

“Songs in the Night”

By

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NEW YORK

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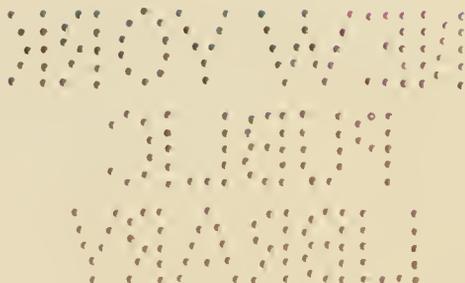
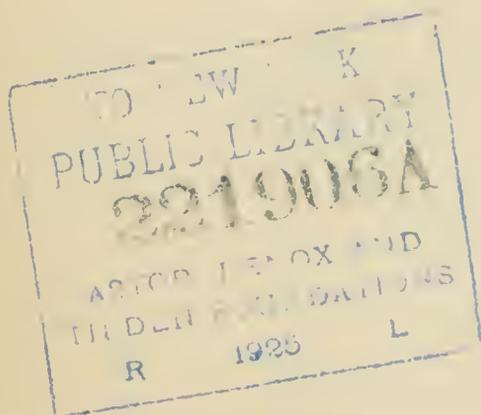
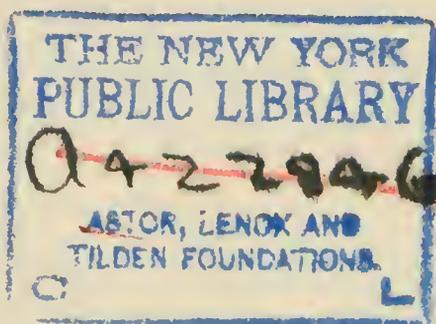
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*Dedicated to all my
Comrades in the School of Sorrow*

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I

“WE SMILE AT PAIN WHILE THOU ART NEAR”

“*Are the consolations of God too small for thee?*”—JOB 15:11.



WANT to say a word or two about the consolations of God. Sometimes we are tempted to think that God's consolations are very inadequate. In the passage before us Eliphaz is represented as asking the afflicted patriarch, “Are the consolations of God too small for thee?” Not are they small, as the old version puts it, but are they too small? Are they unsatisfying? Do they meet your need? Far back in patriarchal days we read the story of Rachel. “Rachel weeping for her children refused to be comforted.” And no doubt the reason why she refused to be comforted was because the consolations offered seemed too small. They did not measure up to her sorrow. They did not really grapple with her grief. Whoever goes into houses of mourning, to-day, will find many distressed and desperate lives like that. They will find those who refuse to be comforted.

Nothing that you can say, seems to appeal to them. I do not mean to infer that they try to be unhappy; it is simply that everything you suggest appears inept and petty. Nothing seems comprehensive enough and big enough to meet their case.

“ Just to give up, and trust
All to a fate unknown,
Plodding along life's road in the dust,
Bounded by walls of stone;
Never to have a heart at peace,
Never to see when care will cease;
Just to be still when sorrows fall;—
This is the bitterest lesson of all.”

And it is foolish to say to such people that they ought to be comforted. It is really not kind to tell them that they are committing a sin in refusing consolation, because consolation is too gentle an angel for any such cruel coercion as that. To blame a grief-stricken mother for continuing to be depressed, would be as inconsiderate as to blame a sick man for continuing to be sick. The doctor does not say to his patient, “Now here are my medicines, take them and they will make you strong; if they do not make you strong it is your own fault.” That is not how the wise physician talks. The wise physician studies the case from every angle. He seeks for adequate causes. If one diagnosis is incorrect, he tries another. If one antidote fails he experiments with a new one. He does not come into the sick

room to play the piano or to read an essay on Thackeray. He does not come to tell the poor fellow in agony how critical his case is, or, what is almost as bad, that there is really nothing the matter with him. He comes to relieve the pain, to repair the ravages of disease, to mend the broken instrument. He comes to cheer, to radiate health and hope, to stir up the elemental forces of recovery.

Many there are who find greater comfort in human friendship than in the great, divine Friend. When the blow comes and the spirit is bruised, they call in their dearest and closest confidants to see if they can help in making the pain endurable. I would not for a moment belittle that. It is a beautiful and gracious thing. The love and sympathy of earthly friends is strong, and sweet, and heartening. Poor indeed and pitiable is the child of sorrow who has no kind heart to turn to in the hour of loss and trial, but poorer far the soul that has no divine companion to whom they can go and with whom they can converse on intimate and familiar terms.

Now, of course, there are many earnest people who do not need this message. I wish I could say that they never will need it, but I cannot say that. I cannot say it because it would not be true. Many of you are young and strong and happy. You do not need consolation, not as yet. Your time is coming, but the word has no meaning for you

just now. It belongs to a foreign language, a language you have never studied, a language you have never thus far had any cause for studying. As Edwin Booth once put it, "Life is a great big spelling book and on every page we turn, the words grow bigger and more difficult." We begin with the easy, then on to the less easy and then on to the hard and the harder. What you need now is work, duty, progress, courage, tasks, service,—something to call out your powers of strength and sacrifice and endurance. "Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not nor the years draw nigh when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them. . . . In the day when the keepers of the house shall tremble, and the strong men shall bow themselves, and the grinders cease because they are few, and those that look out of the windows be darkened."

It is to those who have been in the depths—to those who have been journeying through the valley that I speak. Ian McLaren said towards the close of his life that if he were beginning his ministry over again he would make it more a ministry of comfort. A wise man once wrote a book upon the consolations of philosophy, but the trouble with his message was that only the philosophical were able to understand it, and anyway it was mostly conjectural. What we want is a voice that every man can hear, high

and low, learned and unlearned; what we want is certainty; what we want is demonstration. What we want is something that can be tested and tried in the thin and thick of things. It is all very well to tell us to be philosophical about our trouble, “to grin and bear it,” as the saying is, but there is precious little comfort in that program. A book might be written, too, on the consolations of Science, but it certainly would not be a very bulky volume. For science is grandly and haughtily indifferent to the cry of human misery. The stars are cold, the cyclone is merciless, the earthquake has no pity. In the presence of death, science is dumb. Scientists talk of a Cosmical Phantom, or a stream of tendency, or a universal It. I hope they understand what they mean, but I must say I very much doubt it. And a book could easily be written on the consolations of Fatalism. It had to be, so why worry over it? Just be resigned. In the physical world things are where they were meant to be, and what is going to happen is going to happen. And in human experience is not the same thing true? When the bullet is fired with our number on it then there’s no use trying to dodge it.

“The moving finger writes, and having writ
Moves on; nor all thy piety nor wit
Shall lure it back to cancel half a line
Nor all thy tears wash out a word of it.”

But all this is cold stuff to the man who wants to know and do the will of God, and it is to those who desire to know and do the will of God that I speak just now. There are several ways in which the consolations of God come to us.

Think, in the first place, how God oftentimes consoles us by giving us *Compensations*. Samuel Rutherford once said: "Whenever I find myself in the cellar of affliction I always look about me for the wine." And no matter how sad and grievous our lot, there is always some gracious cheering indemnity. It is easy for us to linger upon our losses, but, then, we have gains and we ought to think more about what we have gained than what we have lost. We ought to meditate more on what has been left than on what has been taken. God sometimes takes one thing away to make room for another. There is a sermon by a great preacher on "the joys that are purchased by sorrow." Some of the sweetest joys in life are the joys that spring out of sorrow. Does not Browning say in Rabbi Ben Ezra that our joys are three parts pain? An old saint once remarked, "When I have most pain in my body, I have most comfort in my soul." Indeed Brother Lawrence says, "God often sends diseases of the body to cure those of the soul." Alfred Russel Wallace argues in one of his books that the fertile portions of the earth depend upon the deserts. He says that if there were no Sahara, there

would not be a vineyard round it for a thousand miles. It is the dust particles flying in the air that make possible the clouds. Whether this be scientifically true or not, it is an undoubted fact that, sometimes, it is the desert tracts of life that prepare us for the richest harvests.

One of John Wesley's earliest memories was the fire that destroyed his father's parsonage. He tells us how, after his own narrow escape, his father finding all the family safe called them in for family worship. And the old man knelt down and thanked his Heavenly Father for His preserving mercies. He had lost his home but his dear ones were spared, so he felt rich. And we all have something to be thankful for. If it isn't one thing it's another. There is always some levelling arrangement. Things are evened up more than we think they are. Never mind your list of negatives. Count up your column of positives. You say you were sick three weeks last year, but why not ponder over the forty-nine in which you were well? So count your blessings and be thankful. The back is always fitted for the burden. Oftentimes a darkening earth means a brightening heaven.

In giving medicine, our Father never opens the wrong bottle. Many a dying saint has looked up in helpless weakness and has been strengthened with might by His Spirit in the inner man. God does not always answer our prayers, but

He does always pour strength into our souls. Spurgeon used to say that love letters from heaven are often mailed in black-edged envelopes. When Madame Guyon was imprisoned in the Castle of Vincennes she wrote these words: "It sometimes seems to me as if I were a little bird which the Lord had placed in a cage and that I had nothing to do now but to sing. The joy of my heart is full. The stones in my prison look like rubies."

Another way in which God consoles us is by giving us a truer *Sense of Values*. He teaches us what is worth while and what is not. He enables us to realize how relatively insignificant and petty some of the things are that we consider urgent and supreme. What a wonderful lesson that man has learned who has been taught to recognize a big thing when he sees it, and a little thing when he sees *it!* How few of us are experts in this matter of appraisalment! How few of us are living our lives with a true accurate sense of proportion! How few are putting "first things first"! Some one has said that he who would speak to the times, must speak from eternity. That is to say the only interpretation of life that satisfies the heart of humanity is the one we get when we climb the mountain with God. Everybody admits we are not children of time. And this being acknowledged, does it not seem the sheerest folly devoting so much of our

strength and energy into the amassing of treasure that cannot possibly be converted into the currency of the place to which we are travelling? The greatest moment in a man's life is when he gets the right view-point, when he sees things as they really are. Indeed that is what conversion is; the man is born again. There is a new orientation of life.

Thomas Chalmers preached for years before he made the great blessed discovery. Then came a day when he was stricken down with a serious illness. For months he never left his room. It was more than a year before he fully recovered, but from these months of profound and solitary musing there came a spiritual revolution. His whole past life looked like a feverish dream, the fruitless chasing of shadows. He found that his past could not stand the scrutiny of the sick room. A new ambition fired his breast. It was a spiritual epoch in his career. The whole man—body, soul and spirit—was transformed, and he went back into his pulpit and shook Scotland with a mighty passion for God. It was said of a certain famous painter that he was noted for the great pains he took in his work and when asked for the reason he answered, “Because I paint for Eternity.” That was the key-note of all Chalmers' future ministry. He felt that he was henceforth preaching for eternity. He learned, too, that we cannot do

good to others save at a cost to ourselves, that we cannot be real sympathizers until we are sufferers.

How prone we are to forget that our life is related to two worlds. The great problem with us all is to learn how to live an eternal life in the midst of time, and how to surrender the lower values for the higher. We so easily lose our sense of proportion. We make the subordinate supreme. Putting the accent in the wrong place, is the cause of nearly all our failures. We turn the pages of history and the names of Cæsar, and Napoleon, and Alexander, are written large. This type fills the foreground of the picture. The historian dismisses Shakespeare with a page, but to Bloody Mary he gives a chapter. Gutenberg gets a scanty line, but Guy Fawkes has a paragraph. The chief cause of the sectarianism which is crippling the Church to-day is a false putting of emphasis. Men seize upon some little arc of truth and dwell on it until they lose sight of the circle. Perhaps the greatest lesson any of us can learn, is to learn where to place the emphasis. The true art of life is to know the things that matter. Everywhere we meet men in deadly earnest but how few are in earnest about the things that really count. Indeed this is the inexplicable irony of life that so much of our time and strength are spent on the things that do not really matter.

Some years ago, a story appeared in one of our magazines. It was concerning an eminent surgeon. I have forgotten many of the details, but I remember it made an impression on me at the time. One of the nurses in the hospital in describing him used these words: “He has few friends but a host of admirers. As an operator he has no superior on Manhattan Island. To watch his hands while working is a perfect delight. They never stop, never fumble; the man is a genius and yet there is something uncanny about him.” “What do you mean, Nurse?” she was asked. “I mean,” she answered, “that professionalism seems to have atrophied his power of sympathy. For instance: an engineer was brought in the other day with his arm crushed. He examined it and told the man, bluntly, that he would have to have it amputated. Of course the poor fellow protested; at which the surgeon lost his temper and went away coldly, saying as he slammed the door that he would leave him to come to his senses and decide whether he preferred amputation or death.”

That evening at dinner, the surgeon was narrating the incident to his sister. The sister had a woman’s heart. “Oh well, John, the poor fellow has a family; his arm is all he has. Did you explain the gravity? Put yourself in his place.”

The words evidently struck home, for that evening he went back to the hospital and the

unfortunate engineer was wheeled into the operating room. But blood poisoning had already set in, and in severing the limb, the surgeon cut his own finger, and it became so badly infected that in a few weeks his skilled hand had lost its cunning.

The great man was now in a kindred situation himself. Calling his sister he said: "Floy, it's the greatest game in the world. Nothing compares with it; it beats war all hollow. To master your work and love it. Just to look about you and see your assistants every one in his place, every one with his part to play—like regulars in gun drill. Not a word, not a hitch, only the clip, clip of the forceps or the low call 'sponge.' To feel the ligatures tighten, to see the tied artery throb and to know it will never slip. And then to think that I can never operate again. Floy, it's hard." The nurse did not understand when she returned later, but in a few days she noticed a change in the great man. He seemed to have a new point of view. He inquired every morning how the engineer was. He even shared his flowers with him. He was less of a surgeon, perhaps, but he was more of a man.

The greatest lesson, after all, to learn is to look at one's life from the view-point of immortality. To live now as we will wish we had lived when twilight falls—that is success. Jesus found men consuming all their energies in seeking the ex-

ternals, and so He endeavoured to recentralize their affections on a more lasting attainment. To Him character alone was supreme; the true wealth was spiritual. “Seek first the Kingdom of God and his righteousness; and all these things will be added unto you.”

Then think of all *the Promises*. The Bible is largely a book of promises. The promises of God are not simply soft, sweet, soothing words. They are wholesome. They are healing. They cure the malady. They are wonderful sources of consolation. They not only charm us with their beauty; they strengthen us with their power. They work. They are true, eternally true. “The promises of God are yea and amen in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

Think of the promise of pardon. You can wade through all your books of philosophy and you will never once find the word pardon; it is not there. The very heart of Christianity is the cross of Calvary. And the great truth it proclaims is that human pain and divine love can go arm in arm together. “Though your sins be as scarlet they shall be as white as snow.” The very fullness of these and such words is what oftentimes causes men to hesitate. They try to clog them with exacting conditions, but there are no conditions save those we formulate and erect ourselves. “Their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more.” God is willing to for-

get. He is willing to forget the things that are behind, but it is a righteous forgetting. It is no mere wilful lapse of memory. It is a step towards a holier state and a higher ambition on our part. If we grieve over, and forsake, and are willing to make amends, when possible, for our sin, God is ready to forgive and forget.

I remember going through the Roman Catacombs, and I recall how strangely we all felt when we were given candles—in the glaring light of a cloudless Italian sky. But when we penetrated into the depths of these underground crypts, we soon realized what our little candles meant. And so is it with the promises of Scripture; they are the candles of the Lord by which we thread our way when twilight falls, “and after that the dark.”

Or consider the consolation of Hope. Our God is a God of Hope, and by hope we mean a conviction in the heart that the future will be good. When the ship is aground hope points to the open sea. In the dead of winter, hope whispers of spring. On the bleakest day in January, when the snow-drifts are piled level with the fences, hope sees the golden harvest. Everybody knows what a comfort there is in hope if it is only a living hope. It makes for strength, and patience, and endurance. The sailor adrift on the ocean soon sinks into helpless despair if there be no vessel in sight, but let a sail appear on the

horizon and how eager and alert he instantly becomes. He tries in every way possible to attract attention. When an oarsman loses hope he soon gives up rowing, especially if the current is against him. Nothing steadies in a crisis like hope. The surgeon says that hope is half the battle. The pain is not nearly so sharp if there is a chance of getting well. They tell me there is not a despondent line in the whole New Testament. Christianity is a manifesto of hope. “We are saved by hope.”

If a loved one has gone out of your life, beyond the reach of your cry, think of your hopes. Your loss after all is a small matter relatively. It is easily met. Get the right point of view. Think of his gain. The promise is that your mourning shall be ended. No man will carry his mourning with him into heaven. “Weeping may endure for a night but joy cometh in the morning.” Most people dread death, but Paul regarded it as a blessing. “What do you know about death?” said a farmer once to Thomas Erskine; “you have never died.” But it is the consolation of God that faith *knows*. “Faith is the assurance of things hoped for.” “For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God and the dead in Christ shall rise first. Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the

clouds to meet the Lord in the air; and so shall we ever be with the Lord. Wherefore comfort one another with these words.”

Or, best of all, consider the consolation of His own blessed presence. God comes to the broken-hearted with His healing presence. “I will pray the Father and he shall give you another Comforter.” A man in sorrow is nearer to God than a man in joy. Sorrow is the great doorkeeper to the Temple of Prayer. The happy child runs farther afield, the hurt child turns home. He wants his mother. There are griefs worse by far than death and much more difficult to comfort. But the presence of the Lord enables us to endure any pain which He sees fit to send.

“Can you see the lake in the Park from your apartment?” a lady said the other day, and I answered her, “Not in summer, but I can in winter. In summer the thick foliage hides the water, but in winter when the trees are bare it sparkles and glitters like a jewel. I sit at my window by the hour and watch the children skating.” And so is it with the eye of faith. Oftentimes the river clear as crystal is hidden from view by the rich shrubbery of our lives. We do not discern the shining shore and our distant home beyond, till our life is stripped and laid naked and bereft.

The Bible says, “Cast your burden on the

Lord." It does not say cast it anywhere. It never says, "Cast your burden into the sea or hurl your burden over the cliff." Nowhere in the Bible are we advised to toss our burdens away recklessly. I think it a very cowardly thing this trying to get rid of burdens. Our burdens, like the wings of the bird, were meant to make us mount. We can transform our burdens into blessings. God intends them for our good. I believe that the root weakness of the Church, to-day, is that we have so much to enjoy and so little to endure. "Cast your burden on the Lord." Remember He is always near. Remember He is the great burden-bearer, the great burden-sharer.

"I don't believe I can ever go into that room again," a mother said, speaking of a chamber in her home where there had been a tragedy. But as she thus spoke, a voice said, "But you could go if I were to go with you." And feeling an unseen presence by her side she opened the door and entered, when, lo, instead of its being a place of dread, she found it a gallery of glory. Do not run away from your troubles, dear friend. Take the Lord by the hand and go right out and face them.

"Humbly I asked of God to give me joy,
To crown my life with blossoms of delight;
I prayed for happiness without alloy,
Desiring that my pathway should be bright.

“I asked of God that He should give success
To the high task I sought for Him to do;
I asked that every hindrance might grow less,
And that my hours of weakness might be few;
I asked that far and lofty heights be scaled—
And now I meekly thank Him that I failed.

“For, with the pain and sorrow, came to me
A dower of tenderness in act and thought;
And with the failure came a sympathy,
An insight which success had never brought.
Father, I had been foolish and unblest,
If Thou hadst granted me my blind request.”

II

“MY VERY HEART AND FLESH CRY OUT”

*“Out of the depths have I cried unto thee,
O God.”—PSALM 130:1.*



HIS psalm is a beautiful prayer. It soars from the depths to the heights. It begins in the darkness of night and self-abasement, but it mounts to the rosy flush of the morning.

The author is unknown. No one knows his name, nor his station, nor his fortune or rather misfortune. He is simply a comrade in trouble. His is the experience of a soul down and out. “O my God, my soul is cast down within me.” “Lord hear my voice, let thine ears be attentive to the voice of my supplications.” Here is a man fallen into a pit and sending up a feeble cry for help. “O Lord, make haste to help me.” Down in the deep black hole he lies “sick and helpless and ready to die” and with that smothering feeling that comes from poor ventilation. It is the sob of a desperate case. It is the cry of despair ready almost for any rash act.

Then all at once he thinks of God. He re-

calls the fact that many a time before has God's redeeming grace met him in the hour of his perplexity. "Man's extremity is God's opportunity." Again and again has the vale of weeping become a place of springs, the Valley of Achor a door of Hope. So he turns his face to the heights.

The great city of London we are told is built over a bed of chalk, and if a pipe be drilled anywhere within its far-reaching limits there will shoot up a fountain of cool clear water. And this is the great truth in religion. "I believe in God" may seem a very simple creed, but it is not simple; it is the profoundest expression of the life of faith. That man has gone a long, long way in his search for truth who has come really to believe that underneath him are the everlasting arms, and that within him is the Eternal Spirit. Sink a shaft into the recesses of the human heart and you will find this fountain of all good; you will find God. "As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God. My heart and my flesh cry out for the living God." "Thou hast put eternity in the heart;" that is the deepest note of the Old Testament. The very moment you touch that spring why "waters break out in the wilderness and streams in the desert."

Have you ever noted how old people tend to migrate back to the scenes of their childhood?

“My Very Heart and Flesh Cry Out” 29

Tiplady in one of his books tells the story of the eel. He says that the eel is born in the depths of the ocean hundreds of miles from shore, and that by a compelling instinct it begins to push itself almost from the moment of its birth towards the land. After a long journey it at last reaches our rivers and streams where it crawls through the marsh and the mud. Here it lives for years gorging its voracious appetite. Then the overmastering impulse that brought it in sends it out again, and it returns to the far-away ocean bed where it was born and where at last it dies. Something like this is the story of man. Wordsworth says, “Trailing clouds of glory do we come from God who is our home,” and an overpowering longing is in us all to return at the end of the pilgrimage to the cradle of our departure.

Have you ever been in the depths, my friend? Have you ever gotten down so low that your feet touched bottom and it seemed as if your poor weak voice could not possibly reach the top? I doubt if there was ever a saint on earth who was not at some time or other in the depths. Take the matter of *Danger*. Have you ever been in any impending peril? In the 107th Psalm we have a forceful picture of a storm at sea. The waves mount up to heaven, then they sink down to the depths! The mariners reel to and fro and stagger like a drunken man. They are at their

wit's end. Then what do they do? Then they do what everybody always does. Then they cry to Jehovah in their trouble. The fact is we all look up when the crisis comes. "Did you run across any atheists in your regiment?" I said to Ralph Connor last winter. Quick as a report from a pistol, he answered, "Not one." One soldier writes, "The nearer we get to the front line trenches the better Christians we are. All the infidels are in the rear." Perhaps one of the greatest passages in literature is where Mrs. Quickly in describing the death of Sir John Falstaff tells how the sensual old knight fumbles the sheets and keeps calling out "*God, God, God.*" In the last great extremity all his vaunting, all his jesting vanishes, and with serious countenance he looks into the face of his Maker mumbling the 23rd Psalm. "When the Devil was sick, the Devil a saint would be."

Or take *Anxiety*. Have you ever been lost in the maze of some dark and staggering suspense? You are bewildered. You do not know which way to go, which corner to turn; you have lost your bearings. Everything is inexplicable and puzzling. Light is what you want and all is darkness. You wait for the word that never comes. You look for the letter that the postman never brings. Perhaps you are standing by the bedside of one you love and life is tilting in the balance. And the cruel anxiety drags on for

days, for weeks. Oh, it is terrible! No anxiety is so nerve-racking as the anxiety that is shrouded in mystery. When you can understand your trouble you are saved the torture of the imagination, but when you cannot understand it, it acts like an infection in the wound. The saddest experience to-day is where a family learns that their lad is among the missing. What happened? Nobody knows. Fancy plays terrible havoc with the heart and suggests all sorts of cruel possibilities.

Or take our need of *Help and Guidance*. Do we not often cry to God from the depths of our need? There is a verse in Genesis and this is how it reads, “Then began men to call on the name of the Lord.” The race was emerging out of darkness into the dawnings of conscience and the first thing it realizes is a sense of need. Are there not times when some great responsibility is laid upon us and we feel utterly unequal to the task? Was it a strange thing that the pressing affairs of state should drive such men as Lincoln and Gladstone and Oliver Cromwell to their knees? Has not many a famous surgeon asked for divine assistance as he stood perplexed by the operating table wondering what was the best thing to do? When judgment wavers and courage fails, is it not natural to seek the counsel of the Most High? One could cite the names of a dozen of the world’s greatest physicians with

whom dependence on a Higher Power was a practical force. What is art but a search for beauty? What is democracy but a search for justice? What is music but a search for harmony? What is society but a search for brotherhood? What is science but a search for truth? What is the home but a search for love? What is anything but a search for God? Do you not see it is God the world is seeking? A flippant critic once said, "There is no God west of the Mississippi," but now we know that God fills every corner of space and every concern and function of life. Everything is a search for God. There is nothing true but God. There is no beauty but the beauty that is found in God. There is no justice but the justice that is found in God. There is no love but the love that is found in God. As Mrs. Browning so beautifully expresses it:

"I am near Thee and I love Thee,
Were I loveless, were I gone.
Love is round, beneath, above Thee,
God, the omnipresent one."

One of our great Naturalists in describing the ascent of man calls him a "climbing animal," but the phrase answers with equal truth the question of his moral and spiritual history. All the striving of humanity from age to age has been called by one of the Fathers "a sigh for God," a blind groping after Him who is our life and

our hope. There is a book by Benson called “The House of Quiet,” and in it there is a paragraph where the life of Charles Darwin is thus portrayed:

“What a wonderful book this is—from end to end nothing but a cry for the Nicene Creed. The man walks along doing his duty so splendidly and nobly, with such single-heartedness and simplicity and just misses the way all the time; the gospel he wanted is just the other side of the wall.”

How true this is of many of our greatest names. They unveiled deep secrets. They were devoted to truth, but they failed to find the greatest truth. I love John Burroughs; I think he is the best of all our nature-poets. I have read nearly all his books and they are exquisitely charming. But there is one sad lack in them. He leads me through the garden and I smell the honeysuckle, and the flowers he points out are so graceful and delicate, but as some one says, there is never a hint about the Lord of the garden. It is a case of “the garden without the Gardener.”

In many of the confessions of these men there is a wistful yearning. In their franker moments no doubt some of them would say that they felt no real need of divine help and comfort, but then it is possible to have needs though one is not conscious of them. The little baby needs its

mother though it be so little that it feels no need of a mother. One might as well try to find a resting place for the joint of the arm aside from the socket of the shoulder bone as to find a resting place for the heart outside of God. Man is half a hinge and God is the other half, and as you cannot have the whole hinge until you put both parts together, so you cannot have the whole man until you put God and man together. "Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole man."

Or take our *Sorrow*. Sorrow is the appointed lot of all. There are depths we all must fathom. There are deep dark subways into which we all must pass. When the sun shines and the heart is glad we forget to look up. God is not very much in our thoughts; but in the dark and cloudy day we seek His face, if not in faith, in fear. Out of the depths of the soul there arises the voice of prayer. Two men were arguing about the stars and why they were never seen by day. One remarked that if he would go down into a well he would be able to see them, but the other laughed at the idea. "All right," suggested the first, "suppose we test it." Accordingly a windlass was arranged and several strong arms were drafted to lower doubting Thomas into the well. When half-way down they called to him: "Do you see anything?" "Not a thing," came back the answer. "Down

further, boys,” they said. Again the voice above called out: “Do you see them now?” Again the reply came, “I can see nothing.” “Still further down,” urged the men. And down to the depths the fellow was lowered. When he touched bottom he fixed his gaze upon the opening above and shouted back: “Yes, I can see the stars.” Go down deep enough into a well at midday and you will see the stars. And it is when we find ourselves in the valley of weeping that we see most clearly the face of God.

I think this is a very wonderful truth. How the spiritual world grows clearer as the physical world becomes dim! Is it not a very curious thing that the tendril of a vine does not turn to the light but to the shadow? And why? Simply because the shadow tells it, in some mysterious way, that there is a solid object near, round which it can twine. If there were no shadow there would be no object. And just so sorrow teaches the soul that there is some one near at hand to whom we can turn, round whom we can cling, on whom we can lean. I remember being told as a boy when climbing some ladder or scaling some height, “Now don’t you look down; if you do you will get dizzy; keep looking up and the giddiness will pass away.” And just so the way to surmount every sorrow is to keep the face Godward. Oliver Wendell Holmes says, “Did you ever see that soft spoken velvet-handed

steam engine at the mint? The smooth piston slides back and forth as a lady might slip a delicate finger in and out of a ring. The engine lays one of its fingers calmly but firmly upon a bit of metal; it is a coin now and will remember that touch and tell a new race about it when the date upon it is crusted over with the rust of twenty centuries." And even so it is that a great sorrow puts a new stamp on the soul in a day—a stamp as sharp and definite as if it had taken years to engrave it.

There is, for instance, the stamp of sympathy. Many a man would never have tapped the springs of compassion in his own heart if it were not for the sharp drill of suffering. Darwin tells us about a tree in Chili that yields a syrup called palm honey. The peculiarity about the tree is that it does not yield the syrup until it is cut down. "This honey," he says, "is really the sap of the tree. A good tree will yield ninety gallons. The tree is felled, the crown of leaves lopped off, and then for months the veins pour forth their stores, and every fresh slice shaved off exposes a new surface and yields a fresh supply." And is not this very thing oftentimes witnessed in human experience? Have we not all met men cold and unflinching and unfeeling until they were struck down by some vital blow? Then they became almost tenderly womanly in their compassion. It often takes

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the lance to pierce into the foundations of healing sympathy.

“Where grows the golden grain!
Where faith? Where sympathy?
In a furrow cut by pain.”

But it is the depths of *Sin* of which the Psalmist is particularly thinking. It was his sin that caused him such profound and painful distress. His conscience is stirred and the deeps are the deeps of penitence. Sin was the deep pit into which he was plunged. This is clear from the verses following, “If thou, Lord, shouldest mark iniquities who could stand? But there is forgiveness with thee that thou mayest be feared. Let Israel hope in the Lord, for with the Lord there is mercy and with him is plenteous redemption and he shall redeem Israel from all his iniquities.”

Are you in the depths of sin, my friend? Look up. It is not what man is that tests him but what he wants to be. We do not belong to the place where we are—else why do we hate it? We belong to the heights, else why do we seek them? Why am I not at peace in my sin? In the solitude of my shame I cry out to my Father. And if fathers hear their children will not God hear too? Blessed be His name it is possible to touch bottom and then with a Hallelujah shout begin to rise.

Oscar Wilde was one of the most brilliant writers of comedy that the Victorian era produced. He made a tour of the United States and lectured more than one hundred times on the philosophy of the æsthetic. But morally the man was a degenerate. He could write English of silken delicacy but he could also write the coarsest stuff. He sowed great fields of literary wild oats. He was sentenced at last to two years' imprisonment for the gravest moral offenses, and during his confinement he wrote a little book called "Out of the Depths." Let me give you the preface:

“The Gods had given me everything, but I allowed myself to be lured into sensualism. I amused myself with being a flâneur, a dandy, a man of fashion. Then tired of the heights I deliberately went to the depths. Desire at last became a malady and a madness. There is only one thing left for me now, absolute humility. I have lain in prison for nearly two years. Out of my nature has come despair, scorn, bitterness, rage, anguish, sorrow.”

The man cried out to God in penitence. Whether his penitence was sincere or not is not clear. Judging from his behaviour in prison, according to the testimony of the warden, it was. Let us hope it was.

I recall a story that Dr. Jowett tells:

“A dear friend came to me once,” says Dr. Jowett, “filled with misery and unrest. After we talked together for a while, he returned home and that night prayed, ‘Lord, wilt Thou reveal to me what there is amiss?’ In a vision during the night, he said, ‘I saw a range of mountains of great height and length, snow-clad, shining in the light of God. As I looked up, I said, Lord, that is where I should like to dwell, in the light and purity of Thy blessed presence. Then I heard a voice say, ‘He that ascended is He that also descended.’” Then I said, “Lord, give me power to descend.” As the vision was continued I saw that I was in a deep valley, surrounded by all manner of unclean beasts, showing their teeth at me. I saw they were incarnations of my past sins. I was overwhelmed with shame and mortification. Suddenly I heard a footfall. I turned and saw that it was Jesus.

“‘I was so ashamed as He came nearer and nearer that I took the cloak I was wearing and threw it over my head. When He stood before me I could not look up, my guilt seemed so great. At last I threw the cloak off, and behold the unclean things were all on Him.’ When the troubled dreamer awoke, his soul was full of joyful praises and shoutings. He was crying ‘Hallelujah, what a Saviour! He bore my sins in His own body on the tree.’”

And now one or two lessons suggest them-

selves in the study of these words, for there are things to be learned in the depths that can be learned nowhere else. One is that it is a natural thing to turn to the Lord when we sink into the slough. God is the God of the valley as well as of the hilltop. To whom else indeed can we turn? To whom shall we go? When we are in trouble we cry out to God. That would seem to imply some connecting link between us. What we do by instinct must be the expression of some profound reality. Between the soul and God there must surely be a great deal in common. If there were not a bond of affinity between us would we so intuitively cry out for Him in the hours of our deepest concern?

I can imagine the needle pointing to the North thinking it is the North that pulls it. But not so! It is the magnetic current which encircles the whole world that draws and binds the two together. It used to be believed that man had no real affinity for God. Total depravity was made so completely and exclusively and cruelly total as to leave no room for the divine at all. But this is gone by. We know that we have suppressed longings after the divine. We pine after God as an orphan does after his lost parents. We do not possess a single faculty that is not in some way related to Him. Even the thief has a sense of justice. What is that but the eternal in him? There may be a tender spot in the heart of an

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assassin. Nothing is more certain as we study man than that he is a religious creature.

Jesus taught us that God was our Father and Fatherhood implies likeness. A son must be of the same nature as his father. If a son be not of the same nature as his father he is no son at all. Creation does not imply fatherhood. God has made a great many things that are not His children. “Behold the fowls of the air,” said Jesus, “they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns and yet”—mark the next word, please—“and yet *your* Heavenly Father feedeth them.” God is never called the father of birds. Man is the only creature that can go to God and say my Father, and he can say that because he was created in His image. That image has been defaced but it can never be effaced. A son may lose the actual privileges of sonship but he can never lose his extraction. The father can never cease to be a father; the son can never cease to be a son. A lad may go down into the slums of vice and prostitution. That will not sever the tie. He is his father’s boy still. So with us all. We can neither destroy our divine lineage nor our divine likeness. We are a part of God; we are a finite part of God’s infinite whole.

Another lesson would seem to indicate that the reason for much of our religious indifference is because life with many of us is so superficial. A

superficial life is a life that floats on the surface of things. A superficial knowledge of anything is a knowledge that does not go to the roots. It does not concern itself with the whys and the wherefores. It is a mere smattering acquaintance with the practical. A superficial character is a vain frivolous character that lives for show and seeming, and such lives do not usually trouble themselves much about reality. Men do not cry out for God until the depths are stirred. How few of us really know what is deep down below, but it is to what is deep down below that God always appeals. So long as we are satisfied with the surface view of things God will not interest us. The empty, frivolous, flashy life does not feel its need of God. It is only when the waves and billows roll over us that we seek the face of our Father. It is only the surface of our nature that nourishes the flowers of unbelief. When the deeps are ploughed the seed of faith begins to sprout and germinate.

Still another lesson would seem to be that it is not enough to look up, we must go up. The Psalmist not only cried; he waited and hoped and trusted. And waiting does not simply mean being passive. It means that when a man calls he waits for the answer, waits sometimes a long time, and is ready to do what the answer bids him. “I waited patiently for the Lord, and he inclined unto me, and heard my cry. He brought

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me up also out of an horrible pit, out of the miry clay, and set my feet on a rock, and established my goings. And he hath put a new song into my mouth, even praise unto our God. Then said I, Lo, I come; in the volume of the book it is written of me, I delight to do thy will, O my God.”

So the great truth for us to learn is to learn to do God's will. His grace does not come to us as a dead weight. It is not a mighty lever to lift us from without; it enters into us and raises us from within. It comes like a heavenly breath to stir our own efforts and make us co-workers with Him in His gracious plans. We must not only live with our eyes turned upwards and our voices calling to the heights. We must do more. We must stretch out our feeble hands of faith and catch the help for which we so earnestly pray. Francis Thompson was perhaps the greatest mystical poet of modern times. Poor Thompson, what a genius he was, and what a life he lived! The poor fellow literally died of starvation at the age of forty-seven. One of his greatest lyrics was found among his papers after his death. Hear him sing. What is the song but a sob for God? It is a cry in the night.

“O world invisible, we view thee,
O world intangible, we touch thee,
O world unknowable, we know thee,
Inapprehensible, we clutch thee!

- “ Does the fish soar to find the ocean,
Does the eagle plunge to find the air—
That we ask of the stars in motion
If they have rumour of thee there?
- “ Not where the wheeling systems darken,
And our benumbed conceiving soars!
The drift of pinions, would we hearken
Beats at our own clay-shuttered doors.
- “ The angels keep their ancient places
Turn but a stone, and start a wing;
'Tis ye, 'tis your estranged faces,
That miss the many-splendoured thing.
- “ But (when so sad thou canst not sadder)
Cry:—upon thy so sore loss
Shall shine the traffic of Jacob's ladder
Pitched betwixt heaven and Charing Cross.
- “ Yea, in the night, my soul, my daughter,
Cry,—clinging Heaven by the hems;
And lo, Christ walking on the water
Not of Gennesaret but Thames.”

III

“BREAD OF THE WORLD IN MERCY BROKEN”

“*I am the bread of life.*”—JOHN 6:35.



THESE are the words of our Lord. He is not speaking about the wonderful miracle which He has just performed, nor about His doctrines, nor about His mission, but about Himself. And He calls Himself the bread of life. Verily it is an astonishing announcement, one of those staggering claims that leave us awe-struck, dumb-struck in His presence. Mark you, there is no quibbling, no equivocating, no beating round the bush, just a clean, clear, colourless challenge made without any flourish, without any call, without any warning. Like a shot from a cannon in the peaceful air, it startles us. “I am the bread of life.” The words indeed are amazing. If they do not make us sit up and take notice, I rather infer that Cardinal Newman was right when he said, “You do not mediate and therefore you are not impressed.”

The bread of life. Every word is monosyllabic,

Anglo-Saxon. There are no long Latin derivatives, no bombastic high-faluting rhetoric, no adjectives full of melody and rich in colour, no twisted, tangled, knotty phrases to untie, then words to parse and analyze; not any, not one. "I am the bread of life." No syllables could be simpler. A little child can understand them. Not life's luxury, life's necessity; not pastry, bread; not dainties, bread. Jesus nowhere calls Himself the dessert of life, the salad or the seasoning rendering things tasty. He nowhere calls Himself the wine of life or the liquor of life. He is not a stimulant; He is a staple. He is a fundamental—bread, meat, flesh, food. We may get the flavourings of the table elsewhere, but the essence of the festival is Himself. Bread is not an ornamental thing; it is a substantial thing; it is the food of the body. And Jesus Christ is bread. "He is the bread of which if a man eat he shall never hunger, the water of which if a man drink he shall never thirst."

Will you permit me to repeat that, please? One of the startling things about this man Jesus is His simplicity. Jesus rarely uses polysyllables. The words He wields are little words—light, life, love, truth, joy, rest, peace, work, hope, God, Father. These are the verbal weapons He handles and stamps with the imprint of eternity. Without such words indeed where would our language be? Can you make a sen-

tence out of polysyllables? Try it. How simple nature is; the tree dies, the sun shines, the rain falls, the bird sings, the grass grows, the fire burns, the water freezes, the wind blows, the dog barks, the baby cries, the boy laughs, the man dies.

The great writers of the world are simple. Deep water is clear; only puddles are muddy. Usually our lack of clearness is due to shallowness or sediment. The great preachers, like the great poets, have always spoken to the common heart. Sometimes I pick up a magazine poem of the present day; I read it over and over, and I say to myself, “I wonder what this thing means.” The words are musical, the figures are flowery; yes, but what does the passage mean? You never have any trouble in telling what Ruskin means, or Tennyson, or Wordsworth. Given the correct text, and there is hardly ever any doubt what Shakespeare means. And Jesus, too, is never cloudy. Mark says, “The common people heard him gladly.” He is literature’s supreme artist; He rises like a great white shaft high up in the field of letters.

Marvellous man, this man of Nazareth! He staggers me by His assumptions; they are so daring. And He never so staggers me as when He begins by saying, “I am.” When Jesus begins by saying “I am,” we know there is something coming. “I am the light of the world.”

"I am the good shepherd." "I am the true vine." "I am the way." "I am the truth." "I am the resurrection." "I am the judge of all." "I am the beginning and the end." Jesus is never afraid to claim preëminence. He loves to make us open our eyes in fixed and holy wonder. "He taught as one having authority and not as the scribes." Men received a spiritual shock in His presence. From the humblest fisherman in Galilee at the bottom, clear up to cultured Nicodemus at the top,—to everybody in fact—He was an amazing man. He is Himself the greatest miracle of the Gospels. Granting Him all other miracles follow.

Now the first thought that meets us in this verse is the thought of *Personality*. "I," He says. Let us start out with that tiny, straight-up, perpendicular "I." Jesus always begins with Himself. He puts the emphasis on His own person, and invites men not to the truth He is proclaiming, but to Himself. The first fundamental of the Christian religion is Christ Himself. Let us drive that nail permanently home at the very outset.

The first question He ever put to His disciples was, "Whom do men say that I, the son of man, am?" This is the more remarkable when we remember that all other great teachers try to efface themselves. Jesus alone among seekers after truth thrusts Himself boldly and aggres-

sively into the foreground. He says, “Follow me.” “Come unto me.” “Abide in me.” “Believe in me.” “Love me.” So I repeat, the first thing that meets us is the *fact* of Christ. He asks acceptance not only for the truth He is proclaiming, but primarily for Himself. He makes Himself the centre of His message. His first recorded public utterance was spoken in the synagogue at Nazareth. “This day is the Scripture fulfilled in your ears.” His last recorded utterance was in the palace of the High Priest. “I am the Christ; hereafter ye shall see me coming in the clouds of heaven.” So I repeat the first thing that confronts us is the *fact* of Christ.

And He confronts us, mark you, not only as a fact but as a supernatural fact. He comes to us in the holy record as a strange being of mystery and wonder, claiming an other-world connection. He does not belong to the inventory of the usual. “Ye are from beneath, I am from above.” You cannot make of Jesus a normal being unless you first rip and gash and slash the documents to your heart’s reckless content.

Some have not hesitated to do this. Indeed some theological surgeons have been so puzzled by the thread of the miraculous that so twines and intertwines itself through the New Testament narratives, that they have decided the easiest thing to do is to cut the thread entirely,

which they straightway proceed to execute, and so deny that such a man as Jesus ever lived; the portrait, say they, is unquestionably imaginary. Some scholars are willing to surrender all that is distinctive about the Christian faith in their passionate desire to be modern. Then they turn about and coolly inform us that Christianity remains unaffected even if the historical part of it is dismissed as symbolic, that our faith is secure even if there are no facts to confirm it, that Christ is simply a name for a religious experience; in other words, that Christ did not make the Christian faith, that the Christian faith made Christ.

But most of us are like little children listening to a story, and the first question we ask is, "Is this story true?" The creed of the Church has always been that the story is true, that God came down to earth in the life of a real man, and that the record of that life can be subjected to the laws of documentary evidence. The record cannot be rationalized. Every attempt to do so has failed. Scholars have tried to explain away the mysterious features of this life and still retain the faith, but the whole narrative is so strange, there is such an accumulation of the ultra surprising, the air is so heavily scented with perfumes that are unfamiliar, that the only way to explain the story is to accept the supernatural in it, or give up the historicity altogether.

The next thought that meets us in this text is the thought of a *Living Personality*. He is not only a fact; He is a living fact. He not only says “I”; He says “I am.” He is not simply a remarkable character of 1900 years ago; He is a remarkable personage to-day. He is not merely a figure of the dim and distant bygone. Of what value to us religiously would such a figure be? He is not a great “I was,” He is a great “I am.” “I am the bread of life.” “I am the living bread.” No one can read the New Testament seriously without noting how constantly the word “life” was on our Lord’s lips. The young lawyer said to Him, “What shall I do to inherit eternal life?” Peter said, “To whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life.” Everybody felt that somehow Jesus had the strange secret of life.

Some critics would make of God a dead name, a mere impersonal entity, a formula for the world’s development, a cold bloodless abstraction. Or they would resolve Him into a great absentee soulless mechanic, gazing in unconcern, aloof and apart, at the amazing spectacle He has made and set in motion. He has created things and set them whirling and whizzing and buzzing through space, but He never interferes with their workings to-day. In fact it is quite possible that He cannot if He wanted to, which is the sad part of the astonishing arrangement. He has given

the whole system certain laws and wound it up just like a clock. At present He is away off watching the time. This is the theory that we call Deism.

Down in Chinatown, San Francisco, the poor superstitious Oriental will go apart and ring a bell to call up the sleeping god. And some Christians act that way; they seem to think that God is absent or asleep. Maurice once said with a touch of irony, speaking of Carlyle, that he (Carlyle) believed in a God who lived until the death of Oliver Cromwell. But that will not suffice. Of what avail is our faith unless we believe God to be present in the life of to-day. We cannot be helped by a dead hero. We need a living power. The whole Christian faith is a protest against the idea of an absentee ruler. That conception leaves no standing room for Christianity at all. The teaching of Christ is that God has pitched His tent among us, that He lives with us, that He is our Father. He is not an antique. We do not have to sing, "In the sweet by and by;" He is with us now. He is a living God. It is Christ Himself, His very self, who is our life.

The great characteristic feature of the Bible, I repeat, is not its acceptance of God, but its acceptance of Him as a living God. This is not simply the burden of the New Testament: it is the burden of the Old Testament too. It is the great bugle note of prophets and apostles. It

runs through every book, every chapter almost. It is the real and the only satisfactory explanation of the miraculous. The Bible is full of the miraculous. And what pray does the miraculous mean? It means, does it not, that this world of ours is a living world, that the Creator of it is a living Person. Every miracle assures us that God is alive and immanent and active and co-operative in the great scheme of things.

I often think of that story told of Dr. Dale. He was in his study writing an Easter sermon when the thought gripped him that his Lord was living. He jumped up excitedly and paced the floor repeating to himself: “Why, Christ is alive, Christ is alive. His ashes are warm. He is not a great ‘I was,’ He is the great ‘I am.’”

Let us remember, too, that the Gospel story is not after all the supreme historical document. The Church is the supreme historical document. Christ lives to-day in the Church and in the Sacraments. We live as Christians through union with Him. How a dead Christ can explain the Christian Church is a mighty difficult problem, for all agree that the Church is built not on the death of our Lord, nor on His life, nor on His teachings, but on His Resurrection. (“When you see a long train pushed backwards round a curve, you know there is something pushing it.”) But even granting it possible, a more difficult problem arises, how can a dead

Christ explain a converted soul? This is the supreme inexplicable mystery. For it must ever be borne in mind that this living bread is a life-giving bread. It is a power not only to support life, but also to impart life. Natural bread put into a dead man's mouth will not make him live. But our Lord Jesus Christ is living bread, and when He touches the dead lips of a penitent sinner, life comes into them. He creates as well as sustains. He is life for the dead as well as food for the living.

Oh, we cannot dismiss this man Jesus. He calmly and patiently refuses to be dismissed. Men say He is not real and never was. They say His story is an invention. Others mock Him, hate Him, crucify Him. They spit on Him and rail at Him. They say His Church is the hotbed of persecution and tyranny. They drive Him away from their presence with a sharp scourge of invectives, but He returns. Back He comes and stands and calls and beckons, so meek, so manly, so human, so divine;—a mighty love, a love "That will not let us go."

"I fled Him down the nights and down the days,
I fled Him down the arches of the years.
I fled Him down the Labyrinthine ways of mine
own mind
And in the mist of tears
I hid from Him, and under running laughter
Up vistaed hopes I sped,
And shot, precipitated,

Adown Titanic glooms and fears,
From those strong feet that followed, followed
after.”

But He is not only a personality and a living personality. The passage assures us that He is a *Communicating Personality*. He communicates Himself. If we give ourselves to Him He will give Himself to us. He is the bread of life. “The bread which I give is my flesh which I will give for the life of the world.” Our God is always a giving God. The sun gives his light, the sky gives its rain, the earth gives its harvest. There is no chest for selfish hoarding in all the works of the good Lord anywhere.

To be sure He is not here speaking of the Holy Sacrament. That came long after. The Holy Sacrament teaches in a graphic way what this sermon was meant to teach in a didactic way, viz., that the spiritual life, like the physical, must be nourished and fed. It must be ministered to from without. Jesus Christ is bread. He is the “Bread of the world in mercy broken.”

Bread is the food of the world. The king eats it in his palace and the peasant in his hut. The President eats it at the banquet and the soldier in the trench. God makes no confectionery; He makes plain bread and He calls it the staff of life. This body of ours needs many ingredients. It needs oxygen, hydrogen, nitrogen, carbon, lime, soda, phosphorus. And they are all in bread. This

loaf of bread contains them all. It is the primary, the ultimate gift of God. You might put a man round a festal board with edibles and delicacies fit for a pampered belly-god, but if he does nothing but look on and admire the china he will starve despite the dainties. There is light all about us, but the only light that illumines our path is the light to which our optic nerve responds. There is an old proverb that "Truth is mighty and will prevail," but it is only a half-truth. It is true that truth is mighty, but it cannot prevail until it finds its way into the hearts and consciences of men. Truth on the mantelpiece covered with dust is a helpless, impotent thing. Truth on the mantel with a dry blanket of dust covering it, is as helpless as the average church with a wet blanket of worldliness.

And the message that Jesus is constantly proclaiming is that just as bread is the food of the body so He Himself is the nourishment of the soul. As we partake of Him our daily waste is repaired. In Him all our need is supplied according to His riches in glory. He not only communicates wisdom and righteousness and sanctification and redemption. He communicates Himself. He looked out upon the world and it was a living world to Him, because it was God's world. And He says I am the living bread for this living world. The mind eats

this living bread by thinking about Him; the soul eats it by trusting Him and loving Him; the will eats it by surrendering to His will. We feed on Christ when in any way or through any experience we draw near to Him. It is a symbolic statement of the truth that the life and growth and health of the soul is as dependent upon the Lord Jesus Christ as the life and growth and health of the body are upon natural food. It is the great mystery of spiritual nutrition.

Mystery, did I say? Of course that is the right word to use. But let us not be too timorous of approach. Is it any more mysterious than the mystery of natural nutrition? Who can explain the miracle of a healthy human appetite? Who can trace the hidden steps by which our daily bread is transformed into blood and bone and sinew? “How can the mute unconscious bread become the living tongue?” The corn eaten by the animal is transformed into flesh. Man takes that flesh and transmutes it into blood and brain and thought and psychology and poetry. Who can understand it? What hunger is, how food becomes part of our bodies, what the laws of growth are is still as great a mystery to us as was the picture of the Cyclops at his meals to Ulysses. Two men for breakfast, two for dinner and two for supper, with large casks of milk and wine, made the bold Trojan hero open his eyes in

puzzling and bewildering wonder. Who can explain how the sap of the plant adds new tissue to its structure? Bear in mind that only each year's growth is living; the rest is all dead wood which would decay speedily were it not that it is protected by the living cells on the surface. The wood of the oak tree, for instance, grows from within outward; but its bark grows from without inward, while its roots grow at their extremities. The mystery of growth! Who can explain it?

Or who can follow and interpret the processes by which the mind of the thinker feeds upon truth? Scholars like Carlyle and Goethe have simply devoured books and made these books a part of their own mental furniture. Wordsworth on the other hand, like Augustus Comte, turned away from books, rarely indeed read a book, turned rather to the great out-of-doors for his refreshment. He drank in the secret of the sky, the lakes, the hills. This is the mark of all truly great men. Intellectual assimilation is the power to take in and absorb and make one's own, the wealth of the world. Everything has its food. We say grace before meat, but as Charles Lamb suggests, why should we not say grace before Milton? Is it because we value the body more than we do the mind? The thinker feeds upon truth, the artist feeds upon beauty, the lover feeds upon affection, the imagination feeds upon

hope, ambition feeds upon power, the soul feeds upon God.

One last word needs to be said and it is this: If one is to grow he must not only have food, but he must have the right kind of food, the food he can assimilate. Have you ever visited a babies' hospital and gone through the wards and studied the little pinched faces of half-starved children? They have no particular disease. They are just weak from lack of the proper nourishment. The physician studies each case individually and at last works out the proper formula. And the spiritual problem is not only to find the food; sometimes the real difficulty is to find the formula. Food means life, growth, strength; but it must be food of the right kind. The Lord Jesus suits every case, fulfills every need, meets every experience. As certain insects are coloured by the leaves on which they feed, just so if we feed on Christ, we will become like Him and our prayer will be answered.

“Give me a faithful heart
Likeness to Thee,
That each departing day
Henceforth may see
Some work of love begun,
Some deed of kindness done,
Some wanderer sought and won,
Something for Thee.”

IV

“WE TURN UNFILLED TO THEE AGAIN”

“Blessed are they that do hunger and thirst after righteousness for they shall be filled.”—MATTHEW 5: 6.



HIS is a great saying. It is so great that we will never be able to grasp it in its rich and rounded completeness. It speaks of being satisfied; it speaks of the only thing that can satisfy—righteousness. And the article is used, *the* righteousness, the one real righteousness, the righteousness of the Kingdom of God. Let us not quibble over the word. Let us not give to it a theological twist or a legal significance remote from life. Moffat in his version translates the word Goodness. “Blessed are they who hunger and thirst after goodness.”

Now to hunger and thirst after a thing is to feel that we need it and need it badly, need it so badly that we are determined to have it, whatever the cost. The Master takes the most familiar of physical cravings, the appetite for meat and drink,

and applies these cravings to the soul. He is not asserting the happiness of goodness in itself, but the happiness of those who hunger and thirst after goodness. The Lord looks upon the heart. It is not a question of what we are, but of what we want to be. He puts to our credit not what we have, but what we wish to have. Our desires become our deeds, our longings our possessions. It is an attitude He has in mind, an aspiration.

Let me repeat that, please. The strange feature of the hunger and thirst that receives the blessing is that it is continuous. The craving is never satisfied. Our physical desire does not die because we ate to-day; it comes again to-morrow. There is no blessing for those who have already attained. The hunger and thirst must last as long as life lasts. The longing is for the unreachable. This is the strange contradiction of the beatitude. There is no room in the New Testament for a stationary religion. There are always heights above to be scaled. The story is told of a man in the Patent Office down in Washington who resigned his position in 1835 because he had come to the conclusion that about the last of the inventions had been made, and his office would soon close. That was almost a century ago, and still the inventions come pouring in thicker and faster than ever. There are no limits to the field of invention. It is as boundless as space. And the possibilities of the soul

are equally rich and ample. The thirst of the soul is never quenched. It is like the asymptote to the parabola in that the line only reaches the curve at infinity. The attainable is not attained until we “awake in His likeness.”

Then, too, it must be noted that hunger is the outcome of health. There is an old proverb that “hunger finds no fault with the cooking.” “To the hungry no bread is bad.” In every healthy organization there is a craving for food. When appetite fails and food is distasteful then the body is sick. For hunger is a healthy human sensation. It is our most compelling passion. It insists on satisfaction. Where it does not exist the functions are not normal. Disease is at work. Nor is it a condition that comes at will. We cannot will ourselves to be hungry. We cannot put an edge on appetite if the appetite be not there, except by some questionable temporary stimulant; just as at the old Roman feasts men would drink bitter mixtures to make them thirsty. And likewise a wholesome hunger of soul can only come from a soul in health. There must be poverty of spirit before God. There must be mourning over sin and a godly sorrow that worketh repentance. There must be an inward cleansing. There must be meekness of spirit and purity of heart before there can be a real yearning after any spiritual conformity to the Will of God.

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And, furthermore, the quest for goodness is the only quest that is certain of fulfillment. In this blessed crusade there can be no disappointments, no failures. We have our Lord's own word for it. The thing we need to worry about is not shall I arrive? But do I really want to arrive? Do I want to arrive earnestly enough to put forth a sustained compelling effort? If I do, it is not possible to fail. Goodness is the one thing that every soul may have. They shall be *filled* is the promise.

Fed, Filled, Satisfied! The peacemakers are going to be called the children of God; the merciful are going to obtain mercy; the mourners are going to be comforted; the meek are going to inherit the earth. But those who hunger and thirst after righteousness are going to be satisfied. The reward is a purely spiritual one. There is not a hint of anything worldly in it. Righteousness is a thing that suits and satisfies completely the cravings of the soul.

And now on the other hand let us turn to some of the voices of the world. For the world singles out its allurements too, and holds them up to be sought after and struggled for and admired. Some of them are legitimate; some of them are most attractive; some of them are noble and worthy and fine. Some adorn a man's character and add to his usefulness and power.

(1) Would it have been surprising, for in-

stance, if Christ had said—Blessed are they who do hunger and thirst after *knowledge*? How great a thing is knowledge! “Knowledge is the wing wherewith we fly to Heaven,” said Shakespeare. There is not much danger these days of underrating the value of knowledge. The pursuit of truth, the unveiling of nature’s secrets, the acquisition of sound learning is one of the noblest aspirations of the human mind. Alexander the Great so valued learning that he used to say he was more indebted to Aristotle for giving him knowledge than to Philip his father for giving him life.

“Knowledge is power,” said Bacon; on which another comments that knowledge is power in the sense that wood is fuel. Wood on fire is fuel and knowledge on fire is power. There is no more power in knowledge of itself than there is in pieces of sticks or lumps of coal. Knowledge is not power until it burns and sparkles in some earnest, consecrated life. When such a life hungers and thirsts for knowledge then it becomes power.

But then the question arises—Are such lives particularly blessed? Are they satisfied? Have they found the secret of peace and rest? Has it been your observation that scholars as a rule are a very contented class? We recall what the poet said of that great Elizabethan genius who was the father of modern science, “the wisest,

brightest, meanest of mankind.” Does not Goethe in *Faust* give us the picture of a soul drawn away by admiration for the gifts of intellect to the most miserable moral ruin? Does not Tennyson in his “*Palace of Art*” give us the experience of a young woman whose supreme passion was to know? But after her quest was gained and her palace completed, a strange loneliness creeps into her heart and she is shot through with the pangs of disappointment, and in despair she throws her royal robes away, exclaiming, “Build me a cottage in the dale where I may mourn and pray.”

We have seen side by side the scholar and the saint. We have admired the one and we have revered and loved the other. We have seen the man of genius with his scientific temper, his trained faculties. We have marvelled at his brilliant powers, but we have noted his cold and cruel heart—selfish, jealous, proud, dictatorial. On the other hand, we have known men of very ordinary gifts, but tender, sympathetic, self-controlled, patient, kind, loving, Christlike; and the inward judgment of our hearts has been, he is the greater man, he is the happier man.

Our deeper natures tell us that splendid as the culture of the mind is, there is something far more splendid. There is a vastly superior order of merit. The immediate verdict of the soul is that the highest law of man is the law of right-

eousness. Some one has said that Christianity is the restoration of righteousness to its rightful place among the ideals of human ambition. Better than scholarship, better than cleverness, better than fame is goodness. We talk a lot about the duty of goodness, but we do not talk half enough about the beauty of goodness or the rewards of goodness or the joys of goodness. "Seek first the Kingdom of God and his righteousness and all these things shall be added unto you."

Most of us cannot hope to enrich the world by our thought. It is not very likely that we shall ever blaze a trail to some hitherto unknown truth and so make the path safer and easier for those who follow. Yet there is a way nevertheless by which we can become real benefactors. There is a blessedness higher than to be able to bequeath some brilliant secret to the world. We may all, by God's help, add to the world's stock of goodness. We can all leave behind us a life lived in the secret of the Master and ruled by His charity, a life rescued from sin and dedicated to loving service.

(2) Others would make *power* the ultimate of life. They would offer the prize to the successful. It may be the power of leadership or skill or heroism or popularity or position or rank or perhaps simply of some social distinction. And what we aim at being we generally secure.

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When men set their hearts on some goal they usually arrive.

Here is the man whose God is gold. His aim is to pile up money and yet more money, because money is power. For this he toils and sweats and slaves. It is the gnawing passion of his life. Life to him is bounded on the north by timber and on the south by railroads. The chief end of this man is to possess, because possession in his opinion is satisfaction. To be sure, he is running after an illusion, but then that matters not, for to him the illusion is real. We know he is foolish, but then he thinks he is wise. It is the tragedy of worldly ambition seeking satisfaction where satisfaction never yet in all the long centuries has been found.

Here is Sisyphus rolling the stone up the cliff, and just as he is about to put forth one last mighty heave and land it on the summit, down it plunges into the valley again. It is the tragedy of the world, I say—seeking satisfaction in the impossible, in the chase for the unreal. Alas! Joy riding is not the road to joy, never has been.

Let us visit this magnate resting in his luxurious davenport with gold and silver and jewelry sparkling all around him. Happy man, you say. Why, he does not know what the word means. His house is large, his retinue is bewildering. He has drunk every cup, quaffed

every chalice, and then set down the goblet with a groan. He remembers how sweet the crust tasted when he was a boy. He is not satisfied climbing the ladder, nor is he satisfied after reaching the top—the fact being there is never any top; the top is always a receding equation. Here is a letter from California. The man writes: "The climate is marvellous, the mountains are glorious, the touring is finer than anything I have seen, the table is all that heart could wish but, ah me, I have no appetite." What a wail from the West! A few weeks later he passed on to "a far serener clime."

One of our magazines recently instituted inquiries touching the private lives of our millionaires, and these sons of success certainly have their full cup of wormwood. One who has made his pile in the wheat market by the irony of fate is a martyr of dyspepsia; another has arterial sclerosis; others have domestic skeletons in their closets that suck the syrup out of life. "When I was a farmer's boy," one of them writes, "I loved the smell of the new mown hay, although I did not relish much pitching it. And my pillow at night was sweet as the clover blossoms. But I wanted to come to the city and live in a mansion. And now I'm in the city and I have my mansion. I have offices and clerks and stenotypes and telephones and dictaphones, but I am tired of it all. The click of the typewriter

annoys me. And sometimes I lean my head on my hand and sigh for the old clover days and the hay I used to pitch and the chaff pillow I used to fondle and hug.”

“Ah me!” writes Emerson, “if the rich were only half as rich as the poor think they are.” When you grasp a bird it ceases to sing. It is only the uncaptured things that make music. Many a boy after climbing a high tree in search of a nest finds the nest empty. We hear the expression so often “happy as a lord,” “happy as a king;” but the testimony of those who know seems to be that kings and lords are not particularly fortunate in this regard. “Uneasy lies the head that wears a crown.” There is a quaint old rhyme that ought not to be forgotten:

“The king can drink the best of wine, so can I;
And has enough when he would dine, so do I;
But cannot order rain or shine, nor can I;
Then where’s the difference, let me see,
Betwixt my Lord, the king, and me?”

(3) Then there are men and women to-day who have a hunger for *justice*, especially for social justice and industrial good-will. They look forward to the time when brotherhood will sway the hearts of men, when oppression and cut-throat selfishness will disappear, when juster laws and a better government shall prevail, when the toiling multitudes and the disinherited shall have a fairer chance, when war shall be no more,

in a word, when the new earth and the new order shall descend out of heaven from God.

But do these things bring satisfaction and contentment to the heart? That is the point at issue. Perhaps no man ever laboured more earnestly for social improvement than John Stuart Mill. In a chapter of his Autobiography he describes the disappointment of soul he experienced when in vision one night he saw his plans realized. The earth was redeemed and the way he felt about it was, that it was not worth while. It was nothing but "Vanity of Vanities." And you will recall how he describes the melancholy that for months came over him, and from which he was rescued only by the influence of the poet Wordsworth.

I believe his experience is not unusual. Because when any hope in this life is realized there is nothing more to hope for unless we can look forward to an after-state. What do international justice and democracy amount to unless we can look forward to a better order beyond? Is it really worth while making the masses happier and giving them better laws, if the whole business is to terminate at the tomb? Germany has constructed a magnificent railroad to hell, but what good has it done her? Is contentment the true goal of social justice? Or is gratification? Or is character? Are people any happier to-day than they were one hundred years

ago, when the world lived closer to nature? It is at least questionable. Our aim is not the perfection of a social state but the development of the soul along the lines of an endless life. If we set our affections on terrestrial reform alone, the time may come when there will be no new slums to conquer. To be sure that would be a most desirable condition, but would it satisfy? Let us not lose sight of the logic of the thing. That is not true satisfaction which has the world for a background. True satisfaction has immortality behind it—and before. As St. Augustine has said, “Thou hast made us for Thyself, and our hearts are restless until they rest in Thee.”

(4) And this leads us back to the Master. It is *heart excellence* that really satisfies, nothing else. We do not need to dine on nightingales' tongues to have a feast for the soul. Goodness is its own reward. The flower carries its own odour. “Blessed are they who do hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled.”

Take Bernard's great hymn, “Jesus Thou joy of loving hearts.” It is a Latin chant of more than two hundred lines. It was born in an hour of intimate communion as he was partaking the bread and wine of the Holy Supper. Suddenly this burst of devotion leaped to his heart, “We turn unfilled to Thee again.” And when we read his life we feel surely indeed he might have been

well satisfied with the bliss that earth imparts. For remember who this man Bernard was. He was far and away the greatest man of his time—an eloquent preacher, a scholar, a statesman, and best of all a saint. He was a man who made Europe tremble by the sheer power of righteousness. When two Cardinals, Anacletus and Innocent, contested for the papal chair Bernard was made arbiter of their claims. That itself was a commanding tribute. No name stood higher in the whole Christian world than the name of Bernard. Luther called him the best monk that ever lived. He was the most influential man of his age. And as he grew in years he grew in influence. Surely if ever a man had reason to be intoxicated with the bliss that earth can give that man was Bernard of Clairvaux. Yet listen to what he says, "Earth can never satisfy the infinite spirit of man."

"Jesus Thou joy of loving hearts,
Thou fount of life, Thou light of men,
From the best bliss that earth imparts
We turn unfilled to Thee again."

Just one point more awaits our reference. "They shall be filled." "Whosoever drinketh of this water shall never thirst." "They shall be filled." Filled with what? Why, filled of course with what they desire to have and to be Filled with righteousness. They shall be right-

eous. They shall be like Him. God has made man's spirit so great that no created thing can possibly feed it, much less fill it. There is a vacuum in the soul that nothing can fill but faith in God. The world's concoction is like rich confectionery to a starving man. Only spiritual things can satisfy the spiritual life. “My soul thirsteth for the living God.” To be sure, as intimated already, this reaches far beyond the present. It can only be true in its literal completeness when we stand in Zion and before God. Because to be satisfied is to cease from hungering and that must never be. The moment hunger ceases that very moment there follows decline. Growth in grace and in the divine likeness must go on forever.

Bishop Creighton once said that the greatest danger of the twentieth century would be the “absence of high aspirations.” On yonder hill I see the horizon line, but when I climb the hill and put out my hand to touch it, the line retreats and is just as far off as ever. So when I know one truth I see another. No king of thought need ever sigh that there are no more worlds to conquer. Our reward is in the search, not in the attainment. We grasp the object of our quest to find it is not after all our quest. Our terminus ad quem when we reach it becomes a terminus a quo. We are on a journey. What is behind is interesting but it is not half

so interesting as what is before. The goal is nothing, the trip is everything. We are children of the infinite and only the infinite can be our eventual home. If you eat a meal you lose your appetite, but if you feed on the Lord Jesus Christ your appetite is intensified and you cry for more. “More about Jesus would I know.”

I remember some years ago reading a little story that greatly impressed me. The story, if I remember rightly, was called “The Windows of Heaven.” Two spirits were in the eternal world. One felt extremely happy and at home; the other seemed lost and uncomfortable. She said, “I was a rich woman on earth. I had everything that heart could wish. But I feel cold and out of place here.” Then looking up into the eyes of her companion she remarked, “I seem to recognize your face. Your features are familiar. Did we ever meet on earth?” “Why, yes,” the former made reply, “I was your washerwoman.”

“O Jesus, ever with us stay;
Make all our moments calm and bright;
Chase the dark night of sin away;
Shed o'er the world Thy holy light.”

V.

‘DROP THY STILL DEWS OF
QUIETNESS’

*“And as Jesus was going up to Jerusalem
he took the twelve disciples apart.”*

—MATTHEW 20:17.



WISH to think with you for a moment about that word apart. Matthew is very partial to the word. In the fourteenth chapter and the thirteenth verse we read that “When Jesus had heard of the death of John the Baptist he withdrew in a boat to a desert place apart.” Then in the twenty-third verse we are told that “He went up into the mountain apart to pray.” The story of the transfiguration in the seventeenth chapter is introduced in this way: “And after six days Jesus taketh Peter and James and John up into a high mountain apart and was transfigured before them.” Indeed all the Evangelists, but especially Matthew, have a great fondness for this word, which, by the way, in the original is two words and denotes separation. The Greek means aside, away from the people, the idea being that of division. We speak of

taking a piece of mechanism apart as a watch or a weapon; we break it up into its components. An apartment is a suite of rooms in a building separated from others—the aim being that of privacy.

Our Lord loved the people, but how often we read of His going away from them for a brief season. He tried every little while to withdraw from the crowd. So He went up, up to get near to His Father and to be alone with Him. He was always stealing away at evening to the hills. Most of His ministry was carried on in the towns and cities by the seashore, but He loved the hills the best, and oftentimes when night fell He would plunge into their peaceful depths. And I cannot help feeling that what the Church of God needs to-day, more almost than anything else, is that she should go apart with her Lord and sit more at His feet in the sacred privacy of His blessed presence.

For consider first of all the *secrecy* of true religion. Religion is preëminently a personal matter; it is a strictly confidential agreement; it is a sacred contract between the soul and its God. There is something about the religious life that was never intended for the vulgar gaze. True religion is practising God's presence, and in order to do this one surely needs some little chapel of retirement. "Come," says the Master, "Come ye apart into a desert place," and He did

not mean by that, one commentator suggests, a vast waterless, treeless, grassless, flowerless waste, but rather a place deserted by the people, a place of tranquil and undisturbed and intimate communion.

We all know there is a strange strength that is conceived in solitude. The noblest creatures of the field and the air are not gregarious. Crows go in flocks and wolves in packs, but the lion and the eagle are solitaires. And so likewise man. Instance Copernicus pondering his great work for three and thirty years. Or Newton holding the idea of gravitation before his mind for nearly twenty years. There was no hurry, no haste, no forcing; just a slow maturing of power. John the Baptist was a child of the wilderness. So was Moses and Daniel and Jeremiah. So Dante and Darwin and our own Hawthorne. The foremost prophets of the world learned their greatest lessons in solitude. It was said of Harriet Martineau that she often took an hour to read a single page. Wordsworth is the supreme poet of nature. What a sense of apartness there is in all his works. He loved to be alone with the rocks and the waterfalls. How fond he was of lingering in unfrequented, out-of-the-way places. A single flower, a lonely star, a secluded dell always drew him. What a charm there is in these lines beginning:

“I wandered lonely as a cloud
That floats on high o'er vale and hill.”

Or in that matchless lyric:

“A violet by a mossy stone
Half hidden from the eye
Fair as a star when only one
Is shining in the sky.”

Now when we study the history of the Church we find a great deal said in it about a certain class of people called the saints. They were men and women who seemed to have a genius for the unseen. They had a strange passion for seclusion. They loved to go apart. They were a company of God's Elect children who pilgrimed on the heights—St. Francis, Loyola, St. Teresa, Thomas à Kempis, John Woolman, Fénelon, Rutherford, McCheyne, Brainerd, and a long glorious chosen band on whom the Spirit came. What a shining group they are as they walk the great white lonely way. And the particular point just now that impresses one is that they all loved the secret place. “They climbed the steep ascent of heaven through peril, toil and pain.” They lived, as the Psalmist puts it, “In the shadow of the Almighty.” They sang songs in the night.

Take the case of a man like George Herbert. He lived only forty years. He did not enter the

ministry till he was thirty-seven, and these three brief years he spent as a country parson in a quiet little village remote from the courts and the crowd, obscure and unknown. He was a gifted musician. He composed many hymns which he set and sung to his own lute, but the man had a burning passion for retirement. And one of the strangest things about his short career is that not a single poem of his appeared until after his death. It was during his last hours that he handed to a friend the volume that is now immortal, saying as he did so, “You will find in these pages a picture of the many spiritual conflicts that have passed between God and my soul, in whose service I have found perfect freedom.” To-day these poems are religious classics. They are among the treasures of our literature and the author is remembered as a saint. We call him “holy George Herbert.”

We are living in a very wonderful age. It is an age of drive and hurry and stress and storm. One would not go far afield to-day in describing our age as an age of impatience and unrest. The tragic fact in the life of the American people at the present time is the absence of apartness or repose. We are in too great a rush for repose. We believe in “drives.” We have little or no time for the inner chamber. We prefer the limelight and the crowds. Nothing appeals to us but the strenuous and the thrilling.

Repose is too tame a thing entirely for this aeroplane age.

And the sad part of it is that this temper has crept into the Church. The Church is imitating the world. Christians are regulating their devotions by the clock. Their hands are so full that their hearts are empty. I hope I do not offend you when I charge that meditation is a word most of us know precious little about. What do you busy men know about meditation? You rise in the morning and it is hurry and sweat and fume and tear, until all frayed and fagged you come home in the evening. How many are living as if life were a railroad journey and the object to get to the end of it as quickly as possible. There are Christians in all our churches who are so busy rushing hither and thither, on errands of mercy it may be, that they are never alone with God. I believe they are missing the great thing after all, the thing that really matters. Some people are so full of energy that they are draining and exhausting the supply. And if the supply gives out what then? What is a man good for when the reservoir is empty? Ruskin tells of a genius who carved a beautiful figure in the snow and the way he describes it is, "Genius engaged in the service of annihilation." I strongly fear that far too much of our work is like that.

We Protestants are very severe on Monasticism, but my own feeling is that we are in grave

danger of drifting into a whirlpool that is far more perilous than any cloister ever was. I am not afraid of the cloister. I would not mind a bit being a monk. Oh, for the lost art of meditation! Oh, for the culture of the secret place! Oh, for the tonic of waiting upon God! Oliver Wendell Holmes says, “I have a tender plant growing in the corner of my heart that needs to be watered at least once a week, and that tender plant is called ‘reverence.’” I think it is Lamartine who in one of his books speaks of a secluded walk in the garden where his mother always spent a certain hour of the day, upon which nobody ever dreamed for a moment of intruding. It was the holy garden of the Lord to her. Poor souls that have no such Beulah land! “When thou prayest enter into thy closet and having shut the door pray to thy Father who is in secret and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly.” Seek the private oratory, Jesus says. It is in solitude that we catch the mystic notes that issue from the soul of things. It is deep down in the depths that religion works. By going apart one gets a bird’s-eye view of the field; we see things as a whole, we get a vision of the picture in its true perspective, but better still we get a vision of God. How vast the soul becomes when in the presence of the Infinite. Do you recall Matthew Arnold’s lines as he addresses the stars:

" Ah! once more, I cried, ye stars, ye waters,
On my heart your mighty charm renew;
Still, still let me, as I gaze upon you,
Feel my soul becoming vast like you.

" From the intense clear star-sown vault of Heaven,
Over the lit sea's unquiet way,
In the rustling night-air came the answer!
Would'st thou be as these are? Live as they.

" Unaffrighted by the silence round them,
Undistracted by the sights they see,
These demand not that the things without them
Yield them love, amusement, sympathy.

" Bounded by themselves and unregardful
In what state God's other works may be,
In their own tasks all their powers pouring,
These attain the mighty life you see.

" Oh! air-borne Voice! long since severely clear,
A cry like thine in mine own heart I hear;
Resolve to be thyself; and know that he
Who finds himself loses his misery."

Then I want to consider with you secondly the *quietness* of true religion. John Boyle O'Reilly says "The infinite always is silent, only the finite speaks." When we look out upon the world we are struck with two kinds of forces. On the one hand we have the earthquake, the storm, the thunder, the dashing of the tide, the shock of the explosion, the crash of the avalanche. On yonder battle-field the din is deafening, the cannons roar, the rocks tremble. These are the destructive forces whose end and aim is death.

On the other hand we have the silent energy of light, the noiseless pull of gravity, the strange mystery of growth with no sound to mar the peace of its tireless activity. Here is an acorn. It falls upon the ground, and takes root. Slowly it becomes a great oak, but with never a whisper to call attention to its mighty expansion. God builds His sacred groves without the clang of any hammer. How noiselessly the sun shines, the harvests ripen, the flowers bloom. All great healing ministries are bashful and unobtrusive. No ear has ever heard the voice of spring. It comes without a rustle. I recall my first visit to a factory. The roar was simply deafening. The manager was trying to explain the workings of the place but I could not hear a word. Such is the work of man, but it is not so with the works of God.

“What tho’ in solemn stillness all
Move round this dark terrestrial ball,
What tho’ no real voice nor sound
Amid the radiant orbs be found.”

This morning the sunbeam tapped on your window but you did not hear it. How soft and silent the falling snow, yet it stalls the mightiest trains, it forms the avalanche. The aeroplane makes a deal of noise, but not the stars. We never hear the machinery of the brain. War is a blustering sabre-rattling bully, but peace is a soft and gentle maiden. Spiritual force is the

supreme force of the world, and it comes without a whisper.

A representative of the American Civic Association, speaking recently before an audience of working women, asked them what they considered the greatest evil in their crowded tenement life. One woman rose and said: “I speak for every woman here; what we cannot stand is the noise; it never stops. We work hard all day and need rest at night. You rich people can get away from the noise during the summer but we cannot. What can your Civic Club do for us?” Some one has made a list of the needless noises on our streets, with this result that between dawn and midnight there is an unnecessary noise every five minutes. Between venders and bells and whistles and clangs and gongs and hurdy gurdies our nights and days are made hideous. Why should those ten-ton motor vans and those huge brewery trucks be allowed to go rumbling along our thoroughfares at all hours of the night and morning? Why should newsboys be tolerated crying out their extras? Why should automobiles with a horrible raucous screech be permitted to shatter our nerves at every corner? The International Congress of Aurists which met in Boston a few years ago maintained that autos should carry a horn emitting a musical note.

The tragic thing, alas, in the life of the world

to-day is the absence of quietness. One of the blessings of the old time Sabbath was its calm, its restfulness, its holy peace. But we have lost that. We have been taught so much the art of being strenuous that we have well-nigh lost the art of being still. Ours is an age of fuss and trumpet blowing. We have more faith in the whirlwind than in the still small voice. God usually speaks in whispers but we cannot hear these whispers for the clamour of the street. We all know that the profoundest feelings of the soul have no words to express them. There are times when talking is almost irreverent. When we enter some venerable building we prefer to be hushed and still. In the hour of sorrow the frivolous remark pains us. No true man is talkative and flippant in the hour of a deep and rich experience. The flower needs the fog and the dew just as much as it needs the shovel and the spade, and quietness is the dew of the soul.

In Sir Walter Besant's story, "All sorts and conditions of men," there is a description of a walk through Whitechapel on a Sunday morning:

“Here,” he says, “was a circle gathered round a man who was waving his arms and shouting; he was an Apostle of Temperance; behind him stood a few of his private friends to act as a clique. The listeners seemed

amused but not convinced. Another circle was gathered round a man in a cart, who had a flaming red flag to support him. He belonged, the flag told the world, to the Tower Hamlets Magna Charta, and the fighting, knee-drill, singing, and storming of the enemy's fort were at their highest and most enjoyable point. Higher up, on the left, stood a rival in red-hot religion, the Hall of the Jubilee Singers, where another vast crowd was worshipping, exhorting and singing.”

Now listen to the comment made on this by the principal character of the story :

“There seems,” said Angela, “to be too much exhorting; can they not sit down somewhere in quiet for praise and prayer? ”

And as before the really lamentable fact about it all is that this babel and clatter have crept into the Church. We are getting to be very fond of a religious activity that has noise in it. We are beginning to feel that a profession that does not cry aloud in the streets, and does not advertise in every newspaper in glaring head-lines is an ineffective thing. We have a strange idea that nothing is being done unless somebody is talking. So Christians fairly swarm to conferences and councils and platform discussions and conventions. The inquiry that is nearly always made concerning a religious gathering is, “Was there much of a crowd there?” We take it for

granted that if the speaker was a good talker and the room was crowded, the meeting was a big success. I would almost wager that the first question that will be asked you this morning when you reach your home will be, “Was there a large congregation present?” Do you remember in “Pilgrim’s Progress” the conversation between Christian and Talkative? “I thought we should have a great deal of talk by this time,” says Talkative. The moments when he was pursuing his journey in silence seemed wasted.

Surely there is a fresh lesson here for us. So many professing followers of the Master are living in the visible and the vocal that they are forgetting that their true real power is out of sight. To-day we have the noiseless gun. The noise is eliminated by the use of a muffler; it being a well-known fact that the noise which goes with an explosion is not produced by the actual discharge but by the sudden escape of the gas. There is no real power in the noise. There is never any real power in noise. They tell me that the engine room of a great factory is the quietest room in the building, although it sets all the rest of the machinery in motion. Strength is not in bluster and noise. Strength is in quietness. True religion is deep rather than demonstrative. “It is the brook and not the river that goes brawling.”

John Burroughs says that the first lesson a naturalist must learn is to be quiet. Let a man go shouting and laughing through the forest and every bird and beast will scurry away from him. Silence is the first door to the temple of nature. “Be still and know.” John Foster, who wrote that great essay on “Decision of Character,” said, “If I had the power of touching mankind with a message it would be in two words ‘*Be Quiet.*’” Richard Jeffries says that men do not know what they miss because they will not be still. “The lake must be calm,” Brierley says, “if the heavens are to be reflected on its surface.” You recall Mrs. Browning’s sonnet on the unchanging Christ:

“Speak low to me, my Saviour, low and sweet,
From out the Hallelujahs, sweet and low,
Lest I should fear and fall and miss Thee so,
Who art not missed by any that entreat.”

Let us learn then a lesson from our Master. Let us learn the lesson of retirement. Let us go apart. Let us go up occasionally to the mountain where things are peaceful and see how life looks from the top. We are called to the heavenly places. Large areas of our life ought to be above the world. For after all our real home is in the heights. Our real power is in communion. I am pleading for more prayer. “Take time to be holy.” The great men of ac-

tion were men great in prayer. Go off into the quiet and find out where you stand with the infinite. Climb the heights and be alone for a little while with your Lord. How haggard and hollow eyed the most of us look. Ah, friends, the shining face comes from the mountain top where Moses got his. Christianity is a still small voice, or as the Welsh translation has it, it is “a silent voice.” That is, it is a voice to some, it is silence to others. There is a music that no one can hear until the ears are anointed. The voice of truth is a very low sweet voice. I would like to thank Whittier for many things but for nothing more than his beautiful hymn:

“ Drop Thy still dewes of quietness,
Till all our strivings cease:
Take from our souls the strain and stress;
And let our ordered lives confess
The beauty of Thy peace.

“ Breathe through the pulses of desire
Thy coolness and Thy balm;
Let sense be dumb, its beats expire:
Speak through the earthquake, wind, and fire,
O still small voice of calm!”

VI

“E’EN THOUGH IT BE A CROSS THAT RAISETH ME”

“For our light affliction which is but for a moment worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; while we look not at the things which are seen but at the things which are unseen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are unseen are eternal.”

—2 CORINTHIANS 4: 17, 18.



HIS passage is a wonderful study in contrasts. The Apostle brings out the strength and glory of his faith by comparing it with the things of sense and time. The law of contrast is one of nature's most effective instruments and also one of her most popular ones. Nothing, it seems, is fully appreciated until we are confronted with its opposite. Why do we love so the first greenness of spring? It is because the memory of the bleak winter is so fresh and vivid. The ease that follows relief from pain in the morning is sweet and blissful because of the excruciating torture of the night. Is it not true that most of us do not value our blessings until

we lose them? Possession is only seen clearly and distinctly in the light of loss.

The law of contrast is one of the secrets of all great art. It is one of the laws of beauty. The beauty of the blue sky is enhanced by the white clouds that float across its face. The starry points sparkle and glitter on the great black dome of night. How beautiful the white daisies in the green clover field! Rembrandt was a firm believer in the power of contrast. When he paints a face he throws a strong ray of light upon the features but the background is always shadowy. Henry Drummond in one of his books has a criticism of the paintings of Sir Noel Paton, and his criticism is this, that part of their peculiar beauty lies by a trick of art in their partial ugliness. There are flowers and birds and knights and ladies thrown upon the canvas, but down in the corner or somewhere in the background there is nearly always some uncouth and loathsome form—a toad or lizard or snail to lend by contrast a lovelier beauty to the rest. Just as in architecture you often see the griffin or the gargoyle keeping company with the faces of cherubs on the front of the cathedral.

Carry this thought over into the realm of literature. Do you recall how Robert Browning, describing the morning of the Day of Judgment, has a lark singing? And do you remember how the poet Coleridge in his “Rime of the Ancient

Mariner'' has a grewsome account of the corpses on shipboard and the sea rolling in corruption and blood and then goes on to say :

“It ceased: yet still the sails made on
A pleasant noise till noon,
A noise like of a hidden brook
In the leafy month of June,
That to the sleeping woods all night
Singeth a quiet tune.”

There is a story of Mrs. Charles Kingsley who long survived her husband. Never perhaps had two souls been united in a closer bond of chivalry and devotion. “Whenever I find myself thinking too much about Charles,” she said in the days of her grief, “I find and read the most sensational novel I can. People may think it heartless, but hearts were given us to love with, not to break.”

Now this law of contrasts is brought out very sharply in this great wonderful passage before us. There is first of all a contrast of conditions; it is on the one hand a state of affliction, on the other hand a state of glory; then the affliction is a light one over against a preponderating weight of glory. Furthermore, the one is as it were momentary, the other is abiding; while to sum up the Apostle's thought in a word, and in a sense to explain and interpret it, it is a contrast of the reality of the facts themselves, the one set of facts being outward, the other inward;

the one set being seen, the other unseen; the one being temporal, the other eternal. What the Apostle really is doing is, he is weighing time over against eternity. In this way he touches the giddy point of the climax.

I. Consider then the first contrast, our afflictions. If our life is to be conformed to the life of Christ it must be a life familiar with affliction. We cannot escape that. We must expect to bear about in our body the dying of the Lord Jesus. The whole tenor of the chapter is to teach us that we must never allow ourselves to become despondent or rebellious or faint-hearted if we are called to pass through the fires of suffering, because suffering has a purpose. Even fire has a remedial value if we use it as a sacrament. It is through fire that the unclean is cleansed and the steel is tempered. “We are troubled on every side,” the Apostle says, “but not distressed, perplexed, but not in despair, cast down but not destroyed. . . . Knowing that he which raised up the Lord Jesus shall raise us up also by Jesus, and shall present us with you.” We are bidden to hold firmly in mind the essential connection there is between the sufferings of time and the glories of eternity. The one condition is working out the other. The sufferings are outward but the glory is inward. God turns the seeming curse into a blessing, and when we stand before the throne

it is quite possible there is nothing we will thank Him for more than the discipline of trial.

I like the way Weymouth translates the verse, “For this our light and transitory burden of suffering is achieving for us a weight of glory.” “Is achieving for us” mark. I prefer that way of putting it. “Is achieving for us.” The question is repeatedly asked—Why is the life of man drenched with so much blood, and blistered with so many tears? The answer is to be found in that word “achieving”; these things are achieving for us something precious. They are teaching us not only the way to victory, but better still the laws of victory. God allows His children a certain measure of self-government. Just as in the George Junior Republic the boys are permitted under wise oversight to make their own laws and rule themselves to a certain extent, so in the work of the Kingdom we have been given dominion over a certain province of the soul realm. You have seen wells, have you not, in which one bucket going down lifts another bucket up. And that is the way with sorrow. Sorrow so adjusts the pulleys that like the birds’ wings its very weight becomes a lift. So we are to count all things but loss if we may but know the fellowship of Christ’s sufferings and are made conformable unto His death, inasmuch as the promise is that “the sufferings of this present time” are not only not

worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed hereafter, but what is infinitely better they are helping to achieve that glory.

Surely indeed this is a wonderfully comforting thought to those who are down in the depths. There is a compensation in every sorrow, and the sorrow is working out the compensation. It is the cry of that dear old hymn:

“Nearer my God to Thee, nearer to Thee
E’en tho’ it be a cross that raiseth me.”

I have a bird in my home and you ought to hear the little fellow sing. He is called a “*Roller*.” He sings as if his throat would burst. He sings out of sheer unselfish ecstasy. He sings as if he were in love. He sings as if he felt. And remember he is caged. Joy sometimes needs pain to give it birth. Fanny Crosby could never have written her beautiful hymn “I shall see Him face to face” were it not for the fact that she had never looked upon the green fields nor the evening sunset nor the kindly twinkle in her mother’s eye. It was the loss of her own vision that helped her to gain her remarkable spiritual discernment. It is the tree that suffers that is capable of polish. When the woodman wants some curved lines of beauty in the grain he cuts down some maple that has been gashed by the axe and twisted by the storm and tapped for the syrup. In this way he secures

the knots and the hardness that take the gloss. Some one has said that out of David Livingstone's own arteries went the red blood which to-day is helping to redeem Africa. Listen to these words from a soldier: "I do not think my life could be used to better advantage than as part of the price which we are paying for the world's freedom in future years. I instinctively look forward to many years of happiness and I trust usefulness in the work of the Church when this war is over, but our lives are in God's hands and I feel sure that He will use mine to the best advantage. I know that out of the Valley of Baca an all wise Father is making a garden!"

II. Then our afflictions are light, the glory is heavy. "Worketh for us more and more exceedingly a weight of glory:" Nay stronger than that, "a preponderating weight of glory." That is to say the affliction is a light trifling matter in comparison with the glory. The troubles of this life He uses as a foil to set forth the surpassing splendours of the other. The whole passage denotes that the glory to come exceeds the power of words to describe. "Eye hath not seen, ear hath not heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man to conceive the things which God hath prepared for them that love him." I have heard it said that we stand heavy trials more easily than we do light ones. If this is true, and I rather think it is, I suppose one

reason is that we try to carry our little loads ourselves, but when some really staggering weight is laid upon us, we feel our absolute insufficiency and so it drives us to a higher power. Thus it is that God comes to our rescue and makes the burden bearable. But perhaps a more likely reason would be that when the heavy cross comes we turn our eyes to the heavenly country, we set our affections more on things above, and the cry of our hearts is:

“O Paradise, O Paradise
Who doth not crave for rest.”

As Donald Hankey says: “I have seen with the eyes of God. I have seen the vanity of the temporal and the glory of the eternal. I have despised comfort and honoured pain. I have understood the victory of the cross. O death, where is thy sting? If we are to do our part in this glorious work it is absolutely essential for us to understand the victory of the cross through the experience of its dynamic in our lives. This alone will give us strength, staying power, courage and devotion to persevere in the work of preparing the world for the return of its rightful king.”

III. Still further the affliction is momentary, the glory is abiding. The one ends with death at the latest, the other has no end. How can we know the meaning of God's dealings with us

if we judge them from the level of time and He deals with us from the plane of eternity? If we are to look at our afflictions in the right light and bear them in the right spirit we must see them in the right connection, not with that which passes but with that which remains. We say I do not know what these troubles of mine mean! I see neither their wisdom nor their justice nor their love. But He says to us, "What I do thou knowest not now, but thou shalt know hereafter."

One of the earliest stories of our race comes down to us from our Saxon fathers. They were discussing whether they would listen to the missionary or not; one chief said, "A bird flies into the tent on one side and then flies out on the other, and so the spirit of man comes in and goes out. If this missionary can tell us where it comes from and where it goes to, for God's sake let us listen to him." There is a precious lesson in that old familiar story. And the lesson is especially comforting in time of sorrow. Sorrow tarries only for the night; it takes its leave in the morning. A thunder-storm is very brief when put alongside the long summer day. "His anger is but for a moment; his favour is for a lifetime. Weeping may endure for the night but joy cometh in the morning."

IV. Then finally the things seen and the things unseen. The Apostle's idea is not that we

are to ignore the former in order to see the latter. He does not mean that we are to push the world entirely out of sight. Paul never closed his eyes on what was round about him. This clause like the others is relative, not absolute. We are not to fasten our gaze upon the things that are seen as the end and aim of our existence. They are meant to be subservient. He means rather that we are to see the invisible through the visible. The temporal things around us are simply windows through which we are to look out upon the eternal.

And is not that their divine purpose? Is not everything we touch and taste and see and handle a thought of God, “a premeditation of God” as Agassiz once expressed it? These outward things are the expression of God just as a book is the expression of its author. The reason why men become worldly is not because they look at the world but because they do not look deeply enough or diligently enough or devoutly enough or penetratingly enough to see the permanent behind the fleeting. The spiritually-minded man is the man who spiritualizes the things of time by seeing them in their relation to eternity.

There is an old saying that things are not what they seem; that is to say our faculties are not infallible. The testimony they give is not always dependable on its face value. The world is packed full of illusion. The earth looks as if it

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were flat but we know it is not. The sun looks as though it rises and sets, but we know it does not. We say that seeing is believing, but when we say that we forget the curious tricks our senses play. Scientists speak of the phenomena of nature, but phenomena is a Greek word and simply means appearance. The appearance of things is not the reality; the reality is infinitely more wonderful than the appearance. To the eye the firmament is studded with fixed points of light but to the soul these points are celestial worlds sweeping by at a breathless velocity. You have never seen God, you say, but then, my friend, have you ever seen any of the really great things about you? Have you ever seen any of the cosmic forces? Have you ever seen a single motive that impels you? Have you ever seen love or hate or joy or peace or patience? Have you ever seen music? A visible God would not be our God. A visible God would have limitations. God to be God must be invisible. No man can see thought but thought can be clothed in speech. No man can see truth but truth can be communicated. The seeming is not the real. The real is the intangible, the eternal, the spiritual.

It is possible to walk through a great gallery of the Masters and see nothing but patches of colour and an array of frames, calculate on their market value and so reduce the whole collection

to a valuable hobby that some rich man might want to possess. Or it is possible to walk through steeped in wonder and admiration and delight, trying all the while to interpret the idea that was in the soul of the artist. We can have the matter view or the mind view of things. It is possible to look at a great landscape as some animal might—a horse or a dog. But it is possible to look upon it as the poet does, with fires of truth and feeling and imagination kindling in his soul.

Oh, it is a wonderful thing to see the invisible. Moses saw the invisible and he endured. Luther saw the invisible and out of the vision came the reformation. David Livingstone saw the invisible and because of that fact Africa to-day is circumscribed with light. It is a great thing to have eyes in the body but it is a far greater thing to have eyes in the soul. It is a glorious thing to be able to pierce through the crust of things and get down to inner values. Glorious because only then do we see the glory. Sometimes we hear people talk of religion declining, but we do not need to worry about that. True religion can never decline. The thing is not possible. It can never decline because it deals with the unseen and it is impossible to eliminate the unseen from life. Every day we are doing business with the unseen, and after all that is what religion is. What is religion but the interpreta-

tion of the unseen? "Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen."

This is why childhood is such a splendid parable of the Kingdom. The child is fundamentally religious. Its young eyes look out upon the world and they see the soul of the world. They see images of wonder and glory. They see faces that look out, as it were, from God. But as age advances this freshness of insight grows dim. The eternal things become hazy and hidden. "They fade into the light of common day," as Wordsworth puts it. The divine touch no longer appeals to us older people until our eyes are anointed and we receive again the spirit of a little child. Then all things become new. This is the truth that Dr. Peabody so beautifully expresses in his comforting lines:

" My darling boy, so early snatched away
From arms still seeking thee in empty air,
That thou shouldst come to me I do not pray,
Lest, by thy coming, heaven should be less fair.

" Stay, rather, in perennial flower of youth,
Such as the Master, looking on, must love;
And send to me the Spirit of the truth,
To teach me of the wisdom from above.

" Beckon to guide my thoughts, as stumblingly
They seek the kingdom of the undefiled;
And meet me at its gateway with thy key,
The unstained spirit of a little child."

I have recently been reading the lives of two great contemporaries—Benvenuto Cellini and Michael Angelo. They were both great artists and great scholars. When you read the life of the former you are struck with the entire absence of anything beyond the visible, but when you read the latter you are impressed with the fact that the passion of the man was to express in a visible form the beauty which his soul saw. In the words of his own sonnet:

“Heaven born, the soul a heavenward course must hold,
Beyond the visible world she soars to seek;
For what delights the sense is false and weak.”

Let us then cultivate the long look. As the writer to the Hebrews puts it: “Looking away unto Jesus.” Follow everything to its close and see how it will look from the last observation point and in the light of the glory-land. We identify the real with the visible and tangible. We crown the material king. “Solid as the rock,” we say; “strong as the bank.” But then the question arises, how solid is the rock, how strong is the bank? And the simple truth is the rock is no more solid, so far as lasting permanence is concerned, than the waves that lash its granite base. And the bank—why, it is just as strong as, and not one whit stronger than, the faith of the community it endeavours to serve.

We must beware of putting in the background everything that is not obvious to sense. It is the intangible, the insensible, that is the real. The spiritual life is the life that rests on reality. It concerns itself with what a thing is, not how it looks. Its estimates are based on intrinsic merit, not on any face value. It pierces the thin veil of illusion and lays hold of the permanent, which is God.

Have you ever seen that remarkable portrait of George Washington? In the right perspective his face is clearly seen, but as you draw nearer you begin to realize that it is an illusion. For the face gradually disappears, and instead, the Declaration of Independence looms into view. Some expert penman had engraved the great immortal document into the picture. And just so is it with the light of faith.

" Faith lends its realizing light,
The clouds disperse, the shadows fly,
The invisible appears in sight,
And God is seen by mortal eye."

One of the most distinguished writers of New England used to love to go out to Mt. Auburn and write descriptions of its monuments. He would describe its rock tombs, its Doric temples, its Grecian mouldings. Then the young man married a wife. The ceremony took place in the morning, and in the afternoon her wedding gown

took fire and she was burned to death. They took her body out and laid it in Mt. Auourn and every little while he would tenderly visit the sacred spot. But now it was not the architecture he noticed; it was not the sculptured pillars or the Grecian cameos. The world looks so entirely different when it is dark. It takes the night time to see the stars. It is one of the laws of celestial optics that it takes the dark valley to show us more clearly the path of life. When our earthly lamp is extinguished then the Sun of Righteousness arises with healing in His wings, then our spirits seem nearer to God.

“The Sun that glads mine eyes,
Is Christ the Lord I love:
I sing for joy of that which lies
Stored up for us above.”

VII

“TOWERING O’ER THE WRECKS OF TIME”

“And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me.”—JOHN 12: 32.



IN the Gospel of John we meet this expression three times. In the third chapter we read that as “Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness even so must the Son of man be lifted up.” In the eighth chapter and the twenty-eighth verse we read, “When ye have lifted up the Son of man then shall ye know that I am he and that I do nothing of myself.” And in this passage we are told “I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me,” to which John adds, “This he said signifying what death he should die.” So beyond all doubt the reference each time is to His crucifixion on the cross. It is another triumphant song in the night.

It will be observed of course that the words have a double meaning. They are true literally and they are true spiritually. He *was* lifted up literally on a cross and spiritually that cross has become a throne to which He is drawing the very world He came to redeem. That is to say, when-

ever men have been brought face to face with the cross and have stood before it reverently, they have always been drawn to the person hanging on it with a strange compelling interest. The Christ whom Christianity has worshipped has always been a Christ who died. Like these powerful magnets which you will see carried every evening through the work rooms of our large millinery shops, picking up the pins and needles dropped by the workers during the day, so Christ lifted up on the cross is drawing to Himself, with a mighty magnetic charm, all classes of men and women who have fallen by the wayside and raising them up to hope and courage and purity and peace. Love sent Him down to earth to seek the lost and love lifted Him up from the earth to save the lost. His life charms us, His example inspires us, His miracles astonish us, but it is His death that draws us.

One of the many remarkable features about the Bible is the way it records the passion of our Lord. Almost one-third of Matthew's story, about two-fifths of Mark's, one-fourth of Luke's and well-nigh half of John's relate to events within one week of the end. Of John's twenty-one chapters the last nine are taken up with the last twenty-four hours of this wonderful life. Only two of the Evangelists tell the story of His birth, only two tell the story of His temptation, only two recount the sermon on the mount, but

every one of them enlarges on the tragedy of His death. And the way they describe it is striking. They all tell it in a unique way. There is no comment. There are very few adjectives. Indeed the scarcity of adjectives is very noticeable. In its self-restraint it is a truly astonishing narrative. It is all told so calmly. There is not a sigh, not a tear, not a single remark about the cold cruelty of the deed. “The style of the Gospel,” says Pascal, “is admirable in many respects and amongst others in this, that there is not a single invective against the murderers and enemies of Jesus Christ.” The language is sober and restrained. There is no straining after effect. There are no “patches of purple rhetoric.” It is all recorded with such seeming indifference. The most awful facts are written down in the simplest, coolest way. In sheer frankness it is like the tale of a little child. “And sitting down they watched Him there.”

Now the first thing that strikes us as we contemplate these words is the genuine ring of confidence there is in them. One cannot fail to observe that. They are spoken in a tone almost of jubilant rapture. It is indeed a lilt in the night. Our Lord knew what was before Him. He knew He was to suffer; He knew He was to die, and He knew He was to die a violent death. And yet we observe that His answer is one of victory, not of defeat. “Who for the joy that was set before

him endured the cross, despising the shame.” “If you ask me,” says Savonarola, as he was being led to the stake, “what shall be in general the issue of this struggle, I reply Victory. If you ask me what shall be the issue in the particular sense, I reply Death.” It was the answer of a seer. It was the answer of the prophet of Galilee.

And we cannot very well help asking the question, have the words before us been verified? Have they been substantiated? Have they been fulfilled? Have they come true? Or are they a mere idle boast which has been completely negated by the facts? Let us approach this question in the spirit of sober inquiry, and let us begin with the light of history.

And in order to do this fairly and impartially let us observe at the outset one or two things. There is first of all the condition stated. It is not temporal, mark; it is conditional. It does not say, “When I am lifted up.” Some would read it that way but it is not an accurate rendering. The text says, “If I be lifted up.” It is *if*, not *when*. The clause is hypothetical. Christ is not concerned with the time but with the results of His passion. He saw the real significance of His own death. To His followers His crucifixion seemed His doom. They felt sure it sealed His fate. They felt confident it meant His permanent overthrow. They did not realize

until afterwards that it behooved the Christ to suffer and to enter into His glory.

It is a notable and undeniable fact that our Lord Himself looked forward to His death for the most far-reaching and compelling results. He was always anticipating it and preparing His disciples for it before it came. The cross was the one divine event towards which His whole ministry moved. He came to give His life a ransom for many. In our text He declares it is going to attract the attention of the world when it comes. It is going to carry with it elements of permanent and paramount surprise. It is not to be simply a sentimental spectacle evoking sympathy and pity. It is going to be a great and mighty influence, the putting in operation of a new law, and a new truth, that is to rule forever the hearts and lives of men.

And strange to say, history substantiates the challenge. Every one knows who has tried it that when we really set about trying to save men from their sins the cross is our master weapon. I know there is another Christianity in the world to-day. We are hearing a great deal about it. Many object to the word blood. It jars upon their delicate refinement. We hear men talk about Jesus as the founder of Christianity. But nonsense! He is not the founder of Christianity. He is Christianity. He is its living centre. Some one has said that war is a "tragedy in

red.” Well, Christianity is a “revelation in red.” A Christianity without blood is a weak and poor and impotent thing. It can never save the world. It is not any better than Buddhism.

We all recognize the magnetism of sacrifice. In his “Seven Lamps of Architecture,” Ruskin says that all the bright lamps of the world depend upon the lamp of sacrifice. And he goes on to name them—Beauty, Obedience, Truth, etc. When the lamp of sacrifice goes out all the others burn dimly. Even the lamp of Beauty is coarse and bold and voluptuous without sacrifice. “You cannot make an omelet without breaking eggs,” the old proverb says. Nor can we better the world we are called to serve without shedding our blood on the altar of sacrifice. On your automobile tires is stamped the name Goodyear. It is only a trade mark but it calls up the story of a life of sacrifice—a life that for twenty years went hungry and cold. Do you recall the story of Giordano Bruno, the noble Italian who pined away in prison for seven long years, and then walked unflinchingly to the flames? It seemed as if his life was absolutely wasted. But four centuries later the people of his native town unveiled a bronze statue to his memory on the very identical spot where the hot fires had incinerated him. Who does not love to read the matchless epic of Livingstone? Think of a great strong cultured man leaving the comforts of home and

pushing through swamp and marsh and jungle in order that he might help heal the running, bleeding sore of the world. Racked by disease, wasted by fever, with ulcers on his feet till every step was an agony, he still held on, inspired by the divine love of his great and noble heart. What is it but the power of a mighty sacrifice?

"Life everywhere is fed by death,
In earth and sea and sky;
And that a rose may breathe its breath,
Something must die."

Nothing overcomes the evil in man like the preaching of the cross. Nothing lifts him out of the cruel tyranny of sin like it. It breaks up his frozen indifference. It warms his heart. You may proclaim the Man of Nazareth as a great reformer until your eyebrows are white, but your program will lack the dynamic of the uplifted Lord. Some people imagine that the demands of the Christian faith are met by declaiming about Christian ethics or humanitarianism or sociology. It is as if one spent his time describing the colour of the hair or the shape of the mouth while ignoring the living spirit within. "Do you know," says James Gilmour, "what it is that makes a Mongolian listen most attentively? It is the central doctrine of Christianity. I know that a Chinaman is degraded and sensual and corrupt, but he has a human heart, and when you can get at his heart it re-

sponds to the story of Calvary.” More than one chaplain has told me that the most popular hymn with the boys at the front was, “When I survey the wondrous cross.” One of them writes, “I have heard great audiences representing many regiments and many types sing it softly as if it were too sacred a thing to be noisy about and then coming out with a great burst of reality on the last stanza :

“Were the whole realm of nature mine
That were a present far too small.”

And speaking of hymns, did you notice the hymn we sang this morning, “The God of Abraham praise”? It was written by a young man, Thomas Olivers. He was the prodigal son of the family. So black was his record that he became a literal vagabond, a common tramp. One day he reached the city of Bristol. It happened that Whitfield was preaching. He saw the crowd and went in. Whitfield was speaking about the power of the cross. Well, to make a long story short, his life was changed. He went back to his native town and paid off his debts. He became the editor of a church paper and wrote this hymn. And it is a great hymn; some critics claim it is the most finished hymn in our language.

Some years ago a book was written by a great English scholar called “Facing the Facts.” In that book he has a chapter on religion at the uni-

versities. And to what does he bid us look for the hope of the future? Why, he says, to gentlemanly manners, to art and beauty and refinement. Culture, he claims, is the hope of the race. The work of all the saints and martyrs of our blood-bought faith is only a matter of culture. All the passion of Paul, the consecrated learning of Augustine is simply the logic of culture. Well, Germany has tried culture, and Germany's greatest son, Goethe, was certainly a man of culture. He has been called “the most splendid specimen of cultivated intellect ever presented to the world.” May I read to you a paragraph from one of his books. No one has ever accused the great German poet of being particularly prejudiced towards evangelical religion. In his “Confessions of a Beautiful Soul” he writes these words:

“I leaned upon a little table beside me and I hid my tear-stained face in my hands, but who could ever express, even in the dimmest way, the experience that came to me then? A secret influence drew my soul to the cross where Jesus died. It was an inward leaning—I cannot give it any other name—an inward leaning like that which draws the heart to its beloved in its absence. As my soul drew near to Him who became mine, and died upon the cross, in that moment I knew what faith meant. And in that moment my spirit received a wholly new power of uplifting.”

Striking words, don't you think, coming from such a source!

(2) So much then for the condition. Now mark the method. “I will draw,” He declares. The attraction is moral not physical. Christ sustains His rule by influence not force. His Kingdom is spiritual not material. “I will draw men.” The sinner cannot save himself because there can be no life without sacrifice. “It is as if a man tried to lift his body out of a pit by pulling himself with his own hands.” The thing is impossible. There must be some leverage from without. The evolutionist claims that we must push ourselves up, but Christianity says there is only one way to get up and that is to be lifted up. It is not a pushing but a pulling process.

William Blake, the poet painter, has a book on Jerusalem. In that book there is a plate of the crucifixion. It is a rather remarkable drawing. The whole scene is in darkness save for one feeble ray of light that shows the Saviour on the cross. And at the foot of the cross there is a lonely figure with outstretched arms in an attitude of worship. It is the world that is represented. Surely indeed that was a bold stroke, to put not the mother nor the beloved disciple but the world in the presence of its suffering Lord, just at the moment of His supreme weakness.

But it is much stronger than this; “I will

draw all men," is the sweeping challenge. "All men." These certainly are astonishing words coming from the lips of a poor peasant who had not where to lay His head, a man unknown to kings and rulers, a man who failed to rally His own nation to His side, a man without army or navy or wealth or influence or reserves of any kind to add significance to his claims. Most men have more influence in life than in death. In life Napoleon was a world figure but in death he was a weakling. In the Hall of Battles there is a famous statue of the great Corsican. He is represented as sitting in a chair dying, and the hands which wielded the sceptre of all Europe almost, hang limp and helpless by his side; the cheeks are sunken, the face is pale. Abraham Lincoln's influence was vastly greater after his death than it was during his life, but he never relied on his death to bring it about. Christ did. He pointed forward in unmistakable words to His death as the secret of His power. He declares that His death and His world empire are related. The power of Jesus as displayed in His life is as nothing to the power evidenced in His death. He is the only man in the history of the race who ever put forward such an astonishing pronouncement. There have been great prophets and martyrs and saints and apostles but they all pointed to the past. Jesus does not point to the past; He points to the future. He points to His

death. He claims to be the conqueror of death. He claims to have the keys of death. “I am he that liveth and was dead and behold I am alive for evermore and have the keys of death and of hell.”

“I will draw all men;” men of all races—Jew and Greek, Roman, Scythian, Celt and Teuton, Negro and Malay. There is no race that is not sending its units to swell the mighty chorus of the redeemed. “All men!” Men of all types, strong and weak, learned and unlearned, rough and gentle, rude and refined. There is no manner of men whom His cross has not subdued. Did you ever observe how Paul links together the Cross and the Crown? “He became obedient to death, even the death of the cross . . . wherefore God hath highly exalted him.” According to the Apostle, death was the pathway to glory. It was by dying and rising again that He was declared to be the Son of God with power. And so He says Himself, “The hour is come that the son of man should be glorified.”

Some read the verse, “I will draw the whole man unto me.” Well, that reading is permissible and it is true. He does draw the whole man. He draws every talent, every gift of body and mind and soul. I protest against the notion that only certain of our powers belong to God. On the contrary, every faculty of our being is God-given and should be God-directed and God-

consecrated. This body of ours is not vile unless we make it vile. It is the temple of the Spirit. The Psalmist says, "Bless the Lord O my soul and all that is within me bless his holy name." There is something in Christ that draws and there is something in us that responds. The magnet does not draw wood or stone, but it does draw iron and steel. There is something in the iron and steel that surrenders. That was a fine remark that was said of Alfred Cookman by one of his brothers, "If you swept a circle of three feet round the cross, inside that circle you could put all there was of Alfred Cookman."

And the most astonishing part of the whole sentence is the last two words. "I will draw all men unto myself." Everything centres in the person of the speaker. He claims to be a living magnet not a dead oracle. It is all very well to make much of Paul and Calvin and Wesley and Spurgeon and Newman, but sinners are never saved until everything human sinks into eclipse and no man is seen save Jesus only. For Jesus is the light and glory of life. Faith finds no resting place until it reaches Him. Not what He said or what He did but what He was and what He is. Criticism finds fault with Christianity's book and Christianity's professor, but criticism finds no fault with Christianity's Christ. And what makes our Gospel so wonderful is that it is the Gospel of a person. Jesus Christ is our

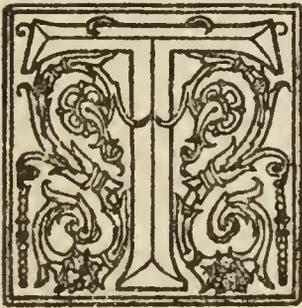
Gospel. Every now and then we hear of some new gospel but there is no need for a new gospel until the old one has been tried. Not a shred of power has passed away from the old message. It is as mighty to-day as ever. “Thy word has still its ancient power.” His offer is still open; it has never been closed. “If I be lifted up,” He still says to us, “I will draw.” And it would seem from this that if men are not drawn, it is because He has not been clearly lifted up. He died for us once and now He calls on us to die for Him. He was lifted up once by hate; now He asks to be lifted up in love. The greatest of living agnostics is reported to have said that if he really believed that Jesus Christ had died for him on the Cross, he would not write nor speak about anything else; thus showing that he grasped the tremendous missionary obligation which the Cross implied. The Cross is the one permanent attraction. Cities, thrones, dynasties pass away but the Cross abides. Where is Babylon to-day? Where is Nineveh? Who cares now that Xerxes crossed the Hellespont? Where is that mighty army now? Cæsar’s throne is in the dust, but Christ’s Cross is a world spectacle. Truly indeed it towers o’er the wrecks of time.

“Dear suffering Lamb, Thy bleeding wounds,
With cords of love divine,
Have drawn our willing hearts to Thee,
And linked our life with Thine.”

VIII

“WE WILL BE TRUE TO THEE TILL DEATH”

“I have kept the faith.”—2 TIMOTHY 4:7.



THESE are the words of an old man written at the close of a remarkably strenuous life. He is nearing the goal of his earthly career; and as he looks back over the road he has travelled, it is interesting to note the spots where memory lingers, and to hear him exclaim with a glad thrill of victory, “I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith.”

When men are about to leave this world they are usually genuine, and as a rule they do not play the braggart. Some, to be sure, have been insincere, and some have boasted. One says, I have made a fortune, another I have had a good time. Some have gloried in their crimes, some have mocked; a few have been false and double-faced even in the presence of the All-Seeing before whom no unreality can live. The gambler has been known to shuffle his deck of cards on his dying couch, and the drunkard to call out for

his drink, and the moral leper to wallow in the memory of his lust. But these things are not the usual. The usual is that when men come to depart, their better nature asserts itself. Dying men as a rule do not lie. The average soul is humble and penitent and prayerful and truthful when it stands in the searching light of the Eternal. When Whittier was breathing his last in his little village home up in Massachusetts the nurse pulled down the blinds. It was in the early morning, and the rising sun was in the dying man's eyes. But the last thing the great Quaker poet did was to wave his hand to have the curtain lifted. He wanted to depart in the full splendour of the morning and in the warm glory of its pure white beams. And is not this a parable of human nature everywhere? The cry of the dying is the cry of Balaam, “Let me die the death of the righteous and let my last end be like his.”

The last words of great men have always been prized and cherished. How beautiful Cookman's note of triumph: “I am sweeping through the gates.” The poet Schiller looks up and says, “Many things are growing plain to me now.” Goethe cries, “More light.” “The best of all is God is with us,” was the quiet remark of John Wesley. Webster exclaims, “I still live.” Beethoven whispers, “I shall hear in heaven.” Jacob Behmen lisps, “Open the door and let in

some of that music." He was hearing the heavenly choir already. The last words of Christmas Evans were, "Drive on." He was finishing his earthly race and was in a hurry for the chariot to take him home to God. A dear friend said not more than ten minutes before he closed his eyes forever, "My trunk is all packed and I'm just waiting for the expressman." Among the closing words of Sir Walter Scott are these: How magnificently noble they are! How beautiful! "I have been perhaps the most voluminous author of my day, and it is a comfort to me now to think that I have never tried to unsettle any man's faith; and that I have written nothing which on my death bed I would want blotted out." What a "Song in the night" that was! What a glorious thing it is, in the sunset of life, to be able to look back upon the past with satisfaction and on the future with hope. To feel at the last hour that the past is reproaching us must be an unspeakably bitter cup to drink, but to be able to face it and feel that it is friendly, and then to turn around and look into the future and know for certain that it is bright—this is an experience that all true men covet. Sir Humphrey Davey at the end of his brilliant career wrote these words, "I envy no quality of mind or intellect in others, not genius, power, wit or fancy. But if I could choose what would be most delightful and I

believe most useful to me, I should prefer a firm religious belief to every other blessing; because it makes life a discipline of goodness, creates new hopes when all earthly hopes vanish, throws over the decay of existence the most gorgeous of all lights.” That was the profound confession of a great scientist, who was singularly successful, but whose life was strangely unhappy.

The great Apostle to the Gentiles, as he lay in his Roman dungeon, knew well that martyrdom was before him, but he had the joy too of knowing that the past had only pleasant memories, and that the future had in store for him a prize that was priceless, a crown that was unfading. “Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness which the Lord the righteous judge will give me at that day, and not to me only but unto all them also that love his appearing.” Now I learn from these words of the text several lessons. Let us take a running glance at them.

I. And the first lesson is this, that the Faith the Apostle kept was a *definite* thing. There must have been something specific to keep before he could be said to have kept it. When he exclaimed, “I have kept the faith,” he must have had something explicit and concrete in his mind. In another passage he exhorts his friends to “contend earnestly for the faith *once for all*”

delivered to the saints." Not simply once, note, "Once for all."

If you take your New Testament and mark every verse where these words "the faith" are used, I think you will be surprised. It means a systematized body of truth, a record of certain facts about the Lord Jesus Christ—His incarnation, His life, His death, His resurrection, the love of the Father, redemption through the cross, sanctification through the Spirit. It seems almost worse than silly to say that it matters little or nothing to our Christian life whether these things are true or not. The way many of us feel about it is this—they are the only things after all that really do matter. People are not going to accept blindly a subjective Christ on our lonely authority. They want something more surely attested. They want a Christ historical as well as spiritual. They will demand to see the print of the nails in His hand and the spear thrust in His side. Nothing less than the New Testament story will satisfy them. They want a Christ as substantial as history. "For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son that whosoever believeth on him should not perish but have everlasting life." That is the faith the Apostle felt he was commissioned to conserve.

We are hearing much to-day of Paul's theology. We are being told that such and such

doctrines are Paul's not Christ's. Just as if the Apostle had forgotten that he was an ambassador and had succeeded in persuading himself that he was an authority, promulgating laws and demanding obedience. But did not he himself say to the Galatian Christians, "I certify to you, brethren, that the Gospel which was preached of me is not after man, for I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of the Lord." And does not John begin the last book of the Bible with these expressive words, "The Revelation of Jesus Christ which God gave unto him to show unto his servants things which must shortly come to pass, and he sent and signified it by his angel unto his servant John." There are people who are telling us to-day that any attempt to prove that Christianity means something definite and excludes something else that is also definite, is interfering with the sacred right of scholarly investigation. Definite lines of any kind are impatiently resented. And any attempt to prescribe a particular system of rules for daily living is regarded as narrow and sectarian. We are living in an age when creeds are laughed at, when theology is bracketed with superstition, when men turn to the latest novel oftentimes, rather than to the Word of the Lord, for their spiritual guidance. One of the strange symptoms of our day is the way we salute the outsider.

What does the outsider think? we ask. The opinion of the outsider is regarded and welcomed in many quarters as a matter of ultimate and non-debatable authority. His criticism of religious truth is listened to with the profoundest respect. His judgment is consulted. Even the Church stands in silent awe of him. What H. G. Wells thinks of certain doctrinal points carries far more weight in some quarters than what George Adam Smith thinks.

But what right has the outsider to dogmatize on Biblical criticism? Who gave him the final credentials? By what authority does he come forth to instruct us on the things of the soul? In a recent article Mr. Arnold Bennett writes these words, "The war has demonstrated the authenticity of one event which in importance far transcends the war itself, viz., the collapse of the Christian religion." In the same article he makes another astonishing deliverance: "My curiosity about a future life never inconveniences me. I have no supernatural religion, and I never had one." Now why should the attitude of a man like that carry any weight with us on spiritual things? If the question of a future life does not even interest a man, what are his views on other religious questions worth? Sir Arthur Conan Doyle tells good detective stories. Let him stick to his last.

This is not denying that the Faith has its ex-

crecences. For that we all admit, and with sorrow. Much that is non-essential and extraneous and false has been grafted on to the creeds of the Church. There are many points of very minor importance which have been allowed to have far too much say, and entirely too much space, in the things that men once counted paramount and vital. The Infallibility of the Pope was not decreed until 1870; that certainly is no part of the body of truth once delivered to the saints. The dogma of the Immaculate Conception dates back only to 1854. The doctrine of Transubstantiation goes back to the Lateran Council of 1216. Does any one claim that these man-made dogmas are part of the organic structure of revealed religion? When we read the minutes of some of the old Church Councils we must all confess that a whole lot of it is very sad and very dreadful reading. We think, for instance, of the second Council of Ephesus, “the robber Council,” as it has been called, where amid the wildest uproar the old Patriarch of Constantinople was trampled to death. In order to decide the nature of our Lord’s Person the delegates were armed with cudgels. In this very Council a question was raised as to the chastity of a certain bishop, and the ruling of the chair was, “If you have a complaint against his orthodoxy we will hear it, but we are not here to decide on his chastity.” And such disgraceful

scenes have occurred time and again in the history of religious assemblies. Truth has been proclaimed on the authority of noisy public gatherings and by men armed. That the Church has survived such scandalous treatment is surely the strongest evidence of the divine and immortal energy at its heart.

The Faith is a question of fundamentals; and fundamentals do not change. They do not change in theology any more than in science. The Copernican system of astronomy is fixed. The law of gravity is final. There are two hundred and eight bones in the human body, always have been, and most likely always will be. Music may combine new tones but she never made one. The circulation of the blood is not a geographical arrangement. Our blood flows as the blood of Virgil flowed. Our heart beats as did the heart of Homer. The Aristotelian system of logic is a final thing. These things are eternal. They are for all time. They are like the Ten Commandments and the Golden Rule—inflexible, unalterable. Professor Proctor used to remark that a good text-book on the laws of light down here would be a good text-book on the North Polar Star. A good book on gravity in this world would be trustworthy in any world. Right is right and wrong is wrong on both sides of the Line. For truth is universal and eternal. And the faith once delivered to the saints as revealed

in the New Testament and interpreted under the guidance of the Spirit—this faith in its great broad scope, in its comprehensive sweep, in its bed-rock essentials, in its spiritual significance is an eternal thing too. It must not be burdened with details. It will consist of great, large, living facts. This does not mean that all religious truth can be formulated any more than love can be formulated, or hope or joy or peace or duty or life. You cannot measure what is immeasurable. You cannot formulate what is spiritual and primary. You can only formulate what is scientific and secondary.

II. Then secondly, it was a precious thing. Paul was not the man to waste his energies on something that was of no importance. He was far too big and too brainy a scholar for that. When we are told that he guarded something with such jealous care, we are safe in concluding that it must have been a treasure of surpassing value. Why should a man on the eve of his martyrdom boast of having kept a trust that after all was not worth the keeping?

And just what was this treasure? Why, it concerned those enduring relations that the soul sustains to its God. And it comprised pardon for sin, freedom from its power, the infinite riches of grace offered freely to all, and then to complete all, a crown of glory, an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not

away. It was not a system of truth he had discovered, but a revelation he had received. He speaks of it as a precious treasure committed to his keeping. And now that the fight is over, he points to the treasure by his side and says, "Here it is, I have not lost it. I have kept it safe." "I know whom I have believed," he says. That good thing which was committed unto me I have guarded through the power of the Holy Spirit.

There is almost a consensus of opinion upon this point. Even those who are most out of sympathy with religious things are free to confess that they wish they could see their way clear to accept the Christian point of view. A great railroad president said publicly not many years ago, "I would give all I have if I could get back to the faith of my childhood." One of Balzac's short stories is entitled "The Atheist's Mass." The story is about a great French surgeon who was an Atheist. One day he was observed going into the Cathedral to attend mass. On being pressed for an explanation he replied that he did it out of respect to Bourgeat. He was a poor boy and Bourgeat had educated him. Bourgeat was poor himself, but he took a liking to the young doctor and shared with him his scanty savings, and made many sacrifices to put him through college. And in memory of his old benefactor he always came to church four times

a year to pray this prayer to whatever gods there be:

“If there is a place after death you put those who have been perfect, think of good Bourgeat; and if he has still anything to suffer, lay these sufferings on me, so that he may enter the sooner into what they call Paradise.”

“This,” the surgeon said to his friend, “is all that a man who holds my opinions can allow himself. But I swear to you that I would give my fortune for the sake of finding the faith of Bourgeat coming into my brain.”

The trouble with the Church is, that she has been confusing the truth with the accretions that have collected around it. We must not mistake the paper and string that wraps the precious jewel, with the jewel. The world cares less and less for the old stale creedal phrases; it never cared as little as it does to-day. What men want to-day is the living reality; not were there streams of grace once but are there streams now? Arguments for faith do not much count; what is wanted is an expression of faith. Newman once said, “Religion is ever changing in order to remain the same.” Principal Selbie remarked the other day, “We have heard a great deal about old theology and new theology, but what the age needs is a living theology.”

III. But I think in these words the Apostle also refers to his own relationship to God, his personal loyalty to his Saviour. No doubt he has in mind the fact that he had been faithful to his God. Men lose their spiritual passion as they grow old, but here was a man who kept his enthusiasm for his Master to the very end. And when he declares that he had kept the faith, he means that he had never swerved from his allegiance to Him whose he was and whom he served.

Because, my friends, all religious truth comes to us first by tradition. We are taught these things at our mothers' knees. But we cannot be said to hold any truth until the truth reaches down into the life. It must become part of the conscience and the affections and the will, before it will minister to our spiritual nature and enable us to grow in Christian virtue and grace. It is a good deal easier to defend a dogma than it is to live a life. The only way to keep a faith is to root it in the soil of character and let it grow. It is not difficult to hold a tradition. Traditions have been held through sheer stubbornness or bigotry. But to keep a faith is different; that is not easy. For faith is a living thing, and living things grow and change and mature. Living things adapt themselves to circumstances. A living faith moves the heart, enlightens the mind, renews the will, stirs the conscience, purifies the

imagination, seizes the affections. In a word, keeping a living faith implies fellowship with God. And this is the faith the Apostle kept. He kept it by prayer and supplication, by shedding tears night and day, by holding it fast in faith and love, by guarding it as a watchman guards a safe deposit.

Unfortunately it is possible to be a Bible scholar and yet not be a Christian. It sounds incredible but it is true—one can be a theologian and yet not be a saint. One can have a passion for exegesis, and yet have no passion for souls. It is possible to have a commentary as our constant companion, and yet have no companionship with the Lord. Henry Drummond tells in one of his books, “The New Evangelism,” of a man he knew, who was the author of a well-known orthodox theological work which passed through a dozen editions. And speaking of him Dr. Drummond says, “I never knew that man to go to church or give a farthing to charity, although he was a rich man, nor to give any sensible sign whatever that he had ever heard of Christianity.” Jane Addams in her book, “Twenty Years at Hull House,” speaks of a man whose conscience was troubled about giving money to a certain settlement because said settlement gave no religious instruction. The trustees of the settlement, on the other hand, were greatly perplexed as to whether they ought to accept the

money because of the unscrupulous way in which it had been made.

Let us then hear the conclusion of the whole matter. Do not be satisfied, I beseech you, to have your name simply on the church roll. It is possible, unfortunately possible, to be a Christian and, as somebody says, “to have astonishingly little to show for it.” Strive to be a victor in this great fight. Strive to get some real joy out of it. Strive to adorn the doctrine. Strive to be true to its ideals. Strive to be faithful.

“ Faith of our fathers living still,
In spite of dungeon fire and sword,
Faith of our fathers, holy faith,
We will be true to thee till death.”

IX

“I YIELD MY FLICKERING TORCH TO THEE”

“I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.”

—ROMANS 12:1.



HIS letter to the Romans is divided into two parts. The first part is doctrinal, the second is practical. And the dividing line is at this verse. You noticed, did you not, that the last word of the previous chapter is the word “Amen.” “To him be the glory forever and ever. Amen.” That closes part one. Now begins part two.

The first eleven chapters are doctrinal, I repeat. They are theological. They fairly revel in the hidden mysteries of the great plan of redemption. But when we come to chapter twelve the tide turns. Now it is the practical, the everyday. The last five chapters are the straight application of these great, rich, wondrous truths to life. We hear almost nothing henceforward about faith or justification or predestination.

Now it is duty, conduct, character, service. "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service."

I wonder if you will allow me to turn aside for half a minute just to say, as we pass on, that this is always the procedure of the Bible. I do not believe there is a great practical duty emphasized in the Word of God that is not rooted in some fundamental article of our credenda. Many to-day are trying to divorce doctrine from duty. Give us the practical, they say, never mind the theoretical. Give us the ethics of the Apostle Paul, never mind his hard iron-clad theology. But you cannot get the ethics without the theology, not in the Bible. You cannot have the apples without the apple tree. You cannot have the plums without the plum tree. As Dr. Morgan puts it, "You cannot grow the tulips of the Kingdom of God unless you get the bulbs from heaven."

I claim that every duty in the New Testament is driven home by the Gospel hammer. When we are encouraged to moral purity, it is because the Eternal God is pure. Listen to this: "Husbands, love your wives, as Christ also loved the Church." Or this: "Masters, give unto your servants that which is just, knowing that ye also have a Master in heaven." Perhaps one of the

most striking illustrations is found in the example of lowly service, as illustrated in the symbol of washing the disciples' feet. This is how it reads: “Jesus knowing that he came forth from God, and goeth unto God, took a towel.” That was a bold stroke, wasn't it, linking God with a towel? The passage, some one says, is like a little root shooting through the ground, but when you pull it up it tears up the soil, and as you keep pulling, it leads you clear over to the trunk. When the Apostle Paul himself would inculcate lowliness of mind on the members of the Church at Philippi you remember how he introduces it. “Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus who, being in the form of God, took upon him the form of a servant.”

Or once more, take such a sordid and worldly matter as the duty of giving. Mark how it is led up to in the letter to the Corinthians. “Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord. Now concerning the collection.” Did you catch that quick transition? Why it is so swift and sudden that were it not for the division of the Epistle just here into chapters, and the consequent pause, it might suggest an irrelevancy? The Apostle has just finished his great colossal argument on the resurrection, and the lesson he draws from it is this:

Wherefore, my beloved brethren, if these things are so, if your faith is so great and rich, your beneficence ought to be great and rich. A hope so gracious and generous ought to express itself in a service that is generous. So let us come now to the collection. Some one has said that in the Bible if we dig deep enough we will find the words, "Do what is right." And then when we have found them, if we just dig a bit deeper we will find the precept rooted in eternal right.

Now I am going to ask you to look with me for a few moments at the wording of this great verse. Because it has three or four rather pregnant phrases in it that are very fertile and very fruitful.

And let us begin with that first phrase, "I beseech you." "I beseech you, brethren." He's talking to Christians, remember, and so he says "brethren." When Paul says brethren he is always talking to Christians. "I beseech you, brethren." And this word beseech is one of his favourite expressions. Time and again he uses it. "I beseech you by the gentleness of Christ." "I beseech you by the meekness of Christ." "I beseech thee for my son Onesimus." "I beseech you to walk worthily of your vocation."

We usually think of Paul as a great intellectual giant, and intellectual people we have found out from experience are as a rule stiff and cold. But one could not say anything much fur-

ther from the truth than to say that Paul was cold. His heart was big and warm and tender. His preaching was persuasive and pleading. He did not use threats as much as tears. He loved to play on the softer notes. “I beseech you.”

And the reason for his beseeching is the mercies of God. I am going to call that the driving power of the whole business. It is the great fly-wheel of the Christian machinery. We have a mighty load to lift, we have a heavy mass to move. I know we have, but then here is the dynamic. “The mercies of God,” literally “the compassions of God.” In view of all that was said in the last eleven chapters, the appeal is made on the basis of God’s mercies. And the word is plural, notice. Primarily, of course, His mercy in Christ Jesus our Lord, but more than that, all His mercies, all His works of tenderness and pity. God wants us to sit down and think over His mercies to us. The greatest argument for consecration is the incomprehensible mercy of God. How Godlike we would be if we only realized how liberal He has been with us. When Mr. Moody was once reading the 103rd Psalm, and came to the verse, “Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits,” he stopped short in his inimitable way, “You can’t remember ’em all, of course, but don’t forget ’em all. Remember some of ’em.” Well, I try to do that sometimes, but do you know it’s a

great big task. I never could understand how a Christian man could be stingy with the Lord. Let me ask a question. Did you ever sit down for one holy hour and just meditate on God's goodness to you? Did you ever thank Him for the gift of sleep? Did you ever thank Him for the gift of friends? Did you ever thank Him for the gift of reason? Helen Keller says in the "Story of my Life" that a man must be a "near relative of the nine ungrateful lepers who is not grateful for his faculties." Frederick Ozanam, the great French Jurist, when warned of his approaching death, wrote in his diary these words: "Oh God, if Thou shouldst chain me to a bed for the rest of my life, it would not suffice to thank Thee for the days I have lived. If these words are the last that I shall ever write, let them be a hymn to Thy goodness." I was interested the other day in reading somewhere that the word "Hallelujah" occurs twenty-four times in the Psalms. "Hallelujah," the Psalmist says. "Praise the Lord." My cup runneth over. It's not only full; it's running over. The good Father keeps pouring out His blessings till the water flows over. "I beseech you by the mercies of God."

Then he passes on to his objective, "that ye present your bodies." The idea being that the mercy of God is the driving power to impel our bodies. We are asked to make a gift of our

bodies because the body is the organ of all our activities. It is through the body that we come in touch with the world. And the Apostle is very personal. Your body, yours, yours; that body sitting in the pew—that is the gift God wants. Never mind brother Jones' body; what God wants is your body. Make no mistake about it, what God asks is these bodies of ours. Those hands, for instance! How many times this past summer did you use those hands for the Lord? The Apostle tells us that he wrote the letter to the Galatians with his own hands. Did you ever write a letter for the Lord with your own hands? You have written a good many letters in your life. Did you ever write one for the Lord? Did you ever send a note to a person in trouble and tell them of the goodness of the Lord? Samuel Rutherford's wonderful letters were all written, he tells us, for the Lord—so likewise McCheyne's and John Wesley's and Mandel Creighton's. Or take those feet of yours. Have you given them to God? It is said that the average man walks about five miles in the run of a day; that counts up to a little more than eighteen hundred miles a year. Have you ever gone out purposely and deliberately and walked a mile for the glory of God? There is a little book called “The Penny Philanthropist.” It is the story of an Irish girl whose parents died and left her with a younger sister and brother to support.

She reads in the papers of the millionaire philanthropists giving their millions. So she decides that she will be a philanthropist too—a penny philanthropist. She will give away a penny of her savings every day. So she starts out to sell newspapers on Halsted Street, Chicago. She walks up and down that great thoroughfare which is more than twenty miles long. And every day she gives away her penny, mostly in tracts. And what is the result? Why, she saves one girl from suicide, she saves dozens from drink. She makes her penny work wonders. Perfectly marvellous what a penny will do when it is anointed.

And so we might go on. What God wants is our bodies—our hands, our feet, our lips, our hearts, our voices. Oh, if men and women would just give God their bodies. Why, I believe we could send the Gospel to every corner of this old world in five years if Christians would just give the Lord their bodies. There is more than a grain of truth in the remark that some one has made that if we were as weak physically as most of us are spiritually, we would not be able to walk. When young Wendell Phillips went to hear Lyman Beecher preach, he came home and threw himself on the floor and prayed: "O God, I belong to Thee, take what is Thine own. I ask this, that whatever is wrong may have no power of temptation over me; and that what-

ever is right I may have the courage to do it. Amen.”

I like to think that the Apostles on the Sea of Galilee were living a healthy outdoor life, roughing it, as we say, toughening their muscles with the oars in order to lay up a store of physical energy which in future days was to be used in carrying the cross of Jesus throughout the world. I like to think of John Williams trained as a blacksmith, and so equipped to endure hardness as a good soldier of Jesus Christ in the terrible hardships of the South Seas. When he was working there at the forge, God was fitting him for his great career. I like to think of Keith Falconer training himself to be the finest amateur cyclist in England, because he had set his mind on getting a body that would serve him when he went out to Arabia as a missionary. I like to think of Charlie Studd and Stanley Smith, who laboured so hard at cricket and rowing in order to make their bodies tough to stand the hard, strenuous work of China. And it is to this glorious priesthood of service that we are all predestined. We are not called to go on some thrilling crusade to the holy places of Bible history. We are not called to leave the busy haunts of men and spend our days in conventual retirement. We are simply asked to dedicate every skill of hand, every power of body, every gift of mind in the daily sacrament of

common things. The vessels of the temple of the Lord are meant for service, not for bric-à-brac; we have entirely too much bric-à-brac already. We have too much ornamental filigree in our churches. What the Lord wants is useful furniture, furniture that can be used. Do not put the Master in the parlour; take Him down into the kitchen; make Him one of the family circle.

And this will be seen more clearly if we look at the next phrase—"a living sacrifice." The old sacrifices were dead. The victim was dragged dead to the altar. It was a dead bull or a dead ox or a dead goat. But we are asked to bring our bodies alive and offer them up as a living oblation. Some years ago General Nogi of Japan took his life to show his devotion to the Emperor. But our great Emperor does not ask us to do that. We are not bidden to cut any jugular vein and let the red tide gurgle out. That is not the idea conveyed in the word sacrifice at all. The word sacrifice means dedicating to God. When in all the actions of my life I am doing everything in absolute conformity to the Will of God, then I am making a sacrifice. A Christian is not an amputated man! He is not a mutilated man. He is a dedicated man. It is easy to slay a bullock or offer one hundred rams, but it is not easy to slay self and rise into the calm glory of the surrendered life. "I have

been crucified with Christ,” says the Apostle. Crucified yet living!

Suppose I were to preach this morning merely to put in the time and fulfill an appointment; that would be a dead sacrifice, a mere mechanical performance. Suppose I come to church out of sheer habit or to please my family—it is a mere perfunctory thing—a dead sacrifice. Suppose I give grudgingly and out of compulsion. Where is the dedication? The Church of Christ is in no great need of money to-day, but she is desperately and shamefully in need of “money with the red streak of sacrifice on it.” The Jews were forbidden to offer anything that was lame or blind or deformed. In like manner we are bidden to give our best, not the feebleness of sickness or the tottering decrepitude of age, but our youth, our health, our virility, our vigour, our very best. It is quite impossible to believe that God ever asks any child of His to cut off his right hand or pull out his right eye literally. There is profanity all about us, but we are not asked to pierce our ear-drums so that we may not hear it. There is ugliness and uncleanness on all sides, but God does not ask us to go blind-folded so that we may not see it. The body is the manifestation of the inner life, and when the body is obedient then the soul will be obedient too. The soul works through the body.

And then finally that last phrase, “which is

your reasonable service." Reasonable! pertaining to the reason, the service of one's reason. The Greek word used is our word logical. It is the logical thing for a man to give God his body because He made it and He has a right to it. God never besought a child of His to do an unreasonable thing.

Think of the false religions of the world. Think of men bowing down to crocodiles and reptiles. Think of little children being offered up by their mothers in fire and water to propitiate their gods. Think of all the wooden images set up to serve as a protection against pestilence and plague and death. The poets said of Saturn that he would eat his children as quickly as they were born. Now if one were to recommend to us the sacrifice of Saturn it would not be a reasonable thing. The Brahmin goes into his temple to kneel before his god. It is a very ancient worship. He brings his chicken and his rice and lays his offering down. There the idol sits in his stolid ivory whiteness, and one is struck with the earnest devotion he sees, but he cannot help feeling that it is not a reasonable performance. Over in China they put a prayer on a prayer wheel, and then they think they have prayed as many times as the wheel has revolved. The whole thing lacks not only the element of spirituality; it lacks the element of reason.

There is just one thing more that I would like to refer to. Sometimes we hear the expression used “divine service.” Are you going to divine service this morning? In our church notices you will see the announcement, “divine service at eleven o’clock.” I think it was Mr. Moody who once said, “I do not know what right we have to call the hour of worship divine service.” It is beautiful; it is helpful; I believe it is essential; I believe that when people give it up they deteriorate. “I love thy Church, O God,” and I should be one of the last to speak a syllable against the glorious exercises of the sanctuary. But, all the same, the great preacher was right, these things are not divine service. Preaching and praying and singing hymns are not primarily serving God. They are a preparation for serving God, that is all. Coming to the Lord’s table is not religion. It is an aid to religion. Religion is loving God; religion is walking with God; religion is trying to do the will of God; religion is helping the widow; religion is being brave in sorrow; religion is keeping oneself unspotted from the world. Not infrequently ministers of the Gospel are called “divines.” Certainly not a few ambassadors of the Master have no desire to be called divines. They would much rather be called humans than divines. The trouble with too many of us is that we are not human enough. The thing that counts is not our creed but our

life. The thing that matters is our living service to our fellow men and a living service is a loving service. One may believe in the resurrection of the body with every power of his being, and yet never present as a sacrifice his own body. But it is his own body that God wants first. We must give ourselves to Him before He will give Himself to us. It is not the work that we do that is the important thing, but the consecration of that work, the moral colour thrown over it. I heard the story of a soldier who said, "I offered my life to France and all she took was my arms." He had found the secret. What God wants is the will to surrender. The Apostle says, "For me to live is Christ." As I understand it, he means that for me to live is to do the will of Christ. When a man is ready to say: Jesus Christ has no hands or feet in this world, I will give Him mine, He has no eyes, I will give Him mine, He has no tongue, I will give Him mine. I will give Him my body to use as seemeth wise to Him, then that man has learned the true meaning of consecration.

"O Light that followed all my way,
I yield my flickering torch to Thee;
My heart restores its borrowed ray,
That in Thy sunshine's blaze its day
May brighter, fairer be."

X

“AWAKE MY SOUL, STRETCH EVERY NERVE”

“*Let us run with patience the race set before us.*”—HEBREWS 12:1.



IFE is a race; it is not a playground nor a pleasure camp; it is a race, a long race, a strenuous race. And it is a race laid down for us. We do not choose our field of action; it is not my race nor your race. It is the race set before us. Each one's track is marked out for him. Each has his own equipment, his own arena. We have all to toe the scratch, press on in our own particular stretch, leap our own barriers, cross our own muddy marshes and deep rivers, climb our own steep hills, and at last pass tired and panting under the tape when the Judge smiles on us with His well done and welcoming approval.

No doubt the writer of these words has in mind the Grecian games, which were annual competitions, and in which racing formed a prominent feature. Not unlikely he had been present himself at many of these memorable gatherings. They drew together a vast crowd of spectators,

perhaps forty or fifty thousand, from all parts of the Isthmus. The white marble seats rose tier above tier, from which could be surveyed the level field, the strained muscles, the passionate eagerness, the judges conferring on the successful the garlands of pine or olive, the glad, happy faces, the hearty congratulations, the rending applause. It is all a very vivid, a very thrilling picture.

And on this familiar scene the Apostle finds high moral lessons. He lifts the picture into the realm of the spiritual. We are all in the stadium, he says; we are all surrounded by a great crowd of spectators:

“From the battlements of glory
Holy ones are looking down.
Thou canst almost hear them shouting.”

There is a great company of sainted veterans up there who understand all about our troubles, who have fought where we fight, who have wept where we weep, and who are looking down with heavenly interest upon the race in which we are competitors now. They are in the galleries, but only a little while ago they were in the arena. They ran their race well, and now they have gone out of the arena into the galleries.

In the previous chapter the Apostle calls up a list of names from this golden roll of the faithful. “These all died in faith,” he com-

ments. In the verse of our text he characterizes them as a great cloud of witnesses. Indeed the word he uses is the word martyr; it will be remembered that the word martyr has changed its meaning. It was not necessary in these days that a man should actually suffer in order to be a martyr. Sometimes he did suffer, sometimes he did not. Indeed, strictly speaking, it is not necessary to-day to suffer to be a martyr. Suffering never made a saint a martyr. Death never made a child of God a martyr. If a follower of the Master is not a martyr before his death he is not likely to be after his death. A martyr in these early times was one who went before kings and councils with a willingness to endure affliction if need be. Oftentimes he did not suffer at all, but he bore witness, that's the point. A martyr is one who bears testimony to the truth.

Now to come back to this figure of the race. We all know there are certain conditions indispensable to the winning of a race. No competitor for a Marathon prize to-day would have the smallest chance of success who did not fulfill these conditions. Let us note what these conditions are. The interesting thing is they are all mentioned in our text.

I. He must first of all put himself in training. He must go into a gymnasium and work hard for hours every day in order to qualify.

He must take off all surplus fat and have his muscles hardened. Every ounce tells. In running, everything not a help is a hindrance. If a thing does not assist in carrying, but itself needs to be carried, then it is in the way. He must watch carefully what he eats and drinks. He must cultivate temperance and chastity. These old Greek athletes went down into the training camp for months and denied themselves of every luxury. And surely not otherwise is it with the Christian. He must needs put his body in subjection. He must mortify his body; he must subdue his carnal nature. He is called upon to crucify the flesh with its affections and lusts. He is to lay aside every weight.

And what is a weight? A weight is an incumbrance. Anything that impedes action is a weight. A weight is not necessarily a sin. Indeed it is worth observing that weights in this verse are distinguished from sins. A weight in itself may be perfectly innocent and permissible. It may be quite legitimate in its place. A thing may be a good thing and yet be a weight. Some things indispensable in the home become absurdities in the trenches. The world laughs at the soldier who goes to war in full dress. One of the criticisms of the Boer war was that some of the officers had pianos in their camps. Refinement is all right but we want it in the drawing-room, not on the battle-field. A soldier, like a

war-ship, must be stripped for action. And the thought that the Apostle is trying to make clear is that the runner, too, must discard every non-essential. Races are usually close. One-half a second may decide the contest, and when the fraction of a second is so important, every rag of needless livery must be cast aside.

A weight, let us repeat, may be right in itself, but if it becomes a hindrance to our effectiveness, then it is wrong. A great preacher has said that he believes more souls are lost by things right in themselves, than by things wrong in themselves. The Bible bids us be diligent in business, but there are men all about us who are losing their spiritual vision every day, from being diligent in business. Do you ask what things may become weights? Well, one simple word answers that. Everything! It is a strange, mysterious power that we all possess, of perverting our highest gifts into the instruments of our own hurt. Just as the chemist can distill poison out of God's fairest flowers, so we can pervert everything we touch into tools for our own destruction.

The question is frequently asked—Is it wrong to do this? Is it wrong to do that? Is it wrong to drink wine? Is it wrong to play golf on Sunday? Our answer is, it is wrong to do anything that may prove a weight.

There are some practices that help us in the

Christian race, and there are some that lower our vitality, and leave us fagged and listless. You cannot always be sure what is a weight to me, nor can I always be certain what encumbers you. Indeed it is quite possible that the same thing may be an incentive to one man and a drag to another. Sometimes railroad men take a special train to hurry them to a certain place, and you will see the locomotive dashing across the rails with two or three cars attached. If you ask why so many cars are needed to carry a single passenger, you will be told that it is to balance the engine and keep it from flying off the track. The cars in this case are not in any wise a check or an interference or a weight. They are a safeguard. Nothing can be called a weight that keeps us on the course. The antlers are not a weight to the stag; the wing is not a weight to the aeroplane; the sail is not a weight to the ship; the propeller is not a weight to the ocean liner. The only way to find out if a thing is a weight is to run; you cannot tell by standing still. One needs to get out of breath to learn what is burdensome and retarding.

But we are not only to lay aside every weight. We are also to strip off the sin which doth so easily beset us. Scholars tell us that the word here used for easily-besetting is nowhere else found in Greek literature, and so its meaning is uncertain. The marginal reading in the Re-

vised Version is, “the sin which doth closely cling to us.” The modern speech New Testament rendering is, “the sin which doth so cleverly entangle us.” Others claim that the Apostle is speaking of sin generically; it being the characteristic of every kind of sin that it is always lying in wait and lurking for us. Sin is a beast of prey crouching at the door.

Personally, however, I must say I like the old phrase “our besetting sins.” We all have them. No one is exempt; the reference being to the closely fitting garment that the athlete wore just as at the present time all athletes wear skin-tight clothing. Let us lay aside every weight and the sin that lies closest to the heart. Every one of us has some pet sin that lies close to his heart, and if there is one thing more than another that will handicap the runner and trip him, it is to have some besetting sin. “What is the matter with that vessel out yonder in the bay?” said one gentleman to another as they stood watching her from the shore; “she has her sails all set; she has a strong wind in her favour, but she is not making any progress.” “What’s the matter? Why, sir, she’s anchored.” I wonder if any of us are anchored, anchored to the world, anchored to strong drink, anchored to some besetting sin? You must part with that darling sin or part with Jesus Christ. Millions of men would be saved but for one sin, the miser but for his gold, the

drunkard but for his drink, the unclean man but for his lust. Therefore, as you love your life, enter the dark cavern of your heart, face the lion that lies lurking there, slay that lion, give it one fatal blow with all the gathered forces of your life. Fling out of its lair the unclean thing and turn the cavern into a pure and holy temple where Jesus Christ can enter and abide.

II. The second essential to the successful runner is earnestness. "Let us run with patience," *i. e.*, with Endurance. Moses endured as seeing Him who is invisible; it is the same word. "Jesus Christ endured the cross despising the shame:" same word again. You young men know how necessary it is to keep up your courage in a race.

Sometimes you see a runner dashing ahead amid the cheers of the crowd only in a little while to grow tired and faint, then falter and flag, and eventually drop into the rear, while a steadier man shoots ahead and wins the prize. To hold out when others are wavering is often the secret of victory. It is not always the person who takes the lead at the start who is in the front at the finish. It is staying power that tells. It is the man who sets the pace and keeps it that gets there. The unsteady runner soon drops behind. spurts do not win races.

Alas, we have so many spurters in the Christian arena. They are not dead in earnest. They

are simply playing at the game. There are some fine sprinters in the Church but they are not the strength of the Church. Why, some boys take more time learning to whistle than many followers of the Lord do in trying to become strong runners for the prize that is eternal. I was reading last summer an account of a famous dancer. She said she began training at the tender age of five and until young womanhood she practiced eight hours a day. When a famous violinist was once asked how long it took him to master the instrument, he replied twelve hours a day for twenty years. Pliny tells us that Apelles never let a day pass without his drawing something with his pencil. “Always room at the top,” they say, yes, but as President Jordan adds, “the elevator is not running.” We must struggle; we must buckle to. You cannot raise an eagle in eiderdown. And if “*getting on*” in life is hard who says that “*getting up*” is easy? “Strive to enter in at the strait gate, for many, I say unto you, shall seek to enter in and shall not be able.” These latter fail, note, and the reason why they fail is that they do not *strive*; they simply *seek*.

“The heights by great men reached and kept
Were not attained by sudden flight;
But they, while their companions slept,
Were toiling upward in the night.”

“I fight,” says the Apostle, “not as one that

beateth the air." I do not make empty flourishes at an imaginary foe. I am not amusing myself in some harmless "make-believe." I fight as one does for his life. My enemy is myself. I bruise my body and bring it under. "I run," he says again, "not as uncertainly." He means there was no hesitation, no slackening of effort, no relaxing of nerves. He ran as if he meant to arrive, as if he meant to attain.

III. And the last essential to the successful runner is to keep the eye fixed upon the goal. He needs to do that for one thing in order to run as straight as possible. It does not pay in a race to run in a curved line. There must be no needless loops in our course. Atlanta stops to pick up the golden apple and she is worsted. Orpheus looked behind and he was left. Our Lord Himself said that "No man having put his hand to the plough and looking back is fit for the Kingdom of Heaven."

Well, our goal is Jesus. "Looking unto Jesus," literally looking *away* unto Jesus. We must turn our gaze away from everything and fix our eyes upon our Lord.

"Would you lose your load of sin?
Fix your eyes upon Jesus."

When Sir Isaac Newton was asked how he worked out different problems he replied, "I keep them steadily before me." We need to keep Christ

steadily before us. It is not enough to resolve vaguely to try and do what is right. We must determine to do what is right whatever the cost. We must keep our eye on the goal. Jesus stands at the finish holding out the prize. I never was much of a shot but I have watched good marksmen out on the rifle range and I used to notice that they always closed one eye, and the reason why they did this, I was told, was to shut out all the rays of light excepting those that came straight from the mark. If a gunner would take true aim he must guard carefully against double vision. A soldier lay wounded on the battlefield. The roar of the guns had died away and he lay in the deadly stillness of its aftermath. The chaplain approaching him said: “Is there anything I can do for you, comrade?” “No, nothing,” said the dying man. “Just cover my face with my blanket. I want to shut out everything but Jesus.”

Sometimes the question is asked why the name of Jesus is not linked onto the roll of heroes in the eleventh chapter, and made the climax of that immortal company? Why is it picked out and placed on a pedestal all by itself? And the answer clearly is that while these noble heroes are worthy to be our inspiration they are not worthy, not one of them, to be our goal. We are not to run this race looking unto Abraham. Abraham is a splendid stimulus but he is not a

worthy model. None of us would be satisfied to go home singing “I want to be like Abraham.” We do not want to be like Abraham or Gideon or Barak or Samson or Jephthah. We don’t want even to be like David or Paul or John. We want to be like Jesus. He is not only the author; He is the finisher of our faith. He does not simply ask prominence in our lives; He asks pre-eminence.

If one thing is certain about Jesus it is that He lived the ethics which He taught.

“No mortal can with Him compare
Among the sons of men;
Fairer is He than all the fair
That fill the heavenly train.”

And now before we part may I ask a question? How many of you have not yet started on this Christian race? Don’t you think it’s time? A little boy came running to a railway station one day just as the train was moving out. He was tired and panting for breath. “Ah,” said the station master, “you pretty nearly caught it; if you had run a little faster you would have been in time.” “No,” said the boy, “that’s not the reason. I ran fast enough! I ran as fast as I could. I didn’t start in time.”

The time to start is in the morning. Statistics show that very few start in the evening. Indeed, for that matter, there are not many entries even in the afternoon. “Remember now thy Creator

in the days of thy youth, ere the evil days come not, or the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them.” “Early let us seek thy favour, early let us do thy will.”

“O Thou, who givest life and breath,
We seek Thy grace alone,
In childhood, manhood, age and death,
To keep us still Thine own.”

XI

“FOR THOSE IN PERIL ON THE SEA”

*“They that go down to the sea in ships,
and do business in great waters, these see the
works of the Lord and his wonders in the
deep.”—PSALM 107: 23.*



REMEMBER some years ago reading a story of a ship that left the harbour of Gloucester in the early days of Massachusetts. She never reached her haven, however, and what became of her no one ever knew. The story went on to say that one day, many years later, some friends were strolling along the shore, when they saw a vessel approach which they knew by its sails and outline to be the very missing ship. It drew so near that every rope and cable were plainly visible, and even the faces of those on board. Then suddenly the vision faded, the sails melted, the hull disappeared and the spectre bark was lost.

And then the writer went on to apply the tale to life. Such is life, he said. Long years ago we left the land-locked harbour of youth. We cherished great dreams, planned great plans,

risked great ventures. But to-day these dreams are vanished, these plans are broken and our fondest hopes, many of them, have sunk beneath the waves. For life with each one of us is a voyage; it is “a home on the rolling deep.” We all go down to the sea in our little boats to an adventure of mystery and danger. We weigh anchor in the morning hopeful and happy. The sky is blue, the air is soft, the water is peaceful. We set out on life’s passage like the sailor leaving shore; we meet adversity like the sailor in the storm; we come into harbour like the sailor entering port. It’s all a beautiful allegory. Human life a voyage; the human soul a ship!

“There’s a schooner in the offing
With her topsails shot with fire,
And my soul has gone aboard her
For the Island of Desire.

“I must forth again to-morrow
And at midnight I shall be
Hull down on the trail of rapture
In the wonder of the sea.”

“They that go down to the sea in ships,” says the Psalmist, “these see the works of the Lord and his wonders in the deep.” The works of the Lord and His wonders in the deep! How differently the sea affects different people. Some see in it the power of God, some His majesty. Some it oppresses with its vastness. To some it

speaks an unknown language, and they cry out, "What are the wild waves saying?" The scientist thinks of the ten or twenty thousand species of living creatures in its depths. The geologist thinks of it as a museum of glittering pearls and buried treasures; the artist dwells on its ever-changing beauty. Down in the "sunless retreats of the ocean" are brilliant masses of weed and moss and sponge and coral. The merchant counts on its commercial value; the delicate voyager dreads its discomforts; the sailor loves it, but he never forgets its treachery. The mountains have a grand tranquillity, but the sea you can never trust.

"Others may use the ocean as their road,
Only the sailor makes it his abode,
Whose ready sails with every wind can fly
And make a covenant with the inconstant sky."

There's a good deal in the Bible about the sea. I sometimes think it is rather remarkable how much there is in it about the sea, when we recall the fact that the Jew was not a sailor. The Jew loved the mountains and the valleys, but he was very sceptical about the water. It was an object of dread to him. There was no "rapture on the lonely shore" for the Jew. Palestine had no real ships. There is not a harbour all along its coast line. It is true that Solomon had fleets on the Red Sea, but these boats were little more than

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galleys propelled by oars, and most likely manned by the Phenicians, for the Phenicians were the mariners of that day. Even in these tiny shells, however, they ventured as far as Gibraltar, and they were bold navigators to do that when we consider that they had no lighthouse or chart to go by. What wonderful strides have been made in the science of ship-building since the days of Solomon. There is no more striking evidence of human skill than in this matter of ship-building; in the construction of our ocean liners, our men-of-war, our submarines. It was not so very long ago that our great marine companies did not hesitate to send out what were called “Coffin ships,” regardless of the lives of the men on board, but this is no longer tolerated. To-day every precaution is taken for the safety of the crew. We have rafts, boats, life-belts, water-tight compartments. Nothing practicable is neglected.

Now the point I am thinking of this morning is this; that this human life of ours is a voyage. We are always using the ship as an allegory of human life. Did you ever consider how significant the metaphor is? You recall these lines of Masfield:

“I must go down to the seas again,
To the lonely sea and the sky,
And all I ask is a tall ship
And a star to steer her by.

And the wheel's kick and the wind's song and
the white sails shaking
And a gray mist on the sea's face
And a gray dawn breaking.

"I must go down to the seas again,
To the vagrant gypsy life,
To the gull's way and the whale's way,
Where the wind's like a whetted knife,
And all I ask is a merry yarn
From a laughing fellow rover,
And a quiet sleep and a sweet dream
When the long trick's over."

The soul of a man, I repeat, is a ship. Let us note briefly some of the points in common.

I. Every ship must have a captain. No ship crosses the ocean without a captain. She may go without her crew complement, but not without her captain. She cannot be registered unless she has a captain; she cannot be insured without a captain; she cannot bring out her bills of lading until she has a captain. She must have a master, a skipper, a commander.

How is it in life? William Ernest Henley wrote:

"It matters not how strait the gate,
How charged with punishment the scroll,
I am the master of my fate;
I am the captain of my soul."

But is that true? Was Henley the captain of his soul? One thing is certain, it is not true in religion. I claim that a Christian man is not

the captain of his soul. If a man is a Christian man, Jesus Christ is the Captain of his soul. There are authorities in literature and science and scholarship whose verdict we accept, but in religion there is only one Man who gives orders and speaks the ultimate word.

In my very slight experience with great men I have always found them humble and anxious to learn. I owe a debt of gratitude I can never repay to Shakespeare and Pascal and Ruskin and Newman and a long list of immortals. There are experts and specialists whose opinions I should as little think of contradicting as I should think of contradicting my New Testament. But in the things of the soul I have only one Master. I take off my hat to Him. It isn't Luther or Calvin or Knox or Wesley or Augustine. Teachers, rare teachers are they all, but only as they were taught. They are really scholars, not masters. We are all of us under orders, if we have surrendered our lives to Jesus Christ. This hand is not mine; it is His. This tongue is not mine; it is His. These lips are not mine; they are His. "For ye are not your own, ye are bought with a price, and one is your Master, even Christ."

Some men's lives are like an orchestra before the performance begins. Every instrument is tuning up; every player strikes what note he pleases and the discord is very disturbing. But when the conductor comes out and lifts his baton

then all individual liberty ceases. And just so it is with our own powers and faculties until the soul surrenders to its true Master, and that Master is Jesus Christ. From whatever angle you approach the Galilean you are struck with His claim to mastery. The dominant note of the man is His authority. He speaks every time in the unfaltering accent of one who claims to know. There is an audacity in Him that is sublime. He defines duty; He interprets life; He challenges death. His influence to-day is the wonder of history. Kings of the earth bow before Him. Astronomy, biology, chemistry, philosophy have made colossal strides, but Jesus stands where He stood two thousand years ago, and "the world is still at His feet."

II. Then every ship must have a cargo. I remember once spending a day in Liverpool waiting for my steamer to sail. I had nothing particular to do, so I strolled down among the docks. They are, as you know, the largest docks in the world, extending along the river front for eight or ten miles. I saw one vessel loaded with cotton from New Orleans. I saw another with wheat from Chicago. A third had potatoes from Nova Scotia; still another had mackerel from Newfoundland. I was interested in a barquentine, with her hatches all open, loading gravel and clay. She had taken a cargo of oats from Halifax, and not being able to secure anything for

her homeward passage she had to take on ballast. For you know every ship must carry something. She must have something down in her hold to steady her. If a ship is empty she is top-heavy, and in a storm to be top-heavy is disastrous. She must have something and if she cannot get freight she takes ballast. Ballast is dead loss, but some cargo she must have. Powder is a dangerous cargo; it is apt to explode. Cotton is a dangerous cargo; it easily catches fire. Salt is a dangerous cargo; it has a tendency to shift. What is your cargo, my friend? What are you loaded with? Whither are you bound? We must bear in mind that we are all ships in commission. The great Captain has a destination for every craft. “They that go down to the sea in ships and do business in great waters.” Business; ah yes, that’s it, and what an indispensable business! In a great world crisis like the one we have just been passing through, the cargo of every ship that leaves and enters our ports is a matter of national concern. The Government controls it. Our vessels had to be used only in the transportation of what was absolutely essential. And should not the analogy dominate the life and purpose of every man and woman? How about us? Are we making the best use possible of our tonnage? Do we carry a cargo of light and unnecessary non-essentials? Is the vessel of our life employed upon the mission of the King-

dom of God? Are we weighted down with the works of the flesh or are we laden with the fruits of the Spirit?

III. Then again every ship must have a compass and a chart. She must have a compass telling her where the North is. She must have a chart mapping out harbour and channel and lighthouse and bank and bar. She must have a rudder. The *Great Eastern* was the largest vessel in her day. She was 22,000 tons. She had six masts. Once she lost her rudder in mid-ocean and well-nigh foundered. When Lieutenant Hobson steered the *Merrimac* into the mouth of Santiago Harbour, his great anxiety was to save the steering. He almost succeeded. But at the last moment one of the Spanish guns turned its fire against the stern and shot away the rudder. That was the vital spot. The brave boys were helpless. They could not turn her in the channel. They just had to do the best they could and sink her where she was.

All of which again is an allegory. No ship ever thinks of steering by her own light. She has a blue light on her starboard bow, and a green light on the masthead, and a white light on her hurricane deck, but she does not navigate by these. There is a star in the north that guides her. Somehow or other nothing down here on earth seems to be absolutely trustworthy. Always before a ship leaves port her compass is

boxed; *i. e.*, it is tested to see that it is accurate. Each new cargo has a tendency to deflect the needle. And just so with you and me. Conscience is the compass of the human ship, and it is a safe guide, provided it is regulated by the Word of God. We should bring our consciences daily to the test of Scripture. The Bible is my infallible chart, but it must be interpreted by the mind of Christ. It needs the illumination of the Holy Spirit.

But it is not the captain or the cargo or the compass or the chart that we are thinking about particularly this morning. It is the crew that interests us just now. So will you please be patient with me if I say a word in closing in behalf of the crew? Whoever else we can dispense with these days, one thing is certain, we cannot do without our sailors. No class of men brings greater contribution to the world to-day. Wherever our sailor boys have gone, there have gone commerce, freedom, civilization.

The destiny of countries has been determined very largely by their coast lines, as is instanced in the case of Greece and England and little Holland. Do you realize that it was commerce that carried the Bible out of Asia into Southern France? In all history it is the maritime cities like Tyre and Carthage and Venice and Genoa that have ruled the world. The sea is the chief bond of human brotherhood to-day. The farther you travel from

the sea the farther away you go from progress and refinement. Once the sea was a dividing line, now it is a connecting link. The sea has made all nations neighbours. It is the sea that has moulded human life. Where the sea cannot go with its far-reaching salty arms, there you are likely to have stagnation and death.

And we owe to those sailor boys who brave its dangers and drink in its briny breezes, more than we can ever repay. We are all only too apt to forget the claims they have upon our sympathy. To-day in these great ocean greyhounds, with their palatial furnishings, how few passengers ever think of the boys below who feed the fires, or keep their eyes on the lookout in the hours of peril. Have we any better friends? Without them where would large parts of our earth be? What would large parts of our earth do? Of many places it would be said, “There arose a mighty famine in that land and the people began to be in want.” About twenty thousand of these brave fellows gave their lives during the past four years. How many fathers and mothers have been singing songs in the night for their sailor boys during this awful war. How often have they watered their couch with their tears as they sobbed:

“O hear us when we cry to Thee
For those in peril on the sea.”

Some weeks ago a great liner was crossing the Atlantic. She carried important documents for the Government. She was loaded with transports returning. One day a soldier was stricken down with pain. An immediate operation was imperative to save his life, but the surgeon said he could not risk the knife while the vessel was quivering under the hammering blows of her great engines. So the captain gave orders to stop; and there in mid-ocean the great liner stood still while the surgeon cut into the flesh of the nameless soldier. That is the spirit of the Gospel of Jesus.

The sailor is free, blunt, brave, generous, off-handed, simple-hearted, genuine. He goes about the world, “knocks about it,” as we say, and sees a good deal of what is called life, but unfortunately it is often life in its worst forms. Think of the thousands of sailor boys ashore here in New York to-day, walking up and down our water front. Think of the temptations they have to meet. The perils of the deep are great, but the perils of the port are greater. He is far from home. He has nothing to restrain him. He has been living a monotonous life on ship-board for weeks. He has been cooped up in a bunk. He is strong and energetic and red-blooded. He’s in a strange city, unknown, with no friend to counsel him. Time hangs heavy on his hands. He has money in his pocket. The

gay lights of Broadway and the luring voices of loud women dazzle him. There are sharks waiting to grab his pocketbook. Is it any wonder if he sometimes falls? What can we do for these poor fellows? Well, he needs a place to eat and sleep and spend his leisure hours. He wants a nice clean room where there are innocent games, and paper and ink to write a letter home. He ought to have wholesome entertainment and amusement while in port. He should be provided with good books.

And then one thought more. What a missionary he may become! I doubt very much if the Church of God in its missionary program has a finer weapon of service than the sailor. Who has greater opportunities of carrying the message to the regions beyond? Think of the leavening influence of his life. Twice every twenty-four hours the tide sweeps in. Gravity lifts the whole ocean bodily from the ground. It lifts it about two feet at the Equator, and about forty at the Poles, and as a result the rising flood fills our docks, steals up our rivers, overflows our marshes, bringing health and purity with it, and carrying away our pollution as it turns and retreats.

And that is still another parable. For there is a human tide going on too. Not a day but a great wave of weather-beaten salty sailor boys sweeps into our harbours and surges up our streets. Every afternoon another wave of human life

sweeps out. And this ebb and flow is going on continuously—thousands going, other thousands coming. What are these lads bringing to us? What are they taking away? Are they carrying off germs of disease and poison to other shores? I believe one secret of the world's conversion is to win the sailors for Jesus Christ. The sailor is a delegate-at-large to all mankind. When Admiral Foote was dining with the King of Siam, he asked a blessing at the table. The King in surprise asked if the bronzed old sailor was a missionary. “Sir,” answered the bluff admiral, “every Christian is a missionary.” If every sailor was a missionary carrying Christ into all the crowded ports of the earth, we should have the mightiest evangelistic agency the world has yet seen. Our aim should be to make every sailor not only a Christian but an Apostle. Where does he not go? On what shore does he not land? To what port does he not sail? Ought we not to try and make him an organ of the truth as it is in Jesus Christ?

“O Christ, whose voice the waters heard
And hushed their raging at Thy word,
Who walkedst on the foaming deep,
And calm amid the storm didst sleep;
O hear us when we cry to Thee
For those in peril on the sea.”

XII

“FAR, FAR AWAY LIKE BELLS AT EVENING PEALING”

*“I call to remembrance my song in the
night.”—PSALM 77: 6.*



AND it certainly has been night during the past four years, black night, midnight, not a star in the sky, not a light on the waves, not a rent in the gloom. Never such a night of woe and frightfulness in the world since time began; everything pitch dark, ebon blackness. We were all becoming very depressed. But at long last the dawn is approaching. The storm is about over. The clouds are rolling away. There is a promising flush in the East. The morning light is breaking. A chorus of bird-voices is stirring the air. And there is a note of thankfulness and relief on every tongue. “Weeping may endure for a night but joy cometh in the morning.”

“ Say not that darkness is the doom of light,
That every sun must sink in night’s abyss,
While every golden day declines to this,
To die and pass at evening out of sight.
Say rather that the morning ends the night,

That death must die beneath the dayspring's
kiss—
Whilst dawn the powers of darkness shall
dismiss,
And put their dusky armaments to flight.
Man measures life in this wise; first the morn,
And secondly the noontide's perfect prime,
And lastly night, when all things fade away:
But God, ere yet the sons of men were born,
Showed forth a better way of marking time—
“The evening and the morning were the day.”

But the Psalmist did not have to wait till the morning for his song. “I call to remembrance,” he says, “my song in the night.” It was not much of a song, but he recalled it. He sang it with trembling voice and quavering note. The night had been indescribably dreadful. He could never forget the night. It was one of those nights that leaves behind it a trail of terror. Some overwhelming trouble had pounced down on him and prostrated him and rendered him speechless. And yet here was the blessed wonder of it. Although the blow had fallen and everything about was black and the earth trembled and shook, yet there forced itself into the Psalmist's heart, in some strange way, a hint of the goodness of the Lord, and all at once he began to hum a hymn of praise.

The Greeks, it will be remembered, had a myth in regard to the statue of Memnon. Memnon was one of the brave heroes of the Trojan war.

He was slain by Achilles. A beautiful statue was erected to his memory at Thebes on the banks of the Nile. It was called “the vocal Memnon,” because the statue when touched by the first rays of the rising sun broke into music. And just so this human heart of ours when touched by sorrow oftentimes breaks every law of nature and bursts into singing. It was out of the darkness of Bedford Jail that Bunyan’s immortal allegory came. It was out of the darkness of Wartburg Castle that Luther sent forth his translation of the Bible. So often in life it is the night that makes the song.

I have read somewhere of a little bird that will never sing the melody his master wishes while his cage is full of light. He learns a snatch of this, a bar of that, a polyglot of something else, but never an entire movement of its own, until the cage is covered and the morning beams shut out. Something like this is the soul’s experience. A good many people never learn to sing until the darkling shadows fall. The fabled nightingale carols with his breast against a thorn. It was in the night that the song of the angels was heard. It was at midnight that the cry came, “Behold the Bridegroom cometh, go ye out to meet him.” Indeed it is extremely doubtful if a soul can really know the love of God in its richness and in its comforting, satisfying completeness until the skies are black and

lowering. Light comes out of darkness, morning out of the womb of night.

James Creelman in one of his letters describes his trip through the Balkan States in search of Natalie, the exiled Queen of Serbia. “In that memorable journey,” he says, “I learned for the first time that the world’s supply of attar of roses comes from the Balkan mountains. And the thing that interested me most,” he goes on, “is that the roses must be gathered in the darkest hours. They start out at one o’clock and finish picking them at two. At first it seemed to me a relic of superstition, but I investigated the picturesque mystery and I learned that actual scientific tests had proven that fully forty per cent. of the fragrance of roses disappeared in the light of day.” And in human life and human culture that is not a playful, fanciful conceit; it is real veritable fact. Take the case of our own Sydney Lanier. He was born in the South before the war. He had a passion for music and literature. Just as he graduated from college the war broke out and he enlisted. Then after it was over he started in to study law. But the thirst for music and literature devoured him. Then he contracted tuberculosis and the rest of his days was a battle for bread. There were times when his little family was on the verge of actual want. He fell on the field of life’s battle just as bravely as any soldier that

ever went over the top. But don't call it defeat, call it rather a magnificent and glorious victory. Listen to his own words:

“The dark hath many dear avails;
The dark distils divinest dews;
The dark is rich with nightingales,
With dreams and with the heavenly muse.

“Of fret, of dark, of thorn, of chill
Complain thou not O heart; for these
Bank in the current of the will
To uses arts and charities.”

Now this song of the Psalmist, I take it, is a record of a private and personal experience, and the inference that runs like a thread throughout the whole hymn is that just as Jehovah redeemed Israel from their bondage in Egypt, so He will redeem us from every exile in which we may find ourselves in any of life's Babylons. The piercing cry of individual grief is all through the introductory verses. If any particular public calamity is referred to, it has become a personal pain and it is symbolic.

I. Notice then first of all that it is a Song of Faith. “I will cry unto God with my voice,” the troubled man begins, “and he will give ear unto me.” He approached the Lord, you will observe, not in studied stilted phrase but with a cry. Now that was simple childlike faith. “In the day of my trouble I sought the Lord. My hand was stretched out to him.” The whole

horizon of the psalm is ominous and threatening, but he felt, and indeed he knew, that God was behind the frowning cloud.

Some one calls Faith the nightingale among the Christian graces. It can see in the dark, and what is better, it can sing in the dark. Its richest strains are not infrequently poured forth in the nocturnal hours. A good many people imagine that they have no need of faith in the daytime. Some of us feel no more need of faith in the daytime than of a lamp. We can see our path plainly and prefer to walk by sight. It is when darkness falls that we realize our helplessness. When the disciples were on the Sea of Galilee and a storm arose, they came to their sleeping Master and said, “Carest thou not that we perish?” But His gentle rebuke was, “How is it that ye have no faith?”

Without faith we cannot see our way in the gloom and certainly without faith we cannot sing our way. Nothing but faith will enable a lonely pilgrim to make a joyful noise unto the Lord when the heavens are like ink and every light has gone out. Faith is the sainted Goddess of holy song and she inspires some of her sweetest lyrics in the depths. When Paul and Silas were in the dungeon at Philippi they lifted praises to God at midnight. There is no pit so deep and hopeless that God cannot reach down and make His presence felt.

"There is never a day so dreary,
But God can make it bright;
And unto the soul that trusts Him
He giveth songs in the night."

But it is only to the soul that trusts Him that He gives the song. He gives no song to the soul that doubts Him. Doubt never sings. When doubt drops down on the soul, song straightway dies in the heart. Doubt is to the Christian pilgrim what fog is to the mariner. It is a heavy pall. So far the navigator has been able to do but little to overcome the perils of fog. No light has yet been devised that is able to penetrate for any considerable distance the thick mist that so often clings around our coasts. Man is pretty nearly as helpless in this matter of fog as he was five thousand years ago. It creates uncertainty and distrust and fear. And where fear is song cannot be.

This has been the trouble with much of our theology. It is too largely founded on fear. And as a result theology does not sing. Churches with a hard, stern creed rarely blossom into song. Calvinism as a rule has never created great song. Presbyterianism has given us fewer hymns than any of the great denominations. To be sure there are exceptions. Such men as Horatius Bonar, for instance, but it is a well-known fact that even his own congregation refused to sing his hymns. It was not until the Church began to

have nobler and worthier and kindlier thoughts of God that singing came into its own. The simple fact is that the great hymns of the Church were born of a spiritual experience. I am firmly convinced that our religious inheritance owes far more to the poets than to the theologians. Who lifts us the higher, John Wesley, the expositor, or Charles Wesley, the singer? His enemies said of Martin Luther that he did far more harm by his hymns than by his sermons, and Coleridge once remarked that he did as much for the Reformation by his songs as by his translation of the Bible. Perhaps the “Christian Year” of John Keble has had more readers than all the writings of the Oxford School put together. It may be that this is the real meaning of the Apocalypse when it describes the glories of heaven in trumpet and minstrel and harp. Some one has said that “if the Church is the bride of the Lord Jesus Christ the hymn book is its love story.”

II. Then it was a Song of Gratitude. “I have considered the days of old,” the Psalmist continues, “the years of ancient times.” “Thou hast made known thy strength among the people. Thou hast with thine own arm redeemed them.” The whole psalm is tinged with reminiscence. The author borrows a light from the altars of yesterday. He consoles himself by recalling the goodness of the Lord in the days gone

by. Gratitude has usually a good memory and can tell many gracious tales of ancient mercies. Of course it needs to be borne in mind that in these olden times song covered a much wider field than it does to-day. In the absence of books or magazines or newspapers the chief relaxation was to tell a story or to sing a song. When the tired traveller halted for the night he would take his flute or his lyre and refresh himself with some ballad of love or home or romance or war. And what the traveller finds in his flute or his harp the psalmist finds in his voice—an instrument to express his grateful sense of the goodness and loving kindness of Jehovah.

William Law says that we should always begin the day with a psalm of thanksgiving, a psalm, for instance, like the 103rd or the 145th, and we should express it, he adds, in song. Because the singing, he claims, awakens all our dull and sluggish devotions. It kindles a holy flame. It creates a sense of jubilant delight in God. We should let our voice have a part in the praise that we feel. Because he goes on, the soul and body are so interrelated that they have each of them a strange power over the other. Each sustains the other. We need the outward action to support the inward temper. The difference between reading a psalm and singing it is much the same as the difference between reading a common song and singing it. Suppose I were to ask

you to sing “Annie Laurie” for me and you were to answer, “I cannot sing it, but I will read it to you;” well, that would be a poor and feeble substitute. A song of praise not sung is a crippled and impoverished thing. Just as we laugh when we are pleased, so we sing when we are thankful. It is the natural outlet. “My heart is fixed,” says David. “My heart is fixed, O God, I will *sing* praises.” Let a man be ungrateful and he cannot lift a tune. He is too out of sorts, too out of communion. It is a certain formula to miss the music.

Would you know who the greatest saint is? It is not he who prays the most or reads his Bible the longest or does the most good in the world. It is he who is most thankful; it is he who is most ready to praise God for everything that happens to him. This is the perfection of all goodness. Because the very moment we can thank God for any cross that comes our way, that very moment we turn the cross into a crown. “Giving thanks always for all things” will do more to put victory and joy and gladness into our lives than anything else. A good woman kept what she called a “Diary of Thanksgiving,” in which she wrote down every day the things for which she was especially thankful. How much better that is than a diary of complaints! It is truly surprising how good a poor meal tastes when one is grateful.

And then this Bible of ours is so gloriously rich in songs of gratitude. The first song of Scripture is the song of Moses. What is it but a burst of thankfulness—a great patriotic flow of praise for the victory over Pharaoh. Never had the shores of the Red Sea—or for that matter of any sea—heard such a mighty strain. Millions made up the choir. It must surely have sounded like the voice of many waters.

Do you know why there are so many lives that are songless? It is because they are ungrateful. This is true even of our burdens. How about your burdens, my friend? Do you hate them? Do you make war against them? Would you like to fling them away? If you feel that way there can be no zest nor relish in the journey. Along that road is bitterness and sighing and complaint. But take up your burden and say, "This, too, like the green fields, is from God," and you will find the burden light, and in a little while you will find yourself unconsciously humming some familiar air as you saunter along.

"Grief comes," as one has beautifully said, "as angels came to the tent of Abraham. Laughter is hushed before them. The mere frolic of life stands still, but the soul takes the grief in as a guest, meets it at the door, kisses its hand, washes its travel-stained feet, spreads its table with the best food, gives it the seat by the fireside,

and listens reverently to what it has to say about the God from Whom it came.”

“Through love to light! O wonderful the way
That leads through darkness to the perfect day!
From darkness and from sorrow of the night
To morning that comes singing o’er the sea.
Through love to light! Through light O God to
Thee
Who art the love of Love, the Eternal Light of
Light.”

III. And then once more it was a Song of Hope. True, the hope is not expressly mentioned but it is everywhere inferred. The psalm ends abruptly but it ends hopefully. He who has brought up His people from the house of bondage is not going to forsake them now. He will lead them into the promised rest. He that hath delivered in six troubles is not going to fail in the seventh. “That which hath been is that which is going to be.” Surely we can learn enough from the past to make us willing to trust for the future. That is the gentle inference He means us to draw. Memory, you see, supplies the colours with which hope paints the picture. And the picture is all the more striking because it is left for the imagination to portray.

There is no music like the music that hope sings. Hope of some kind is necessary to kindle the heart into melody. There is no discord like the discord that despair makes. To refuse to hope when God promises is to be out of harmony

with Him. When men are hopeless their harps hang silent on the willows. And Christianity is a manifesto of hope from start to finish. It was born with a song and it has been singing ever since.

A good deal of our music, it must be confessed, is in the minor strain. It is sung in four flats instead of five sharps. We say sullenly, "It's God's will and I suppose I must try and give in." But that is not the better way. That is not turning the statute into a song. The Psalmist does not say, "I call to remembrance my sigh in the night." It is not my sigh but my song. The statute does not become a song until it sings in our life and becomes a joy. As William Watson puts it in his lovely ode to the skylark:

" My heart is dashed with griefs and fears,
My song comes fluttering and is gone;
O, high above the home of tears,
Eternal Joy, Sing on."

And then the most beautiful thing of all about hope is that, like faith, it is in the night time that it sings the sweetest too. Night is a symbol of affliction. Hope brings a joyful feeling of deliverance into the very darkest hours. It is not so very difficult to warble our little ditty in the day. It is natural to sing when the sun is shining and the sky is clear. Think of Habbakuk, "Although the fig tree shall not flourish,

neither shall fruit be in the vines, the labour of the olive shall fail and the fields shall yield no food; the flock shall be cut off from the fold and there shall be no herd in the stalls.” Well, that is surely a very dark and a very desperate outlook. And what does he do about it? Does the old prophet give up? What is the sequel? What does he say? Listen! This is what he says: Although all these things are so, yet “I will rejoice in Jehovah, I will joy in the God of my salvation.” That is sublime, isn’t it? That was a real song in the night.

“I heard a voice in the darkness singing
 (That was a valiant soul I knew)
And the joy of his song was a wild bird winging
 Swift to his mate through a sky of blue.

“Myself—I sang when the dawn was flinging
 Wide his guerdon of fire and dew;
I heard a voice in the darkness singing
 (That was a valiant soul I knew).

“And his song was of love and all its bringing
 And of certain day when the night was through;
I raised my eyes where the hope was springing,
 And I think in His heaven God smiled too.
I heard a voice in the darkness singing
 (That was a valiant soul I knew).”

In one of Ralph Connor’s books he tells the story of Gwen. Gwen was a wild wilful lassie and one who had always been accustomed to having her own way. Then one day she met with

a terrible accident which crippled her for life. She became very rebellious and in this murmuring state she was visited by the Sky Pilot. He began to tell her the parable of the canyon. He told how the Master of the prairies sought in vain for the flowers he loved and then how one day he spoke to the lightning which with one swift blow cleft the rocks and made a jagged, gaping wound. Then the river flowed down, bringing the rich mould, and the birds carried the seed, and soon all kinds of lovely flowers began to grow in the sheltered canyon, until it became the Master's favourite place for walking, and there were no flowers like the canyon flowers. Gwen thought a moment and then said sadly, "There are no flowers in my canyon any more, only jagged rocks." "Some day, Gwen," he remarked, "your flowers will bloom. The Master is going to bring you out by and by into the garden where the roses grow." Some day you will stand amid the splendours of rainbows on the shores of Glory.

Let us then learn more of the inspiring ministry of song. Let us try and cultivate the gentle art. Let us pray God that He will tune our hearts to sing His grace. "Are you ever free from pain?" a sainted invalid was asked. "Never," she replied, "but I am never free from peace either." Surely that was a song in the night. Strange and wondrous is the power of

music. We read that when Napoleon was crossing the Alps his soldiers almost gave out. They were appalled by the perils, but every little while they would stop and sing the “Marseillaise” and it buoyed them up. And you will recall how Sir Walter Scott tries to relieve the pain of Roderick Dhu, when that old warrior was dying, by having the minstrel sing to the harp some verses of a famous battle hymn, so that though dying in prison,

“His free spirit might burst away
As if it soared from battle fray.”

Look at Harry Lauder. He goes over to Flanders to find the grave of his boy and standing by it he said, “I wish I could see my John for just a wee minit to tell him how proud I am of him.” Then back he goes to the camps to sing to the soldiers.

Seventy years ago a man by the name of Hannington, better known to us to-day as Bishop Hannington, went out to Africa to preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ. He laboured for almost forty years in the Dark Continent and then was cruelly murdered by the natives. He kept a diary which Stanley brought back with him and which has proven to be a very remarkable document. The handwriting is small and closely written, and this is the entry on the last page, the last entry that was made:

"I can hear no news, but was held up by Psalm 30, which came with great power. A hyena howled near me last night, smelling a sick man, but I hope he is not to have me yet."

The date of that entry was October 29, 1885, and it shows how a man lonely and sick and burning up with fever and face to face with the very worst can by God's help sing a song in the night,—a song of Faith, a song of Gratitude, a song of Hope.

"Don't let the song go out of your life
Though it chance sometimes to flow
In a minor strain; it will blend again
With the major tone you know.

"What though shadows rise to obscure life's skies,
And hide for a time the sun,
The sooner they'll lift and reveal the rift,
If you let the melody run.

"Don't let the song go out of your life;
Though the voice may have lost its trill,
Though the tremulous note may die in your throat,
Let it sing in your spirit still.

"Don't let the song go out of your life;
Let it ring in the soul while here;
And when you go hence, 'twill follow you thence,
And live on in another sphere."