searched *me*, and known *me*.' All the more remarkable, then, is it that the psalm should end with asking God to do what it began with declaring that He does. He knows us each, altogether; whether we like it or not, whether we try to hinder it or not, whether we remember it or not. Singular, therefore, is it to find this prayer as the very climax of all the Psalmist's contemplation. It is more than the 'searching' which was spoken of at the beginning, which is desired at the end. It is a process which has for its issue the cleansing of all the evil that is beheld. The prayer of the text is in fact the yearning of the devout soul for purity. I simply wish to consider the series of petitions here, in the hope that we may catch something of their spirit, and that some faint echo of

them may sound in our desires. My purpose, then, will be best accomplished if I follow the words of the text, and look at these petitions in the order in which they stand.

I. Note then, first, the longing for the searching of God's eye.

Now, the word which is here rendered 'search' is a very emphatic and picturesque one. It means to dig deep. God is prayed, as it were, to make a cutting into the man, and lay bare his inmost nature, as men do in a railway cutting, layer after layer, going ever deeper down till the bed-rock is reached. 'Search me'—dig into me, bring the deep-lying parts to light —'and know my heart'; the centre of my personality, my inmost self. That is the prayer, not of fancied fitness to stand investigation, but of lowly acknowledgment. In other words, it is really a form of confession. 'Search me. I know Thou wilt find evil, but still—search me!' It seems to me that there are two main ideas in this petition, on each of which I touch briefly.

One is, that it is a glad recognition of a fact which is very terrible to many hearts. The conception of God as 'knowing me altogether,' down to the very roots of my being, is either the most blessed or the most unwelcome thought, according to my conception of what His heart to me is. If I think of Him, as so many of us do, as simply the 'austere man' who 'gathers where he did not straw,' and 'reaps

where he did not sow'; if my thought of God is mainly that of an Investigator and a Judge, with pure eyes and rigid judgment, then I shall be more ignorant of myself, and more confident in myself, than the most of men are when they bethink themselves, if I do not feel that I shrink up like a sensitive plant's leaf when a finger touches it, and would fain curl myself together, and hide from His eye something that I know lurks and poisons at the centre of my being.

The gaoler's eye at the slit in the wall of the solitary prisoner's cell is a constant terror to the man who knows that it may be upon him at every moment, and does not know where the eyehole is, or when the merciless eye may be at it, but if we love one another we do not shrink from opening out our inward baseness to each other. We can venture to tell those that are dear to us as our own hearts the things that lie in our own hearts and make them black and ugly in all eyes but love's; or if we cannot venture to do it wholly, at all events we do it more fully, and more willingly, and with more of something that is almost pleasure in the very act of confession, in proportion as we are bound by the sacred ties of love to the recipient of the confession. There is a joy, and a blessedness deeper than joy, in discovering ourselves, even our unworthy selves, when we know that the eye that looks is a loving eye.

If, then, we have rightly conceived of our relation to Him, that infinite Lover of all our hearts, who

looks, 'with other eyes than ours, and makes allowance for us all,' there will be a certain blessedness, almost like joy, in turning ourselves inside out before Him; and in feeling that every corner of our hearts lies naked and opened unto the eyes of Him with whom we have to do. 'Search me, O God!' is the voice of confident love, which is sure of the love that contemplates the sinner.

And for us Christian people, to whom all these attributes of Deity are gathered together and brought very near our hearts and our experiences in the person of our Brother Christ, the thought of such knowledge of us becomes still more blessed. Just as the Apostle who was conscious of many sins, could say to his Master, not in petulance, but in deeply-moved confidence, 'Thou knowest all things! Why dost Thou ask me questions? Thou knowest all things; Thou knowest, notwithstanding my denials, that I love Thee,' so may we turn to Jesus Christ, who knows what is in men, and who knows each man, and may be sure that the eye which looks upon our unworthiness pities our sinfulness, and is ready to bear it all away. There is a deeper gladness in pouring out our hearts to our loving Lord than in locking them in sullen silence, with the vain conceit that we thereby hide ourselves from Him. Make a clean breast of your evil, and you will find that the act has in it a blessedness all unique and poignant. 'Pour out your hearts before Him, O ye people! God is a refuge for us.'

This prayer is also an expression of absolute willingness to submit to the searching process. God is represented in my text as searching the secrets of a man's heart, not that God may know, but that the man may know. By His Spirit He will come into the innermost corners of our nature, if this prayer is a real expression of our desire, and there the illumination of His presence will flash light into all the dark places of our experience and of our natures. We cannot afford to be in ignorance of these. Pestilence breathes in the unventilated, unlighted, uncleansed recesses of a neglected nature. It is only on condition of the light of God's convincing Spirit being cast into every part of our being that we shall be able to overcome and annihilate the creeping swarms of microscopic sins that are there, minute but mighty in their myriads to destroy a man's soul. 'Search me' is the expression of a penitence that knows itself to be full of evil, that does not know all the evil of which it is full, that needs enlightenment, that desires deliverance, that is sure of the love that looks, and that so spreads itself, as a bleacher spreads some piece of stained cloth in the gracious sunshine and sprinkles it with the pure water of heaven that all the stains may melt away.

It is useless to ask God to search us if we lock our hearts against His searching. The mere natural exercise, if I may so say, of the divine attribute of Omniscience we cannot hinder. He knows us thereby altogether, whether we like it or not; but the

'searching' of my text is one which He cannot put in force without our consent. We have to confess our sins unto the Lord ere this kind of divine scrutiny can be brought to bear. By His natural Omniscience, He knows them altogether, but the seeing which is preparatory to destroying them depends on our willingness to submit ourselves to the often painful process by which He drags our sins to light. Do you want Him to come and search your hearts, and tell you in your spirits what He has found there? Do you desire to know your hidden evil? Then keep close to Him, and tell Him what the sin is which you know to be sin; and ask Him to show you what the sins are which, as yet, you have not grown up to the height of understanding and acknowledging.

II. Next, there follows the longing for the divine testing of our thoughts.

Now you will have observed, I suppose, that in the second clause of my text, 'try me, and know my thoughts' the result of the investigation is somewhat different from that of the previous clause. The 'searching' issued in a divine knowledge of the heart; the 'trying,' or testing, issues in a divine knowledge of the thoughts. The distinction between these two, in the Biblical use of the expressions, is not precisely the same as in our modern popular speech. We are accustomed to talk of the heart as being the seat of emotions, affections, feelings, whereas we relegate thoughts to the head. But Scripture does not quite take that metaphorical view. In it the heart is the

centre of personal being, and out of it there come, not only emotions and loves, but 'thoughts and intents.' The difference, then, between these two, 'heart' and 'thoughts' is this, the one is the workshop and the other is the product. The heart is the place where the thoughts are elaborated. So you see the process of the Psalmist's prayer is from the centre a little outwards, first the inmost self, and then the 'thoughts,' meaning thereby the whole web of activities, both intellectual and emotional, of which the heart, in his sense of the word, is the seat and source. In like manner as the field of investigation is somewhat shifted in the second petition, so the manner of investigation is correspondingly different. 'Search' is the divine scrutiny of the inner man by the eye; 'test' is the trial as metals are tried and proved by the fiery furnace.

So, then, the innermost man is searched by the divine knowledge, and the thoughts which the innermost man produces are tested by the divine providence. And our second petition is for a trial by facts, by external agencies, of the true nature and character of the purposes, desires, designs, intentions, as well as of the affections and loves and joys. That is to say, this second prayer submits absolutely to any discipline, fiery and fierce and bitter, by which the true character of a man's activities may be made clear to himself. Oh! it is a prayer easily offered; hard to stand by. It is a prayer often answered in ways that drive us almost to

despair. It means, 'Do anything with me, put me into any seven-fold heated furnace of sorrow, do anything that will melt my hardness, and run off my dross, which Thy great ladle will then skim away, that the surface may be clear, and the substance without alloy.'

Do you pray that prayer, brother! knowing all that it means, and being willing to take the answer, in forms that may rack your heart, and sadden your whole lives? If you are wise, you will. Better to go crippled into life than, 'having two hands or two feet, to be cast into hell fire'! Better to be saved though maimed, than to be entire and lost.

'Try me.' It is an awful prayer. Let us not offer it lightly, or unadvisedly; but if we are wise let it be our inmost desire. And when the answer comes, and sorrows fall, do not let us murmur, do not let us kick, do not let us wonder, but let us say, 'Thou art a God that hearest prayer,' and 'I will glorify God in the fires.' Then 'the trial of your faith being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, shall be found unto praise and honour and glory.'

III. The next petition of my text is a longing for the casting out of evil.

'See if there be any wicked way in me.' Now, that *if* is not the 'if' of doubt whether any such 'ways' are in the man, but it is the 'if' of consciousness that there

are such, though what they are he may not clearly discern. And so, it is the 'if' of humility—knowing that he is not justified because he knows nothing against himself—and not the 'if' of presumption.

I have only time to observe here, in a word or two, what would well deserve more expanded treatment, and that is, the very striking and significant expression here employed for this evil way that the Psalmist desires to be detected, that it may be cast out. The word rendered 'wicked'—or more properly, wickedness—is literally 'forced labour,' which was, in old times, and still is in some countries, laid upon the inhabitants at the command of authority; and then, because forced labour is grievous labour, it comes to mean sorrow. So the 'way of wickedness' that the Psalmist feels is in him is the way of compulsory service, and the way that leads to sorrow. That is to say, all sin is slavery, and all sin leads to a bitter and a bad end, and its fruit is death. And so, because the man feels that his better self is in bondage, and shudderingly apprehends that the courses which he pursues can only end in bitterness and misery, he turns to God and asks Him that He would enlighten him as to what these fatal courses are. 'See if there be any way of wickedness in me,' because he is quite sure that the evil which God sees, God will help him to overcome.

Ah, friends! we all have such ways deeply lodged within us, and we do not always know that we have; but if we will turn ourselves to Him, He will prevent

our 'condemning ourselves in things that we allow' and increasing the sensitiveness of our consciences, He will teach us that many things that we did not know to be wrong are harmful.

As soon as we learn that they are, He will help us to cast them out. God has nothing to do with our evil but to fight against it. Be sure of this, that whatsoever evil in us He thus searches and shows us. He does so in order to fling it from us. He goes down into the cellars of our hearts, with the candle of His Spirit in His hand, in order that He may lay hold of all the explosives there, and having drenched them so that they shall not catch fire, may cast them clean out so that they may not blow us to destruction.

IV. The last petition of my text is for guidance in 'the everlasting way.'

The 'ways of wickedness' are in us; the 'way everlasting' we need to be led into. That is to say, naturally we incline to evil; it must be the divine hand and the divine Spirit that lead our feet in the paths of righteousness. When we ask Him to 'guide us in the way everlasting,' we ask that we may know what is duty, and that we may incline to do it. And He answers it by the gift of His divine Spirit, by the quickening of our consciences, by bringing nearer to our hearts the great Example who has left us His footsteps as a legacy that we may tread in them.

Whosoever walks in Christ's footsteps is walking in

'the way everlasting,' for that path is rightly so named which leads to eternal blessedness. It is everlasting, too, inasmuch as nothing of human effort or work abides except that which is in conformity with the will of God, and inasmuch as it, and it alone, is not broken short off by death, but runs, borne upon one mighty arch that spans the gorge, clean across the black abyss, and continues straight on in the same course, only with a swifter upward gradient, through all the ages of eternity. The man who here has lived for God will live yonder as he has lived here, only more completely and more joyously for ever. 'A highway shall be there, and a way, and the ransomed of the Lord shall return and come to Zion with songs, and everlasting joy upon their heads.'

THE INCENSE OF PRAYER

> 'Let my prayer be set forth before Thee as incense, and the lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice.'—PSALM cxli. 2.

The place which this psalm occupies in the Psalter, very near its end, makes it probable that it is

considerably later in date than the prior portions of the collection. But the Psalmist, who here penetrates to the inmost meaning of the symbolic sacrificial worship of the Old Testament, was not helped to his clear-sightedness by his date, but by his devotion. For throughout the Old Testament you find side by side these two trends of thought—a scrupulous carefulness for the observance of all the requirements of ritual worship, and a clear-eyed recognition that it was all external and symbolical and prophetic. Who was it that said 'Obedience is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams'? Samuel, away back in the times when many scholars tell us that the loftier conceptions of worship had not yet emerged. Similar utterances are scattered throughout the Old Testament, and the prominence given to the more spiritual side depends not on the speaker's date but on his disposition and devotion. So here this Psalmist, because his soul was filled with true longings after God, passes clear through the externals and says, 'Here am I with no incense, but I have brought my prayer. I am empty-handed, but because my hands are empty, I lift them up to Thee; and Thou dost accept them, as if they were—yea, rather than if they were—filled with the most elaborate and costly sacrifices.'

So here are two thoughts suggested, which sound mere commonplace, but if we realised them, in our religious life, that life would be revolutionised; first, the incense of prayer; second, the sacrifice of the

empty-handed. Let us look at these two points.

I. The Incense of Prayer. 'Let my prayer come before Thee as incense.'

Now, that symbol of incense is thus used in many places in Scripture. I need only remind you of one or two instances. You remember how, when the father of John the Baptist went into the Holy Place, as was his priestly duty at the time of the offering of the evening oblation, the whole multitude were in the Outer Court praying; he in the Inner Court, presenting the symbolical worship, and they, without, offering the real. Then, if we turn to the grand imagery of the Book of the Revelation, where we find the heavenly temple opened up to our reverent gaze, we read that the elders, the representatives of redeemed humanity, have 'golden bowls full of odours, which are the prayers of the saints.' So there is no fancifulness in interpreting the incense of the ancient ritual as meaning simply the prayers of devout hearts. Of course there has been a great deal of nonsense talked about the symbolical signification of these Old Testament rites, and there is need for sober sense to put the rein upon a vivid imagination in interpreting these; still clear utterances of Scripture as well as this verse itself remove all need for hesitation to accept this meaning of the symbol.

Now, let me remind you of the place which the Altar of Incense occupied. The Temple was divided

into three courts, the Outer Court, the Holy Place, and the Holiest of All. The Altar of Incense stood in the second of these, the Holy Place; the Altar of Burnt Offering stood in the court without. It was not until that Altar, with its expiatory sacrifice, had been passed, that one could enter into the Holy Place, where the Altar of Incense stood. There were three pieces of furniture in that Place, the Altar of Incense, the Golden Candlestick, and the Table of the Shewbread. Of these three, the Altar of Incense stood in the centre. Twice a day the incense was kindled upon it by a priest, by means of live coals brought from the Altar of Burnt Offering in the Outer Court, and, thus kindled, the wreaths of fragrant smoke ascended on high. All day long the incense smouldered upon the altar; twice a day it was kindled into a bright flame.

Now, if we take these things with us, we can understand a little more of the depth and beauty of this prayer, and see how much it tells us of what we, as the priests of the most High God—which we are, if we are Christian people at all—ought to have in our censers.

I need not dwell upon the careful and sedulous preparation from pure spices which went to the making of the incense. So we have to prepare ourselves by sedulous purity if there is to be any life or power in our devotions. But I pass from that, and ask you to think of the lovely picture of true devoutness given in that inflamed incense, wreathing

in coils of fragrance up to the heavens. Prayer is more than petition. It is the going up of the whole soul towards God. Brother! do you know anything of that instinctive and spontaneous rising up of desire and aspiration and faith and love, up and up and up, until they reach Him? Do you realise that just in the measure in which we set our minds as well as our affections, and our affections as well as our minds, on the things which are above, just to that extent, and not one hairsbreadth further, have we the right to call ourselves Christians at all? I fear me that for the great mass of Christian professors the great bulk of their lives creeps along the low levels like the mists in winter, that hug the marshes instead of rising, swirling up like an incense cloud, impelled by nothing but the fire in the censer up and up towards God. Let us each ask the question for himself, Is my prayer '*directed*'—as is the true meaning of the Hebrew word—'before Thee as incense'?

Remember, too, that the incense lay dead, unfragrant, and with no capacity of soaring, till it was kindled; that is to say, unless there is a flame in my heart there will be no rising of my aspirations to God. Cold prayers do not go up more than a foot or two above the ground; they have no power to soar. There must be the inflaming before there can be the mounting of the aspiration. You cannot get a balloon to go up unless the gas within it is warmer than the atmosphere round it. It is because we are habitually such tepid Christians that we are so tongue-tied in

prayer.

Where was the incense kindled from? From coals brought from the Altar of Burnt Offering in the outer court; that is to say, light the fire in your heart with a coal brought from Christ's sacrifice, and then it will flame; and only then will love well upwards and desires be set on the things above. The beginning of Christian fervour lies in the habitual realising as a fact of the great love which 'loved me and gave itself for me.' There is no patent way of getting a vivid Christian experience except the old way of clinging close to Jesus Christ the Saviour; and in order to do that, we have to think about Him, as well as to feel about Him, a great deal more than I fear the most of us do.

Further, does not this lovely symbol of my text suggest to us a glorious thought, the acceptableness even of our poor prayers, if they come from hearts inflamed with love because of Christ's great redeeming love? The Psalmist, thinking humbly of himself and of the worth of anything that he can bring, says, 'Let my prayer come before Thee as incense,' an 'odour of a sweet smell, acceptable to God'; yes, even our prayers will be sweet to Him if they are prayers of true aspiration and mounting faith, leaping from a kindled heart, kindled at the great flame of Christ's love.

Were you ever in a Roman Catholic cathedral? Did you ever see there the little boys that carry the

censers, swinging them backwards and forwards every now and then, and by means of the silver chains lifting the covers? What is that for? Because the incense would go out unless the air was let into it. So a constant effort is needed in order to keep the incense of our prayers alight. We have to swing the censer to get rid of the things that make our hearts cold; we have to stir the fire, and only so shall we keep up our devotion. Remember the incense burned all day long on the altar; though perhaps but smouldering, like the banked-up fires in the furnaces of a steamer that lies at anchor, still the glow was there; and twice a day there came the priest with his pan full of fresh glowing coals from the altar in the Outer Court, and kindled it up into a flame once more. Which things are thus far an allegory that our devotion is to be diffused throughout our lives in a lambent glow, and if it is, it will have to be fed by special acts of worship day by day.

You hear people talk of not caring about times and seasons of prayer, and of the beauty of making all life a prayer. Amen! I say so too. But depend upon it that there will never be devotion diffused through life unless there is devotion concentrated at points in the life. There must be reservoirs as well as pipes in order to supply the water through the whole city. So the incense is perpetually to be heaped on the Altar of Incense, but also it is to be stirred to a fragrant blaze and fed, morning and evening, by fresh coals from the altar.

II. Now let me say a word about the other thought here—the sacrifice of the empty-handed.

'The lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice.' In accordance with the genius of Hebrew poetry the same general idea is repeated in the second member of the parallelism, but with modifications. What is implied in likening the uplifted empty hands to the evening sacrifice? First, it is a confession of impotent emptiness, a lifting up of expectant hands to be filled with the gift from God. And, says this Psalmist, 'Because I bring nothing in my hand, Thou dost accept me, as if I came laden with offerings.' That is just a picturesque way of putting a familiar, threadbare truth, which, threadbare as it is, needs to be laid to heart a great deal more by us, that our true worship and truest honour of God lies not in giving but in taking. 'He is not worshipped with men's hands, as though He needed anything, seeing that He giveth to all life, and breath, and all things.' That one truth, Paul felt on Mars Hill, was sure enough to make all the temples and statues by which he was surrounded crumble into nothingness. But it does not merely destroy idolatry. It cuts up by the root much of what we call Christian worship. How many people worship because they think they ought? How many people talk about Christian worship as being a duty—'Our duty we have now performed'? How many have never had a glimpse of this thought, that God wills us to draw near to Him, not because it pleases Him

but because it blesses us, and that we are to worship, not in order that we may bring anything, either the sacrifices of bulls and goats, or the more refined ones that we bring nowadays, but in order that, bringing our emptiness into touch with His infinite fulness, as much of that fulness as we need to make us full, and as much of that blessedness as we need to make us blessed, may pass into our lives. Oh! if we understand 'the giving God,' as James calls Him in his letter; and if we had learned the old lesson of that fiftieth Psalm, 'If I were hungry I would not tell thee.... Will I eat the flesh of bulls and drink the blood of goats? He that offereth praise glorifieth Me, and to him that ordereth his conversation aright will I show the salvation of God'—if we had learned that, and laid it to heart, and applied it to our own worship and our lives, mountains of misconception would be lifted away from many hearts. In our service we do not need to bring any merit of our own. This great principle destroys not only the gross externalities of heathen sacrifice, and the notion that worship is a duty, but it destroys the other notion of our having to bring anything to deserve God's gifts. And so it is an encouragement to us when we feel ourselves to be what we are, and what we should always feel ourselves to be, empty-handed, coming to Him not only with hearts that aspire like incense, but with petitions that confess our need, and cast ourselves upon His grace. See that you desire what God wishes to give; see that you go to Him for what He does give. See that you give to Him the only thing

that He does wish, or that it lies in your power to give, and that is yourself.

Nothing in my hand I bring,
Simply to Thy Cross I cling.

'Let the lifting of my hands be as the evening sacrifice'; as the Psalmist has it in another place, 'What shall I render to the Lord for all His benefits?'—it is not a question of rendering, but 'I will *take* the cup of salvation.' Taking is our truest worship, and the lifting up of empty, expectant hands is, in God's sight, as the evening sacrifice.

THE PRAYER OF PRAYERS

> 'Teach me to do Thy will; for Thou art my God! Thy spirit is good; lead me into the land of uprightness.'—PSALM cxliii. 10.

These two clauses mean substantially the same thing. The Psalmist's longings are expressed in the first of them in plain words, and in the second in a figure. 'To do God's will' is to be in 'the land of uprightness.' That phrase, in its literal application, means a stretch of level country, and hence is

naturally employed as an emblem of a moral or religious condition. A life of obedience to the will of God is likened to some far stretching plain, easy to traverse, broken by no barren mountains or frowning cliffs, but basking, peaceful and fruitful, beneath the smile of God. Into such a garden of the Lord the Psalmist prays to be led.

In each case his prayer is based upon a motive or plea. 'Thou art my God'; his faith apprehends a personal bond between him and God, and feels that that bond obliges God to teach him His will. If we adopt the reading in our Bibles of our second clause a still deeper and more wonderful plea is presented there. 'Thy Spirit is good,' and therefore the trusting spirit has a right to ask to be made good likewise. The relation of the believing spirit to God not only obliges God to teach it His will, but to make it partaker of His own image and conformed to His own purity. So high on wings of faith and desire soared this man, who, at the beginning of his psalm, was crushed to the dust by enemies and by dangers. So high we may rise by like means.

I. Notice, then, first, the supreme desire of the devout soul.

We do not know who wrote this psalm. The superscription says that it was David's, and although its place in the Psalter seems to suggest another author, the peculiar fervour and closeness of intimacy with God which breathes through it are like

the Davidic psalms, and seem to confirm the superscription. If so, it will naturally fall into its place with the others which were pressed from his heart by the rebellion of Absalom. But be that as it may, whosoever wrote the psalm, was a man in extremest misery and peril, and as he says of himself, 'persecuted,' 'overwhelmed,' 'desolate.' The tempest blows him to the Throne of God, and when he is there, what does he ask? Deliverance? Scarcely. In one clause, and again at the end, as if by a kind of after-thought, he asks for the removal of the calamities. But the main burden of his prayer is for a closer knowledge of God, the sound of His lovingkindness in his inward ear, light to show him the way wherein he should walk, and the sweet sunshine of God's face upon his heart. There is a better thing to ask than exemption from sorrows, even grace to bear them rightly. The supreme desire of the devout soul is practical conformity to the will of God. For the prayer of our text is not 'Teach me to *know* Thy will.' The Psalmist, indeed, has asked *that* in a previous clause—'Cause me to know the way wherein I should walk.' But knowledge is not all that we need, and the gulf between knowledge and practice is so deep that after we have prayed that we may be caused to know the way, and have received the answer, there still remains the need for God's help that knowledge may become life, and that all which we understand we may do. To such practical conformity to the will of God all other aspects of religion are meant to be subservient.

Christianity is a revelation of truth, but to accept it as such is not enough. Christianity brings to me exemption from punishment, escape from hell, deliverance from condemnation and guilt, and by some of us, that is apt to be regarded as the whole Gospel; but pardon is only a means to an end. Christianity brings to us the possibility of indulgence in sweet and blessed emotions, and a fervour of feeling which to experience is the ante-past of heaven, and for some of us, all our religion goes off in vaporous emotion; but feeling alone is not Christianity. Our religion brings to us sweet and gracious consolations, but it is a poor affair if we only use it as an anodyne and a comfort. Our Christianity brings to us glorious hopes that flash lustre into the darkness, and make the solitude of the grave companionship, and the end of earth the beginning of life, but it is a poor affair if the mightiest operation of our religion be relegated to a future, and flung on to the close. All these things, the truth which the Gospel brings, the pardon and peace of conscience which it ensures, the joyful emotion which it sets loose from the ice of indifference, the sweet consolations with which it pillows the weary head and bandages the bleeding heart, and the great hopes which flash light into glazing eyes, and make the end glorious with the rays of a beginning, and the western heaven bright with the promise of a new day—all these things are but subservient means to this highest purpose, that we should do the will of God, and be conformed to His image. They whose

religion has not reached that apex have yet to understand its highest meaning. The river of the water of life that proceeds from the Throne of God and the Lamb is not sent merely to refresh thirsty lips, and to bring music into the silence of a waterless desert, but it is sent to drive the wheels of life. Action, not thought, is the end of God's revelation, and the perfecting of man.

But, then, let us remember that we shall most imperfectly apprehend the whole sweep and blessedness of this great supreme aim of the devout soul, if we regard this doing of God's will as merely the external act of obedience to an external command. Simple doing is not enough; the deed must be the fruit of love. The aim of the Christian life is not obedience to a law that is recognised as authoritative, but joyful moulding of ourselves after a law that is felt to be sweet and loving. 'I delight to do Thy will, yea! Thy law is within my heart.' Only when thus the will yields itself in loving and glad conformity to the will of God is true obedience possible for us. Brother! is that your Christianity? Do you desire, more than anything besides, that what He wills you should will, and that His law should be stamped upon your hearts, and all your rebellious desires and purposes should be brought into a sweet captivity which is freedom, and an obedience to Christ which is kingship over the universe and yourselves?

II. Note, secondly, the divine teaching and touch

which are required for this conformity.

The Psalmist betakes himself to prayer, because he knows that of himself he cannot bring his will into this attitude of harmonious submission. And his prayer for 'teaching' is deepened in the second clause of our text into a petition, which is substantially the same in meaning, but yet sets the felt need and the coveted help in a still more striking light, in its cry for the touch of God's good spirit to guide, as by a hand grasping the Psalmist's hand, into the paths of obedience.

We may learn from this prayer, then, that practical conformity to God's will can never be attained by our own efforts. Remember all the hindrances that rise between us and it; these wild passions of ours, this obstinate gravitating of tastes and desires towards earth, these animal necessities, these spiritual perversities, which make up so much of us all—how can we coerce these into submission? Our better selves sit within like some prisoned king, surrounded and 'fooled by the rebel powers' of his revolted subjects; and our best recourse is to send an embassy to the Over-lord, the Sovereign King, praying Him to come to our help. We cannot will to will as God wills, but we can turn ourselves to Him, and ask Him to put the power within us which shall subdue the evil, conquer the rebels, and make us masters of our own else anarchic and troubled spirits. For all honest attempts to make the will of God our wills, the one secret of success is confident and continual appeal to

Him. A man must have gone a very little way, very superficially and perfunctorily, on the path of seeking to make himself what he ought to be, unless he has found out that he cannot do it, and unless he has found out that there is only one way to do it, and that is to go to God and say, 'O Lord! I am baffled and beaten. I put the reins into Thy hand; do Thou inspire and direct and sanctify.'

That practical conformity to the will of God requires divine teaching, but yet that teaching must be no outward thing. It is not enough that we should have communicated to us, as from without, the clearest knowledge of what we ought to be. There must be more than that. Our Psalmist's prayer was a prophecy. He said, 'Teach me to do Thy will.' And he thought, no doubt, of an inward teaching which should mould his nature as well as enlighten it; of the communication of impulses as well as of conceptions; of something which should make him love the divine will, as well as of something which should make him know it.

You and I have Jesus Christ for our Teacher, the answer to the psalm. His teaching is inward and deep and real, and answers to all the necessities of the case. We have His example to stand as our perfect law. If we want to know what is God's will, we have only to turn to that life; and however different from ours His may have been in its outward circumstances, and however fragmentary and brief its records in the Gospels may sometimes seem to us,

yet in these little booklets, telling of the quiet life of the carpenter's Son, there is guidance for every man and woman in all circumstances, however complicated, and we do not need anything more to teach us what God's will is than the life of Jesus Christ. His teaching goes deeper than example. He comes into our hearts, He moulds our wills. His teaching is by inward impulses and communications of desire and power to do, as well as of light to know. A law has been given which can give life. As the modeller will take a piece of wax into his hand, and by warmth and manipulation make it soft and pliable, so Jesus Christ, if we let Him, will take our hard hearts into His hands, and by gentle, loving, subtle touches, will shape them into the pattern of His own perfect beauty, and will mould all their vagrant inclinations and aberrant distortions into 'one immortal feature of loveliness and perfection.' 'The *grace of God* that bringeth salvation hath appeared unto all men *teaching* that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly,' controlling ourselves, 'righteously,' fulfilling all our obligations to our fellows, 'and godly,' referring everything to Him, 'in this present world.'

That practical conformity to the divine will requires, still further, the operation of the divine Spirit as our Guide. 'Thy Spirit is good lead me into the land of uprightness.' There is only one power that can draw us out of the far-off land of rebellious disobedience, where the prodigals and the swine's

husks and the famine and the rags are, into the 'land of uprightness,' and that is, the communicated Spirit of God, which is given to all them that desire Him, and will lead them in paths of righteousness for His name's sake. It is He that works in us, the willing and the doing, according to His own good pleasure. 'He shall guide you,' said the Master, 'into all truth'—not merely into its knowledge, but into its performance, not merely into truth of conception, but into truth of practice, which is righteousness, and the fulfilling of the Law.

III. Lastly, note the divine guarantee that this practical conformity shall be ours.

The Psalmist pleads with God a double motive—His relation to us and His own perfectness, 'Thou art my God; therefore teach me.' 'Thy Spirit is good; therefore lead me into the land of uprightness.' I can but glance for a moment at these two pleas of the prayer.

Note, then, first, God's personal relation to the devout soul, as the guarantee that that soul shall be taught, not merely to know, but also to do His will. If He be 'my God,' there can be no deeper desire in His heart, than that His will should be my will. And this He desires, not from any masterfulness or love of dominion, but only from love to us. If He be my God, and therefore longing to have me obedient, He will not withhold what is needed to make me so. God is no hard Taskmaster who sets us to make bricks

without straw. Whatsoever He commands He gives, and His commandments are always second and His gifts first. He bestows Himself and then He says, 'For the love's sake, do My will.' Be sure that the sacred bond which knits us to Him is regarded by Him, the faithful Creator, as an obligation which He recognises and respects and will discharge. We have a right to go to Him and to say to Him, 'Thou art my God; and Thou wilt not be what Thou art, nor do what Thou hast pledged Thyself to do, unless Thou makest me to know and to do Thy will.'

And on the other hand, if we have taken Him for ours, and have the bond knit from our side as well as from His, then the fact of our faith gives us a claim on Him which He is sure to honour. The soul that can say, 'I have taken Thee for mine,' has a hold on God which God is only too glad to recognise and to vindicate. And whoever, humbly trusting to that great Father in the heavens, feels that he belongs to God, and that God belongs to him, is warranted in praying, 'Teach me, and make me, to do Thy will,' and in being confident of an answer.

And there is the other plea with Him and guarantee for us, drawn from God's own moral character and perfectness. The last clause of my text may either be read as our Bible has it, 'Thy Spirit is good; lead me,' or 'Let Thy good Spirit lead me.' In either case the goodness of the divine Spirit is the plea on which the prayer is grounded. The goodness here referred to is, as I take it, not merely

beneficence and kindliness, but rather goodness in its broader and loftier sense of perfect moral purity. So that the thought just comes to this—we have the right to expect that we shall be made participant of the divine nature for so sweet, so deep, so tender is the tie that knits a devout soul to God, that nothing short of conformity to the perfect purity of God can satisfy the aspirations of the creature, or discharge the obligations of the Creator.

It is a daring thought. The Psalmist's desire was a prophecy. The New Testament vindicates and fulfils it when it says 'We shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.' Since He now dwells in 'the land of uprightness,' who once dwelt among us in this weary world of confusion and of sin, then we one day shall be with Him. Christ's heart cannot be satisfied, Christ's Cross cannot be rewarded, the divine nature cannot be at rest, the purpose of redemption cannot be accomplished, until all who have trusted in Christ be partakers of divine purity, and all the wanderers be led by devious and yet by right paths, by crooked and yet by straight ways, by places rough and yet smooth, into 'the land of uprightness.' Where and what He is, there and that shall also His servants be.

My brother! if to do the will of God is to dwell in the land of uprightness, disobedience is to dwell in a dry and thirsty land, barren and dreary, horrid with frowning rocks and jagged cliffs, where every stone cuts the feet and every step is a blunder, and all the paths end at last on the edge of an abyss, and

crumble into nothingness beneath the despairing foot that treads them. Do you see to it that you walk in ways of righteousness which are paths of peace; and look for all the help you need, with assured faith, to Him who shall 'guide us by His counsel and afterwards receive us to His glory.'

THE SATISFIER OF ALL DESIRES

> 'Thou openest Thine hand, and satisfiest the desire of every living thing … 19. He will fulfil the desire of them that fear Him: He also will hear their cry, and will save them.'—PSALM cxlv. 16, 19.

You observe the recurrence, in these two verses, of the one emphatic word 'desire.' Its repetition evidently shows that the Psalmist wishes to run a parallel between God's dealings in two regions. The same beneficence works in both. Here is the true extension of natural law to the spiritual world. It is the same teaching to which our Lord has given immortal and inimitable utterance, when He says, 'Your heavenly Father feedeth them.' And so we are entitled to look on all the wonders of creation, and to

find in them buttresses which may support the edifice of our faith, and to believe that wherever there is a mouth God sends food to fill it. 'Thou openest Thine hand'—that is all—'and satisfiest the desire of every living thing.' But to fulfil the desires of them who are not only 'living things,' but 'who fear' Him, is it such a simple task? Sometimes more is wanted than an open hand before that can be accomplished. So, looking not only at the words I have read, but at the whole of their setting, which is influenced by the thought of this parallelism, we see here two sets of pensioners, two kinds of wants, two forms of appeal, two processes of satisfaction.

I. Two kinds of pensioners.

'Every living thing—' life makes a claim on God, and whatever desires arise in the living creature by reason of its life, God would be untrue to Himself, a cruel Parent, an unnatural Father, if He did not satisfy them. We do not half enough realise the fact that the condescension of creation lies not only in the act of creating, but in the willing acceptance by the Creator of the bonds under which He thereby lays Himself; obliging Himself to see to the creatures that He has chosen to make. And so, as one of the New Testament writers puts it, in his simple way, with a profound truth, 'He is a faithful Creator'; and wherever there is a creature that He has made to need anything, He has thereby said, 'As I live, that creature shall have what it needs.'

Then, take the other class, 'them that fear Him'; or as they are described in the context—by contrast with 'the wicked who are destroyed'—'the righteous.' That is to say, whilst, because we are living things, like the bee and the worm, we have a claim on God precisely parallel with theirs for what we may need by reason of His gift, which we never asked for, His gift of life, we shall have a similar but higher claim on Him if we are 'they that fear Him' with that loving reverence which has no torment in it, and that love Him with that reverential affection which has no presumption in it, and whose love and fear coalesce in making them long to be righteous like the Object of their love, to be holy like the Object of their fear. And just as the fact of physical life binds God to care for it, and to give all that is needed for its health, growth, blessedness, so the fact of man's having in his heart the faintest tremor of reverential dread, the feeblest aspiration of outgoing affection, the most faltering desire after purity of life and conduct, binds God to answer these according to the man's need. Of all incredibilities in the world, there is nothing more incredible, because there is nothing more contrary to the very depths of the divine nature, than that desires, longings, expectations, which are the direct result of the love and fear of God, and the hunger and thirst after righteousness, should not be answered.

Now that is a very wide principle, and I do not believe that it is trusted enough by many. It comes to

this—wherever you find in people a confidence which grows with their love of God, be sure that there is, somewhere or other in the universe of things, that which answers it.

Take a case. If there was not a word in the New Testament about Jesus Christ's resurrection, the fact that just in proportion as men grow in devotion, in love of God, in fear of Him, in longing to be good and to appear like Him, in that same proportion does their conviction that there must be a life beyond the grave become firm and certain—that fact would be enough to make any one who believed in God sure that the hope thus rooted in love to Him, and fed by everything that draws us nearer to Him, could not be a delusion, nor be destined to be left unfulfilled.

And we might go round the whole circle of dim religious aspirations and desires, and find in all of them illustrations of the principle so profoundly and so simply put in our psalm, that the same Love which, in the realm of the physical world, binds itself to satisfy the life which it imparts, is at work in the higher regions, and will 'fulfil the desires of them that fear Him.'

II. Again, there are two sets of needs.

The first of them is very easily disposed of. 'The eyes of all wait upon Thee, and Thou givest them their meat.' That is all. Feed the beast, and give it the other things necessary for its physical existence, and

there is no more to be done. But there is more wanted for the desires of the men that love and fear God. These are glanced at in the context, 'He also will hear their cry, and will save them'; 'the Lord preserveth all them that love Him.' That is to say, there are deeper needs in our hearts and lives than any that are known amongst the lower creatures. Evils, dangers inward and outward, sorrows, disappointments, losses of all sorts shadow our lives, in a fashion which the happy, careless life of field and forest knows nothing about. Give them their meat, and they curl themselves up and lie down to sleep, satisfied. Man longs for something more and needs something more.

'He will save them.' Now, I do not suppose that 'save' here is employed in its full New Testament sense, but it approximates to that sense. And, further, there are other aspects of our needs set forth in the context, on which I briefly touch. Do not let us vulgarise such a saying as this of my text, 'He will fulfil the desire of them that fear Him,' as if it only meant that if a man fears God he may set his longing upon any outward thing, and be sure to get it. There is nothing so poor, so unworthy as that promised in Scripture. For one thing, it is not true; for another, it would not be good if it were. The way to spoil children is not the way to perfect saints; and to give them what they want because they want it, is the sure way to spoil children of all ages. We may be quite certain that our heavenly Father is not going to

do that. The promise here means something far nobler and loftier. The fact of creation binds God to supply all the wants which spring from life. The fact of our loving and fearing Him binds Him to supply all the wants which spring from our love and fear. And it is these desires which the Psalmist is thinking of.

What is the object of desire to a man who loves God? God. What is the object of desire to a man who fears Him? God. What is the object of desire to a righteous man? Righteousness. And these are the desires which God is sure to fulfil to us. Therefore, there is only one region in which it is safe and wise to cherish longings, and it is the region of the spiritual life where God imparts Himself. Everywhere else there will be disappointments—thank Him for them. Nowhere else is it absolutely true that He will 'fulfil the desires of them that fear Him.' But in this region it is. Whatever any of us desire to have of God, we are sure to get. We open our mouths and He fills them. In the Christian life desire is the measure of possession, and to long is to have. And there is nowhere else where it is absolutely, unconditionally, and universally true that to wish is to possess, and to ask is to have.

Oh! then, is it not a foolish thing for us to worry and torture and sweat, in order to win for ourselves for a little while the uncertain possession of incomplete bliss? Would it not be wiser, instead of letting the current of our desires dribble itself away

through a thousand channels in the sand and get lost, to gather it all into one great stream which is sure to find its way to the broad ocean? 'Delight thyself in the Lord, and He shall give thee the desires of thine heart,' for these will then be after Himself, and Himself only.

III. Further, there are here two forms of appeal.

'The eyes of all wait upon Thee.' That is beautiful! The dumb look of the unconscious creature, like that of a dog looking up in its master's face for a crust, makes appeal to God, and He answers that. But a dumb, unconscious look is not for us. 'He also will hear their cry.' Put your wish into words if you want it answered; not for His information, but for your strengthening. 'Your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of these things before ye ask Him.' What then? Why should I ask Him? Because the asking will clear your thoughts about your desires. It will be a very good test of them. There are many things that we all wish, which I am afraid we should not much like to put into our prayers, not because of any foolish notion that they are too small to find a place there, but because of an uncomfortable suspicion that perhaps they are not the kind of things that we ought to wish. And if we cannot make the desire into a cry, the sooner we make it dead as well as dumb the better for ourselves. The cry will serve, too, as a stimulus to the wishes which are put into words. Silent prayer is well, but there is a wonderful power on ourselves—it may be due to our weakness,

but still it exists—in the articulate and audible utterance of our petitions to God. I would fain that all of us were more in the habit of putting into distinct words that we ourselves can hear, the wishes that we cherish. I am sure our prayers would be more sincere, less wandering, more earnest and real, if they were spoken, as well as felt, prayers.

Let us remember, dear brethren! that the condition of our getting the higher gifts is not only that we should love and fear, and in the silence of our own hearts should wish for, but that we should definitely ask for, them. Not only desire, but 'their cry,' brings the answer.

IV. And now one last word. Note the two processes of satisfying.

'Thou openest Thine hand.' That is enough. But God cannot satisfy our deepest desires by any such short and easy method. There is a great deal more to be done by Him before the aspirations of love and fear and longing for righteousness can be fulfilled. He has to breathe Himself into us. Lower creatures have enough when they have the meat that drops from His hand. They know and care nothing for the hand that feeds. But God's best gifts cannot be separated from Himself. They are Himself, and in order to 'satisfy the desires of them that fear Him' there is no way possible, even to Him, but the impartation of Himself to the waiting heart.

That is a mystery deep and blessed. Oh, that we may all know, by our own living experience, what it is to have not only the gifts which drop from His hands, but the gifts which cannot be parted from Him, the Giver! He has to discipline us for His highest gifts, in order that we may receive them. And sometimes He has to do that, as I have no doubt He has done it with many of us, by withholding or withdrawing the satisfaction of some of our lower desires, and so emptying our hearts and turning the current of our wishes from earth to heaven. If you are going to pour precious wine into a chalice, you begin by emptying out the less valuable liquid that may be in it. So God often empties us, in order that He may fill us, and takes away the creatures in order that we may long for the Creator.

Not only has He to give us Himself, and to discipline us in order to receive Him, but He has to put all His gifts which meet our deepest desires into a great storehouse. He does not open His hand and give us peace and righteousness, and growing knowledge of Himself, and closer union, and the other blessings of the Christian life, but He gives us Jesus Christ. We are to find all these blessings in Him, and it depends upon us whether we find them or not, and how much of them we find. You will always find as much in Christ as you want, but you may not find nearly as much in Him as you could; and you will never find as much in Him as there is. God sends His Son, and in that one gift, like a box

'wherein sweets compacted lie,' are all the gifts that even His hand can bestow, or our desires require. So be sure that you have what you have, and that you suck out of the Rose of Sharon all the honey that lies deep in its calyx. Expand your desires to the width of Christ's great mercies; for the measure of our wishes is the limit of our possession. He has laid up the supply of all our need in the storehouse, which is Christ; and He has given us the key. Let us see to it that we enter in. 'Ye have not because ye ask not.' 'To him that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance.'

END OF VOL. II.

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