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# VILLAGE SERMONS

BY THE LATE

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## PREFACE

FOR twelve years my father, as Regius Professor of Divinity at Cambridge, was also Rector of Somersham ; but in 1882, to his great relief, the Somersham Rectory Act disannexed that Rectory from the Regius Professorship. The major portion of the sermons contained in this volume were preached either in Somersham Church or in its daughter churches at Pidley and Colne. For a few years my father was happy in securing the services of his old friend the Rev. H. R. Alder for the charge of Somersham, and on p. 170 a feeling reference to Mr. Alder's departure from Somersham will be found.

Other sermons belong to earlier years of my father's life and were preached in Harrow and its neighbourhood or at places visited by him during his holidays, such as St. Leonard's in Bucks (Mr. Alder's old parish), and Moseley (his parents' home). I have endeavoured as far as possible to give the dates and localities of the sermons, and have added within brackets particulars as to earlier use of certain

of them. I have not included any definitely School Sermons, though some of those here printed were originally intended for Harrow School Chapel and were afterwards adapted for parochial use. In the later years of his life my father could not find time to write out Village Sermons at length, and the memorials of many such that he preached only survive in careful notes scribbled on odd half sheets of note-paper.

My hope in bringing to light these sermons is that they may prove as helpful and suggestive to other country parsons as they have to me.

A. W.

CRAYKE,  
*16th November 1906.*

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# I

*And the multitudes that went before, and that followed, cried, saying, Hosanna to the son of David: Blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord; Hosanna in the highest.*—ST. MATTHEW xxi. 9.

THE Advent, or coming of Christ, which we begin to celebrate to-day, in one sense or other is the message of all Scripture. From the first book to the last His coming is proclaimed, now in prayers of thankful humility and now in songs of joyous exultation. The first promise which is contained in Genesis is that a Saviour shall come: the last words of our Blessed Lord are that He will come again. Thus Christ's Advent is no event accomplished once for all, and then to be put aside from the common course of our thoughts; but rather, as it forms a very important part of our Christian creed and our Christian prayer, so should it also fill us with serious and heart-searching questioning at such times as these. The patriarchs and prophets looked to it through long ages with earnest and inquiring hope. The apostles and martyrs looked to it, in fearful and lasting tribulations, with sure and quickening faith. The believer in our time looks to it when fainting and wearied with his work, and so labours on with active and self-denying love.

This coming of Christ, you will remember, is manifold in its nature. Once Christ came meek and lowly, despised and rejected of men, the teacher and companion of the poor, the scorn and the victim of the proud. This was His first Advent—the Advent of love.

Once again Christ shall come, on the clouds of heaven; angels and apostles and saints shall attend Him then. The trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall hear His voice, and every eye shall see Him in His kingly state. This is His second Advent—the Advent of judgment.

And there is still one other way in which Christ comes—comes, or waits to come, into the heart of each one of us, as we listen to His voice and open to Him when He knocketh, and this is a third Advent—the Advent of faith.

At this solemn season it is natural that our thoughts should turn to meditate on these things, and on the work for which He came. It is, I say, very natural, and may God grant that it may be useful to ponder on these things! Like all the truths of Holy Scripture, Advent truths must have a very deep and real influence upon our life if we rightly believe them. If we rightly believe them: for in some sense we do all believe them, if we mean anything by joining in the service of God and bearing the Christian name. From day to day we profess to acknowledge that “the only begotten Son of God came down from heaven for us men, and for our salvation.” From day to day we profess to look for Him “to come again with glory to judge both the quick and the dead.” From day to day we pray that

His kingdom may come—not only in the world, but in us, and in our souls. And if then we do indeed believe this, and pray for this sincerely and thoughtfully—if we simply and faithfully declare that God was made man for us—if we hopefully and humbly look forward to a great day of account—if we patiently and zealously strive to hasten the time when the kingdoms of this world shall be the kingdom of the Lord—what manner of men must we be, my brethren, in all holy conversation—loving one another even as Christ loved us—forgiving one another even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven us—exhorting one another in all meekness and long-suffering, that men may see our good works and glorify our Father.

At first, we say, Christ came to visit us in great humility. The prophet of old prayed in passionate words that God would *rend the heavens and come down*. The heavens, indeed, were opened, but the Spirit descended like a dove, and not as a consuming fire. God came down; but this glory was veiled in the form of man, that men might be able to have faith in Him. I will not now anticipate Christmas time in calling to your minds all the marvellous details of Christ's lowly state. The stable of the village inn was indeed a fit birthplace for One who was a pilgrim on earth, and had not where to lay His head. The end was as the beginning. At first men found no room for Him, and then they slew Him. There were occasions, however, when the power of His divine majesty claimed their wonder and adoration even at this season. So was it when He entered the Holy City for the last time. A great multitude

spread their garments in the way as though He were some mighty king ; others strewed palm branches before Him, as though He were some triumphant conqueror ; and all cried to Him as unto their Saviour—*Hosanna. Save now, we pray Thee, O Thou Son of David. Blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest.* They sang to Jesus the hymn which they were soon to sing again at the coming feast. They consecrated Him—our great Passover—with the same words as those with which the legal sacrifice was offered. And so the glorious train passed on. The Temple was cleared. The questions of the Jews were answered. And yet in one short week the King—the Conqueror—the Saviour—was forgotten ; and men cried *Away with Him—Crucify Him*—and mocked Him as He hung upon the Cross.

Now all this, my brethren, has a meaning for *us*. This advent of Christ into Jerusalem is but a figure and a pattern of His general reception in the world. At first when men hear of Christ and of His mighty works they are moved, and prepare to celebrate His triumph. They are willing to welcome Him in great and glorious pomp, for then they share in the honour which they give. They follow Him when He passes through the city sweeping away vast and terrible evils. But then the trial comes. He is slighted by the learned and the powerful, and how shall the ignorant and weak hold fast their faith? They have not learnt to suffer with Christ that so they may reign with Him ; but rather they have sought to reign first before suffering. God's order is broken, and their strength fails them : for only patience

worketh experience, and experience alone can give that hope which maketh not ashamed.

Let us then all learn from this Advent of Christ a lesson of meekness and patience. If God in His great goodness allow us to take part in any of the noble victories of our faith, let us not forget that He may also call upon us to bear reproaches for it.

Let us not forget in the season of holiest joy that we must be made perfect through suffering, even as Christ was; that we must beware when men speak well of us, lest we be soon found among the enemies of the Lord; that we must not only be willing to confess a conquering King, but ready also to believe in a crucified Saviour. In our times there is much need that we should think on this, for Christ has appeared once again as a victorious power and won the praises of the world. We hear many things said wisely and nobly of the influence of Christ in lessening the wants and woes of men—in raising them to a better place and to a higher knowledge. But for us—for each of us it must be much more than this. It must be the spring of a new life, the dawn of a new day in our hearts; it must be a source of love and hope and holiness within us—a power of God to cleanse us from the brand of sin and to free us from its dominion.

How clear indeed must this seem to all if we think of the Second Advent—of Christ's entrance into a new Zion not to die but to reign—when He shall "return in glorious majesty to judge both the quick and dead." Felix of old trembled, when St. Paul reasoned of the judgment to come, for he

knew not of our Advocate who ever maketh intercession for us. And as Felix trembled, we too may also tremble, my brethren—the holiest, the purest, the wisest among us may well tremble—at the distant vision of that last day, even while they cling for sole succour and support to Christ's cross. It is impossible for us to picture clearly and steadily to our minds the majesty of our Great Judge, and the multitudes of all ages, lands, and ranks who will await from His word the sentence of life or death; and yet in His Gospel He has Himself turned our eyes to the scene, and we must in faith bear to gaze upon it. It is impossible that our souls could long endure to contemplate the depths of misery and despair from which Christ has raised us; and yet, as at this season we are specially called to turn our eyes to that spectacle, by God's blessing it may awaken some of us from sleep, as the apostle says; and it may quicken all of us to live more humbly, to labour more earnestly, to trust more entirely, not in ourselves, but in Him who hath saved us, and saves us still.

Think then, I would say, my brethren, of the witness which our own conscience will bear against us when Christ shall judge the world; and so judge yourselves that ye be not judged. We know nothing perhaps so little or so badly as our own heart. We do not commonly search it thoroughly. At times we catch some glimpses of its depths, and then in fear we turn away lest we should behold more.

It will not be so at that day. Then we shall see our sins as God sees them. We shall see them in their first origin as well as in their full maturity.

We shall see them in their vast consequences as well as in their direct effect upon ourselves. We shall see them as they lurk in the inmost recesses of our souls; and marvel, perhaps, at their fearful extent and influence. There may be a crowd of evil desires to witness against us which we have never confessed to ourselves because they have not grown into evil acts. There may be a host of wild passions to witness against us which we have never subdued because their progress was slow and secret. There may be a multitude of wicked plans to witness against us which we have forgotten because we lacked the opportunity to accomplish them. But a desire once formed—a passion once cherished—a plan once entertained—stands for ever against us, till it be done away by lively repentance through Christ's blood.

And, on the other side, there will be the burning memory of the good which we might have done and yet have left undone, through pride or indolence or selfishness. It may be some one will stand there whom we saw sick and in prison and visited not—some one whom we saw naked and clothed not—some one whom we saw an hungered and fed not. Or still worse: it may be that some one will be there who will point to us as the author of his misery, and trace to our words or works the source of his guilt.

No one speaks carelessly of death and the judgment after death but he who knows nothing of himself—nothing of God. The first lesson which we learn of our own nature, if we deal sincerely with ourselves, must be one of deep, inexpressibly

deep humility. The first lesson which we learn from the Bible, if we truly realise its teaching, must be one of deep, inexpressibly deep gratitude. And thus to quicken our penitence and love God sends into our hearts solemn thoughts. And surely, my brethren, those thoughts of judgment are solemn thoughts—more solemn too in that they must fall far short of the reality of that dreadful day; and if anything can add to their awe it must be the idea of the presence in which we shall then stand—of the countless multitudes who will then behold the shame of the rebellious and impenitent.

Think then, I would say, that when we shall appear before the face of God, it will be as if the eyes of a whole world were directed to our most hidden faults, exposed to their view without anything to conceal or soften them—without any fresh space wherein to obliterate and redeem them.

Here it often happens that we are able to gain and keep the goodwill and praise of men by our outward actions, when our inward thoughts would fill them with loathing and dread. But God reads the heart; and then its inmost recesses shall be laid open. Then our earthly friends perhaps will see that our generosity was thoughtlessness—that our zeal was ambition—that our religion was hypocrisy.

Here it often happens that those we love are ready to clothe and excuse our failings—to set down to the sudden frailty of man what is in truth the result of long forgetfulness of God. It will not be so then. No words will be spoken to lessen the sin

with which our own soul accuses us ; no veil will be able to soften the dye of that crime which is before the eyes of all.

Here it often happens that our judge pardons the infirmity of which he is himself conscious. Men feel their own needs, and as they feel them so do they deal gently with others. But then it will not be so. True it is that Christ knows our infirmities ; but if we have refused to hear His voice when He called to us, He will leave us when our trial cometh. Judgment alone—judgment without mercy remains for those who refuse eternal life.

Here it often happens that penitence and amendment blot out the memory of the past. A further trial is allowed that one once fallen may recover his name and rank. But then it will not be so. There lies no appeal from that verdict : we know of no second life. Here there is hope—hope to the uttermost : but no promise lights the gloom beyond the grave.

Sad indeed must be the feelings of each of us while we ponder on these things. Before each heart there must surely rise a fearful vision of evil done and good neglected. Surely we must all cry with the prophet, Who shall abide the day of Christ's appearing? Who shall stand when He trieth His people? And if, indeed, we had to come forth in our own strength and in our own righteousness, if we had to bear the scrutiny of an all-seeing God without a Saviour wherein to hide us, it had been well for us not to have been born ; but there is yet a third Advent full of joy and peace and hope and comfort to every troubled soul.

Christ comes to each one of us—to each one of *us* who have been made His members in an especial manner—as He once came to His own, in love and tenderness. And yet how often it happens that He has not where to lay His head, even among those whom He died to save! He finds no rest in their hearts: some rival has occupied His throne, and He stands without knocking. He our Maker and our Judge is cast away from us.

Think then, I would say, once more on this third blessed Advent of mercy. If Christ be already with you, labour more and more earnestly that your whole life may be devoted to God through Him. If Christ be not formed in you, pray faithfully for the presence which He has pledged to you. Pray faithfully, earnestly, ceaselessly, and be very sure that your prayer will be heard, and Christ will come to you, and make His dwelling with you.

But that Christ may thus come to us, we must cast out all that is hostile to Him. We must, as far as we can, cleanse the temple in which He is to dwell. We must cherish no sin which He hates—which He died to subdue. We must love Him above all things, and all things in Him.

That Christ may thus come to us, we must patiently wait for Him. For thirty years He lived on earth unknown. For thirty years it seemed as though there was no Saviour born. But then the time came that He should do His Father's work, and every form of evil fell before Him. So may it be with us. We may lament long and sincerely that we do not feel that Christ is with us. But still let us humbly possess our souls in peace, and in

His own good time He will make His coming known.

That Christ may thus come to us, we must be silent. Men trouble and disquiet themselves in vain. If God's voice is to be heard, we must be still. The Spirit's gentle sounds are lost in the din and strife of the busy world. And often we have to wait for a night of sorrow before they are regarded.

That Christ may thus come to us, we must pray to Him, as the multitude prayed, *Hosanna. Save now, we beseech Thee.* We must, indeed, feel, as the thoughts of to-day make us feel, that we need a Saviour—that we cannot save ourselves; and then when we have confessed our want, how gladly, how sincerely, how heartily shall we join in the voice of thanksgiving. Blessed is He who hath brought us back to God and made us one with Him. *Blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord.*

And for my own part I cannot but rejoice that, while I am so rarely able to come among you, I should be allowed to address to you these simple words of Advent greeting. When I last spoke here it was of the glorious tidings of Easter, and now I ask you to prepare to welcome Christ in His lowliness, as I asked you then to acknowledge Him in His triumph. I ask you to meet me on this our Christian New Year's morning in that Holy Communion in which He assures us perfect fellowship with one another in Himself. I ask you to join me in praying for him who will henceforth minister among you, that he may have strength to

fulfil his work and find around him sympathy to cheer him in it.

The lessons of the triple Advent of which we have spoken are lessons of self-sacrifice, of self-inquiry, of calm trust. May God in His great mercy grant that we may learn them faithfully!

## II

*And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob ; and He will teach us of His ways, and we will walk in His paths : for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.—ISAIAH ii. 3.*

I HAVE been asked to speak this evening on the work of Foreign Missions. I do so gladly, for, as I said last Advent, Foreign Missions appear to me to be as great a blessing to those who provide as to those who receive the teaching of the faith. They serve to enlarge our sympathy by leading us to strive, as we can, to enter into the feelings and modes of life of other nations widely different from ourselves ; they offer a decisive test of the value which we set upon our own privileges as members of Christ's Church ; they lay open to us the true spiritual fellowship of mankind, as we see how the same Gospel meets the same wants throughout the world, and raises those who welcome it to the same level of the children of God.

But, as I observed before, our living interest in the work of Foreign Missions suffers from the vastness and the remoteness of the work. We offer our alms, it may be, but we do so rather as a matter of course than because we aim at a definite object. We

are unable to follow our customary gift to its destination. We do not know, we hardly try to know, to what use it will be put. If we send our prayers with our alms, as we are bound to do, they are vague and uncertain. In this way, I believe, we lose much; and, if Foreign Missions are to take the place which they ought to take in our thoughts, we must, I think, fix our attention upon some little fragment of the great work, and strive to enter into it as we should enter into the affairs of our own parish, and then strive also, as we may be enabled, to further the labours of ministers whose difficulties we can intelligently grasp, and the progress of hearers whose struggle towards the light we can watch with a real interest though it be far off.

This, then, my friends, is what I wish to help you to do this evening. I shall endeavour to give you a faint idea of one such fragment of missionary work, the mission to the Kôls in Bengal. Special circumstances have led me to study this mission,<sup>1</sup> and in its origin, its character, and its results it seems to me well fitted to call out that distinct, personal, direct interest in missions which is twice blessed in its issues.

The Kôls are one of those aboriginal tribes of India which remain scattered throughout the country on the hills and highlands, where they have found a refuge from successive invaders, like our own Cornishmen or Welshmen. They are perhaps 4,000,000 in number, and occupy a pleasant country about 200 miles west of Calcutta, and are occupied chiefly in

<sup>1</sup> Bishop Whitley, who laboured for thirty-five years among the Kôls, married my mother's sister. My brother Foss has now succeeded him in the See of Chhota Nagpur.—A. W.

the cultivation of rice. They are regarded, like the other aboriginal races, with great contempt by their Hindu and Mohammedan conquerors. Their name itself is a name of reproach and degradation, and means "filth" or "offal." They have a kind of religion, but it consists for the most part in a belief in evil and cruel spirits, whose anger they seek to turn aside by various sacrifices. Every wood and stream has its demon, who is supposed to be powerful for mischief; and old clumps of trees stand here and there over the country which were left by those who cleared the land as a home for the spirits whom they thought that they had disturbed. The people are very poor, but yet they are able to provide for themselves the bare necessaries of life. They are the victims, it need scarcely be added, of the vices which belong to men in such a state—indolence and drunkenness.

It is impossible to tell for how many hundred years the Kôls had continued this poor and hopeless existence when they were first visited by Christian teachers thirty-three years ago. The occasion of the visit was most striking. A German, by name Gossner, residing at Berlin, had become deeply interested in mission work. He was himself a most remarkable man. By birth a Romanist, he had been a priest, but his devotion to the simple truth of the Gospel led to his separation from the Roman Church. Some extracts from English tracts, it is said, directed his attention to Foreign Missions, and when he was seventy years old he learnt English in order that he might read more on the subject. After other enterprises, he found, in 1844, an opportunity of sending

four missionaries to India. They were to go to a place in the northern provinces, but when they arrived at Calcutta the Sikh war had broken out and the frontier was unsafe. Their original scheme was therefore abandoned of necessity, and they stayed in the city for a time without any fixed plan. After a few weeks their attention was drawn to some poor men who performed the meanest offices in the streets, as scavengers. The men seemed to be simple and harmless, but they were utterly despised, and lived as desolate outcasts. These were Kôls, and the German missionaries determined to visit them in their homes.

Such was the beginning of the mission. There was little promise in the first prospect, and for five years the missionaries worked on without success. They wrote to their chief pastor, Gossner, very sadly : "We have ploughed the earth with patient toil," they said, "and sown the seed, but there are no signs of fruit." "Whether you convert the Kôls or not," was his reply, "your duty is the same—go on praying and working, and we will pray and work for you."

You will scarcely require to be told that the praying and working were not in vain. In 1850, less than a year after their complaint, four men who had learned something of Christ from a Hindi New Testament came to the missionaries to learn more of Him. They came literally with the request of the Greeks of whom we read in the Gospel of St. John. "They wished to see Jesus." They begged to be brought before Him face to face. No explanation at the time could satisfy them, and they went away angry because their desire was not gratified. However, though they could not see Jesus with the eyes

of the body, they did come to know Him in His own way. The aspirations of their faith were genuine, and they were enabled to feel His unseen Presence. They watched the English Service, and happily came to know that there was an invisible power there, even He for whom they were looking. In due course they were instructed and baptized; and now by steady growth from year to year there are more than 20,000 Christians in the provinces, won in twenty years.

At an early time the little Church had its decisive trial. When the Indian Mutiny broke out in 1857, and, as you remember, shook our empire to its foundation, there were 700 Kôl Christians. They were only fresh converts, and their temptation was severe; but it was the joy of Gossner to hear just before he died that of these 700 not one had been moved from his faith or from loyalty during that season of grievous peril. These young believers, like the saints of old time, *took joyfully the spoiling of their goods* for their Lord's sake. This devotion established a claim on the gratitude of England, and English Churchmen have not wholly disregarded the appeal which Gossner made to them to support, after his death, the work which he had been allowed to establish. An English mission was organised among the Kôls in 1869, and there are now in connexion with it more than 8000 Christians. But the numbers do not give a complete notion of the vigour of the work. Of these 8000 half are communicants. Eight natives have been ordained. Last year nearly 1400 were baptized, and more than 1500 were confirmed. Christians are scattered through more than

300 villages ; and there are nearly 800 children in the Christian schools.

If for a moment we come to details, it is impossible not to contrast the zeal of their fresh faith with our own coldness or indifference. Thus I read : " On Christmas Eve many hundreds of people came trooping into Ranchi [the chief town] from their villages, some of them from a distance of thirty or forty miles. The five deacons and most of the readers came with their people. . . . At the Hindi celebration of Holy Communion on Christmas Day there were about 500 communicants."

And again : " Our harvest festival was held on Sunday, 1st February. . . . The offering of the grain is a very striking sight. The choir and the clergy go in procession singing the thanksgiving hymn, and the people follow carrying their offerings. Each pours out his . . . rice . . . before the altar, while offerings of money are received in small baskets. . . . When all had poured out their offerings and gone to their places, the singing ceased and some special prayers were said. Holy Communion was then celebrated. On this occasion there were 300 communicants."

Such, my friends, is the simple history which I wished to lay before you. There is nothing very strange or exceptional in it. It might be paralleled, I believe, by several others. But at any rate it is real. It represents something clear, intelligible, unmistakable ; it represents numbers of men raised from the lowest state of misery to orderly self-control and self-respect ; it represents the first stage at least of Christian sacrifice and effort on the part

of those who had been treated for ages as outcasts ; it represents the apprehension of the loftiest hope by people who had before found in the spiritual world nothing but the terrors of demons and witchcraft ; it represents a beginning, a promise, a pledge of a corresponding future. And I ask you, if you have followed me with any interest, to inquire for yourselves whether the picture which I have tried to draw is true, and then to do what you can to change the promise into fulfilment. These poor Kôls are our fellow-citizens : their Empress is our Queen. Yes, we have some 200,000,000 heathen fellow-citizens : India is now one with us.

And let us never forget that India has been committed to England for great ends. No nation has ever yet received such a charge. Every thoughtful man must tremble at its grandeur. It needs every exertion that we may rise in any way to the level of our duty. In the past history of English rule in India there is much to be atoned for. In the future there is much which we cannot foresee. But at least we may rejoice if there is in the present some simple office which we can fulfil for men bound to us by common rule. If you ask what you can do, I reply that in the mission of which I have spoken—and it is but one example out of many—complete in its kind and full of hope, there is such an opening for us. A piece of work can be done there by any English parish. For example, a child may be supported in the boarding-school for £3:10s. a year ; a reader or teacher receives a salary of about £6 or £8 a year ; a deacon, about £18 a year. There is thus oppor-

tunity for a congregation to choose some single object which lies within its means, such as the support of a child or a reader or a deacon, and to accomplish it. The alms offered can be sent directly to those who distribute them. Every penny is used for the one purpose for which it is offered. But whether you take for yourselves some such ministration as this or contribute to mission work in other ways, do not let your action be without thought and without sympathy. That is the point on which I wish to insist most. There is no blessing in the conventional subscription itself. What we want for the growth of our Christian life is the spirit of fellowship, the sense of obligation, the practical acknowledgment of the union of man with man. A vital interest in missions will bring these. Our home duties will become clearer as we acknowledge our duties abroad more cheerfully. He who thinks and works for India will think and work with better effect for England.

And, let me repeat, for there is nothing which I feel more strongly, India has been committed by God to England and the English Church for great ends. The gift is a call to win Asia for Christ. It is a gift too which seems to contain a sign of what shall come to pass. Some of those who know India best think that the aboriginal tribes, like the Kôls, have a far more important part to play in the time to come than they have played, in that they are simpler, less bound by tradition, more open to Christian influences than men of Hindu descent. However this may be, we must press forward wherever the way is opened. Our empire is not

for vainglory, not for aggrandisement, not for self-assertion, but for the benefit of mankind. Here also it is true that he who is master of all is servant of all. Increased power carries with it the necessity of more devoted service. You will see now why I have chosen a text on which I have not yet touched. We are now what the Jews once were—in another sense—the missionary nation of the world. No office can be more glorious or more full of responsibility. And the Bible speaks to us plainly of our work. The divine discipline of the Jews is the discipline of England. The encouragements, the warnings, the threats, the promises of the prophets are addressed to us with an immediate force. The words of the magnificent passage of Isaiah which we have just heard portray the position which England ought to occupy. Do not our hearts thrill as we listen to the words? That, I say again, is the position which it is the duty of every one of us to seek to win for our country. That picture of the mountain of the Lord's house established on the top of the mountains is but a figure of the spiritual elevation which the providential guidance of the past has prepared for our own Church. That cry of the nations as they turn to the centre of universal worship is but a figure of the welcome which, as we trust, shall one day meet the full and open confession of our faith. Hitherto we have, as a nation, veiled, nay, almost dissembled, our convictions; but that shall not be for ever. *Out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem*—the law to discipline and the word to build up. In that short sentence

lies the secret and the fulfilment of a nation's, yes, of our nation's, office. In that short sentence lies the one end to which all the kingdoms of the earth are moving, and for which they are made. In that short sentence lies the charter of all missionary labour, in which I beg you to take part, as you love the empire which inspires you with its splendid achievements, as you love the Church which has enriched you with the treasures of every age, as you love the faith which has united for you earth and heaven, the seen and the unseen, man and God.

### III

*And He turned Him unto His disciples, and said privately, Blessed are the eyes which see the things that ye see : For I tell you, that many prophets and kings have desired to see those things which ye see, and have not seen them ; and to hear those things which ye hear, and have not heard them.*—ST. LUKE X. 23, 24.

THESE words of the Lord may well come to us as an Advent greeting—bearing with them a divine interpretation of the chequered experience of the year which is past, bearing with them a divine encouragement for the year which has just begun.

The words were originally addressed to the first missionaries, to the seventy disciples among others who had just returned with joy from the fulfilment of their charge to prepare the way for the Lord's coming through the cities of the Holy Land. These earliest evangelists had given an account of their work in glad thankfulness. The darker future which their Master saw clearly was hid from them. But as He saw clearly the inevitable sorrow soon to come upon them, as they could not see it, He saw also a blessing in their faith deeper, fuller, richer than they had yet been able to realise. He looked beyond the superficial show to the very heart of things ; and so looking, He could declare those blessed who were, though

they knew it not, to suffer for Him loss, persecution, death.

As the words were once spoken, they are spoken still to the Church in all ages ; as they were once true, they are true still. Nay, I will go further and say that the absolute blessedness which lies in the possession of a divine revelation freshly opened to willing sight may be pronounced upon us more fully now and here than on those over whom the words of benediction were first uttered. Let us not, through any false estimate of what has been taken away and what has been given, forget the endowment of later time. The vision and the understanding of the Gospel cannot but grow wider and clearer as the ages go on. There are, and there always must be until the end, clouds and darkness about the paths of God, but yet the line in which He moves is seen to be luminous as we look back to the source of light. For the moment our own sorrows and difficulties and doubts may appear to be overwhelming, but then it is that we can enter into earlier conflicts with livelier sympathy, and learn from the records of the past that the Truth has gained strength by encountering greater trials than we have to bear.

At first sight indeed, and in regard to that which is outward and obvious, there was little to justify the language in which the Lord raised the actual experience of His humble Galilean followers above that of kings and prophets in the commonwealth of Israel. Those who looked at the surface of things in those days saw the city of God held firmly by the iron grasp of the Roman Emperor ; they saw their own princes aliens ; they saw, saddest of all, a corrupt

priesthood making a base traffic of the very worship of the Temple. If they listened to the loudest voices, they heard stern definitions of ceremonial duties, proud thanksgivings of self-righteousness, mingled perhaps with some sudden outburst of fanatical zeal, or some startling call from the desert.

In all this there was ground only for humiliation and hopelessness, and not for thanksgiving. The Church seemed to have become the world; but still, in the midst of the triumph of worldliness, of the deadening of faith, there was offered to the simple and the child-hearted sights better than Solomon had seen in all his glory, words richer in promise than Isaiah had spoken.

However imperfectly the disciples could as yet apprehend the majesty of Christ's Person, however imperfectly they could anticipate the issue of His work, they yet saw Him move in the face of the leaders of the people with the bearing of authority; they saw Him *going about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil*; they saw Him dispensing the powers of a higher order. *Lord*, they said, *even the demons are subject to us in Thy name*. And as they followed Him, often in *fear and amazement*, they heard the message of the Kingdom—a message in which all that is generous in patriotism becomes contributory to the fulness of a larger life; they heard the universal call to repentance and faith which places all men in a living relation to God, and banishes the dream of inalienable privilege and meritorious service; they heard the voice of blessing follow the common joys and duties of earth.

And as they thus saw and heard, with partial understanding and complete self-surrender, no fore-warnings of suffering and shame and death, which the Lord now joined to His teaching, could shake their confidence in His victory, and in their victory through Him.

We can understand then how, on their return from their first mission, the Lord, as we read, *rejoiced in the Holy Spirit, and thanked the Father that He had hidden these things from the wise, and revealed them unto babes*; and how then, turning to the disciples, He *said privately, Blessed are the eyes which see the things that ye see: For I say unto you, that many prophets and kings desired to see the things which ye see, and saw them not; and to hear the things which ye hear, and heard them not.*

So it was at that first turning-point of Christian revelation. In the immediate prospect of what the world called failure the Lord saw the promise of fulfilment. And, my friends, has not all this, as I have said, a direct application to ourselves? May we not dare to say that in those scenes of outward discouragement and spiritual quickening we have an image of the Christian work at every time, and especially at times of revelation such as that in which we are ourselves placed? A period of sorrow must, in a disordered system, go before a new birth: but the sorrow is not fruitless. To feel the sorrow, to feel that there is much within ourselves, within society, painfully struggling to gain expression, is in itself, if we believe that God is the King of Life, a prophecy of joy that shall be hereafter, though we may not know it. But though we may not

know it, we can meet our dangers as we look on to the end. And there are among us, in our own land, to go no farther, dangers which I would not for one moment underrate. There is the spirit which more and more openly claims to deal with questions of state policy without regard to the sanctions and the obligations of the Faith; there is the spirit which strives to substitute for a frank and fearless love of truth the mechanical repetition of traditional words; there is the spirit which labours to find in the engrossing occupation of outward observances a fellowship with the unseen; there is the spirit which sadly and scornfully declares that the aspirations of religion are illusory, and that a darkness absolutely impenetrable falls over the grave. All this is most true; but none the less I believe, as I have often said here, that through this strange tumult of conflicting forces God is even now showing Himself to us; that Christ is even now coming to us; and that while the Son of Man is arraigned and condemned before earthly tribunals, He is saying to many childly believers: *Blessed are the eyes which see the things that ye see.* Yes, even where Christ is not named we can see tokens of His progress. We can see who He is whom our adversaries unconsciously worship. We can thankfully acknowledge that many great truths have so passed into life that their source is forgotten, and that they are coming back to us with a new power from unlooked-for quarters. No one, for example, will deny now that nations are bound to one another as members of the commonwealth of humanity, each charged with a peculiar office and endowed with corresponding

gifts. No one will deny now that all individual action—all action of the very least among us—has a social value, so that we must live and die for others, for their good or for their harm, beyond the power of reckoning. No one will deny now that we men are closely linked with all the creation of which we are part. No one will deny now, at least in word, that out of these truths consequences flow which cannot but profoundly affect our views of justice and duty and love. And no believer can fail to see that, while they spring directly out of the facts of the Gospel and find their solid support there, they modify our conceptions of its scope, and enable us to enter more deeply than men in earlier times into the mysteries of redemption.

But these lessons of larger sympathy and loftier hope are not for thought only, but for action. And here lies our trial. We do not, I think, any of us—and let me repeat this again and again for my own sake as for yours—bring the great treasures of faith into such close connexion as we should do with ordinary business and thought. We lay them up idly, and run the risk of the Master's reproof. For the blessedness of opportunity lies in the use which is made of it. An opportunity unused, a conviction unrealised, is changed into a sentence of condemnation. And the sentence is the heavier because it carries with it the penalty of insensibility to later impressions. We neglect the feeling which first prompts us to doing, and then the feeling ceases to stir us.

Therefore it is our duty to ask ourselves again and again whether our faith is effective in life ;

whether we apply it, or seek to apply it, to the little anxieties of the passing days. The revelation of the Lord Jesus Christ not only brings harmony to our view of the constitution and destiny of things, but it is capable of inspiring us with a patience of hope and energy of action which nothing else can create. It gives reality to that sense of the brotherhood of nations to which men are reaching forth, even through sanguinary wars, as they have never done before. It gives reality to that conviction of mutual dependence which promises to bring in due time dignity to the humblest service. It gives reality to that instinctive feeling—which some have called the pathetic fallacy—by which we attribute to all about us—"the round ocean, and the living air, and the blue sky," "all objects of all thought"—sympathy with us in the possession of one being. For others such thoughts are nothing more than splendid guesses; but for the Christian they are mysteries—truths shadowed out in the fact that *the Word became flesh*, and he welcomes every discovery which helps him to give greater distinctness and completer unity to the teaching which that fact brings. Men tell us, and they tell us very truly, as I have often said in this place, that our Faith is on its trial—that is, that we who are the messengers, the interpreters, the representatives of the Faith are on our trial. And I do not suppose that we should wish, even if we were able, to refuse the challenge which the statement implies. It is, in other words, an invitation to us to make good that which we have received, that which we are. As Christians we have entrusted to us, so we confess, a

power of fellowship with the unseen inexhaustible in resources of strength ; an assurance of the triumph of good sufficient to spread hope over the dark places of the earth ; a light through death sufficient to show the permanence in the world to come of all that is human, under new conditions. As Christians, therefore, we know that we are furnished, every one of us, with means for hastening the victory of our Lord. The Christian who is not encouraged, nay constrained, by what he believes to look at national questions with a solemn and intense interest ; who is not elevated in the performance of his daily duties—monotonous and trivial as they may seem—by the knowledge that even so he is ministering to his Master ; who does not perceive a glory and a promise under the manifold treasures of nature ; who does not at least unceasingly strive to make such thoughts of his better moments more dominant throughout his whole being ; who does not let it be seen that he is so animated, raised, enlightened, dishonours the Gospel by leaving it untested by life. But if we do work, and help each other to work, in the strength of that fellowship which we recognise with God and with man and with the world ; if we do make it clear that all life is for us a divine ministry ; if we do show that we move with reverence and patient questionings among the wonders which surround us on every side, then we shall assist even gainsayers to feel that our faith brings that which men need—an end for all effort, a consecration for all labour, a blessing on the boldest ventures of hope.

Some perhaps may wish that their lot had fallen

in times less troubled than our own by restless and overbold searchings for truth, less distracted by the conflicts of wayward, if generous, aspirations. But we have in the thoughts which our Faith confirms to us—thoughts of a divine kinsmanship and of a divine destiny—that which makes each difficulty an occasion. We look out upon the world, upon society, upon the Church—upon the world bound together in all its discordant elements by a necessity of connexion, upon society grievously torn by selfishness and crime, upon the Church divided and distracted—and then we look to Christ. That look brings confidence and knowledge; and as He makes known to us ever more of His Person and of His work, in many parts and in many fashions, we hear again from Him the benediction of faith: *Blessed are the eyes which see the things that ye see*—blessed for the larger vision of the ways of God which has been opened in eighteen Christian centuries; blessed in the conditions which multiply the fruitfulness of individual endeavour; blessed even by the fresh sense of the magnitude of the evils against which you have to contend; blessed in the call to work, in the field for work, in the strength for work: *for many prophets and kings have desired to see those things which ye see, and have not seen them; and to hear those things which ye hear, and have not heard them.*

That blessing, my friends, is ours by the gift of God; at least, that blessing may be ours—an inspiration for life when it opens before us, a comfort still when we feel that our work is drawing to its close.

The words were first spoken, as I said, to the seventy disciples whom the Lord sent before His

face to prepare for His coming. Our thoughts turn to other seventy disciples, charged no less directly, no less solemnly, with Christ's message—the seventy from these sister parishes who received the Bishop's blessing here a few weeks since, and were confirmed, strengthened for their life's work. Let me pray you then, as many of these seventy disciples as are here to-night, to strive together to fulfil your vows, to look to yourselves, to look to your fellows, to look to your parish, to look to God ; to offer, as each can offer, to those about you the witness of a sober and holy life, sobered and hallowed by Christ's help. Seventy disciples striving together in Christ's name, what can they not do ?

Yet one word more. Our offertory to-day is, as usual on Advent Sunday, for Foreign Missions. I have nothing new to add to the pleas which I have often urged on behalf of this object. For many this is the one occasion where they can take part outwardly in the work ; and any one who has known in any degree the blessedness of which the Lord speaks, must wish to make known to others what has brought joy or hope at least to himself. The cause, then, in its very nature is its own advocate, and the cause has been in a peculiar sense committed to England from the character of her empire—may I not say to the English Church from the purity and breadth of her teaching ? So let us each as we have the power—what that may be God knows—take our little part now in fulfilling the charge to preach the Gospel to every creature, not grudgingly or of necessity ; for God, as we have heard to-day, loveth a cheerful giver, and blesses his least gift.

## IV

*And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth.*—ST. JOHN i. 14.

THERE is one peculiarity of St. John's Gospel which must have struck those who at this season have endeavoured to gather for themselves from the different Evangelists the scattered details of the Lord's Birth—that Christmas tidings on which our thoughts are still fixed. Like St. Mark, he tells us nothing of the outward circumstances of that miracle of miracles: nothing of the angel-message by which it was announced; nothing of the angel-song by which it was welcomed; nothing of the shepherds who were Christ's first heralds; nothing of the Wise Men who were Christ's first worshippers. But he is unlike St. Mark in this that he does not pass on at once to the ministry of the Lord. He goes back even to the beginning—the beginning of this order in which we live—and connects with that the final manifestation of God among men. *In the beginning was the Word*; and then, after a brief record of His work as the Life and Light of men, he adds: *And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth.*

And it is to this last clause that I wish to turn your thoughts this morning. It falls in with the present season. It directs us to consider not so much the outward fact of the Nativity as its eternal meaning,—just as we cling still to the feelings of Christmas though the actual presence of our Christmas Day is past. It comes as a later revelation of a known truth. In one short sentence St. John here completes the teaching which the other Evangelists began. To use the figure which was used of him seventeen hundred years ago, he animates the form with life, the body with spirit. In one short sentence, as we are enabled to penetrate into its depths by the help of the Spirit of God, he gives the single sufficient answer to the hardest riddles of our nature. Every word teems with a wealth of meaning.

*The Word was made flesh.* THE WORD. In that one title lies the whole history of earlier ages. From the Creation God had spoken to man. This was the creature's highest privilege that even when fallen he could hold converse with his Maker. God spoke to him, and that not in mere fragmentary utterances, but, as it were, in a connected story. *The Word of the Lord* came to patriarch and lawgiver and king and prophet, and it was felt to be the same Word. One purpose, one law bound all the ages together. And just as the *Name of God* is used to express this character as revealed to us, so the *Word of God* presents Him in His continued manifestation, as He is ever communing with and guiding men. In this age of books we lose much of the personal dignity of

words: for us they are written symbols rather than living signs. But it was not always so. When St. John wrote the same term was used for "word" and for "reason." Both were felt to be essentially the same. Speech is but reason in action: reason is but silent speech. And thus we can dimly realise the grandeur of the idea which presents to us the Son as the Reason and the Word of the Father—as God creating, and visiting the world which He created. And this Word—this Son of God, who *was in the beginning with God—by whom all things were made—who was the light of men*, sustaining our whole frame, penetrating our inmost soul—*was made*, as at this time, or rather *became*, by a voluntary act of infinite love, *flesh*. It is as if St. John would make the contrast as clear as possible, and show us at once the fulness of Christ's tenderness. He does not say *The Word became Man*, but *The Word became flesh*. He took to Himself our nature as liable to weariness and sorrow and death. All human differences are as nothing when seen in the light of this truth. As Christ shared the nature of all, before God all men, as men, are equal. If He was made like unto us, then we may also through Him be raised into His likeness. By that one act our whole race was ennobled. We are declared to be of a heavenly lineage. Because *He lives, we shall live also*.

But this is not all. *The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us*. The Nativity was but the beginning of a long work. The Son of God not only came as man, but He grew as man grows. He passed through the stages of human development,

*tempted in all points* even as we are. He consecrated not our nature only, but our life. *He dwelt among us.* He shared the transitory joys and griefs—the spirit of righteous anger and the spirit of thankful exaltation—which belong to us. *He tabernacled among us,*—to preserve the idea of the original, which carries us back to the time when the people of Israel wandered as pilgrims in the wilderness, and the visible glory of the Lord rested when they should rest and guided their forward path, the sign and type of God's abiding presence. And even so it was with Christ. He tabernacled with us, and the faithful beheld His glory. He marked out the path of life. He hallowed each resting-place upon the way. The material splendour of the fiery pillar was changed into a spiritual beacon; but it was still clear with the light of heaven—clear to the loving. But even here, as of old time, that which is the light of the Christian is the thick gloom which enwraps the unbelieving—the thick gloom or even the consuming fire.

For Christ came, as St. John tells us, *full of grace and truth*—not of grace only, but also of truth. He cannot deny Himself. We need mercy and we need guidance, and He offers both—truth to those who sue for help, and help to those who lose the truth. But for the impenitent and the disobedient the Gospel has no blessing. The presence of Christ is a cloud and darkness to these, while it gives light by night to those. He who quickened the love of sinners into devotion and raised the questionings of the timid teacher into faith, denounced woe with-

out mercy against the self-righteous and hypocrite. He came that the thoughts of many hearts might be revealed ; and even the full hymns of this Christmas morning may be the notes of our own condemnation. It is nothing, or worse than nothing, to hang over the manger at Bethlehem unless we worship there. The bent knee and bowed head and beating heart are our truest homage. This we can all render, rich and poor, wise and simple, one with another, in the devout thankfulness of adoration. Here all gifts, all minds, all souls are without preference and without superiority. In the contemplation of this mystery of mysteries one prayer befits us all—a prayer which was crowned with blessing when it was first uttered, and which is powerful in any age to win the grace of God : *Lord, I believe ; help Thou mine unbelief.*

*The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth.* This is our Christmas message, telling of God visiting men, that we all may know that we too are partakers of the divine nature ; of God dwelling with men, that we all may know that every scene and part of life has been sanctified by His life ; of grace, lest we should faint in the retrospect of our failings and the consciousness of our weakness ; of truth, lest we should presume on infinite love and disregard the holy laws of light. This is our Christmas message, and if we carry it with us to our work and pleasure, it will blend both in a calm and quiet joy which no man can take from us. The Word of the Lord came to men of old, and by it they were made valiant and pure and fearless. It comes to us

now on this glad morning no longer impersonal, but in the majesty of a sinless Redeemer, that we through Him may be perfect as He is perfect, holy as He is holy.

A true instinct has led men to connect Christmas with notions of social union. The scattered family now, if ever, is gathered round one hearth. Now, if ever, dim forms from the past are felt to complete the circle which time has broken. Now, if ever, we know something of that energy of the soul which can embrace with a living love the absent and the departed. But this social union is but a faint shadow of Christ's union. Christ came as an infant, that we may welcome the least and weakest as His children; He came in the form of a slave, that the humblest among us may be assured of His sympathy; He came with the greatest signs, that the noblest may know that he has no gift which cannot be consecrated to God. Thus the lesson of Christmas is one of universal fellowship—of fellowship not with those only to whom we are bound by natural ties of birth or sympathy, but with all for whom Christ died: with the poor outcast to whom the merry sounds of Christmas seem a bitter mockery; with the reckless prodigal who is still rioting in a far country, forgetful of his Father's home. Love grows by using. The better we love one the more we shall love all; and if our hearts are ready, God will make us this Christmas-tide the ministers of His love, to bear gladness to the mourner and comfort to the broken-hearted.

*The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us.* This divine message rightly marks the Holy

Table where even now Christ is waiting to receive us. In the strength of this assurance we are all called to realise once more our communion with one another and with God. Let us listen to the invitation if we have been deaf too often; let us listen more heedfully if we have ever caught before broken phrases of the Gospel. For us too there is still a choir of heavenly voices, for us a guiding star. Let us listen only and follow—follow ere it be yet too late. In that grand sacrament, the symbol of our Christian warfare, the pledge of our Christian strength, the union is spiritually perfected which we labour painfully to gain in our daily life. In that all differences, all jealousies, all selfish hopes, all petty ambitions vanish. In that we see again, as in some sure sign, the mystery of Bethlehem—a glorious presence plain to the eye of faith but hidden from the world. God's commands and promises are for all. If we doubt, this day may convince us. And would that all in whose heart His Spirit now speaks with gentlest influence would draw near and seek from Him, according to His Word, the consecration of their earthly joys, the full blessings and the calm peace of this holy season!

*The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us*—that is the beginning of St. John's Gospel; and mark its close: *This was written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life in His name.*

## V

*And it came to pass, as the angels were gone away from them into heaven, the shepherds said one to another, Let us now go even unto Bethlehem, and see this thing which is come to pass, which the Lord hath made known unto us.—ST. LUKE ii. 15.*

THIS was the first comment on the news of the great Christmas morning. It shows us how resolve must pass into action. It expresses the spirit with which we must hold ourselves in readiness to meet the Saviour, who still comes to us from year to year with new messages of love to meet new wants. Therefore it is that we are gathered here amidst the fresh emblems of joy ; therefore it is that every voice of praise and triumph is mingled in our Services ; therefore it is that Christ's Table is spread before us with His holy Feast, that we also, like the shepherds in old time, may go now in spirit even unto Bethlehem, to find there a Saviour and a King.

You will remember the circumstances under which the words were spoken. On such a day the words of the preacher must be simple and few. The festival itself is the great sermon. I wish, then, only to commend the text to you as gathering up in a practical way some Christmas thoughts which we all feel alike. The Angel of the Lord had delivered his glad tidings ; the heavenly host had chanted their

divine hymn ; darkness had followed the great light ; silence had followed the angelic music. But the eyes on which the glory had broken were not dim ; the ears on which the strain had fallen were not dull. At once, without one doubt, the poor men who were privileged first to hear the Gospel of the poor hastened to show their faith by action. *Let us now go, they said one to another, even unto Bethlehem, and see this thing which is come to pass, which the Lord hath made known to us.*

Here then lies the point to which I wish first to call your attention. The shepherds give us an example of Christian decision. They went at once. They might have made many plausible excuses to justify at least delay. They might have said : "These bright thoughts and sounds are but the images and echoes of what is passing in our own minds ; the chequered shadows of the long night have cheated us with visionary forms ; the desolate stillness of the weary watch has grown vocal by the touch of hope unsatisfied. We will wait for the clear day. It will be time enough, if need be, to seek Bethlehem then." Or they might have said : "Such a message, if it be indeed real, cannot be for us—for us simple shepherds, whose homage can add nothing to the glory of a king, whose power can do nothing to establish his dominion. It must be by accident that we have heard the voice which was addressed to others who can better interpret its meaning and fulfil its purpose. We will wait for the judgment of the wise. It will be time enough, if need be, to seek Bethlehem then."

Or, again, they might have said : "The marks of

the divine announcement are, it is true, not to be questioned, and they have been manifested to us ; but for the present we have our proper work to do. Can we leave our flocks untended in the wilderness ? Can we desert our post to go in quest of something which if true must also be abiding ? We will wait till we are free. It will be time enough, if need be, to seek Bethlehem then."

They might have said this, and much more like this, with a great show of reason ; but the loving and trustful heart is slow to argue and swift to do. Faith outruns calculation. The path might be dark and steep and rugged, the way might be long, but the shepherds thought only of the divine impulse and of the divine end. And so it was that they were allowed first to look upon the accomplishment of man's redemption. The signs which they had witnessed were ratified by facts. The words which they had spoken were treasured in the Virgin Mother's heart. The work which they had left for a time was hallowed by a new nobility. *They returned*, we read, *glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen.*

And for us, my friends, all this is a living parable. The words of the shepherds will come, if we give heed to them, as a trial for ourselves. There is no one of us who does not think that if he had been watching in the fields on that holy night, and had seen the glorious vision and heard the angelic chorus, he would have gone with great joy to Bethlehem. But when what we read is translated into the forms of our own experience, it may be that we are slow to prove that the spirit of the shepherds is indeed

our own. We forget their difficulties when we think of their reward. We forget that the manner in which God reveals Himself must change while the trial is the same. We forget that He has a present voice, a present work, a present test for us as we stand now before Him. For to us on this Christmas morning the glad tidings which the shepherds heard comes not less magnificently heralded than to them by the gathered witness of eighteen centuries of faith. To us, on the other hand, doubt and distrust and cares suggest the excuses which they set aside. And to us may God grant the same mind which He granted to them, that we too may say one to another, responsive to the heavenly call, without hesitation and without reserve—*Let us now go even unto Bethlehem.* Let us now go even unto Bethlehem that we may find Christ, that we may serve Christ that we may carry away thence the thought of Christ to our pleasure and to our work.

*Let us now go even unto Bethlehem,* that we may find Christ. The words are still as they were of old time a profession of faith. Christ does not show Himself in the place where we should have been inclined to look for Him; He does not show Himself in the guise in which we should have been most ready to acknowledge Him. "Can it be at Bethlehem," the shepherds might have asked in old time, "a poor and forgotten village, and not at Jerusalem, that the Lord will manifest Himself? Can it be as *a babe lying in a manger* that He will first appear who is to be the Saviour of His people?" Again and again the questions are rising in new forms, and we still feel it hard to make a past

experience our own. Self-sacrifice, humility, patience are glorious when they have gathered round them the halo of time. But for the present they are grievous. God's ways are not even now as our ways. If we are to find Christ we must look for Him where we should not expect naturally to see Him. We must lay aside our pride if we are indeed to welcome the Son who is given to us to-day. His first coming is the image of His comings still. He comes to us in the lowly places of the earth, and in the shape of the most helpless. He comes to us in the lonely, outlying cottage ; He comes to us in the crowded and neglected suburb ; He comes to us in the poor, the naked, the hungry. He comes to us in the penitent, the prisoner, the outcast. We have but to go a little way from our own homes to find some Bethlehem—some poor unnoticed spot—which Christ left heaven to glorify by His Presence. We have but to open our eyes and we shall see Him this morning very near to us, even as He once was, *a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief*—ready to receive even from us whom He saves the offerings of grateful love.

So *Let us go now even unto Bethlehem*, in the next place, that we may serve Christ. The words are not only a profession of faith, they are also a profession of devotion. He who has found Christ will not rest till he has done something for Him. It may seem little that we can do, as we reckon great and small, but the soul rejects such measurement. The shepherds had no treasures of gold or frankincense or myrrh, like the Wise Men, but they had hearts to feel and lips to express their feelings : they could tell

what they had heard and seen, and their words were blessed. The earthly gifts soon perished in the using, but these words *Mary kept*, as we read, *and pondered in her heart*. We are indeed for the most part endowed with an abundance of earthly goods, and of these we shall thankfully offer part to Christ if we have found Him. But if it be not so—if we can spare nothing from a store which hardly meets our natural wants—even then this Christmas morning will not leave us without the opportunity of rendering a tribute to our Lord. We all have that which the shepherds had. We all have in part like them known the power and the love of Christ. This we can ourselves in turn declare to some one near to us who is in trouble or sorrow or sin. The tender look remains to cheer a lonely sufferer when the messenger of love has departed; the kind word checks the current of repining when reason is unavailing; the silent prayer is a spring of secret amendment when remonstrance is despised. At all times these offerings are within our reach; but to-day can we be content till we have made some one happier, brighter, better in the name and for the sake of Christ? To-day His words have a meaning which we cannot mistake: *Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these My brethren, ye have done it unto Me*. To-day we may claim to recognise Him in His great humility, and so only shall we be allowed to know the transforming power of His divine Presence.

For, once again, *Let us now go even unto Bethlehem*, that we may carry thence the thought of Christ to our pleasure and to our work. The words,

which are, as we have seen, first a profession of faith and then a profession of devotion, are also a profession of hope. If we have found Christ in His lowly resting-place, if we have served Him in the person of one whom He came to raise and cheer and save, we shall have learnt the secret of a noble and a happy life. The shepherds, after they had welcomed the royal child, returned to their common duty; but they returned with the fulness of divine praise in their hearts and on their lips. They knew at last that they had very near to them a Saviour—God veiled in flesh—and by that knowledge all earthly ministry was shown in its true light. To recognise the love of God in the infant of Bethlehem is now as then to acknowledge the divine inheritance of all humanity. The abiding thought of that awful truth once manifested to men does not check the energy of work, but rather supports it, by the assurance that Christ works with us, so far as we work truly. The thrilling sense of that amazing descent from heaven to earth once realised does not stop the natural flow of pleasure, but adds to that which is unstable and fleeting a power of unchangeable joy. Let Christmas Day be felt to be, what it most surely is, the birthday of a King who is not ashamed to call the poorest man His brother, and it must be for all a day of joy. Let it be to us what it most surely may be, and its influence will attend us throughout the coming year. It cannot be a vain thing for us to have felt and known that God has visited our earth and lived our life and borne our temptations. And if it be granted us to wipe away to-day one tear from some dimmed eye, to remove one stain from

some soiled conscience, to bring one ray of light to some darkened soul, to remove one misconception, to forgive one wrong—and whose experience does not give him scope for the exercise of this God-like privilege?—we shall know, as perhaps we have never yet known, that it is good for us to *go*—where we are called by the divine voice—*even unto Bethlehem*—to see Christ, and confess Him in weakness, that hereafter we may be made partakers of His glory. To this end we must *go*: something must be risked, something must be left. The confidence of faith, the resolve of faith, the activity of faith are necessary for us as for the Judæan shepherds, if we are to gain for our lives the power of the Christmas tidings. To the last, all our thoughts will fall infinitely below the apprehension of the mystery which we proclaim; all our efforts will fall infinitely below the strength which it assures to us. If we could grasp its meaning, if we could wield its power, the world itself would be an easy conquest. As it is, while we falter and fail, Christ is ready to raise us to a higher knowledge, and to endow us with a more prevailing energy. We may not forget that on this Christmas morning He who “was as at this time born for us” is even here waiting to give to us Himself as our spiritual sustenance. The Holy Communion continues to us in some degree the blessing and the trial of the Incarnation. In that, under the commonest form, the divinest gift lies hid. In that we have the sure law of the divine working. In that the angelic hymn once again calls us to deeds of trust and love. And may God grant to us grace to know Christ there and to receive Him by faith! May He enable

us in this sense also to *go now even unto Bethlehem*—the house of heavenly bread! May He enable us to find Christ there; to serve Him with active devotion; to bear away with us for all life the sure conviction of His Presence, and the abiding support of His glorified Humanity!

## VI

*Wherefore thou art no more a servant, but a son ; and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ.*—GALATIANS iv. 7.

THE week which has just passed has been specially distinguished by the number of festivals appointed to be observed in it. Round Christmas Day other days are grouped, to remind us how the Nativity is of present interest to us, how Christ is ever born afresh in the souls of all who live and die for Him ; and the continuation of the use of the same Collect to-day leads us still to dwell on the thoughts which that holy season suggests. And there is nothing strange in this. The birth of Christ is, indeed, the new birth of the world, the spring of all our hopes, the power whereby the secrets of our hearts are laid open ; and to see the fruits of the Incarnation realised in the lives of saints is at once a warning and a comfort to us—a warning lest we should think that the Christian has now no fierce warfare to wage ; a comfort lest we should faint under its pressure. It was for this reason that examples were set before us so widely differing as those of St. Stephen and St. John : that whether in word or thought, whether in spreading the truth with zeal or in guarding it with jealousy, we might

learn how youth can be consecrated to God's service and age blessed by His power. And even thus the lesson had been incomplete unless we had seen how the Holy Innocents were enrolled in the army of martyrs ; for in their glory all pride is abased. In them we behold the meek, the lowly, the simple placed side by side with him whom Jesus loved. In them these words of our Lord found fulfilment by anticipation, that His disciples must become as little children.

And how great a blessing, my brethren, is attached to that command. And how great love hath the Father bestowed upon us, that we should be called children of God. For the Christian is not a child only, but a child of God. He has a Father and a home in heaven. Here for a time he is under restraint and discipline ; but when the appointed day shall come, then will he enter on an inheritance which shall never fail.

Yet in this we may see how our sense is blunted by familiarity. We have been so long accustomed to speak of God as our Father, that the ideas which the words involve seem a necessary part of our nature. The title has become synonymous with the very name of God. But it was not always so. There is a famous passage in which an ancient heathen writer sums up very briefly all that wisdom could find out of Him. "The Father of all things," he says, "cannot be discovered ; or if discovered, He cannot be made known to all." He knew, then, of no heavenly Father to listen to the sorrows of the poor, to enlighten the mind of the ignorant, to bind up the wounds of the broken-hearted ; but

unto us Christ hath declared Him, and the first prayer of a Christian child proclaims the truth which wise men failed to grasp.

And what, then, do we mean by this truth? how is it realised? and what are its practical results?

When we speak of God as our Father, we claim to be His sons, and as a seal of this we appeal rightly to our baptism. But though this be an unspeakable blessing, let us rightly apprehend its character. There is a danger lest we misunderstand the nature of the blessing which is assured to us as partakers in the Christian covenant. We are placed in a new relation to Him, but our constitution is not changed. We are introduced into a new order of being, and brought within the reach of new influences, but yet this is not in itself sufficient to ensure the preservation of our high estate or the right use of our privileges. Birth is no pledge of the continuance of life, much less of mature and perfect growth. Though it is the condition which makes life and growth possible, they are not results necessarily springing out of it.

This will appear yet more clearly if we notice in what it is that Holy Scripture places our sonship to God—even in our union with Christ. For He Himself has taught us how man may break the connexion which God hath blessed; how branches of the true Vine may prove unfaithful, and in the end be cut off and cast into the fire.

But while we do not find any encouragement for presumption in this title of *sons of God*, it is indeed full of joy and peace for as many as strive heartily to realise its full meaning. Because we are

sons, God sent forth the Spirit of Christ into our hearts, that we might use our privilege and address Him as our Father. As members of Christ we know that His works are in some mysterious sense our works, and His righteousness our righteousness. Do we tremble before difficulties? In Him we can do all things. Do we linger in doubt and perplexity? In Him is perfect light. Do we feel that we have wandered far from God? In Him, and in His blood, are we brought near. Do we shrink from God's presence? In Him we have boldness and access. Do we mourn for those whom we have loved? In Him is the resurrection. Do we sink in death? In Him is life eternal. In every circumstance of our being—in all the struggles of self-discipline, in all the trials of society—this sense of a true union with Christ is the very ground of our confidence and the source of our strength.

Thus we see what our sonship does for us and what it does not do: how it places us in a new position, of which we must, by God's help, make use. And thus we pass to our second point—how we give reality to the new relation. In this there is need of great endurance, of watching, of labour. In God's dealings with us all is orderly and progressive. So it was with regard to His people in old time. So it is with regard to His children now. Long years of discipline and labour must try the heart before Christ can be fully formed in it. But with what cheerfulness and patience will the son of God wait the decision of a Father's will. Though he is a son, he will remember that in one sense he is a servant too—a servant of righteousness,

a servant of Christ, a servant of God. And it was in this title above all that the apostles rejoiced, for it told them of the mighty work which they had to do both for themselves and for others. And in the same titles we too, my brethren, may find a fresh hope for the redemption of our own bodies and an all-powerful motive for Christian work among our fellow-men.

Let me say a few words on each of these points—on the results of our sonship slowly, painfully, trustfully wrought out in us individually, and made active in our dealings with others.

As to ourselves: In the Epistle to the Hebrews we read that it became Him who brought many sons to glory to make the Captain of their Salvation perfect through suffering. And do we not see in these words the true explanation of all the doubts and trials, of all the assaults within and without, by which the Christian is harassed? The life of Christ is the pattern to which his life is made conformable. He has to be made fit for the inheritance laid up for him, and to this end he has to be renewed from day to day—ever approaching by God's help more nearly to that likeness, ever becoming by the influences of the Spirit more worthy of his name. His life is not a bondage, but a progress to freedom. His sufferings are not the punishment of a slave, but the chastisement of a son. In all he learns to see a Father's hand and to recognise a Father's love.

And the same thought which supports us in our sorrow should sober us in our joy. For as sons of God we must remember that our gladness should ever reflect a heavenly light. And as we can do all

things to God's glory, so should we seek in all things to realise His presence. For there is indeed no limit fixed in Holy Scripture to the extent of our Christian duties or of our Christian powers. We are told to be blameless children—holy as God is holy, perfect as God is perfect. And these very commands are given us to assure us of the infinite love of God to those who cast themselves on Him as an Almighty Father. To explain the words away or to narrow their force is only to doubt His truth or to distrust His power.

But though the Christian has a mighty task before him in self-training, this, as we have said, is not all. As a son of God he is a member of a vast household, and consequently bound to His brethren by countless ties of affection and duty. His sonship is not a power for himself alone: it is a power also in his action towards others. And if the title of Father has become meaningless to us from frequent use, what shall I say of that holy title of brethren by which we are all united in Christ. Is it not too often a mere idle phrase, used without any sense of its depth or any regard to its consequences? When we hear of some fearful crime committed even in this Christian land, do we indeed think that the poor wretch who has brought upon himself the just vengeance of our laws claims brotherhood with us: and that for him also Christ died? When we pass along a crowded thoroughfare, and watch the busy stream of men hastening to their proper work, and bearing its image stamped on their eager faces, do we think that each one of these claims brotherhood with us: and that for him also Christ died? It is, indeed,

a hard matter to gain any practical feeling of the union of man with man in Christ, and yet we cannot fulfil our Christian work as sons of God in any right way unless we seek by His help to realise its meaning: to sympathise with the cares of the powerful and wealthy—to lighten the sufferings of the afflicted and poor—to bear truth to the ignorant—to mourn over the failings of others as though they were our own, and to welcome their success with unaffected joy.

Our common brotherhood must then become to sons of God a ground of deepest sympathy, and is it not also a ground of surest hope? With what joy was the teaching of our Lord received in old time by outcasts and sinners; and shall it be less powerful now? He came to gather into one the children of God scattered throughout the world, and shall He not now by us continue the work which He has begun? He died for the sins of the whole world; and will He not be ready to give to all the inheritance which He purchased with His own blood? Even if the prodigal has claimed his birthright and left his home and squandered his substance in riotous living—even if at last he has joined himself willingly to a citizen of a far country—a Father is still waiting to welcome his return, to place again upon his finger the ring of honour and clothe him afresh with the robe of righteousness.

The fault is all our own if our faith seem lifeless and our profession bring no fruit? The wickedness and ignorance and misery by which we are dismayed in this Christian land are an accusation of our indolence and not a proof of the inefficiency

of the Gospel. If our hearts fail us at the sight of wider distress, let us ask if we have done all that which lies in our power, each in our own circle, to spread glad tidings of a Saviour. If we have even made any serious effort to do it? Or rather, if we do not too often shut up our sympathies, when they are most sincere, within our own hearts? If we do not too often not only fail to throw down the walls of partition which divide class from class and man from man, but ourselves make the separation more complete and lasting? If we do not too often by our works deny that we have any common Father while we call upon Him in our daily prayers? If we do not too often claim to be called sons of God while we are not peacemakers, and sons of the Highest while we are not merciful?

But let us not therefore cast away the title because we have proved ourselves unworthy of it. Nay, rather let us cling to it with more zeal and cherish it with more affection, for while it witnesses against us in the past, it is as a message of comfort for the time to come. It tells us of the true source of our error, and holds out to us the perfect pattern of charity. It is at once a test by which we may prove our sincerity and a pledge whereby we may anticipate our success. For hereby we know that we love the brethren by the love of God that is in us. Without this filial love the common impulses of sentiment will fail: with it weakness shall be made strong, and Christ Himself will not be ashamed to call them brethren who have sought in feebleness, though still in faith, to do His work and extend the glory of His name.

Still even to the last something will be wanting to complete the fulness of our sonship. Even to the last there will be evil within us and misery without. Even to the last death will remain to proclaim the presence and the penalty of sin. But when the end shall have come, then in that kingdom of heaven for the advent of which we pray from day to day, all that shall be accomplished of which our present joys and our present works are but faint anticipations. Then the full meaning of our new relation to God shall be known and realised. Then the very title of children of God, full though it be of all peace and hope, shall be inadequate to convey an image of our bliss. *Now are we children of God, but it doth not yet appear what we shall be : but we know that, when He shall appear, we shall be like Him ; for we shall see Him as He is.* Then we shall bear the image of a glorified Lord, as we have borne the image of a suffering Saviour. Then the world with which we have battled during a life-long struggle shall be made subject to His power. Then the influence of our blessedness shall extend to all creation, which even now is waiting in travail-pain for the manifestation of the sons of God. Then all things shall share the blessing of man, as in old time they shared his curse. And at length will be made known to us what eye hath not seen nor ear heard, even that which God hath prepared for them that love Him.

Such are some of the thoughts as to our divine sonship which are suggested to me by the happy services of to-day. They may by God's blessing follow us through life—to cheer, to rouse, to strengthen : they may remain a living power with

them who shall hereafter bear our names and carry forward to a riper fulfilment that which we have begun. We cannot measure the love of God or track out all its workings. But we know that all symbols of human affection must fall short of that boundless compassion, and if the child brings to an earthly home the fulness of joy, shall it be that our heavenly Father welcomes less tenderly the son who recognises, however late, that he is a son, and claims his blessing? Not so, my brethren—let me use the sacred name—not so: the prayer of the son shall never be unanswered; that prayer is the voice of God's Spirit, who knoweth our needs even before we shape our petitions. Let us listen now how that voice is prompting each one of us, and welcome the words which it teaches us to utter; let us gather them into one short effort of supreme devotion, and that will leave us stronger, purer, nearer to God as grateful sons to a loving Father.

## VII

*And he called His name Jesus.*—ST. MATTHEW i. 25.

ALL custom and instinct consecrates the beginning and the close of a year to kind wishes and fresh resolves. We feel at such a season as this that a marked space of irrecoverable time lies closed behind us, and we look forward to a new course for work and thought as yet unchequered by failure. To-day is, as it were, the eve of our common birthday. Sorrow and regret may have prevailed yesterday, but to-day we are full of energy and hope. New purposes, new plans, new resolutions fill our minds. If we have been unsuccessful hitherto, it seems that success is again possible. The light of Christmas brightens forward into a new dawn. To-day the good wish which ever lives in the inmost soul finds expression. To-day we give and gain strength by words of true sympathy. To-day happiness is on the lips of all, and if we turn to God, He will place it in our hearts. And so our Church points us again to-day to the birth of Christ, and in the emphatic record of His name meets us with a voice of comfort for the past, with a voice of greeting for the coming year, and it is to that name that I wish now by God's help to fix your thoughts.

In the midst of all other greetings our Church also meets us to-day by anticipation with a New Year's wish, glorious and sure, even if it be chastened with thoughts of sacrifice. To-day we celebrate the admission of Christ, our pattern and representative, into covenant with God, according to the rites of His chosen people. As on this day He received that Name which contains the sum of all our confidence. For us as on this day He was made subject to the Law, that in Him we may fulfil its spirit. For us He was called Jesus—the Lord our Saviour—that we may look to Him in all sorrows and losses and dangers. This, then, is what our Church says to us on this New Year's morning: Remember now, at the outset of your labour, that you too are devoted to God, not without suffering, since you share the sufferings of Christ. Remember—and no blessing can go further than this—that He whose name you bear, and to whose service you are pledged, has called Jesus the Lord our Saviour. Remember Him, in your coming work, and by the sign and in the power of that holy name you shall be more than conquerors.

*He called His name Jesus.* To Jewish ears there was nothing necessarily striking in the name. It was borne by at least one Christian in the apostolic age, as we know from the New Testament, and was not even rare. It is indeed nothing more than the Greek form of the Hebrew name Joshua, which is still common among us. But to those who looked deeper, to those who, like Mary, pondered the signs of God's working in their hearts, even that familiar name may well have spoken, as it speaks to

us, of victory and redemption dimly shadowed forth in times of old. Nothing, indeed, is trivial when God speaks. A word or even a letter, as we shall read to-morrow in the case of the patriarch Abraham, may be charged with a mystery. And so this common name Joshua—Jesus—bears with it the living memorial of past deliverances and the certain assurance of eternal aid. Let us only listen to the records of the Bible, and that name, at which all things in heaven and earth shall bow, may be to us a watchword of joy and help through the year to come, a token of mercy and love for the year which has drawn to its close.

*He called His name Jesus—Joshua—the Lord our Saviour.* Two men above all others in old time bore the name, and bearing it were permitted by God to present some traits of the Saviour of the world. One appears at the beginning and the other at the close of the divine history of the earthly Canaan. We first read of Joshua the son of Nun, the great captain; and then of Joshua the son of Josedech, the great high priest. By position and office these men were as widely separated as they were in time. But both witnessed to the great truth which the name contained. Both, in the midst of opposition within and without, presented to the world the Lord as the Saviour. Both, as prophets in action, proclaimed that when all else was changed, this promise was unchangeable and eternal. And now, speaking to us from an almost forgotten age, these two namesakes of Christ will serve to fix in our minds, by God's blessing, the ideas which I would connect with our Lord's earthly name as one

lesson for this day, which stands between the New and Old.

*And Moses called Oshea the son of Nun Jehoshua.* Such are the pregnant words with which the sacred historian closes the first notice of the future leader of Israel—the Jesus of the Exodus. It was not the man who should save the people, but Jehovah through the man. And why should I tell of the fulfilment of the sign? Faithful among the faithless, Joshua saw the terrible sons of Anak in the promised land without dismay; and when the people wept he said, *Fear them not, the Lord is with us.* In the strength of that faith he led their sons across Jordan. The walls of Jericho fell before him. Only sin for a moment checked the progress of his victorious army. Five kings combined against him, and the very powers of nature obeyed his word that he might show that *the Lord God fought for Israel.* A noble repose closed a course of valiant action. *The land rested from war; and the people said unto Joshua, The Lord our God will we serve, and His voice will we obey.* The great captain won peace by conflict, and confirmed faith by deeds of might.

And is not all this an image of the work of Jesus, the Captain of our Salvation? He too is leading a great host, in which we all have been solemnly enrolled, to a heavenly country. Giant passions and ancient prejudices, foes without and weaknesses within, threaten our progress; but in all our trouble and terror, when we approach a task which we have no adequate forces to fulfil, when we face an enemy by whom we have been foiled before, He still says,

*Fear not : the Lord is with you.* He has suffered every temptation that can assail us, that we may know that He can help us when we are tempted. Look back upon His childhood, if you would learn humility ; on His silent life, if you would learn patience ; on His ministry, if you would learn devotion ; on His death, if you would learn sacrifice. Look back on His miracles, if you would see the sacraments of a redemption accomplished ; on His Resurrection, if you would know the pledge of an atonement realised. Look back on what has been, and look within at what Christ is still waiting to do. There is not a sign of old time which may not find its counterpart now : there is not a peril of old time which does not beset us now. We cannot see the full dimensions of the conflict till we are removed from it ; but, each in our own hearts, we are conscious that powers of good and evil are waging unceasing strife. Every act which we do, every resolution which we make, reveals their antagonism. It may be that we are preparing to-day for a new and more courageous warfare. Let us then be sure that we are not alone. The very purpose is of God ; and we have a leader whose eye never grows dim and whose arm never fails. He has seen the land towards which we are struggling. He has conquered the foes whom we shall meet. In token that we should not shrink before our adversary or faint in the hour of battle, *His name was called Jesus*—the Lord our Saviour.

This, then, is one picture : Jesus the great Captain. But there is another : Jesus the great High Priest. *I lifted up mine eyes again, and looked . . . and,*

*behold, the angel showed me Joshua the High Priest standing before the Angel of the Lord, and Satan standing at his right hand to resist him.* Such was the vision of Zechariah when the sad remnant of the Babylonish captivity came again to occupy the inheritance of their fathers and raise the sanctuary which had fallen. The proud days of conquest and dominion were over. Weary and wasted and sin-stained, the children of the patriarchs hung on the precarious help of a foreign power. The land which was once peopled by mighty warriors, and guarded by fenced cities, and flowing with milk and honey, was a lonely wilderness. The wild battle was over, and now there was the sad silence of desolation. Yet even so there was one to tell the few exiles in his own person that the Lord was still a Saviour. But this new Joshua, the Jesus of the Return, was no champion of a youthful nation marshalled for active strife. He was the representative and mediator of a nation burdened with long guilt and suffering. His work was not to face leagued hosts at Gibeon, but to withstand a spiritual adversary before the throne of God. The whole contest is changed. The enemy is strong by the record of past sins, and not by the creation of present dangers. He is an accuser in the court of heaven and not an open assailant upon earth. Yet even so the prophet heard the cheering words: *The Lord rebuke thee, O Satan.* And unto Joshua the Lord said: *Behold, I have caused thine iniquity to pass from thee. . . . So they set a fair mitre upon his head, and clothed him with garments.* And the words are more than fulfilled. The blessing of the

priest passed to the people. In the strength of this vision and of the truth which it symbolised, the little colony grew to be a spiritual power to which antiquity knows no parallel. In the midst of persecutions of hideous ferocity, in times of unexampled licence, in centuries of God's silence, in the remotest corners of the world, the children of God found in a new and higher sense than in any outward warfare the Lord their Saviour.

This, then, is the second picture : and so we also have Jesus, as a great High Priest at the right hand of God, ever ready to make intercession. That which was a prophetic vision is now an accomplished fact. He who bore for us all the trials of life is now our Advocate in heaven. The work of the Mediator follows the work of the Leader. At the outset of life we think, perhaps, that we need guidance only and not mercy. We trust that the vigorous nerve and ready will will remain for ever. But the nerve yields and the will falters. The bold struggles of youth, strong for good and for evil, pass by. Our first foes, whether vanquished or victors, lose their power. With us as with the Jewish nation the fashion of our contest changes with advancing years. As we look backward we see the gathered sins of the past rising like a mountain to overwhelm us. Wounds which we did not heed in the heat of battle tell upon a weakened frame. The excitement of victory, the dreams of hope, are all over. We are alone, desolate, conscious of sin, strangers in our former homes. Alone and yet not alone, for Christ is with us ; desolate, but not forsaken ; conscious of sin, and yet children of a Redeemer ; strangers on earth, and yet heirs of a

glorious kingdom. Oh, my friends—friends at least in the fulness of a common faith—receive this holy name Jesus for an Old Year's pardon as well as for a New Year's welcome. In all doubt and misgiving, in all error and sorrow, in the remembrance of good neglected and of evil sought, we have a Mediator whose Spirit interprets the prayer which the lips cannot utter—One who inspires the true repentance and crowns it with forgiveness, One who speaks "Peace" to the troubled soul, as aforetime to the stormy lake. For in token that we should not sink beneath the burden of past guilt or despair in the dark valley, *His name was called Jesus*—the Lord our Saviour.

Take, then, this one word "Jesus," with its two-fold lesson, to your work and to your retirement. It has teaching for both, all-powerful to hallow labour and to brighten thought. In the daily conflicts of life—and all life is a conflict—in the hour of temptation and in the hour of triumph, remember Christ Jesus, your great Captain. This is strength. In times of depression and loneliness, when the presence of God is clouded by the memory of sin, or you tremble before the vision of the holy Judge, remember Christ Jesus your great Mediator. This is comfort. The future lies before us charged with the fate of nations. To many it seems that the coming months bear with them woe and suffering for men, conflicts of creeds and not of parties, of principles and not of peoples. It may be so, but for us all is yet veiled. One thing only is certain: the strong arm may fail and the wise counsel be turned to folly; evil may be exalted with false splendour,

and good be purified by sorrow ; but God cannot change. Christ is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever. His word is sure, and His help exceeds our hope. And here, while we are preparing ourselves for a new year, He waits to receive us as His guests. He offers Himself afresh to us—His body to strengthen us for all labour, His blood to cleanse us from all sin. The word of greeting is made an act of welcome. The promise becomes a sacrament. Let us only draw near with faith. Let us look for a blessing and we shall have one—a blessing for the Old Year, a blessing for the New Year, and a blessing for endless ages, the abiding presence of Him whose name was called Jesus—the Lord our Saviour.

## VIII

*Mine hour is not yet come.*—ST. JOHN ii. 4.

AT this season we are led by the Services of the Church to dwell upon the various Epiphanies or Manifestations of Christ, and so to gather from the records of old times some lessons as to the way in which He may show Himself now to us. And there is one feature in the histories which are brought before us which is, I think, full of instruction apart from their several details. A fortnight ago we were led with the wise men to worship the Infant-King born to the Jews at Bethlehem. Last Sunday we saw the youthful Saviour busy with "His Father's business" in the Temple at Jerusalem. To-day we find Him among His disciples at the marriage feast at Cana, working the first miracle which confirmed their faith. An interval of thirty years separated that first Epiphany of lowly sovereignty from that last Epiphany of glorious ministry, and for us it is compressed into two weeks. Nor could it be otherwise; for the visit to Jerusalem is the only incident in the Lord's life which is recorded between His infancy and His full manhood. Surely the fact is a striking one, and one

which we may well ponder. For thirty years Christ was secluded in holy silence: for three years only at the most He taught the words which He had received from His Father. For thirty years He gathered, as we read, all the varied stores of wisdom and grace: for three years He used them in winning men to the ways of truth. For thirty years He lived, as we must believe, as a man among men, busied with common cares, sharing in common joys, with His glory veiled and His power unused: for three years *He went about doing good*, scattering blessings, quickening hope, infusing life into a dying people.

In other words, when the Lord came among men, by very far the longest part of His sojourn was spent in what we should be tempted to say was not His work—in obscurity, in retirement, in isolation. But the ways of God are not as our ways, and perhaps in this marvellous history He would teach us this among other things, that public work is but the open revelation of that which has been matured through tedious times of preparation—the flower or fruit which crowns the invisible growth of blade and ear. For so it is that He works in Nature. The very earth on which we stand was made fit for man through a succession of countless ages to reckon which baffles all thought; the very soil which we till is rich with the ruins of former life. Slowly and painfully lawless tribes in our own land were fashioned by law, and softened by the gentler influences of country and home. Slowly and painfully these hills around us were reclaimed from robbers and cleared of forests and taught to bear their rich harvests to peaceful homesteads. Slowly

and painfully, as it seems to our eyes, God is pleased to work in Nature and in Nations, and in the record of the Gospel He teaches us that He works in no other way with man.

It has been often said that the bitterest pain which we can feel is to *know* and not be able to *do*. And what then must our Lord have borne during those thirty years of silence—He to whom the spring and issue of evil were alike open ; He who had not, as we have, any point of connexion with it ; He whose power was limited only by the moral control of supreme wisdom !

If the age at which He came had been one of quiet and peace and progress ; if all had been outwardly working together to found a true kingdom of God ; if the Jewish faith had been gradually moving towards a divine transfiguration, then we could have understood how the Lord might have watched in silence till He should ascend the throne made ready for Him, leaving to others to prepare His way.

But it was not so. The times were full of distress and perplexity. The last semblance of independence had turned away from Judæa. A heathen governor ruled in the holy city. Strange impostors in the name of Messiah drew after them credulous multitudes to ruin and death. The blood of worshippers was mingled with their sacrifices. The precincts of the temple were defiled by Samaritans. Everywhere there was desolation and woe, without one visible sign of hope or assuagement. And meanwhile Jesus lived in a humble village of Galilee, knowing all, seeing all, bearing all. He who knew what was in man—his thoughts, his errors, his wants

—spoke not, stirred not. His hour had not yet come.

But at last His hour came. He had been tempted in all things like as we are, even by the sorest temptation—when good is cast down by evil and we are forced to see its fall. He had won every power of man to its proper use, and when the Prince of this world came he found nothing in Him. The years of growth and preparation had ended in victory, and He stood forth to claim the fruits of His triumph.

And for us the silence of these thirty years cannot be without deep lessons. If we listen, it must make itself felt with an eloquence fuller than that of words—calming, comforting, bracing us. Each for himself can best interpret its teaching according as he *feels* what it was ; and yet there are three common lessons out of many, which, as it speaks to me, I now wish to set before you—the lesson of patience, the lesson of trust, the lesson of watchfulness.

*The lesson of patience.* No one who looks honestly within him or without him can feel satisfied. Within he feels evil ever rising to fresh efforts, good struggling towards victory and not yet supreme. Without he sees suffering and ignorance and sin, apparently without any present remedy or immediate relief. At his best moments he is conscious of a power which can find no exercise, of a knowledge which can find no expression, of a capacity of sympathy which can find no fulfilment. He is restless and dissatisfied. He would anticipate by some bold venture the hour of God's counsel. He would refashion in a day the growth of centuries. But

when the temptation is strongest, let him look to the quiet and lowly home where Jesus dwelt at Nazareth or Cana or Capernaum, and there at least he will learn to be patient and to wait, knowing that *his strength is to sit still*.

*The lesson of trust.* The same temper which makes us impatient makes us also distrustful. What needs to be done must, we think, be done at once, and we must do it. If it is not done now, we argue, it can never be done. Each year makes the task more and more hopeless. It is not enough for us to keep the attitude of readiness, and wait in eager confidence for the first word of our great Captain. We doubt, in deed if not in word, whether He has looked at our position, measured our endurance, known our difficulties. We think, perhaps, that the battle is going against us and that His eye has not marked the wavering line. But when the temptation is strongest let us look back at those long thirty years in which, as we believe, Jesus waited for His Father's voice to call Him to His outward work. To man's eyes it might have appeared that that work would never be finished. But the hour came and death was finally vanquished.

*The lesson of watchfulness.* In proportion as we are eager to do much we are likely to forget the power of ordinary life. It is a common fancy that the great man is made and not merely revealed by great actions. Yet no one would suppose that bodily skill or strength could be acquired by attempting at the first the feats which display them. Slowly and silently, by the performance of the commonest trifles in the simplest routine of study or work or

social intercourse from day to day we build up our characters. Each evening finds us stronger or weaker than the morning found us, more or less fitted to do our proper work for God. Yet we ask, it may be, for some broader field in which to show our zeal. These little things, we think, are as nothing when measured by the powers of life. But when the temptation is strongest, let us remember the life through which Jesus increased in favour with God and man, and the glorious revelation which declared its fulfilment when the voice from heaven was heard to say at His divine Epiphany, *This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.*

So His hour came, and showed Him as He truly was, equipped on all sides by the thirty years of silent waiting. So, too, our hour will come and in a momentary crisis show the fulness of our nature. It may be here in this world where God will give us some task to do for Him at a time when we do not look for it; it may be first when we stand before Him on the Judgment seat. Then at least shall we be openly made known; for when all else is stripped from us, that character which is fashioned in our daily life will survive to witness what we have made ourselves and what we are. Meanwhile, looking for that hour, and thinking on the preparation of the Lord, let us be patient, for we cannot measure the plans of God; let us be trustful, for in due time His word shall be accomplished to the uttermost; let us be watchful, for the hour which shall be revealed by fire shall try every man's work—the work of silence and routine no less than the work of energy and strife—of what sort it is.

## IX

*This beginning of miracles did Jesus in Cana of Galilee, and manifested forth His glory; and His disciples believed on Him.—*  
ST. JOHN ii. 11.

THESE words which we have just heard in the Gospel of the day gather up the thoughts which are offered to us by our Church at this season of the Epiphany—the Manifestation of Christ. According to old usage, which has lasted for fifteen centuries, three distinct events were celebrated by the festival which is the necessary sequel of Christmas. It was taken to commemorate—(1) The visit of the Wise Men; (2) The Baptism of Christ; and (3) His first miracle at the marriage feast, that significant beginning of signs in which He manifested forth His glory. Thus these Epiphanies were grouped together, in which men might at all times see the manifold forms under which the Lord's coming and office were first outwardly revealed to the world. Each scene fixes itself in our memories for ever. An Infant in a crowded inn is singled out by divine tokens in heaven and on earth—by the bright beaming of a guiding star, and by the sure testimony of the prophetic word; and strangers from a far land in humble faith recognise His royal title.

This was the Epiphany of Revelation. Again, one man among the many who crowded to John on the bank of Jordan confessing their sins, and sought from him the pledge of a holier life in the mystic washing in its waters, claimed the Baptism, though He made no confession. The Baptist saw in Him the Greater One, whose way he was himself sent to prepare, the Lamb of God who should take away the sin of the world ; and a voice was heard from heaven, saying, *This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.* This was the Epiphany of Divine Witness. Once more : a guest at a village feast shared the simple joy of His lowly friends ; the failing wine showed that the spirit of the host was richer than his means ; but a word from Him who came to bless changed the water of purification into that good wine which crowned the festival. This was the Epiphany of loving Power. And then these three typical Epiphanies—the Epiphany of Revelation, the Epiphany of Witness, the Epiphany of Power interpreted by faith—are still all, as you will remember, set before us in the Services of the festival itself. But at the same time we are guided to a wider view of the Manifestation of Christ in the Services which follow. The three lessons of the festival are extended in the seven Gospels of the whole season. And it is of these taken together that I would now say a few words. The occasion may serve to suggest trains of reflection for other similar times. For the fuller harmonies of our Prayer-Book—the work not of one mind, but of the instinctive faith of centuries—very often escape our notice ; and yet they are so

encouraging to the devout listener; they are so fruitful in deeper thoughts; they help us to realise so much more vividly than we commonly do the variety and the unity of the parts of our public worship, that it may be well for us this morning to seek to catch the clue of this sevenfold Epiphany. Nor is it far to seek. It lies, I believe, upon the surface. If you will take the Gospels as they stand, Sunday by Sunday, and put them together, you can hardly miss it.

Let us then so follow them one by one very rapidly, but with more attention, because the whole series is very rarely brought before us in due succession—scarcely six times in a whole life. It is not, therefore, surprising that their combined teaching is neglected; it is not surprising, but none the less it is great loss to us. The earliest Epiphany, then, the Adoration of the Magi, is, as I have said, an Epiphany of Revelation. So, too, is the last Epiphany, commemorated on the sixth Sunday. That first Epiphany was in great humility, but this last Epiphany to which we look shall be in glorious majesty. Then the patient seekers after Christ found Him with toil and danger; found Him poor and offered Him their choicest treasures; found Him a babe and worshipped Him as a king: but hereafter, when the sign of the Son of Man shall appear in heaven, every eye shall see Him—see Him, it may be, in consternation and mourning, or it may be in strange and thrilling joy; see Him throned on the clouds of heaven, and not cradled in a manger; see Him, not welcoming in His low estate the homage of a few strangers, but gathering His elect from the four

winds with a great sound of the angel's trumpet, to reign in triumph. Thus the beginning and the end of our commemoration of Christ's Epiphany correspond to one another with the completeness of contrast. The Epiphany of humiliation is at last merged into the Epiphany of victory. The trial is shown to be over, the darkness is scattered, the will of God is accomplished.

But between these two Epiphanies of Revelation, our first lesson and our last—the past Epiphany of sorrow, the future Epiphany of joy—lie others which fill up the interval by which they are separated. There is the Epiphany of Christ's Spirit. There are Epiphanies of Christ's action. And there is the cloud over the Epiphany in the shadow of which our work is to be done.

We must then touch on these in their order. Thus last Sunday we were called to witness the Epiphany of Christ's Spirit. At the fixed age when He was first bound by the requirements of the Law, He not only accepted the new duties, but showed that in that which these symbolised and expressed lay the true spring of His earthly life. His home was His Father's house. His teachers were the appointed ministers of His Father's will. His work was His Father's business. The choice was made. The mission was announced. The one supreme end of action was established. Against this no other claims could be maintained. To those who looked beneath the surface it could, according to His words, create no surprise that all other ties were taken up and absorbed in this. But thenceforth when the aim was clear, the way was clear also.

His life was to do the will of God, to grow and wax strong, and that will found its fulfilment in the circumstances of His common duties. He was consecrated to His Father, and therefore He saw Him in His earthly parents. He went down with them and dwelt at Nazareth—at Nazareth, out of which men thought that no good thing could come—and was subject unto them.

In this way the thirty years of growth and preparation were accomplished, and to-day we read how when His hour came—when His hour came, and not till then—the Epiphany of His Spirit was consummated in the first Epiphany of action. But here again, as in the Temple, He vindicated the absolute sovereignty of the divine law. These words, *Woman, what have I to do with thee?*—however reverent they may be when rightly understood—yet mark the limit of earthly authority; just as before the question, *How is it that ye sought Me?* brought out the real naturalness of a complete devotion to God's service. And then at last, when this rule was once set down, every prayer of faith was answered according to its spirit. The Gospels for next Sunday and the Sunday after carry forward this Epiphany of Christ in action into other regions. In the three successive Gospels we are taught to see the working of Christ's love in every realm of being—in nature and in men and in spirits. The water is ennobled at His bidding. The sick are restored by His touch or by His voice. The storm is stilled, and the legion is cast out. Nor is this all. Side by side with these threefold Epiphanies of power, are corresponding revelations of men's hearts. The works of

Christ then, as now, tested men. Before Him all appeared as they really were ; and His working was according to those for whom He wrought. Where there was the eye to see, He was acknowledged in His divine glory, and blessings flowed from His Presence. Where selfishness hid Him, He was rejected as one who brought only loss. And so we read in the successive narratives how to *those who had, more was given* ; how *His disciples believed on Him* ; and how the faith of the centurion was quickened to the fulness of undoubting trust. But how, on the other hand, the Gergesenes, whom Christ's coming had bereft of their unclean gains, *besought Him that He would depart out of their coasts*.

And this last most sad history brings us to the lesson of the fifth Sunday. There is a cloud over the brightness of Christ's Epiphanies—for so it always must be in this chequered world of ours. An enemy is ever busy where Christ has been, while men sleep. The evil grows up mingled with the good, and we may not separate them. Indeed, we are poor judges at the best, and God works in many ways. Yet we may be thankful that He has warned us of the conflicts and contrasts and disappointments of life. If it were not for this, we might have been discouraged and cast down at the little apparent progress which His cause makes in us or around us. But as it is, we can trust Him, and winning our souls in patience, be still till the end. For then the cloud shall pass away, and all that is evil and base will perish in the exceeding brightness of that last Epiphany of glory.

Such, most briefly, are the sevenfold Epiphanies recorded for us at this holy time. I can only ask you to study them for yourselves, in dependence upon God's Spirit, and their meaning and connexion will grow clearer. They do in very deed present to us a parable of life.

As it was of old, so it is now. The Manifestation, the Epiphany of Christ is the open secret of the world—open because whoever will can know it, a secret because it is known only by the help of God. We live and move in the light of the Epiphany, and yet we may not perceive the brightness which the light casts about us. Like Saul we may be blinded by the exceeding glory of the Lord, till the scales fall from our eyes when we offer ourselves for His service, and then we know that He has always been about us, drawing us to Himself, teaching us little by little to see Him. No one form of Epiphany which gladdened the saints of the Gospel is denied to us in these latest days. We can read those clearly, and yet too often, too grievously we misunderstand their present antitypes. But let our eyes be turned heavenward and we shall be sensible of Christ's coming. For Christ comes to us as the Kingly Infant, and lifts our thoughts above the pride of earth in the contemplation of His lowly sovereignty.

Christ comes to us as the child among the doctors, and in His own person teaches us the nobility of devotion by which every duty of opening life is hallowed.

Christ comes to us in our common joys, and when our own stores fail, He transfigures that which

seemed before poor and joyless into a source of richer delight.

Christ comes to us in our times of weakness and distress and stormy doubt, and at His word the sin is forgiven and the tempest is stilled.

Christ comes to us in our temptations to unholy selfishness, and while He chastens us offers us afresh the blessing of His Presence.

Christ comes to us in the sunshine and in the gloom ; and He is near us still when the enemy is busiest.

In all these ways Christ comes to us and manifests His glory to those who look for Him. We may seem to be thrust aside because there is no room for us, but even in forgotten places His glory rests. Our days may be filled with the commonest duties, but through these His glory shines. Unlooked-for failure may surprise us in the moment when all is fullest of hope, but through this His glory can be revealed. It may be in some marvel of deliverance, it may be in some surprise of loss that His glory is manifested to us. But whatever be the fashion of the divine Epiphany, may He give us grace to behold the glory, and to strive towards it! Then will a clear light fall upon our path wherever God may lead us, and as we have seen the veiled glory of our Lord, so shall we be made fit hereafter to reflect His glory, when we shall see Him face to face, even as He is.

## X

*Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law: for sin is the transgression of the law.*—1 JOHN iii. 4.

THERE is a sentence of marvellous power in a work by a great modern preacher which may well seem to introduce the subject which I purpose to take for our thoughts this evening. "If I looked into a mirror," he writes, "and did not see my face, I should have the sort of feeling which actually comes upon me when I look into this living, busy world and see no reflection of its Creator." The picture thus drawn of the working of sin is startlingly vivid, and can hardly fail to call up in us some solemn questionings and searchings of heart. It may be, indeed, that the image of God is hidden from us no less by the infirmity of our own vision than by the imperfection of the glass through which we now behold it. It may be that if we look patiently, humbly, faithfully, with pure eyes and untroubled hearts, we shall see His Face rising through the dark clouds which seem to hide it. It may be that we disregard tokens of His Presence, and unduly limit His action and narrow His love. It may be so, and I believe it is so; but when every concession is made, we are still forced to allow that His Image is defaced, His glory veiled,

His working hindered by some hostile power in man, and that power is sin—a selfish and wilful rebellion against His sovereignty. As soon as we know ourselves, we become conscious of the sinful impulse and of the sinful action. And this sinfulness is soon distinguished from other conditions which at first sight have some resemblance to it. We may grieve over our natural wants and imperfections, but we do not reproach ourselves for these: they are not sin. We may be bowed down by suffering and calamity, but we do not reproach ourselves for these, as such: they are not sin. Even the lower animals are stricken thus. But there is something in life far bitterer than these, which is perfectly characteristic of fallen man. There is the secret indulgence hidden from all eyes, which our soul condemns; there is the false action which seems fair and prospers, which our soul condemns; there is the deliberate or habitual forgetfulness of God, known only to Him and to us, which our soul condemns. There is something amiss, we feel, which depends upon ourselves and not upon our circumstances, something in which we have been disloyal, something in which we are blameworthy, something in which we have striven consciously to keep out the divine light from us: and this we call sin. Whence it comes, and how it can be removed, we do not inquire now. I wish simply to consider what is the nature of sin, and how we can best recognise it. This evil is like a disease, of which we have to learn the symptoms before we can apply the cure. We strive to know it first that we may better meet it after. *Sin*, then, St. John says, *is the transgression of the law*; or rather, *the*

*transgression of law*—lawlessness generally. The thought has always been precious, but it is of surpassing interest to us, because lawlessness, anarchy, the assertion of what is called personal right and personal liberty, mark our own age with its peculiar character. And while we may recognise in all this an element of life, and therefore of hope, still we must remember that life itself is pregnant with peril unless it be hallowed by the Spirit of God.

There is then, as I have said, a great inclination at present to look at each man by himself: to make each one practically the judge of his own duty, the centre of his own life, the supreme end of his own efforts. And I do not shrink from affirming that in this idolisation of self lies the essence of sin. Sin is emphatically the transgression of law. The nature of man is neither simple nor solitary. No thought or word or action is ever bounded by the immediate effect which it produces. We cannot, if we would, live alone. Countless subtle influences pass off from us at every moment which affect others and react upon ourselves. A life at random must be a life of sin. Then only can we live in Christ and for Christ, when we strive to know more clearly and obey more loyally the laws by which the Father has ordered our being.

These laws are manifold. Any one, then, who thoughtfully reflects upon himself will see that he lives, so to speak, three lives. He has a personal life, a social life, a divine life. The three are no doubt actually inwoven together, but they can be considered apart, and we learn much by so considering them. Corresponding to these three lives, there

are three laws by which they are respectively ruled. Each law is divine, and gradually made known to us by revelation and experience ; and as we break them knowingly, we sin. In one case we sin against ourselves ; in another we sin against our neighbours ; in another we sin against God. But each separate form of lawlessness is sin. How this is will appear more distinctly if we take the laws one by one.

First, then, there is the law of our personal life. If we look at ourselves alone, as far as may be without regard to anything about us, we find that we are made up of many parts ; that while we have very much in common with others, we have also something, more or less, which is peculiar to us ; that we are subject to change. The law of our personal life, then, involves complexity, individuality, growth. And just so far as we wilfully dissemble or mar or contravene these conditions, we sin—sin against ourselves.

Thus, for example, if we grant an undue preponderance to any part of our nature ; if we surrender ourselves wholly to some engrossing pursuit of business or pleasure ; if we give no play to the exercise of our affections : so far we sin. We betray the trust with which God has charged us. We neglect powers which He has given us to use. We deaden feelings which He has given us to cultivate.

Or again if, as is very commonly the case, we are content to take a common average for our standard ; if we measure ourselves by others, and acquiesce simply in popular opinion as the exhaustive rule of our conduct ; if we shrink, through a fear of singularity, from putting forth that in which we

are made to differ from others, and fail to add the fruit of our particular endowment to the wealth of the world: so far we sin. We mar for our part the fulness and harmony of human life. We desert the special post in which we have been stationed. We impoverish the world by our example, when we might enrich it.

Once more, if we repose in the results of efforts made in former time; if, after a vigorous and devoted youth, we sink into indolence and call it rest; if we neglect to recognise that each stage of life has its proper opportunities and its proper work, which it is equally vain to anticipate and to recall: so far we sin. We are faithless to the loving guidance of God. We pause when He is ever leading us onwards. We are like Christian in the allegory, asleep on the Hill Difficulty, forgetting that it is our duty to advance ever to that goal, where all the varied experiences of life will not be cancelled, but crowned with an exceeding glory.

It may seem strange to speak of some of these failings, negligences, shortcomings, as sin; but if we would truly apprehend life we must call them by no other name. *Sin is the transgression of law*, and if we disregard the law by which God has determined the nature and progress of our personal life, we sin.

But, secondly, there is the law of our social life. No man can live for himself: no man can die for himself. We inherit nearly all our means of action from those who have gone before us. We depend upon others at every moment, in the greatest and most trivial details. Our most efficient labour

springs from cheerful co-operation; our purest pleasure from voluntary devotion. The law of our social life, then, involves combination, subordination, sacrifice. And just so far as we wilfully resist or mistake or murmur against these conditions, we sin—sin against our neighbour.

Nothing, perhaps, is more sad than the waste of good intentions. It is proverbial that any assembly of men is lower in its tone and in its morality than each man separately. By some false shame every one shrinks from seeming better than his fellow, and so he hides his noblest thoughts. We thus meet to deaden and not to quicken one another. But when we do so; when we repress the generous aspiration which burns within us; when we are ashamed of the cross which it should be our glory to bear forward; when, as far as lies in us, we make it harder for our friends to rise above the trivialities with which they affect to veil their interest in the great mysteries of being: let us not deceive ourselves, we sin. We break an ordinance of God. We misuse an opportunity which He has given us for good. We come together not for the better, but for the worse.

To go one step further. We all speak of the Christian body; but how little are we inclined naturally to accept in practice the idea which that figure conveys! With feverish, impatient, importunate activity, we seem to be striving for the most part to alter our position in it. In our words we thankfully acknowledge the difference of function of every member; in our acts we are restlessly occupied in claiming for ourselves the part of another. And

here again I say that if, when we have found work which we can do for God, we allow ourselves to be looking for something else with speedier return or (as we judge) with nobler fruit; if we impair the well-being of the whole by disturbing the due relations of the parts; if we persist in choosing for ourselves when the choice has been made for us: we sin. The body of Christ maimed and disorganised condemns us of violating its laws.

For all real life is powerful by sacrifice. And yet this idea of sacrifice appears to be dying out from among us. We seem to assume that the good labourer will reap here the harvest of his toils. We argue as if *Woe unto you when all men shall speak well of you* was not said of Christians. But even if I write my own sad sentence, I must plainly declare that if we offer any other emblem to the believer than the cross; if we look to any other judge of our work than Christ; if we hold back any part of that which is wholly consecrated to His service: we sin. We break the law by which God binds our common life to the life of the risen Saviour.

And thus we come to the third law, on which the two others hang—the law of our divine life. Hitherto we have dealt with the person and the act: now we can penetrate to the spirit. The selfishness which is seen in private indulgence and caprice, in social discontent and ambition, is first shown in its true character by the light of this final and supreme law. Our duty to ourselves and our duty to our neighbours are partial reflections of our duty to God. In this, as it is summed up in the three characteristics of

dependence, faith, and love, is the one complete rule of life. And if it be so, then every form of self-assertion, every deliberate preference of an immediate object of desire, because it is near and because it is visible, every violation of that tender sympathy by which we are brought close to one another since we are brought close to God : is sin—sin against God. For sin is the transgression of that law whereby, as the essential rule of our proper nature, in all things we rest on God, in all things we look to God, and, as far as our human weakness can aspire, in all things we love God.

If, then, we take this last result as our guide, we can see clearly what sin is. Sin is living for self and not for God—the substitution of the caprice of the individual will for that infinite Providence which embraces all things in its range. By an amazing confusion, lawlessness and not obedience has become popularly identified with liberty ; and yet the least reflection will show that he only is free who fulfils the sovereign law of his higher nature, and that law is the will of God. He who *cannot* sin is absolutely free, and not he who sins without the feeling of restraint. Sin is slavery to foreign and disturbing powers. The service of God is perfect freedom.

Sin, again, is living by sight—the conscious acquiescence in motives and ends of this earth only. *Whatsoever is not of faith is sin* must often have seemed a hard saying, and yet we dare not diminish ought from its peremptory verdict. What has been already said shows that it is inevitably true. If we will not look onward and upward, and when we will

not, we do despite to God, who in the Person of His Son has for us united the seen with the unseen, the finite with the infinite, and made us already to taste something of the powers of the world to come.

Sin, lastly, is living without love—the wilful isolation of life, which then first is seen in its true dignity when it has been offered to God in Christ. Sin necessarily concentrates a man upon himself. The principle of sin, therefore, cannot coexist in us with the principle of sacrifice. And if we would bring to a final test the principle of our own lives, it is enough to ask whether we know the meaning of these words : *We love Him, because He first loved us. He that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen? He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love.* If they express the deepest conviction and the truest purpose of our lives; if they set forth what, with countless failures, we yet aspire to feel and to do; if they offer that which alone can satisfy us: it is well. But if not—if for us God is but a name of strength and our brother but a title of courtesy, we are still, whatever we may seem, slaves to sin.

Such a view of sin as this may well fill us all with anxious thoughts. Sin, we see, lies not so much in acts as in the spring and the spirit of action. It is in its beginning and in its end separation from God. Physical suffering can not only be endured but be transformed into a source of blessing. Moral weakness can not only be borne but become by divine grace the basis of a noble character. But sin is wholly alien from every good use. It is not to be subdued only, but destroyed. And there is

something strangely pathetic in the original terms by which it is called in the Old and New Testaments. It is failure, an aim missed, an end lost. A sinful life is a life wasted. And in the way of Nature it must be so. Nature's laws are inexorably pitiless. Words and deeds, as we are forced to think, must be operative for evil as well as for good without end. But God hath made known to us a more excellent way. In the Life of Christ He has shown to us the conquest of sin; in the Death of Christ He has shown to us the ransom for sin; in the Resurrection of Christ He has shown to us the restoration from sin.

And may God in His great mercy grant to us all so to know what sin is that we may know also what is the power of that Life, what is the efficacy of that Death, what is the glory of that Resurrection!

## XI

*I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren.*—ST. LUKE xxii. 32.

AN old writer has said very truly that if we could see the complex and delicate mechanism called into play by the least motion of our bodies, if we could see the slender threads by which the balance of the limbs is supported, and the fragile bounds within which the stream of life is contained, we should hardly dare to breathe; and so in spiritual things, if we could follow out the springs and issues of action, if we could listen to the distant echoes of our words sounding on throughout all time, and mark the signs of our deeds transmitted to endless generations, we should hardly dare to speak or act. When, indeed, we first try to form any conception of the worth and destiny of man, we are bewildered. Everything human grows infinite; everything secular becomes eternal. But here, as in all other cases, Holy Scripture comes to our help, and shows us how this is so. If our world seem but as a grain of sand compared with a boundless universe, it points us to an Incarnate God; if we are lost in the petty concerns of our individual life, it points us to a Father in Heaven. And in

Scripture everything assumes a practical aspect. If it dwells on the higher affinities of our nature, it is to show that this little earth on which we live is the battlefield of spiritual powers, and man's soul the inestimable prize which hangs upon the issue of the great conflict of good and evil. If it describes the endless consequences of human action, it is to bring out with greater clearness our mutual duties as members of one great family which has wandered far from its proper home into a strange land. It is, then, to these two thoughts, as affecting the great Lenten lesson of temptation, that I wish now very shortly to direct your attention. It is not enough that we should look into the evil of our own hearts, and the outward dangers by which we are surrounded; but it is well that our eyes should be directed to these messengers of light and darkness which hover about our paths; and yet higher, to the mighty Adversary and the mightier Advocate ever pleading our cause before the throne of God. It is not enough that we should think of ourselves and of those with whom we are most closely connected; but it is well that we should extend our sympathy to all for whom Christ died, praying that as He conquered temptation not for Himself but for others, so He may impart to us the virtue of His victory.

The whole narrative of the Passion is an inexpressibly solemn record of the climax of this struggle of good and evil for the mastery of man. It tells us how the devil, who had at first left our Lord for a season, returned seeking to shake by terror that faith which was unmoved by flattery; and how

Christ met death, man's last enemy, face to face, and conquered. But in no part of it is the conflict more distinctly represented than in these words from which my text is taken. "Simon, Simon," said our Blessed Lord to the apostle foremost in devoted zeal, "Satan begged you for himself from God—all of you who have followed Me in my temptations, all of you who shall share My kingdom—to sift you as wheat ; and his request was granted. But *I*, to whom all secret things lie open, prayed for *thee*—for thee on whom my Church shall be built, that thy faith fail not. And so do thou, when at length thou hast turned back from thy flight, strengthen thy brethren." Such is the meaning of my text ; and where can we find a clearer picture of our position and of our duty ?

The awful vision of an accuser appearing against us before God is revealed to us also in the Old Testament, and under circumstances in some degree similar. While Job was living in prosperity, Satan appeared from wandering to and fro throughout the earth, and received permission to visit him with sore plagues. While the apostles were dreaming of a speedy triumph, their great Adversary was empowered to sift them as wheat. And so it is with us now. While men sleep the enemy is busy. When we are least suspicious our foes are most active. But if we sleep, there is one who watches for us ; if our eyes are heavy, there is the record of Gethsemane ; if we have an unseen enemy, so too have we an unseen helper. Peter was trusting to his own firmness when Christ prayed for him. And there is One who prays for us as He prayed for

St. Peter ; One who will keep our faith from failing, though we stumble often ; One who will aid us in our efforts to do right, though He will not compel us to abstain from wrong.

And this leads us to mark the limit which is always set to Satan's power. He is allowed to sift God's servants as wheat : he may separate the evil from the good, but the good itself remains uncorrupted and untouched. In that which is truly holy the devil can find no point of approach ; for our Saviour has said : *The prince of this world cometh, and hath nothing in Me.* And thus it is that we ourselves must offer an entrance to the evil spirit before he can dwell with us ; and even then all that is consecrated to Christ—all that is done in His name and for His glory—is made inviolable through His blessing. All that is worthless and refuse in us like chaff shall be burned up ; but the fine wheat, though it be but one grain, shall be garnered in heaven. As it was in old time, so it is now : the fires of persecution—material or spiritual—are the element out of which God brings a Holy Bible and a Holy Church on earth, and the innumerable company of the blessed Saints above.

But, as I said, the words of our Lord tell us not only of our position and of our strength, but also of our duty. Though the Saviour saw that St. Peter would soon desert and deny Him, He looked beyond the apostle's fall to his restoration, and charged him to extend to others the help which he should himself receive. And you will all remember how nobly St. Peter fulfilled his charge. He who had trembled to own his Master before a few servants

and soldiers, soon confessed his faith in Him before the wisest and mightiest of the chosen people. Now he receives Jews gathered from all the nations under heaven into the Christian Church ; now he extends its full blessings to the heathen Cornelius. His fall was as the death of his old nature, and thenceforth he was strong not in himself, but in Christ ; and he who is strong in Christ is more than conqueror.

Nor is the charge to Peter without a very real application to ourselves. If we are still to be tried as he was tried, if we are to find help where he found it, so too are we bound to strengthen our brethren as he did. And how many of us, like him, are constrained to show our present sincerity by an honourable shame for the past? How many of us have denied Christ before those who mocked at Him! How many of us have hardly ventured to follow Him afar off, when others have abandoned Him! How often has a bold and wicked jest forced us to declare that we know nothing of Him with wild and unnatural vehemence! And if so, with what zeal and love and patience must we labour to be made partakers of that glorious end to which St. Peter attained! And yet there is no lesson which it is more needful that we should learn, my brethren, than this: that if we *do* know and love God, we must show forth our faith as a testimony against the careless and a confirmation of the weak. For it is vain for us to think that we may be neutral—that we may keep what is right ourselves and smile at what is wrong in others. Have we not heard Christ Himself say to us this morning, *He that is not with Me is against Me.* If we are not

active in His service, we are enemies to His kingdom. If we are not messengers of good tidings to all around us, we are messengers of evil. And there is nothing which brings more sorrow to those who watch for signs of Christian life among us than to see evil stalking abroad as though it were good, and good hiding itself as though it were evil; to see laws broken without any loyal shame, as though punishment were an absolution of wrong; to see a low standard of honour and truth accepted by the mass which each one would shrink from accepting by himself; to find that the tone of the whole Christian body most nearly resembles that of the least worthy of its members. What a contrast does all this offer to our notion of a Christian body such as St. Paul describes in the lesson for the evening! What a condemnation does it pronounce against ourselves! Where every one should strive manfully to remove the evil which endangers the well-being of our little society, every one seems rather to prefer the risk of having all that is best in him corrupted by its infection. It seems as if those of us who have turned to Christ do not seek to strengthen their brethren. His name is profaned and His commands are set aside, and we confess Him not. We distrust ourselves, it may be, but rather we distrust our Saviour; and how can we win others to serve Him whom we are ready to deny, lest we should meet with a little ridicule or a little unpopularity. How is it that we cannot bring into public life the pure thoughts of our closets? How is it that we dare not appear to be that which we really are: that we dare not maintain

what we inwardly believe? Is it not all from forgetting that if our hearts be earnestly set to do God's will, Christ prays for us that our faith fail not; and that all powers of evil are unable to touch the good? Surely, my brethren, we cannot be contented to bear with that which we know to be unworthy of our name. Shall we not rather at this season consider in what cause we are engaged, and what has been given us to do here? Shall we not remember the solemn charge which we have heard this morning, which tells us of a harvest ready which we are to reap, of a victory gained in which we are to share, of a book of life in which our names are written; which establishes a law as comprehensive as life, and a brotherhood wide as the world? Our week-day services remind us that it is a time of special supplication—not only for ourselves but for others. And how can he truly pray who himself makes no effort to give his prayers effect? How can he pray that it may please God “to strengthen such as stand,” whose actions are a snare to their feet? “to comfort and help the weak-hearted,” who has himself no words of encouragement or caution to address to his friend? “to raise up them that fall,” who dares not to notice their condition? “to beat down Satan under our feet,” who shows in his daily conduct no sense of any vital struggle, no sense of wrong to be mastered and right to be maintained?

Nor will any one who is indeed in earnest for the truth, who is daily jealous for God's honour, who strives according to the measure of his influence to keep alive in others as well as in his own heart

a due regard for Christian duties and Christian hopes, be in any danger of exalting himself. He will remember that Peter's fall preceded his work, and that he was strong only by recognising his weakness. And indeed our frailty is our very qualification for our work. Since we have been tempted ourselves, we can sympathise with those who are tempted. We know their difficulties because we have been harassed by them. We know their wants because we have felt them. And believe me, that if those among us who have turned to God were to dare to be honest with ourselves and with others; if we were to show that we abhor all that is unrighteous and unholy; if we were to labour to do that which we feel to be right, and to spread that which we know to be true, we should not only confirm our brethren, but gain blessing for which we never hoped, and win by our example those whom we can never reach by our words. And does not the view of life which I have very faintly set before you kindle in each heart some natural zeal to engage in that mighty contest for which we feel that we were born? Is it not sufficient to fill us with holy hope when we know that angels are waiting to strengthen us, and Christ Himself directing our course? Is it not sufficient to fill us with anxious watchfulness when we know that a restless and relentless enemy is ever ready to assail us? Is it not enough to fill us with earnest zeal when we see our brethren falling and fallen—brethren for whom Christ died?

By all, then, that you hold most precious, we entreat you, my brethren, to think on the charge

which is given you to help one another not in prayer only, but in word and act. If you cherish with affection the glorious name of your country, so lately written in the blood of her bravest sons, if you are rightly jealous for her honour, think that truth and godliness are the only stays by which it can be supported. If you truly judge that a neighbourhood is only a larger home, think how soon that household falls where God is not sole Master: how soon a house divided against itself must fall. If you prize the blessings of friendship, think that that friendship alone is hallowed which will last for ever. Let the remembrance of Christ follow you through your daily work and your daily pleasures; and then when your time of trial comes, the mighty conflict will have been already won, and Satan will find nothing in you. And your Saviour will recognise as done unto Himself all the small offices of kindness and love which you have shown to those who are called by His name.

## XII

*Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children.*—EPHES. v. 1.

IN speaking this morning of the great thought of the presence of God—of the presence of One infinitely holy and pure and just—with us who are sin-stained and weak, I said that if we could regard it as sons, what was before unspeakably awful would become full of hope and strength. I wish, then, this evening to say something more in detail of this childly relation in which we stand to God, and of the lessons which we can draw from it. The words of our earliest and most frequent prayer bring the idea constantly before us. It is familiar and yet it is inexhaustible.

It is the great mark of the Gospel that its deepest truths are presented to us in forms taken from our daily life. It was given to transfigure all that is earthly, and the shape in which it comes to us is itself the pledge of the fulfilment of its work. The cleansing water and the simple meal are made Sacraments—revelations—of divine mysteries. The ties of family are the chosen emblems of our heavenly fellowship. One of these relations is set before us in the words which I have taken for my

text—a relation so familiar that few of us probably ever pause to reflect that the message which it involves was once glad tidings to a world. The Hebrew prophets in rare passages had spoken of the God of Israel as “their Father.” The oldest poets of Greece, among whom the instinct of patriarchal life still survived, had sung of “the Father of gods and men”; but it was with a new power and a new meaning that the Lord revealed to us *Our Father which is in heaven—His Father and our Father*, and taught us the sublime truth with which we preface our earliest prayer.

But I do not wish now to dwell specially on this idea of the Fatherhood of God, fertile as it is with great thoughts and noble lessons, but rather on the converse idea which it includes. The title reveals to us not only the relation of God to the world and to us, but also our relation to God. We all—learned or simple, rich or poor, old or young—are as children in His household, heirs indeed of a glorious inheritance, but yet children, and then nearest Him when we realise most fully our childly duties at His feet. You will all remember the gracious words with which this relation is enforced and blessed in the Services of our Church at the most solemn seasons. *Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not; for of such is the kingdom of God. Come, ye blessed children of my Father, receive the kingdom prepared for you from the beginning of the world.* These are the earliest words of Christ with which we are welcomed to the font; these are the latest words of Christ which will be spoken over our closing graves; and

blessed indeed shall we be, thrice blessed, if the truth which they express follows us through life to guide, to chasten, to console.

True childliness is indeed the spring of humility and the spring of strength; for humility and strength are but different sides of the same virtue. It can follow us with refreshing power through all the changes of our circumstances. It can open to us springs of blessing in all the relations of life, as Christ Himself has taught us—as to our own character, as to others, as to the Revelation which God is pleased to make of Himself. As to ourselves: *Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.* As to our duty to others: *Whoso shall receive one such little child in My name receiveth Me.* And again, as to the Revelation which God is pleased to make of Himself: *Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child shall in no wise enter therein.* To become as little children, to receive little children, to receive the truth ourselves as little children, this is the sum. And there never was an age when the lesson was more needed than that in which we live. In old times, when our mind could grasp all that was known of the world, it was easy to preserve a constant sense of its unity, of its relation to men, of the relation of all created things to the One Father; but now it is otherwise. The endless multiplication of special researches, the severing of various branches of study, the infinite complexity of details into which all knowledge wanders, the very mid-day light with which the field of science is

flooded, serve to efface those grander outlines which stand out clearly in the dawn. It is our glory and our danger that the features of Nature grow daily more familiar to us—our glory if we do not fail to see the one principle of life which underlies their changeful beauty, our danger if we rest in outward things. One of our greatest writers used to say that “we think too highly of ourselves and of our place in creation.” This is most true, I fear, and yet it is only half the truth. We think too highly of ourselves and yet not highly enough—too highly of what we have received or gained, of the differences which separate man from man and race from race and age from age, but not highly enough of what God has made us. In the face of the countless marvels of the material world we forget that the mind which embraces them all in its thought is greater than they; we forget that Christ took our nature upon Him; we forget that our Father made the heaven and the earth and all that is therein.

Thus it is that the childliness of temper, the childliness of confidence and of submission, of which Christ often spoke, is our stay and guide. When we are wearied, bewildered, lost, this places us once again in the very presence of God; this vividly recalls to the last those lessons of dependence, of trustfulness, of partial knowledge which were the natural training of our early years. Let us then dwell for a few moments on each of these three lessons of childliness, with the prayer that the Holy Spirit may make them clear to us.

*The lesson of dependence.* A child never forgets

his dependence. He does not even inquire why he is dependent. It seems natural to him that he should be so. He stands in immediate connexion with those to whom he looks for all he needs, and he does not ask why all is given. He sees before him the image of a noble future, but he makes no haste to escape from the bonds of grateful service. For he too has a service to render. Effort, vigour, patience are included in all action, and the child's reward is that his work is like his father's work, or in harmony with it.

And is not this a just description of our position with regard to our heavenly Father? It is true that we are led to transfer to instruments the virtue which belongs to His will; that we make idols of the laws which rule our conception of His workings; that the tempter persuades us to think that man lives by bread alone without God's word; that in the pride of strength we fancy that life must ever flow on in its glad and even course. So we are inclined to dream, till some great blow comes which scatters our dreams, and then our only shelter is if haply we may yet again find our Father's house. But how much happier if we can ever rest beneath its shadow; if we can retain, even in our vigour and success, the deep conviction that all comes from Him; if we can realise, in the midst of all that charms the sense, the presence of Him whom to know is life; if we can remember with filial reverence when we form our little schemes that "in His hand are we and our works"; if we can lift up our souls to feel the boundless grandeur of that universe which is upheld by the word of

His power ; if we can engage in all the duties by which we are encompassed, and yet look forward not to the fruit of our own labour, but to that end beyond all transitory failure, beyond all personal reward, the unspeakable joys which our Father has prepared for those who love Him.

This is the first lesson—the lesson of dependence. We pass to the next—*The lesson of trustfulness*. A child has no doubts, no misgivings. It is enough that his father has spoken. That voice for him is truth and law. Much that he sees is strange, perplexing, perhaps, as he thinks, contradictory or hurtful, but he entertains no anxious questionings, for it is his father's will : all will one day be clear. The message which is sanctioned by his father's name is welcomed, whatever it may be. He examines not the message, but the credentials of the bearer. There is something sublime in such a faith, which in later years is wholly unattainable. But all human powers fall below the claims which it makes. It can be satisfied only in its spiritual aspect. There indeed the childly heart will find no rude disappointment. The Christian will not yet see all, but all which he sees will strengthen his trust. A deeper glimpse here or there will reveal to him harmonies of facts or words sufficient to cheer him when his way is dark and silent. Much which he believes will be inevitably removed beyond all power of proof and even of inquiry, but he will remember that there is a spiritual blessing, which countless numbers in every age have realised, for those who have not seen and yet have believed. When some great

truth flashes upon his mind of which he can render no clear account by human thought, he will recall that wondrous thanksgiving of Christ: *I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because Thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes.* There is, he will know, a logic of the heart as well as of the head; a power within him which can reach forth into the unseen and bridge the chasm on the edge of which reason falters. Thus he will not ask why evil yet lingers, why good yet falters; it will be enough for him to look back through the countless ages and see how all worked together for a noble end before man was, and to trace in the Bible the growing purpose of God wrought out in the midst of sin and sorrow.

For the lessons of dependence and trustfulness are completed in—*The lesson of partial knowledge.* A child is ever conscious that he is in the midst of a vast system of which he understands only a few isolated facts, and that in part only and not in their relation to the whole. He rests satisfied if he is told that something which rouses his curiosity or perplexes his judgment is as yet beyond his comprehension. He is content to wait for fuller understanding, and meanwhile to follow out what he may of that which falls within his range.

And what other temper befits us when we think, with all the help of maturer judgment, on the infinite grandeur of the world in which we are placed, and the infinite littleness of the parts of it which we can observe. We can trace change, but

we cannot form any conception of new creation. We can classify phenomena, but we cannot form any conception of being. We can follow the broken outlines of one divine plan in nature and in the Bible, but when we try to pursue it into detail, our progress is barred by evil in a thousand forms, by sin, by suffering, by waste. Yet even here the childly soul will rest without fear. The Christian professes that he knows in part. He does not look for any complete solution of his difficulties. A veil, he believes, yet rests upon the world. His own image mingles with every reflection which he catches of things without him. But when he is most sorely baffled, he remembers that the end of our trial on earth is not to gain knowledge, but to shape a character; that knowledge itself, for one who is at once mortal and immortal, is chiefly valuable for its moral discipline; that virtue needs no open stage for its training; that as the child in any home has full scope for the exercise of childly goodness, so he too has, in whatever part of his Father's family he may be placed; that now as of old it is out of the mouth of babes that praise is perfected. At present his Father knoweth all things, and when that which is in part is done away, then will he know even as he is known. So for him death is not an end but a beginning, the entrance to manhood, the passage into the immediate presence of all that truly is, and already he reaches out to that future by silent communion with those who have been called to his Father's side.

In whichever direction we turn, this simple thought that we are all children—children of God—

meets us with a message of comfort and joy. It teaches us patience in the lot of life to which we may be called. It teaches us faith in the sight of the difficulties by which we are tried. It teaches us hope in the contemplation of the vast world of which our little lives are made a part. It spiritualises every tenderest relation of our life. It transforms our time of earthly discipline into one great parable. Only let us extend the holy lessons of "home" and "childhood" to our connexion with our heavenly Father, and both the present and the future will gain a reality and distinctness which they cannot otherwise have. And at the same time that our view of life is widened and deepened, our sense of duty gains equally in force and extent. How this is our text will show us if we take the words in their literal force. *Show yourselves*, St. Paul says, *imitators of God, as beloved children.* "Imitators of God," "beloved children," what soul can exhaust the teachings of those divine phrases! In one short sentence the apostle gives in all their fulness the motive and the rule of Christian action. A Father's love is the constraining power which moves us; a Father—perfect and holy—is Himself the pattern which we, by His help and command, must follow. The very nobleness of the work may well daunt all who think only of the part and of themselves. But the childly soul thinks only of his Father. Feebly, waywardly, imperfectly shall we strive to reach to Him. Yet we bear with us a talisman proof against all failure, strong against all weakness, no less than this, that *like as a father pitieth his children*—with watchful affection and

boundless forgiveness—*even so the Lord pitieth them that fear Him.* The glory of the future lies about our path, brightening unto the perfect day. *Beloved, now are we children of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that when He shall appear, we shall be like Him; for we shall see Him as He is.*

### XIII

*When Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, Depart from me ; for I am a sinful man, O Lord.—ST. LUKE v. 8.*

THESE words seem to me to form a very natural introduction to our Lenten season. They gather up in a brief space the thoughts which are most present with us—thoughts of our own weakness and failures, thoughts of God's holiness and nearness. Such thoughts may be fruitful in blessing to us ; they may—and we must not leave out the alternative—prove only a lesson wasted. This double aspect of the subject is presented to us very clearly in Holy Scripture.

There are two cases recorded in the Gospels in which those who had recognised in the Lord the manifestation of a divine power prayed to be delivered from the overwhelming judgment of His awful presence. The one, in the eighth chapter of St. Matthew, was when the whole city of the Gergesenes, alarmed by the tidings of the swineherds, *came out to meet Jesus, and besought Him that He would depart out of their coasts* ; the other we have heard in the Gospel of the day, in which St. Peter, astonished at the unexpected issue of his labour, *fell down at Jesus'*

*knees, saying, Depart from me ; for I am a sinful man, O Lord.*

There is an outward resemblance in the two petitions, but they are essentially different in occasion, in spirit, and in issue. Taken together they include as in a parable the contrasts of human life ; taken separately they are a revelation of our weakness and a revelation of our strength. To the Gergesenes Christ made Himself known by contrasted signs. He restored the demoniacs among them to their right mind ; but at the same time He suffered their swine to be lost in the sea. For them the material loss outweighed the spiritual gain. It was of little moment that the souls of their fellow-men were set free from the dominion of evil, if the hope of their unclean profit was thereby taken away. In that Presence which purified as it were by fire, they saw nothing for the future but disaster. They begged to be left to themselves : in act they repeated the very prayer of the evil spirits, that they might not be *tormented before their time* ; and so Christ left them.

To St. Peter, on the other hand, Christ made Himself known by a blessing granted to faithful work. He was weary with toiling and yet ready for fresh labour. The night was spent, when the prospect of his work was best, and yet at the strange Teacher's word—for so only as yet he knew Christ—he was willing to let down his net in the broad daylight. The words which he had just heard moved him to obedience if not to hope. And when the crowning sign was given, he saw at once its inner significance. He knew that he was face to

face with God. And at that supreme crisis it was not loss or gain of which he thought, but simply of sin. As a sinful man—and the original word is personal and not general—he felt that he could not stand before his Lord and live. But it was this very sin, felt and confessed, which Christ had come to take away; and so He did *not* leave him.

Now these two narratives are for us, as I have said, a parable of life in its highest aspects. They show us how we may deal with the manifestations which God is pleased to make to us of His judgment or of His love; how these may be to us an occasion of final abandonment or a call to a new and nobler charge. They do not belong to an obsolete order of things, but to that under which we live.

The revelation of the nearness of God is not less real, not less solemn now than it was in old times. It is not less real. When we look at the two narratives which I have put together, we shall be struck by one point which they have in common. Where nearly all else is different, the Gergesenes and St. Peter were alike in this, that they recognised in the works which they saw a divine power. They could have explained them otherwise. There was nothing outward in them which might not and does not in some form or other happen to us in the ordinary course of God's Providence. But to them the child-like expression of an instinctive conviction was more natural than it is to us. The expression of the conviction was more natural, but not, I believe, the conviction itself. However much the fashion of modern thought may disguise or stifle the feeling, yet our own hearts bear witness within us to its

existence. If we ask ourselves sincerely, we shall know that it is not a mere form of words if in some sorrow we say that it is the Lord's doing; or in some joy that it is the Lord's gift; or in some work that it is the Lord's charge. The belief to which such phrases bear witness is real, even when it is not energetic and abiding. Only let us be true to ourselves, true to our deepest instincts, true to every lesson of history and every experience of life, and we shall know that to us also God shows Himself in acts and words and thoughts, not less luminously, not less powerfully, than to the men of old time. We too may beseech Him to leave us, because we are unwilling to give up some unworthy idol, and He may leave us—leave us like the Gergesenes, bereft of our treasure and yet without Him. We too may fall down in humblest acknowledgment of our sinfulness like St. Peter, and He may accept the offering which we render Him of His own gift, and call us to follow Him.

Thus the revelation of the Presence of God to men is not, we may be assured, less real now than it once was, though it is modified in character, even as men themselves are changed; and it is not, if we allow ourselves to think of it, less solemn. If indeed we could realise it as vividly as outward things, the powers of life would be paralysed. When the Jews heard the voice of God from Horeb, they cried in an agony of distress, *Why should we die? for this great fire will consume us.* And to us God is made known in more exceeding majesty. We can see, what they could not see, the far-reaching results of His laws, extending beyond all thought and investing each

act with an infinite importance. It was an old belief that Lazarus, who had looked upon the mysteries of the other world and seen the issues of life as they are, never smiled again when he came back to the earth. The thought is a sombre one and only partly true, and yet it is partly true, and it is well for us to look calmly at it, and so onward to the great hereafter. It is well for us to take measure, as God may enable us to do, of the contrast between what we are and wish to be, and what He is; to set the thought of His immediate presence before us when we are beset by temptations or oppressed with weariness; to recall what is the necessary destiny of a being with whom He can hold converse, when the routine of life seems trivial and disappointing. The very power which awes us will at the same time guard us; and as we apprehend more fully the infinite relations of our transitory life with all that has been and all that will be, we shall work with more absolute patience, knowing that, wherever we are, we may be fellow-workers with God, even as we are partakers of the divine nature.

Do not therefore, I would say to you all, drive away the thoughts of the presence of God. Do not drive away the thoughts of the terrible majesty and holiness of God which must come into your hearts from time to time, as if they were foreign to the revelation of the Gospel; but rather cherish them as the foundation of some higher task. Strive, at such a season as this, to gain for them intensity and depth. They are not indeed the characteristic marks of the Christian mind, but they awaken it to

new energy. The consciousness of personal sin which they disclose is the first condition of forgiveness ; and the sense of forgiveness is the spring of active love. If, then, you regard the evident signs of the unapproachable purity and truth of God as showing you your weakness and your needs ; if they lead you to shrink from the face of God because of your unworthiness and not because you are unwilling to lose that which would perish in His sight ; if you still cling to the knees of Christ when you pray Him to depart, the will of Christ will have been wrought in you, and though He may call you to abandon the gift which has revealed His presence, He will transform your common work with a spiritual power.

So it is that the sense of the nearness of God, which at first appals us, becomes afterwards a necessity of life. It is not that the contrast between the Sinless and the sinful can ever grow less ; it is not that the difficulties and contradictions of the world are in any degree removed ; but in the Person of Christ that contrast is seen to be capable of being carried up to a final harmony ; and in the work of Christ the visible order in which man moves is seen to be but a small fraction of the whole order with which his destiny is bound up. In this way our eyes are opened that we should see a continual revelation of God in and through the common routine of duty. We learn practically that while in one sense we are infinitely removed from Him, yet in another sense it is in Him we live and move and have our being. For us the experience of St. Peter is fulfilled in action. When he first

recognised his divine Master by His marvellous gift, he prayed Him to depart from him. At a later time, when others were offended at the mysteries of Christ's teaching and walked no more with him, St. Peter was unmoved. As soon as the question was asked, *Will ye also go away?* he was prepared with the one true answer, *Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life.*

If indeed we have shared in any way St. Peter's fear, we shall also share St. Peter's faith. The lesson of Easter will follow the lesson of Lent. There is no other way in which we can truly live than fellowship with Christ. That Presence of God which in itself is of insupportable glory is tempered to us through His Son, and thus only, with human sympathy. Thus only we can feel Him near to us, and when stricken down yet cling to Him the closer. But without the possibility of a constant looking to God we may add year to year and grow or decay as time rolls on, but we cannot *live*. There is nothing else which can bind all the fragments of our existence together in a vital whole; which can enable us to look backward and forward and claim a share in the past and in the future without diminishing ought from the reality and permanence of the separate existences of which they are made up; which can assure us that our connexion with the physical world is not limited by what we see, but extends to an undiscovered order of which this is but the image.

Briefly, then, to sum up all that has been said, the revelation of the presence of God—of God in Christ—however awful in its first apprehension,

supports life, ennobles life, and in the end transfigures life.

*It supports life.* We all know what is the power of a friend near us in person or in thought to keep us from evil, to rouse us to good, to make us like himself, exactly as he is pure and brave and generous. And if that Friend be as able to help us as He is ready; if His power anticipates our prayers; if to the words *Thou God seest me* we can add also *Thou God lovest me*, what more is needed to guard us when we are hard pressed in the battle or to raise us when we are cast down?

*It ennobles life.* In every case by far the largest part of our time is filled up with little occupations of business or society which seem to have no moral value. Can the end of man be so magnificent, we are tempted to ask, when he is so often forced to forget the glory of his birthright and so rarely enabled to contemplate it? But such misgivings disappear when we remember that the end is not yet; that neither years nor action represent the actual efficacy of life; that even here God is working, we know not how, towards issues which our conceptions of great and small are unable to measure; that He has lived on earth in His Son; that He is living now on earth through His Spirit in His Church.

*It transfigures life.* The vision of God which is first gained on earth, it may be, in times of great darkness and distress, and is inevitably obscured to the last with clouds of doubt and error and failure, is the pledge of its own more perfect accomplishment. The divine glory is seen now here, now there, and though we cannot yet either approach to or bear

its full brightness, we know that it is about us everywhere even where it is veiled, and thus wait in hope till it is openly shown. The spirit of sonship reposes without impatience in the counsels of the heavenly Father and looks forward to their consummation. *Beloved, now are we children of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be : but we know that when He shall appear, we shall be like Him ; for we shall see Him as He is.* So at last, when death is swallowed up in victory, judgment also is set aside by the fulfilment in the believer of the Divine image. Then the Presence which was at first recognised for reproof shall be found to be for life. The glory of the Resurrection shall crown the Temptation in the Wilderness.

## XIV

*Father, if Thou be willing, remove this cup from Me: nevertheless not My will, but Thine, be done.*—ST. LUKE xxii. 42.

AT the close of his account of the Temptation, St. Luke tells us that then *The devil left our Lord for a season*. Doubtless there was no time throughout His life—which was, indeed, one victory over evil—in which that great adversary left Him wholly unassailed; but the words lead us to look for some special manifestation of his malice—some sequel to his first desperate attempt—some last struggle with his Conqueror. Nor is the expectation vain. The Agony in the garden, which we are led in the course of our Services to consider this morning, is in many respects the natural correlative to the Temptation. In this we see Christ's human will proved to be in perfect harmony with the righteous will of God, just as in that His sense and soul and spirit were found subjected to the higher laws of life and devotion and providence. The points of similarity between them are numerous and striking. The Temptation occurred directly after the public recognition of our Lord's Messiahship at His Baptism: the Agony was separated only by a few days from His triumphal entry into the Holy City. The Tempta-

tion preceded the active work of our Lord's prophetic ministry: the Agony ushered in the final scenes of His priestly offering. The Temptation was endured in the savage wastes of the wilderness: the Agony in the silent shades of the night. Thrice under various pleas did Satan dare to approach the Saviour: thrice now does the Saviour approach His Father with a prayer of unutterable depth. When the Temptation was over angels came and ministered to Him who had met Satan face to face: during the Agony an angel was seen strengthening Him who fought with death knowing all its terrors. But there are also differences between the two events which give to each their peculiar meaning and importance for us, though they are thus intimately connected. At the first our Lord was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted: at the last He retired into the garden to seek the presence of God. At the first He went alone to meet man's enemy: at the last He takes with Him three loved disciples to watch and pray while He approaches His Father. At the first Satan lures Him to gratify each element of His nature: at the last He endeavours to oppress Him by fear. At the first our Lord repels the Tempter with the language of invincible majesty: at the last He seems to sink under a burden—like the cross which He soon carried—too heavy for Him to bear.

It would be easy for me to tell in other words the narrative to which we have listened—to ask you to call to mind the slope of the mountain now cast in shadow by the Paschal moon—the ancient wood of olives—the deep, dark ravine of Kedron below,

the long line of the Temple walls above, standing out clearly in the brightness of an Eastern sky as the symbol of God's power—but I dare not weaken by other language the simple majesty of Holy Scripture. The accompaniments of nature are all lost in that vision of Divine Agony, when Christ's soul was exceeding sorrowful unto death, when He fell on His face upon the earth which He had made, and prayed to the Father with whom He was one.

It is, then, to this that I wish to direct your thoughts—to this, that Christ Himself—Christ our Lord and our God—bowed down before His Father, praying that *if it were possible the cup of suffering which He had to drink might pass from Him*. And think at what time this was. It was but yesterday that we contemplated Him thanking His Father that His work was done, that His Father was glorified, yet scarcely was that wondrous thanksgiving uttered when He Himself appears as a suppliant—when He entreats that He may be delivered from that hour in which all was to be consummated, if such were God's will. How are we to explain this contrast? How could Christ thus faint at the prospect of His sufferings—He who ever was *a man of sorrow*? How could He show the agony by which His soul was troubled? Martyrs have faced death in every form, not with patience only, but with exultation. Thousands have offered their lives without a thought, for their country or their rights. Nay, more, there have been those who, despising in proud scorn all outward help, have found in a firm will support, as it has seemed, in the bitterest trials of humanity. It

was not so with Christ. In the prospect of death He is not triumphant, nor dauntless, nor unmoved. The narratives of the Evangelists bid us contemplate Him who gives joy to the martyr, heroism to the patriot, courage to the weak, full of grief, I had almost said of fear. We must try with devout reverence to realise the awful scene—most feebly and most dimly it will be at best—to understand the mysterious fulness of its teaching.

I have alluded to the contrast which this prayer of our Lord offers to that recorded by St. John, in which He commends His disciples to His Father's care, that they may be one in Him as He is in the Father. There is, indeed, a contrast, but let us not think, as some have dreamt, that there is any inconsistency here. The priestly prayer was ended and now the victim had to be prepared—the life-long sacrifice was now to be completed in death. But the will had first to be offered up to God as a living, holy offering, in the full vision of woe which Christ alone could dare to contemplate. At such a time can we wonder that His perfect Manhood was proved to be perfect by sorrow? Have not we felt ourselves, in the narrow limits of our experience, sudden changes of feeling in great crises of our lives, which we are permitted to liken to Christ's triumph and Christ's sorrow? These are words, brethren, of unspeakable solemnity, and yet Scripture encourages us to use them. Christ, we must remember, was tried in all things as we are, and the Christian is tried as his Master was—He indeed without sin, but we with sin only less than His love. Have

not we then felt at times the blessing of prayer answered, work done, communion granted? Have we not felt that in us, as members of Christ, God is glorified—that in us His name is manifested—that we are not of the world, but one with Him, already admitted to share the glory of His kingdom and the brightness of His presence? And when the new joy has promised to abide with us for ever, have we not at times sunk down to the depths of despondency? Have we not felt cast off by Him whom we have sought to love—deserted in some hour of need—entangled in busy cares—blinded by the darkness of earth? Surely we have all felt thus; and whither shall we turn for comfort but to Gethsemane? to whom shall we look for truest sympathy but to Him who from the shelter of God's Temple crossed the dark river and entered the garden of affliction? For every detail, every name in this marvellous Gospel has its meaning. If He had not shown to us that Temptation is no sign of God's displeasure, we might faint when tempted. If He had not shown us that sorrow even unto death is no sign of God's desertion, we might despair when cast down.

But let us look still deeper. Let us try to discern faintly the cause of Christ's sorrow. Sorrow is ever the child of sin. Without sin neither sorrow nor death—the end of sorrow—had entered this world of ours. Christ, then, when He took our nature upon Him to redeem it from sin, though sinless Himself, endured its penalty. We, indeed, are so stained with sin that we cannot contrast our present form with its first purity. Sin is so bound

up with our lives, if I may so speak, that we cannot contemplate it apart in its hideous deformity. We have a certain fellowship with sorrow which makes us forget the origin from which it springs. We look on ruins with a pensive pleasure, because we do not realise how they mar the perfection of God's world. Evil in every shape has points of contact with us; but in Christ the power of evil had nothing. Before His eye sin stood unveiled and monstrous: and by it pain and grief and death its offspring. These He endured not as the heritage of a corrupted nature, of a diseased will, of a guilty life, but all-holy, all-pure, all-just, for us. With sin He could have no part, but when He endured its consequences then He felt its utter misery and godlessness—then He felt that by this He was separated from His Father—then His soul was very heavy—then He, who sighed because sin had stopped men's ears, who wept because sin had made his very friends to doubt His power, and Sion to reject her King—in this nearer presence of its malignant working was weighed down to the ground. But out of the depths He called to God, and God heard Him. "Father" He still cried, and the Son was answered.

And is there in this, my brethren, no lesson for us? Do we look on sin—that is, on all that which separates us from God—as Christ looked on it? Do we trifle with that which made Him tremble? Or do we try, by His help, to hate it because God hates it, because it is opposed to Him? The holiest men are always the most severe in judging themselves; and for this reason, that their eyes are in part opened—that they can take in something of

the extent and full proportions of evil as it was revealed to Christ at the awful moment of His prayer. If *we* have no such misgivings, no such trials, then for us this Agony has little comfort. But if we *do* feel a power within us warring against God's Spirit, then, my brethren, where need we look for comfort but to Him who in our human nature conquered the whole progeny of sin—who stripped off their disguises and put them at last to an open shame?

There is still one other point on which I wish to speak. I said that Christ showed His sufferings. His Temptation was exposed to no human eye; but the same disciples who had witnessed the manifestation of His glory on the Holy Mount were present at the depth of His humiliation in the garden. They were not enemies who could triumph over sacred sorrow, but friends whom He chose to watch with Him. Yet do *we* not find it hard to open our hearts to others? do we not often pride ourselves on what we call self-command and fortitude? do we not hide in our secret chamber feelings which we are ashamed to confess? do we not mask by a smile the grief which is consuming us? Yet, my brethren, it was not so with Christ. He does not teach us to be stoics: He does not teach us to count sorrow a light thing, and evil a passing cloud. He has provided us with strength to bear the burden, He has placed a light in Heaven to gild the darkness; but He would have us feel that there is a weight to bear, that there is a shadow on the earth. Let us then in this be true-hearted: let us dare to seem to be what we are; let us profess

that evil is indeed the evil that we know it to be, that pain is not natural to man but contrary to his nature, that death is terrible in itself; and while the profession is made, joy and peace and hope will stream down to us, angels will appear to us to strengthen us, because we are thus made partakers of Christ's sufferings, and because we suffer with Him and in Him, we are more than conquerors.

Christ's Agony is, indeed, the very consecration of human suffering, the fresh spring of human hope. There is no depth into which we can be plunged which He has not fathomed, no gloom into which we can be cast which He has not illumined. There are trials harder to bear even than death itself, but Christ hath known their bitterness, and if we recognise the source of sin from which they first flowed, He can turn those bitter waters into rivers of comfort. In all, however, there is one voice of warning. In all Christ says to us, even as He said to the apostles, *Watch and pray, lest ye enter into temptation.* There is danger even when we follow Christ most closely into the inmost recesses. Watch and pray, lest your eyes be heavy—lest you do not see the misery of sin—lest you do not look to your Redeemer's sufferings—lest you do not notice the powers of good and evil hovering around to guard or ruin you. Watch and pray, for Satan, when vanquished, only leaves you for a time, to come again with new fire. So let us watch, so let us pray, and we shall know, as countless thousands have already known, the virtue of Christ's midnight Agony.

## XV

*And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto Me.*  
—ST. JOHN xii. 32.

TO-DAY the thoughts of all of us, my brethren, are turned to one subject, but that subject is so vast and mysterious, so full of hope and warning, so joyous in its issue and so terrible in its accomplishment, that each one will find in it some peculiar lesson. The full contemplation of the Passion of our Lord is, indeed, beyond all the powers of man. The death of Christ stands alone even among the marvels of Redemption. The thought of the Incarnation is shrouded in wonder and awe, yet old poets dreamt that God might come down from heaven and dwell on earth ; but no human imagination ever ventured to picture the Creator suffering for the creature, the very Lord of Life slain by those who held their lives from Him. No one ever imagined this mystery, and now no one can realise it. Strive as we will, we can only catch distant glimpses of the truth, and apply to ourselves now in this way and now in that the teaching which they suggest.

Thus we may—trusting wholly to the Spirit and the Word—inquire with humble reverence into

the cause which necessitated an event so overwhelming as the death of the Son of God ; and learn to see, however dimly and feebly, that it was needful that a life-long sacrifice of body, soul, and spirit should be consummated in death, in order that our whole nature might be redeemed from the power and the curse of sin. Or we may examine with inward questionings the character and motives of those by whose agency Christ was led to the cross, and detect the secret thoughts which were revealed in the hearts of priest and governor and king when Jesus was led before them. Or, turning to another side, we may contemplate the Christian as dying in Christ, and recall the oft-repeated words of the apostle who speaks of the crucifixion of our old natures not as an idle figure, but as a vital reality, and ask in sober earnestness whether such words have any meaning for us ; whether we bear about in our bodies the marks of the Lord Jesus, branded as His true bond-servants, dying daily. Or again, centering all hope in the triumph of Christ's love, we may look within ourselves and watch whether any heavy burden falls from us when our eyes rest upon the cross, so that, like Bunyan's Pilgrim, thenceforward we go on our way rejoicing.

These and many other lines of thought, fruitful for life, may occur to us as we ponder on the teachings of this day ; but there is yet another suggested by the Collects for the day, which, by God's help, I am more anxious to follow. In the Collects we are taught to contemplate the Death of Christ as the central point in the history of the world, as being in very deed the pledge of the

union of mankind, the common foundation of Christendom, the bond of the Christian congregation. For it is on this day in an especial manner that we pray for those who have not known Christ or who have rejected Him—"for Jews, Turks, infidels, and heretics"; on this day for all estates of men in the Holy Church; on this day for each family of God assembled to meet Him in His house.

The words which I have taken for my text present these thoughts to us in a most marked form, and if we can only carry those words away with us, the day will have taught us a great lesson. *If I be lifted up from the earth, I will draw all men unto Me.* Such were the words which Christ spoke in the contemplation of His death, and the history of Christianity is the record of the fulfilment of the prophecy. The cross is offered to us as exercising an inherent, constraining, overmastering force, as that which seizes and carries with it those to whom it is applied: and so it has proved. The cross is indeed the power as well as the stumbling-block of the Gospel. And even from the first in the details of the Passion we may, I think, trace the beginnings of Christ's sovereignty. After the mysterious Agony a divine calm is settled upon His acts. The spiritual victory was achieved, and thenceforth He was unmoved by the bodily sufferings which followed in quick succession. The contrast is complete and striking. He was betrayed, and He addressed the traitor only in words of tender remonstrance. He was arrested, and He healed the servant whose hands were ready to bind Him. He was accused falsely, and He opened

not His mouth. He was denied, and a look alone was turned upon the faithless apostle. He was mocked, and He wore in silence the purple robe and the crown of thorns. He was delivered to be crucified, and He went forth meekly bearing the cross. If the daughters of Jerusalem bewail Him, He bids them weep rather for the desolation which should fall upon themselves; if the robber acknowledge His royal power, forthwith He dispenses the blessings of paradise. Everywhere He appears triumphant in suffering till the last pang of mortal agony, when the endurance of death—the end of sin—seemed to separate Him from His Father. “Christ reigns from the tree” in the language of the early believers, and, as I said, if we look for any wide and lasting bond of brotherhood among men, for any symbol of love among Christians, for any source of unity among ourselves, we need only fix our eyes faithfully upon the cross of Christ.

Let me then say a few words on each of these thoughts in succession. *If I be raised up from the earth, I will draw all men unto Me.* Christ upon the cross is the pledge of the fellowship of all mankind of men as men. We say commonly that all men are brethren as descended from a common father—brethren as heirs of a common nature—brethren as condemned to a common death. Much more are they brethren for whom Christ died. The savage of Australia, for example, has little in common with ourselves. The image of our first parents is almost as much effaced from his person as the image of God from his heart. Yet for him Christ

died. This I know; and to one who knows this the consciousness of spiritual brotherhood must last for ever in spite of the widest differences of circumstance or culture. But we need not go to the other side of the world to find a test for the reality of our belief in the universal love of a crucified Saviour. Our streets are thronged by thousands with whom we have no earthly sympathy, no earthly bond. Stand in the crowded thoroughfare and watch for a moment the living stream as it rolls along. Each one hurries on to his work and to his labour, passing you without a word, without a look, busy with his own cares, filled with his own pleasures; and yet in each, however proud, or mean, or bright, or vile, or sad, you will see a soul for which Christ died—a brother bound to you by ties stronger than all human ties, by interests which shall survive the ages.

We hear on all sides of violence open and unrestrained, of ignorance dark and wilful, of poverty crouching under the shadow of wealth, of evil arraying itself in the robes of virtue, of enterprise which commands the resources of worlds, of fraud which appeals to providence to further its deceptions, of tyranny which usurps the language of justice and the sanction of religion. And surely, my brethren, in the midst of such wild confusion, when rivalry sharpens the ear and tongue, there is much need that we should look to Christ's cross and learn from Him to pray for those whom we condemn, to encourage those who repent, to teach those who know not what they do. In the midst of our material prosperity, in the fulness of our acknow-

ledged power, there is yet room left to Englishmen for humiliation and self-abasement. And believe me, that each time we bend to the earth in penitence we shall rise with renewed strength for the conflict. Much may be done if our hearts be ready. The day is still before us in which we may work; and God in His own good time will show us a more perfect way. Meanwhile, it will be needful that we also take up a cross and follow Christ. In proclaiming the fulness of His love, we must be ready to bear some shame and trials for His sake through whom God is not ashamed to call the least and lowest of men His sons.

But let us narrow our ground. Not only is Christ crucified the point of union of mankind. In a more peculiar sense He is the centre of Christendom. We cannot hide from ourselves the fact that as it has pleased God that hitherto the vast majority of men should know nothing of His Gospel, so it has pleased Him that of those who profess to follow Christ a vast majority should overlay the truth by error or hold it most imperfectly. Yet even here there is one common point. If it were not so we might well faint in our labours. But as in the Holy City, while all other sites are jealously guarded by some special sect, the Church on Calvary is open to every Christian, so all who bear Christ's name alike find joy and peace and strength in looking to His cross. In this all are at one. The thought of Christ crucified brings comfort to the heavy-laden in every Christian church, in every Christian land. That thought calms the death-bed and confirms the faith

of Greek and Latin, of Copt and Armenian. Christ still reigns from the cross over a Christian world. For this let us thank God heartily. And exactly as our faith is lively and our hope steadfast, when we are brought face to face with error, sorrow will take the place of anger, love will take the place of bitterness, zeal will take the place of strife. We shall not cherish the truth which we hold less fervently, we shall not hate the falsehood which Christ hates less sincerely, but withal we shall rejoice to know that beyond and below all our differences there lies this foundation which none can shake, even Christ crucified. We shall hail this beginning as the sign of a glorious future when His promise shall have a full accomplishment. *If I be lifted up from the earth, I will draw all men unto Me.*

Nor is this all. Christ crucified, who is the bond of mankind, the bond of Christendom, is in a yet closer sense for us the bond of this His family here assembled to seek His presence and to commemorate His death. And is there not in this truth something which we fail to make our own? Day after day we come together into His house to pray to Him and to hear His Word, and yet how few of us expect to meet Him there! How few of us think that when two or three are met together in His name, He is in the midst of them—in sorrow or in love—as surely as He was with the disciples in the upper room where they were gathered in fear and He addressed to them the words of peace! It is now too often as it has been of old time, in spite of the compelling virtue of the cross. For long centuries Christ had been in the world speaking

by the prophets, speaking in men's hearts, and they knew Him not. He clothed Himself in human flesh and they crucified Him. He rose from the grave and appeared to those faithful few who had recognised in the Man of Sorrows the Saviour of the world, and even they said that it was a spirit. He comes to us now and we welcome Him not. He is with us here and we perceive Him not. He whispers in our hearts and we hear Him not. He fills us with thoughts of love and patience and long-suffering, and we cast them away as weak and unmanly. He bids us follow Him and we turn aside from the narrow path of grief to the highways of the world. He invites us to His feast and we make excuses and cannot come.

But if our eyes have been holden hitherto, they need be holden now no longer. Christ is waiting as at this time to reveal His Passion and His Victory. He holds out to us His cross, the symbol not of suffering only, but of triumph. Let us look to that, and we shall find in it all wisdom and all hope. As we strive to work for God, times of doubt and difficulty, of mistrust and discouragement, must come. It may seem, when we have done all, that the realm of darkness is still unenlightened, the power of evil still unchecked. But let us be of good cheer. Christ reigns from the cross. He has conquered by dying, and will, if it please Him, give us the victory through sorrow.

Never was there such a comment on what the world calls success as the cross of Christ. That agony of shame and suffering and desertion seemed to be the end, past all reversal and beyond all re-

trivement. It seemed to be the end, but in the transfigured cross we have learnt something more of the ways of God. Looking to that we can bear and wait, and know that many who will not acknowledge us as yet, fix their eyes also on that transforming mystery.

There are, however, other trials, not from open opposition or apparent failure, but from divided interests, which we can bear by virtue of the same help. Some of us may be jealous for the purity of the faith which our own Church has preserved in the noble array of apostolic order. Others around us may be eager to spread doctrines less pure and forms less simple or less becoming. But let us not be hasty to forbid them. Christ reigns from the cross. If He is preached, in that at least we may rejoice.

Or yet again, we hold, perhaps, each of us in our inmost heart, some point of doctrine which we have felt most deeply. In comparison with this all other doctrines seem to us of secondary importance. But while we hold most firmly the truth which we have known, while we guard most watchfully the treasure which we have won, let us remember that the gifts of God vary according to the needs of man, that He distributes to us severally what we most require. Christ reigns from the cross. In the light of that sovereign love all personal differences will vanish.

In all things, my brethren, in the manifold discouragements of your conflict with the powers of evil, in the painful variations of Christian teaching, in the constitutional differences of fellow-believers,

turn ever to the cross of Christ. Remember the words which the Lord has spoken: *If I be lifted up from the earth, I will draw all men unto Me.* It is His promise, His strength. Labour in the full belief that His promise must be fulfilled, that His strength must be sufficient. Look not around you, but onwards and upwards—to Christ your present helper, to Christ your future King. So Passion week will lead you to the glories of an Easter morning—a short time of trial to the fulness of eternal life.

This may God grant to each one of us!

## XVI

*For as yet they knew not the scripture, that He must rise again from the dead.*—ST. JOHN xx. 9.

IT is very difficult for us to carry back our thoughts to that first Easter morning of which these words were written—for us who day by day repeat our belief in the great fact that Christ was raised from the dead; for us to whom the truths which that fact sets forth have, as it seems, become so commonplace that we hardly pause to think upon them; for us whose weekly day of rest is but the memorial and reflection of the glory of Easter. And so it is that these words must fall strangely on our ears, and now most strangely when we have been engaged in celebrating our Easter festival. Whatever may have been their meaning once, we are tempted to believe that they can have no meaning for us now. Nay, more, they appear to us to be very hard words. We cannot understand how they could have been once true. Can it be, we ask, that the apostles were ignorant of the central lesson of the Gospel when they had before them the signs of its reality? Can it be that, standing by that empty tomb, they failed to grasp the substance of its teaching? Can it be that they knew not at length the meaning of words

which they had anxiously pondered in their hearts, questioning at an earlier time what the rising from the dead should mean? Not even yet, when in the twilight of the early dawn they hastened to prove the strange tidings which had broken their suspense of sorrow? not even yet, when they had dared to enter into the lonely place where the Lord had been? not even yet, when the first fear was dispelled that an enemy had taken away the dear remains of Him whom they had loved?

Not even yet!—so our thoughts run on—and still they had had a testimony to the Resurrection which seems to us most clear and unmistakable. They had listened to the living words of Christ; they had heard the confession of His adversaries that never man spake like that man; they had followed the outlines which He had drawn of a glorious kingdom; they had welcomed the promise which He had given them of future triumph; they had witnessed afar off the claims which He made to royal majesty before the judgment seat of Pilate. And could they think that every hope was quenched and every deeper source of truth sealed for ever in the unreturning grave? We, so we fancy, had we been with them, could not have thought so.

They had seen the works of Christ: how His unfailling power had ever fulfilled the tender counsels of His unfailling love; how His inviolable holiness had conquered by open contact the evil in which it had no part; how the brightness of His Presence had effaced by its abounding splendour the darkest stains of sin. And could they think that every energy of His quickening life was spent, and that

He who had saved others was Himself doomed to corruption? We could not have thought so.

They had been present at the awful spectacle of Christ's death; they had felt that Nature sympathised with Him who had swayed her powers; they had seen Him dispense to the penitent from His throne of shame and yet of glory the rewards of a life to come; they had marked the confession of the centurion who watched over His last agony, that truly this was the Son of God. And could they think that such an end was not to be the beginning of a nobler triumph? Could they think that the cross was set for ever as a token of defeat, and not to be hereafter the emblem of surest strength? We could not have thought so.

They had studied the writings of the prophets; they had found the key to their meaning in the Person of the Lord; they had recognised in Him the sum of ancient promises; they had known that this was He of whom men in old time had spoken; they had felt each in the depths of their own hearts that it was for such a one that men in every time, burdened and bowed down with sin and grief, yearn with passionate desire. And could they think that a mission which had been heralded by a world-long line of witnesses, and confirmed by the instinct of devotion, was to issue in darkness and martyrdom? We could not have thought so. So we fancy when we listen to the words, *They knew not the scripture, that He must rise again from the dead.*

To us all these separate lines of witness seem so certainly to point to one conclusion that we marvel at the slowness of the apostles' thoughts.

To us the life and death of Christ seem only a prelude and a preparation for His Resurrection. We cannot understand what other end they could have had than that. But, as we see, to the apostles the darkness over His grave was a thick veil through which no light was possible. They could patiently, wistfully, tremblingly wait and wonder, but at first they could not know. The lesson which they had to learn was one wholly new to them, and they were dull (as we judge) at learning it. But perhaps, if we look deeper, we may see that we all are still like them in this. It would surely be strange if it were not so. The Gospel does not really grow easier by time. If it was hard at first to understand the reality of the Resurrection, it is not less hard now to feel what its message is to each one of us; to apprehend it as personal good tidings; not only to record the memory of it every Sunday, but also to bear it about with us in our common work as the sure pledge of the transformation of all that is lowly and mean to highest uses. The likeness indeed between ourselves and the apostles in this respect is far closer than we are apt to suspect. We dare not flatter ourselves, as we practically do, that had we been in their place we should have felt the truth of Christ's Rising more readily. If we are in spirit faithless it is not from want of outward signs to arouse our faith. If we believe not now with the living voice of Christendom sounding in our ears, neither should we have believed if Christ had preached in our streets.

The apostles had had, as we have seen, the testimony of Christ's words and works and death and

the full voice of Scripture to quicken their faith ; and we now in our own late age have no less.

The apostles had heard Christ's words : we too acknowledge Him as our Teacher. There is no one here who does not treasure up sayings of Christ which seem like charms against the ills of life ; there is no one who does not remember with personal aspiration His promises of peace and rest ; there is no one who does not call Him " Lord."

The apostles had seen Christ's works : we too acknowledge Him as our Healer. Whatever be our sorrow we hasten to lay that before Him, even if we keep our joys to ourselves. We look instinctively to Him for help in our distress, even if we do not venture to prescribe the mode of its application. He, we believe, knows our frailty and is merciful to forgive us our sin if we open it to Him.

The apostles had seen Christ's death : we too have the cross ever before our eyes. The experience of ages has proved its virtue more surely than the darkness and the earthquake. Not one penitent, but thousands have known its efficacy. Not one stranger, but thousands have borne involuntary testimony to the sublime grandeur of its lesson.

The apostles had read the Scriptures : we have added to the records of Scripture the broader lessons of Providence through eighteen Christian centuries. They saw the converging lines of old life meeting in Christ : we have seen the diverging lines of a new life springing out from and fulfilling in many ways the varied purport of His will. They saw the end and the beginning : we see the variety of a rich and manifold growth.

The fulness of testimony in old time failed to enlighten, and dare we assume that it will necessarily enlighten now? Is there no danger that we may miss something of the message of this holy season? The apostles, in spite of their knowledge, knew not even on the Easter morning that Christ must rise from the dead. And we with our wider knowledge, do we know—know with any living power—what the Resurrection is? We habitually think of Christ as the Teacher, the Healer, the Sacrifice, but do we with equal trust think of Him as the Conqueror of death, the Transfigurer of daily duty, Himself the spring and Author of eternal life?

It is towards this that we must strive if we would learn what Christ is and what He has done; it is in this conviction alone that we can find peace: to know this is really to know that Christ rose again from the dead. We must, in the words of Sunday's Epistle, set our affections—our thoughts—on things above—that is, we must see heaven about us here, look through that which appears to that which is. The cross indeed is a sign of unutterable woe till the open sepulchre is seen beside it. The human life of Christ is a dim record till it is apprehended in that risen life by which it is brought near to every one of us. The burden of common work seems only earthly and ungodlike till we feel with a true assurance that Christ also bore it, and carried through the grave that body which had toiled and suffered, that soul which had been oppressed by sorrow and disappointment, to the unspeakable fulness of divine glory.

And do we then, all of us, in this sense know,

or strive to know—strive to know with an effort real if not always prevailing—that Christ has risen, and by rising given us a sure pledge of hope amidst the tumults of nations, the loss of friends, the failure of our best endeavours? For this it is, and nothing less than this, if we think upon it, that the Resurrection teaches us. And it is to learn this that we must bend all our energies if we would take to ourselves the blessings which Christ offers. It may well appear that the lesson is for a lifetime, and that it is only learnt in part even to the end. Our own strength gives way even in proportion as we see the marvellous grandeur of the object to which our efforts are turned. But if our hearts fail us, if we feel that we have hitherto hardly pierced to the true meaning of the fact which we confess, if this Easter we humbly say “not even yet,” God is greater than our hearts and bids us see what He has done for us and what He is waiting to do. Easter is a time not for regret but for hope. The question we ask and dare not answer is turned into a voice of encouragement.

The apostles on that holy morning knew not that Christ must rise again, and yet the teaching of the opened tomb was not lost upon them. They returned home, but not as they came, doubting, lonely, desolate. They returned to gather strength from what they had seen, to ponder on the meaning of what they had heard, to wait for further manifestations of their Lord. And if, as our hearts bear witness, we are like them in their slowness to believe the Easter news, may we not also be like them when we return home to common work from looking even as

now on Christ's sepulchre? The voice of angels which meets us is that same voice which met them. Christ is not here: He is risen. And we know that He is risen from the dead, if we can look to Him in the shaking of empires and churches, in the confusions of parties and classes, and faithfully doing what we find ready to do, leave the issue in His hands, trusting that He will guide to a perfect end all that seems most discordant now, and build up into some portion of the heavenly temple in which He will dwell for ever the fabric of our lives.

We know that Christ is risen from the dead, if we commit to Him in faith those whom He calls from us to Himself, believing that in Him their life never ceaseth, but rather works on in nobler energy, more like to His life and nearer to our truest life because it is in closer dependence upon Him.

We know that Christ is risen from the dead, if from day to day we reach forward to a higher standard of Christian labour; if we make, as has been said, of our dead selves stepping-stones to higher things; if we rise out of the years that are gone with transformed powers, and bear about in us their fruits as elements of a diviner being; if each morning finds us stronger, braver, humbler than the night left us.

We know that Christ is risen from the dead, if the Sacraments which He has appointed for our great and endless comfort—the bread of blessing in which we have this day shared, the water of sprinkling through which we have this day welcomed new children of God into Christ's army—are

to us sensible pledges of an assured promise and intelligible signs of a presence everywhere made known in the world by commonest things.

We know that Christ is risen from the dead, if we look upon the earth as that which has been blessed by His coming, and which is destined to share the deliverance which He wrought ; if we look upon man as one whose image He has taken to the presence of God.

And if in any degree we *do* know this, if Christ has been pleased to reveal to us the power of His Resurrection not as a confession of words only, but as a vital principle of thought and action—may He in His great love increase this knowledge in us to a fuller and riper growth ! If we know it not, may He in His great mercy yet write upon our hearts the tidings of Easter, that we may all say, returning to our own homes, not only Christ hath risen indeed and appeared to Peter and the twelve, but each in our own souls and to our friends, Christ hath risen indeed and appeared by His Spirit unto me !

## XVII

*To whom also He shewed Himself alive after His passion by many infallible proofs, being seen of them forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God.—ACTS i. 3.*

I WISH this evening to direct your attention to a rapid survey of the revelations of the risen Christ which have been preserved to us by the Evangelists. In the course of the following weeks they will be brought before us in due order, and I think that we shall learn more from their teaching if we see first how they are related to one another, how they carry us from point to point in the gradual unfolding of a higher life, how they help us little by little to treasure up something of the Gospel of Easter for our guidance in the coming year.

But before I notice in succession the various scenes in which the risen Saviour is shown to us, it will be well to call attention to the contrasts which His new life, changed and yet the same, offered to the old life. Others had been raised from the dead, but they were raised, as far as we know, only to resume the ordinary functions of humanity and to obey its claims. They were as prizes wrested from death and not death's conquerors. Others had been clothed with an immortal dress, but they were

at once removed from fellowship with men, swept aloft in the fiery chariot or translated to the presence of God. Angels had visited the earth in various guises, revealing themselves as messengers of mercy or judgment, but they passed away when their work was done, capable, as it would seem, of closer intercourse with our race only for evil. But the Lord united in Himself truly and essentially a material being and a spiritual being. He offered His body to the disciples to be felt. He showed them the wounds in His hands and His side. He ate in their presence. He Himself prepared a meal for them. The familiar tone of His voice brought back lost hope; the familiar gesture of "blessing and breaking bread" made known His presence. And yet more, He retained not only the external characteristics of man, but also, in some sense, the feelings of man. He reproved the disciples for their dulness of understanding; he upbraided them for their unbelief and hardness of heart; and even used the semblance of human policy, when *He made as though He would have gone further*. But, on the other hand, He knew the words of Thomas which were spoken at a time when to their eyes He was absent. He appeared suddenly among the disciples *when the doors were shut*. He *vanished from their sight*. He was seen only when He revealed Himself, now in one form, now in another, as the work of love might need. And at last He ascended from earth so as to leave on the minds of His chosen witnesses the clear impression that He had raised humanity above the common laws of the material world.

We shall not, then, be wrong if we regard the

various manifestations of Christ after His Resurrection as designed to lead up to the perception of the true nature of this final lesson, and to explain gradually the character of that life, truly spiritual and yet truly human, which it is the office of Christianity to found. There are doubtless other aspects in which they may be regarded, full of comfort and instruction, but this is that, I believe, which shows them all to us in their perfect unity and completeness; and while I pass them in review, I would earnestly ask you to fill up afterwards for yourselves the outline which can only be drawn hastily.

The appearances of the risen Lord naturally fall into two groups, those which took place on Easter Day and those which took place in the course of the following forty days. These seem to be generally different in scope and character. The appearances on Easter Day were mainly, we may say, directed to convey a present belief; those afterwards to indicate a future presence. At first the true personal resurrection of Christ is the one fact which is variously revealed in relation to typical forms of doubt. Afterwards the connexion between Himself and His servants is unfolded in successive charges. The teaching of the one group culminates in the words: *Handle Me, and see; for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see Me have.* The other in the words: *Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, . . . and, lo, I am with you all the days, even to the end of the world.*

*Now when Jesus was risen early the first day of the week—thus we read in St. Mark—He appeared*

first to *Mary Magdalene, out of whom He had cast seven devils.* The fact is most full of meaning. The first sight of the triumphant Saviour was granted to one who had most sorely needed His help. His first words were: *Woman, why weepest thou?* To her who loved much, much was given. The tears which veiled the Comforter, still brought Him to console. Sorrow, isolation, the memory of the cross, these commonly first bring Christ to us in His glory. In His glory, and yet we know Him not. To us, absorbed in our own grief, preoccupied with our own dreams, He seems some common man. It is not till He calls us by name, till He makes us know what we are, that we can recognise Him. And then follows the reaction. As before Mary had seen but a "gardener," so when one word revealed the Lord, she would have kept Him as she saw Him then: she clung to Him. But at once the tidings of separation were coupled with the removal of bereavement: *Go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; and to my God, and your God.* Purely personal and earthly devotion, such as so often mars the noble records of enthusiasm, has no true place in the service of the risen Christ. Human tears indulged in hide Him. Human passion removes Him. We may not claim to retain Him for ever as He once shows Himself. He would lift us up above ourselves, and not restore only that which we cherish with imperfect affection. This is the first lesson of Christ's appearance. The next carries us somewhat further.

Two disciples were returning from Jerusalem to

Emmaus, talking of all that had happened during the last three days, sadly and hopelessly. *We trusted*, they said to Jesus, who joined them as a fellow-wayfarer, *that it had been He which should have redeemed Israel*. They had formed, that is, certain notions of what Messiah should do and be, and now that these were rudely dispelled they laid aside all hope. Mary was blinded by feeling, these by prejudice. They had searched Moses and the prophets, and found there only the confirmation of popular beliefs. Then it was that Christ applied to them the remedy for their failing. He addressed Mary directly: to these *He opened the scriptures*, and their hearts burned within them. They felt that they had erred—that Christ ought to suffer. They welcomed—hardest of trials—Him who had at once dispelled all the theories which were hallowed by tradition and use. They constrained Him to stay with them. They gave Him the teacher's place. *And it came to pass, as He . . . took bread, and blessed it, and brake, and gave to them, their eyes were opened, and they knew Him*. Here is the second lesson. As we may not measure the higher life by earthly emotion, so neither may we measure it by any partial deductions from revelation. We may not hold to this or that part, but must lay ourselves open to the whole. The secret of true knowledge is the loyal desire to know. If we think Christ might have been something which it seems to us that He is not, let us listen for the still voice of God, and it may be that a vision of glory will crown a lesson of reproof and patience.

Passing over two or perhaps three other appear-

ances of the Lord, which are very briefly noticed, we come to the third critical appearance on the Easter Day. The tidings that *the Lord was risen* had already spread, and the disciples were gathered together, as it would seem, to meditate on the joyful news. *And when the doors were shut where they were assembled for fear of the Jews, came Jesus and stood in the midst, and saith unto them, Peace be unto you.* Here then was a new trial of faith. Before Christ had shown Himself, so to speak, naturally, but now the miracle of His presence was obvious. Fear or reason might well suggest to those present that *they saw a spirit.* And so Christ met the double doubt. *Why are ye troubled? and why do thoughts arise in your hearts? Behold My hands and My feet, that it is I Myself: handle Me and see. . . . And He showed them His hands and His feet . . . and did eat before them.*

In these three great appearances the work of the first Easter Day was finished. The blindness which comes from the doubt of feeling, the doubt of prejudice, the doubt of reason was set aside. Christ's voice was heard. His divine portraiture was recognised. His true humanity was attested. One alone, as far as I know, Thomas, still cherished his misgivings, *believing not for joy.* And for him in due time a gracious revelation was prepared. This brings us to the second group of Christ's appearances—those after the first Easter Day. These too, as far as we can notice them, were three in number—in the assembly at Jerusalem, by the Sea of Tiberias, on the Galilean Mount. And then, finally, all these revelations were completed on Olivet at the Ascension.

For a whole week, it seems, the disciples were left to ponder on what they had seen and heard without further manifestations of Christ. He was with them, doubtless, as He is with us, though they knew it not. Then after eight days as they were together *when the doors were shut*, He again appeared among them. At once He offered to Thomas the very proof for which he had asked. But His presence chased away all doubt, and the fulness of faith found utterance in that confession, which went beyond all earlier thought: *My Lord and my God*. Then it was that those words followed which contain the great lesson of this scene for us—words which gave comfort to the last moments of one of the noblest of Englishmen—words which may speak joy to us for whom too often the light of heaven seems darkened and the glory of Easter dimmed: *Thomas, because thou hast seen Me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed*. In closest connexion with the most gracious revelation of Christ, it is written for all ages that the truest communication with Him is not with the hand which feels or the eye which sees, but with the heart which loves and worships.

*After these things Jesus shewed Himself again to the disciples at the Sea of Tiberias*. They had gone there in obedience to His command, and were waiting in patience for His promised charge. Meanwhile they were busy with their daily work, and in the midst of this He found them. A miracle which brought back the time of their early call revealed His presence, and then after a divine meal Christ foreshowed to Peter and John the various forms of

His service. He answered doubts and questionings which are always rising in our hearts. In the contemplation of our own difficulties we are often tempted to compare ourselves with others. We are ever asking, *Lord, and what shall this man do?* Is it for us to toil and for others to reap? For us to bear the burden and heat, and for others to garner the rich reward? Then we may recall Christ's words. He fixes our task, and for us our task is enough. To one it is given to labour and wander and suffer to *follow Christ*; to another to *tarry till His coming*, to wait in patience while each hope fades, while evil waxes strong and love waxes cold, to stand alone, it may be, powerless to human eye, against increasing foes, in the sure confidence that in the end the truth will conquer, though its champion may be baffled, defeated, forgotten.

This was a special charge. There was yet a third appearance, in which one commission was given to all Christians. In the last appearance we were led to remark the differences of mode in which Christ's work may be fulfilled, but in this we are led to look at its oneness. On the Mount in Galilee—the Mount, we may believe, which was already hallowed by many lessons of divine love—Christ met the great body of His disciples, and, declaring the fulness of His power in heaven and earth, charged them to teach all nations. And as it was not on apostles only that He breathed the gift of the Holy Spirit, so neither was it to the apostles only that this charge was given. *Ye have an unction from the Holy One. Ye are a royal priesthood.* The charge is for us—for all of us according to our special

place and duty ; and not the charge only, but the accompanying promise, which no age can exhaust, no faithlessness annul: *Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world.*

It is not the season to-day to speak of the Ascension—the last appearance of the risen Saviour—but you will remember how that summed up the lessons which we have gathered from the scenes which went before ; how it closed with the prospect of a witness to be borne unto the uttermost part of the earth, of a power which believers should receive by the descent of the Holy Ghost.

And in the face of this commission, in the face of this promise, what is our answer to the question, Do ye now believe? How do we make the revelations of the risen Christ our own? What do we carry away with us from the sight of those great scenes to which our eyes have been turned? Is that risen life of Christ a message of joy to us, a sensible link with a higher world, a pledge of our hope, a guide of our aspirations? Can we rest while it is less than this? Can we rest till we see in that which is no theory, no vision, no fancy, but a history realised among men, the transfiguration of our life? So far as it is so, let us thank God for His great gift ; and where we fall short of reaching to the fulness of its power, as we must all do, both in act and thought, let us with humble importunity repeat those simple prayers which should never die upon our lips: *Lord, increase our faith. Lord, we believe ; help Thou our unbelief.*

## XVIII

*Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves.*—2 COR. xiii. 5.

PERHAPS some who hear me now were startled as I was early last year by seeing advertised as the subject of an article in one of our popular magazines the question: "Are we Christians?" I have not read the article, and I do not know how the question was answered, but again and again in the course of the months which have followed, the question itself has risen before my eyes, claiming importunately a personal reply and a national reply, and it is one, if I may judge others by myself, which a congregation of men "who profess and call themselves Christians" will do well to ponder.

It may indeed seem a grievous thing that such a question can even now be asked as if there were a shadow of doubt on the matter; that it can be asked after eighteen centuries of conflict and victory; that it can be asked in this sacred building, which has gathered into itself the offerings of forty generations of believers; that it can be asked at this season, when we are again called to prepare for the commemoration of the facts of our faith in all their social and moving power. But however

grievous the thing may be, we know that the question has been answered in the negative by a few at least who claim to speak for a silent many who are less courageous than themselves; we know that it mixes itself in various ways with much of the most serious thought of the time. And at such a crisis it is our bounden duty to be candid in our self-interrogation, to look steadily at the greatest problems, and to try ourselves. For my own part, I do not think that we generally perceive how far this question reaches. We are distracted by external differences, by disputes which affect at the most our apprehension of the truth, and all the while I believe that our most imminent peril is not that we should think wrongly of God, but that we should cease to think of Him in any practical way at all. The real conflict in our own souls and in the world about us is between blank atheism and a living trust in God. And if we look forth with calm, open eyes upon the earth, upon nations desolated by anarchy and violence, upon cities stained by crime and sensuality and ignorance, upon our own neighbourhoods saddened by suffering which comes of sin, upon our own lives as we ourselves know them, guided too often, if guided at all, by some impulse of selfishness, we shall not dare to say that the conflict is decided. The conflict is not decided, and too often, as I think, we neglect to notice how it must be decided. For to believe in God as a King, a Teacher, a Saviour is, as all experience shows, possible only to him who believes in Christ—in Christ incarnate, crucified, raised, ascended; and thus, when we ask ourselves the last

question of all, Have we a God in the world? we are brought back to the question which we have already put, Are we Christians?

Are we Christians? In one sense of course we are. We are Christians by the circumstances of our birth, just as we are Englishmen. We have been made in our baptism members of Christ. The precious inheritance of the divine covenant is ours to use. We have laid upon us the responsibility of faith. I do not wish to underrate these common blessings. Far from it. These and these alone give us the assurance that all else is possible. But when we speak with generous pride of an Englishman, we do not mean the man who uses the resources of a great nation to further his mercenary treachery, who finds in the vicissitudes of foreign or home affairs nothing more than the chance amusement of indolent leisure, who never makes one effort to understand a little better the history and office of his country or his class, that so he may render some service to the common weal—we do not, I say, call that man an Englishman simply because he was born upon a certain rood of earth. Every one would shrink from such a profanation of a noble title. And so he is not a Christian, in the sense in which we now use the word, who only rests his claim to the name upon influences of time and place, who adopts the title as a covering of respectability or as an occasion of censoriousness, who has no active conviction that the faith which he professes reaches to the very springs of life, and that if it be real it must make itself felt in every deed and word and thought. The Christian, no less than the

Englishman, has his own kingdom, his own wars, his own fellow-citizens, and if these are nothing to him, his name can only be a ground of reproach from honest men.

What then is a Christian? Three words will really give us the answer. A Christian is one who believes in Christ. Who *believes in Christ*, you will observe, and not merely who *believes Christ*; one, that is, who does not merely endeavour to obey the commands and follow the example of a dead Teacher, but who throws himself with absolute trust upon a living Lord. Other priests and prophets and kings, at sundry times and in divers manners, as they were enabled by the Word, pointed out the way, and revealed fragments of the truth, and lived by the power of the heavenly life; but Christ was Himself *the Way, the Truth, and the Life*. He came not to bring a revelation of the divine will, but to *be* a revelation of the divine love. And he who sees the Father in Him, according to His declaration, who rests in Him, who lives in Him, is a Christian. But this definition, though it will be found to contain implicitly all that we can ever know or say in fragmentary apprehensions if we weigh it duly, will seem to many to be too vague.

A brief sentence of St. Paul, which we heard on St. Andrew's Day, will make it clearer. *If thou shalt confess*, so he writes (Rom. x. 9)—*if thou shalt confess with thy mouth that Jesus is Lord, and shalt believe in thy heart that God raised Him from the dead, thou shalt be saved*. These words, which we ought to keep ever before our eyes as the great

charter of our faith, contain, I think, all that we want. They are a brief comment on Easter Day. They set sharply before us what we must understand by belief in Christ. They lay down two conditions of our Christianity perfectly simple and intelligible. There must be, St. Paul says, an open confession in the face of the world that Jesus is Lord, and there must be a true belief in the depths of the soul that God raised Him from the dead. He who satisfies these conditions is a Christian.

*Thou shalt confess with thy mouth Jesus is Lord:* this is the first condition. And in this confession lies the sure safeguard against the practical atheism of which I have spoken. If we dare make the confession our own, we know and we proclaim that there is a living Power near to every one of us by whom the world is guided; we know and we proclaim that there is a living bond by which men are held together as sharers in a redeemed humanity.

Till we reflect we shall probably miss the amazing contrast contained in the phrase *Jesus is Lord*, which lies at the root of its meaning. That simple human name "Jesus" has been so glorified by long associations that we cannot without an effort realise that it describes Him who was very man; as man is known by a name which He shared at the time with hundreds of other men; as able to be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; as tempted in all points like as we are. And on the other side the term "Lord" is used so vaguely that we do not at once recognise that it marks here a supreme sovereignty exercised by a present King. But let us once feel what the two words thus say, and the

power of the confession *Jesus is Lord* will be obvious. It is, as I said briefly, the proclamation on the part of those who make it that to them God has been revealed in His Son, who took their nature upon Him ; that He, being very God and very man, is with them all the days ; that one whom their hearts can embrace with love is able to fulfil their prayers ; that the world is not left desolate ; that death and sin have found a Conqueror.

And the sufficient ground for this infinite Gospel is given in the second condition of St. Paul in the message of our Easter Day : *Thou shalt believe in thy heart that God raised Jesus from the dead*—even Him who was born and lived and died for men. In this belief lies the assurance that life is not a mere isolated fragment, a gleam of light between two realms of impenetrable darkness, but that it is a beginning of that which shall be, or rather of that which *is*, a seed charged with a power of victorious vitality ; that heaven is not some remote, inaccessible region, but the very atmosphere which lies about the believing soul ; that the two worlds of sight and faith are brought together in a sacramental union which is made real to us by holy rites.

A Christian, then, to sum up what has been shortly indicated, confesses, and lives as confessing, that all the affairs of men, all the processes of Nature, are swayed by one to whom he can look as his own Saviour ; a Christian believes, and lives as believing, that in the Resurrection of his Lord he too was raised ; that eternal life belongs not to the future only, but to the present ; that all he has been and is goes to form that which he shall be.

Looking at these truths, these conditions, we ask again, Are we Christians? or each with a personal questioning, Am I a Christian? We can, no doubt, put the question by. We can assume, if we please, that with a little leisure and a little thought we could answer it satisfactorily. But if the inquiry were indefinitely less momentous we should not do so; and if we do put it by, what shall we say in the meantime of our spiritual growth, of our social work, of the subtle influences which are passing off from us to others at every moment? Let us, God helping us, be honest with ourselves and render an answer in our hearts. For on the answer Yes or No must depend ultimately our whole view of the creation, of man, of duty, of sin, of the world to come.

If we are Christians, then we have a faith which is able to take possession of all life and to rule it; which is to raise the fallen and to cheer the desolate, while it claims and consecrates the energies of the powerful and vigorous; which gathers up into one mystery all the mysteries of being and makes them light or even welcome; which supplies a motive for devotion unimpaired by failure and undestroyed by death; which reveals that indestructible self (that ghostly "I")—which has been and is and will be—in its true relation to a loving Father; which breaks down the wall of partition between time and eternity, and lets in upon our faith rays of the divine glory; which makes toil easy because it cannot be fruitless, and love enduring because everywhere it rests upon the Source of love; which reveals death as a beginning and not an ending only, whereby the harvest of the good seed will be gathered into the hands of

the Great Reaper. Sorrow will come, change will come, trial will come, death will come, as they have come among us during the last few months. We shall miss the faces of those to whom we have looked for support. We shall feel darkness closing about us where we had looked for light. But if we are Christians we can still trust and hope; we can still realise a fellowship with those who have passed away, unbroken by separation, and a confidence as yet unshaken in Him who makes all things work together for good for those who love Him.

And if we are not Christians—if Easter has no present joy for us—what can we say either of the present or of the future? For us then, reason as we will, virtue will become what a man likes, and law will be the expression of force. The habits, the modes of thought, the traditions of faith may for a time keep down the violence of selfish passion. But if faith lose its power, the shadow of faith will pass away; and what then?

What then? If I read, as I read quite lately, that two-thirds of the criminals in one of our greatest cities were proved to be destitute of religious instruction, I seem to find the answer. The experience of every one's heart will tell him that the voices of God which he hears, the love of God which he feels, the grace of God which he seeks, the awfulness of God before which he bows himself, are not strong enough, as he feebly realises them, to keep him from frequent failure; and when those voices are unheard, when that love is unfelt, when that grace is unsought, when that awfulness is unrecognised, what hope can there be if unbelief

is armed with authority? And let us not flinch from the prospect in all its sadness. According to an inevitable law of human affairs, the power of sovereignty from age to age descends lower and is spread more widely, and dare we say that the great masses of Englishmen are Christians in the sense which I have endeavoured to fix? And if not, how do we regard the issue? Are we ourselves striving to win them by first giving up our own selves, or do we look idly on the swelling current of events and say in our hearts "After us the deluge," forgetting that he who dared so to speak in the last generation lived to be a fugitive and an exile?

These wider thoughts, and I can barely touch upon them, give a most solemn form to the question of our Easter Day, out of which they sprung. The point at issue, when we ask ourselves "if we are Christians," is not the observance of certain definite precepts, but a whole view of life. Do we or do we not believe that God has been revealed to us in a personal form to which we can approach; that He at present rules the world which He made; that He has united us one to another by ties which permeate our inmost being? Do we or do we not believe that He has shown to us the continuity of life through the grave, and that He has poured about us the light of an unending day? Do we or do we not believe that He is even now calling us to Himself and offering us power to obey the call? If by His Spirit we can say, with a faith trembling in the recollection of faithlessness, we do, then let us take heart, He will show us in good time how we may spread our faith and apprehend

it in greater majesty. For I believe that He is waiting to make known to us treasures of wisdom hidden from our forefathers. I believe that He is waiting to establish through us a nobler form of social order than has yet been reared. I believe that to England, "the eye, the soul of Europe," the priceless opportunity is given of seeing the Truth as it dawns, of feeling the aspiration which strives toward fulfilment. Through what sharp trial of apparent loss—fallings off, vanishings of what we have held dear—the new Truth will come; through what pitiless conflict of selfish interests the new order will come we know not, we do not ask to know. But if we are Christians—if we each one confess our faith with our mouth and believe it in our heart—we do know that the struggle cannot be long and that the issue cannot be doubtful. To this end, while there is yet time, may we take St. Paul's words into our souls and examine ourselves whether we be in the faith and prove our own selves. Easter is a time for fresh resolves and fresh efforts—a time for encouragement and strength—a time of rising out of our dead selves to a new and nobler being. Now if ever we can see clearly, God helping us, that over all the trials and anxieties and doubts and losses and bereavements of earth the promise shines brightly legible: *If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised Him from the dead, thou shalt be saved.*

## XIX

*A little while, and ye shall not see Me: and again, a little while, and ye shall see Me, because I go to the Father.*—ST. JOHN xvi. 16.

THESE words, which immediately follow the Gospel for the day, filled the apostles with perplexity. They had followed the Lord to Jerusalem with strange and wondering awe; they had assisted at His triumphant entry; they had witnessed the victories of His teaching; they had just risen from that Last Supper in which He gave them the Sacrament of the New Covenant; they had just listened to the words in which He promised them another Comforter to occupy His place and to complete His work. Everything foreshadowed some great and mysterious change, and still as yet they could not apprehend its nature or realise its nearness. The Presence of Christ had been to them the spring and strength of life; and could it be that now, when they were beginning to apprehend the grandeur of the work to which they were called, He in whom alone they were strong should leave them? For a brief space they had been allowed to dwell with watchful devotion upon His words and deeds, ever advancing towards their true meaning, and could it

be that this power of divine teaching should be suddenly withdrawn? If they had learnt much, yet how much more was still hidden from them; the whole period of their discipleship was but a small fraction of a lifetime, and could it be that now in *a little while* the privilege should cease? The thought of separation was simply sorrow: the thought of after-reunion was simply a riddle. If the crisis were indeed so near, would not they still cling to their Master in the strength of love? Could they not go with Him to prison and to death? In a few short hours the answer was given to these questionings by the agony, by the betrayal, by the desertion, by the cross, by the open grave; and then at last the apostles discovered that Death was the single gate to Life, and that it was only by the virtue of Christ's Passion that they could come where He was, and in due time follow Him whither He went.

In this way experience has made the general scope of the text of simple interpretation; and yet as the words stand in our English Bibles they hardly convey to us their full meaning. In the original there are two distinct words for "seeing": the sight of the risen Christ is distinguished from the sight of Christ yet living among men. The sight which was taken from the disciples was not given back to them again, but replaced by something nobler, surer, more intense. The Lord seems to say, if we may attempt to paraphrase the verse: "A little while, and you no longer continue to regard Me, as now, with scrutinising gaze, if perchance by the way of outward experience you may attain to

a knowledge of My person and of My work ; and again a little while, and you shall see Me—see Me once more truly with the bodily eye, and straightway interpret the sight by a spiritual perception which is raised above all doubt.” Or, to put the thought in another shape, that which is earthly, transitory, partial comes first ; and then that which is heavenly, eternal, complete. Outward experience only conducts to the border of the realm which faith enters. An interval of loneliness and mourning separates the time of external communion from the time of immediate knowledge. For a little while the consciousness of dependence is deepened by the feeling of bereavement ; and then in due course contemplation is gathered up in sight.

If now we bear in mind this full sense of the words, we can see how their application reaches outwards to the consummation of Christian hope. Each fresh manifestation of Christ is heralded by a time of sorrow which issues in a greater joy. A little while and the crucified Saviour came to His own as the Conqueror of death ; a little while and the re-ascended Lord sent to the Church the Spirit who should be its life ; a little while and we look for Him to come again, in what form we know not, to claim the sovereignty over the world which He redeemed.

And that which is true of these great epochs in the personal revelation of Christ is true also of the different stages of that social revelation of Himself which He makes through the Church. In one sense Christ is ever leaving the world to come again the same and yet transfigured. That which we

have grown to identify with the fulness of His Presence is withdrawn, and while we lament He stands among us again, and we know Him as before we could not know Him. He is unchanged, and so the unity of our life is preserved; He is changed, and by the change He raises us likewise to a higher level.

There is also yet another aspect in which the text presents itself for our consolation. The words find their fulfilment not only in the manifestations of Christ and in the progress of His Church, but also in the life of each one of us. For us the circumstances of our religious progress are so many revelations of Christ; and we have all known crises which have altered the entire conditions of our thoughts and actions. It cannot but happen that from time to time the immediate influences through which Christ has been pleased to make Himself known are withdrawn. When such a trial comes we cannot any longer regard Him and hear Him in the familiar way. The waters of comfort, if they flow, are hidden in strange channels. We seem perhaps to be alone. We miss a well-known face, a well-known voice. We look round and we no longer see Christ as we have hitherto recognised Him. But if it be so, if we think that the first part of His words is too truly fulfilled, let us not doubt, but believe most earnestly that the second part also waits for a higher fulfilment. *A little while, and ye shall not see Me* is true, that it may be true also, *again, a little while, and ye shall see Me*. Sorrow which lays open the true depth of our feeling is the preparation for joy. Separation which reveals the

extremity of our needs is the prelude to a fuller communion.

In this larger and yet more personal sense the words of Christ are words of blessing over work ended, words of blessing over work begun ; over work ended through which He has been pleased to show Himself, over work begun through which, as we believe, He is waiting to show Himself again. They are a divine commentary, a divine light on the changes of life. They teach us how we may regard disappointment and even draw hope from our loss. For this reason I have chosen them to guide our thoughts this morning. We all feel that there is a place vacant among us which we cannot fill. You and I have lost a friend, and yet I know—know even from Christ's own words—that we have not lost him so far as he was Christ's minister to us. There is a vitality in service which survives absence. There is a power of sympathy which overleaps space. Words once faithfully spoken come back. An example once given grows more powerful when we are forced to dwell upon it. Affection adds energy to motive even if regret does not move to new efforts. He who has laboured among you, as you best know, will not, my friends, I am sure, forget you, and you on your part will strive as you can for love of him to carry forward what he has begun as he would have guided you. You will help another to reap what he has sowed, that in God's good time, and in God's glorious presence, both he that sowed and he that reaped may rejoice together. The occasion is for all a very solemn one ; its effects must make themselves felt profoundly and lastingly ; and therefore I ask

you, as many as can, to join us this day at the Table of the Lord in one service of thanksgiving, in one service of prayer, in one service of Holy Communion, that at the outset of a new work we may realise the fulness of a divine fellowship and a divine support ; that we may learn better than before that what is taken from us may yet be continued in another form. I ask you, I say, to join in one service of thanksgiving for all the past offices of Christian generosity and watchfulness and devotion which make you feel your present loss ; in one service of prayer at once for him who has left us and for him who in his spirit will seek to continue his ministry ; in one service of Holy Communion, that we all, whether absent or present, may come to know more and more that we are bound one to another by spiritual forces which react beyond time and beyond change.

If this be our mind, we shall most certainly find Christ's words fulfilled even in the passing circumstances of our own lives. Something will be taken, and though taken it will still be left ; and He Himself will speak to us through "the sundry and manifold changes of the world," as He has spoken to all who believe in Him for eighteen centuries : *A little while, and ye shall not see Me : and again, a little while, and ye shall see Me . . . ye shall be sorrowful, but your sorrow shall be turned into joy.*

## XX

*For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith.—I JOHN v. 4.*

THE Services of our Church from Easter to Ascension-Day form a remarkable contrast to those for the Lenten season which we have lately celebrated. We were then invited to dwell with thoughtful reverence on the forty days in which our Blessed Lord was pleased to endure for our sakes the temptations of the flesh, the world, and the spirit, and to vanquish in His own person the craft and malice of the devil: we are now encouraged to listen with thankful earnestness to the teaching of those other forty days, wherein He assured His disciples by many infallible signs of the reality of His final victory over death and the grave, and spake to them of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God. Then we saw the preparation for His ministry: now we trace the foundations of His Church. Then we saw the ineffectual attempts of Satan to thwart the work which God proposed: now we see the sure pledges of its abiding triumph. The strong man then was vanquished, but now his house is spoiled.

In former times, as we are told, the Services in which we have just now joined had a deep and

affecting significance. The new converts who were received into Christ's fold on Easter Eve came as on this day to lay up their white baptismal robes in God's sanctuary, as pledges of their present zeal and symbols of their future life. Hence the prayer for purity and truth; hence the words of warning and guidance; hence the solemn professions of belief; hence the promises of God's presence and God's peace; hence the glorious assurance of our text, which must have sounded with divine sweetness and power in the first ages on the ear of the young, the hopeful, the earnest, that the Christian faith for which they had sacrificed all was truly the victory which overcometh the world.

But surely, my brethren, these Services are not less applicable to us than to the early Christians. We too at this time profess to have dwelt in an especial manner on the mysteries of the Gospel history. We too have followed our Master to the wilderness; like St. John we have seen Him on the cross; like the Maries we have watched at His sepulchre; like the disciples we have rejoiced at His resurrection; like the Christians of every age we have been ourselves baptized into His death, that *as He was raised by the glory of the Father, even so we may walk in newness of life.*

And it is very well for us to store up as it were at this time our Easter treasures. It is very well for us to reflect what are the great marks of the Christian Creed, and what are the results which should spring from them. It is very well for us to think on the cause in which we are enlisted, and on the victory which is assured to it. In these

days we must all ever be prepared, by God's help, to meet the changing assaults of conflicting enemies whose only bond is a common hatred to our cause. We must be ready to oppose new forms of truth to the illusions of superstition and unbelief. We must from time to time observe the tactics of active and untiring foes, and try the temper of our own arms. For God has entrusted to each one of us some great and special work to do for the safety and well-being of His Church—some great work, I say, for the results of every life are infinite, whether for good or evil; some special work, for we all have blessings which none else have, in our wealth or in our position or in our powers. According to our several ability Christ has assigned to us definite posts in His army, which we cannot desert without damage to His cause, or maintain without the strength of His help. And yet, if we obey His voice, we shall still be enabled to fight manfully under His banner, according to our baptismal vows, without fear or peril, for *our faith is the victory which overcometh the world*. Nay, more, as the original expresses it, *which overcame the world*, when it welcomed a risen Saviour. The first thing, perhaps, which strikes us in the character of our faith is that it bears the impress of man as well as of God—of God *in* and *through* man. Christianity is essentially *personal*: it centres in a Saviour's life. For this reason it is that the Church through half her year leads us to view each great event in the Gospel history, and calls her seasons from their names. And it cannot but be that all here present have felt at some time a fresh spirit of watchfulness, of joy, of thankfulness, of self-

denial, of hope from the contemplation of our Lord's life from Advent to Easter. And yet more often, perhaps, we profit unconsciously by that which is inwrought into our religious service. For this personality of our faith corresponds with the deepest instinct of our nature. For ages men eagerly sought for some great hero on whom they might fix their hope and found their life; they felt truly and deeply that man can find in man alone that fulness of sympathy which is necessary for the perfection of worship. They made a king, or a poet, or a philosopher to be their god; they framed legends of some ancient connexion of heaven and earth. They strove to reconstruct the morning-song of the Sons of God from the echoes which still lingered on the earth; but to these the voice of angels was silent. Their idols were like unto themselves, and nothing more: they had no power to help them, no promises to console them, no sacrifice to redeem them. And so when Christ came to realise what men had vainly longed for, the world had well-nigh ceased to believe in anything divine. The Jews limited the exhibition of God's love and power to the renewed prosperity and dominion of Israel. The heathen practically denied the action of Providence, whose existence was feebly attested by the arguments of a few philosophers and the offerings of a few peasants. The most pious of their teachers declared that it was impossible to proclaim to all men the knowledge of their Maker. But this cannot be our feeling, if we grasp in any measure the meaning of our creed. We *know* that we have a Saviour who is very man, though He be also very

God ; who is touched with a sense of our infirmities, though sin found no place in Him ; who has passed through every stage of human trial and suffering, though He be now seated at the right hand of God, to make intercession for " His brethren " ; who is even here, present among us, speaking words of comfort and peace to all who silently listen to His voice ; who is waiting to assure all who are working in His service that our faith is indeed the victory which overcometh the world.

Secondly, Our faith is not only personal : it is essentially historical. True it is that more than eighteen hundred years have passed since He who was called contemptuously " the Nazarene," proclaimed Himself to be " the Son of God, the Saviour of the World," but we must remember that since the commission to the twelve His words have ever had their full effect. To this our yearly Services bear witness. Saints and apostles are set before us, that in them we may see reflections as it were of small fragments of the Saviour's glory, even as it was typified before in patriarchs and prophets. The last festival in our Calendar tells of that great multitude whom no man can number with whom we too are bound in one communion and fellowship. Christ's Church has resisted alike the assaults of persecution and ignorance. At first its members were ridiculed, reviled, and martyred ; and still in three centuries they ruled the civilised world. Its doctrines were mocked and criticised ; and still the schools of wisdom were closed before the force of Christian truth. Barbarian tribes desolated the Roman Empire, and even then the light of the

Gospel shone brightly in the utmost bounds of the known world; and missionaries from Ireland converted the nations and trained the princes of Europe. Thousands there were in the darkest times who loved our Lord sincerely and laboured for Him heartily. Thousands there were whose words and works speak of God's grace in their hearts and lives. And let us then not forget that our faith is the inheritance of long ages; that we too are one in Christ with the glorious company of prophets and the noble army of martyrs; that we too join in prayers and praises with which the Church hath acknowledged God for seventeen hundred years at least; that the annals of Christianity are an evidence of its divine origin which scepticism cannot shake; that the historic perpetuity of our faith is an assurance that it is the victory which overcometh the world.

Thirdly, Our faith, which is personal and historical, is also essentially practical. Every mystery which is revealed to us is only so far set forth as to guide our conduct without satisfying our curiosity. If we look at the systems of human religions, we find elaborate attempts to explain and justify whatever seems at present strange and difficult to our limited powers. It is not so in the Bible. The doctrines of our creed are rather implied in it than expounded there; and though we see them all meet in one centre and in one scene, we know not, nor can we yet know, how far their influence extends beyond the revelation which God has given us, and beyond this world in which we live. If for a moment we direct our thoughts to the

Scripture teaching of the Fall—of the Incarnation—of the Future Life, we see that just so much is told on each of these points as is needful for us to know. Thus we say that our faith is practical. Its adaptation to the wants of our common life is an assurance that it “will overcome the world,” that it will overpower all the elements of matter or intellect or reason which are opposed to God, and hallow afresh every faculty of man—body, soul, and spirit—to the service and glory of his Maker. For, as we have said before, each characteristic of Christianity will answer to some power of the Christian. The victory of faith is as manifold as its nature.

(a) In the first place, it is a victory over fleshly, material evils, both in the individual and in society. It has power, we say, to vanquish the selfishness of man. Strange, indeed, would it be, if we could read the life of the Master whom we profess to serve and yet refuse to offer ourselves as a sacrifice to His cause. Thus it is that the *personal* character of our religion kindles our devotion. We do not read homilies on self-denial, but we see the image of our Blessed Lord as He wandered about on earth homeless, friendless, and forsaken. The Christian’s heart is kindled by His Saviour’s love; each look and sigh and word and deed recorded in the Gospel history is instinct with instruction and comfort for him, deeper than words could utter; and as he follows the traces of the life of Jesus he rejoices in every sacrifice which he makes to Him who was made sin that God might show His righteousness in us. He thinks often of that solemn admonition to *sin no more* with which our Lord concluded His merciful

judgment on the offending wife. He remembers that sick man who, after his year-long disease was cured, was still cautioned to beware lest a worse thing should befall him. He knows that our Lord hid Himself from those disciples who would have taken Him by force to make Him a king. He pauses to reflect in the warmth of controversy whether he too be not imitating the disciples who sought to restrain one from casting out devils in their Master's name, because he followed not with them. He takes account with himself from time to time whether he also is prepared to give up all that makes this life happy for the excellence of his faith.

And how is it with us, my brethren? How far are we conscious in any degree of imitating the most holy pattern of the Saviour's life, who left us an example that we should follow in His steps? How far do we place that before us as our ideal standard, that when perfected we may be like Him? How far are we willing and anxious to hallow our talents by consecrating their first-fruits to His service? How vividly do we realise His presence in our secret chamber? How earnestly do we seek to obey the teachings of His Spirit and His words in our intercourse with others, active against all evil, thankful for all good, prizing above all things the truth which God has made known to us, and zealous in spreading it abroad with sincere affection and love? For our faith will overcome also the material evils of the world around us. The miracles of our Blessed Lord, by which He removed the sufferings of want and disease, are in some measure perpetuated in the charitable deeds of His people. What was once

wrought by words of power is now realised by works of love. The alms-house and the hospital tell us of a sure and certain way in which it may be our blessed privilege to feed the hungry and restore the sick, and gain for ourselves the holy joy which God has been pleased to attach to the silent blessings of the poor and desolate.

How is it then with us, my brethren? If God has increased our store, do we lay aside of our abundance that we may cheer the fatherless and the widow? If God has granted us bodily vigour, do we ever employ it in seeking out those whom He has confined to comfortless chambers, far from all the sights and sounds with which the changing seasons gladden our eyes and ears? Do we strive in any sense to *go about doing good*, satisfying real wants and comforting aching hearts by deeds and words of sympathy? Do *we* battle with head and heart and hand against every form of disloyalty, oppression, and need, earnestly, patiently, lovingly, with a sure and certain hope; because we know that *our faith is the victory which overcometh the world*.

( $\beta$ ) Yet again, our faith is also a victory over intellectual as well as over material evils. Its history shows us how far it can appropriate all that is good and great in the progress of nations. The eternal truths of revelation remain unchanged, but they are clothed from time to time in that outward form which makes them most effectual in influencing the temper of the age. There is nothing in Christianity which is hostile to the development of men—nothing which checks the influence of reason and understanding in

the domains of human knowledge. Christian writers have adorned literature with the noblest efforts of imagination and taste. Christian philosophers have penetrated most deeply into the infinite forms of life with which God has peopled our own world, and scrutinised most carefully the countless worlds with which He has surrounded it. Christian scholars have analysed most successfully the powers of man, and found fresh tokens of divine wisdom in the varied harmony of our nature. And how, then, is it with us? Do *we* carry our faith into our studies? Do we look patiently for the working of God's wisdom in history? Do we mark carefully the traces of His goodness in Nature? Do we acknowledge thankfully the fitness of His revelations to unfold and hallow our whole being? And though perhaps some of us may find no leisure for literature or science or philosophy in the manifold engagements of daily life, yet at least as citizens of a Christian commonwealth, as members of God's kingdom on earth—though the full of enjoyment of our citizenship is still in store for us in heaven, as we read to-day—we are all charged with high and holy duties which we cannot neglect without breaking our earliest vows. Here at least we have scope for earnest and prayerful exercise of thought; here at least we have an opportunity of serving God with our *mind*, according to His own commandment. Teachers of old ventured to separate the duties which we owe to our religion and to our country; but this the Christian cannot do. He thankfully acknowledges that the inspired sincere prayers of a people bring with them divine help. He remembers that the Lord is still

the God of hosts, though He has also revealed Himself to us as the Prince of Peace. And surely, my brethren, it is our duty and joy to think on these things. Hitherto we have been singularly blessed as a nation. We have been spared the evils of anarchy and despotism with which other states have been desolated. And so may we sincerely acknowledge that God is the author of prosperity, and heartily thank Him for His mercies! So may we gratefully labour in our turn to do His work and to lighten, as far as we may be enabled, the clouds of darkness and misery which still dim the glory of this Christian land! There will doubtless be trials and difficulties in our task. For it is, I know, a saddening task to trace out distress too deep for us to relieve; it is a disheartening chance to find ignorance too dull to welcome or understand our teaching; it is a sickening sight to discover pretence and deceit called in to aggravate sufferings in themselves most real. But yet we are not alone in our labours. He who sent forth twelve fishermen and peasants to evangelise the world is present with us whenever we work in His name. He who knew full well the heart of man has told us to preach the Gospel to every creature. *Our faith is still assuredly the victory which overcometh the world.*

(γ) Yet, once more, our faith is also a victory over spiritual evils. The Christian life is the necessary commentary on the Christian creed. The sincerity of our belief is measured by the efficiency of our practice. *By their fruits ye shall know them. In this are ye My disciples, if ye love one another.* It is not enough to idolise a ritual, or conform outwardly

to the services of the Church. It is not enough to frame fair visions of perfection and to dream in seclusion of the restoration of the world. Formality and mysticism find little encouragement in the Gospel. Worship must be quickened by devotion, and contemplation must be realised in practice, before they can be worthy of that Spirit which is waiting to help our infirmities and to bring our right desires to good effect.

Our faith is practical. It is a power which must enter into every detail of our life or it is nothing. It is for the busiest an influence to hallow his common duties, for the loneliest a spring of blessing to cheer his solitude. And thus it is that our Church speaks to us at every crisis of our life, raising the veil which hides from careless eyes the sure connexion of earth and heaven.

Much, indeed, there is most precious and most beautiful in the ancient forms and services of our Church. It is, as I have already said, a noble privilege to inherit the rich treasures of the past; but the past loses all its proper power and meaning when it is transformed into an idol. In our age there are needs and dangers, there are instruments of good and evil, which were unknown when pious men first gathered round the central Church all that wisdom and art and benevolence could devise for the benefit of Christians. The school, the street, the prison itself open to *us* new channels which we must seek to fill with the water of life, not according to any antique formula, but by the analogy of the apostolic teaching. And we desert the post which God has given us, we endanger, as far as lies in us,

the victory of our faith, when we endeavour to recall some past time instead of striving earnestly to combine and hallow the conflicting interests of modern life.

Our faith is practical. And what then are we doing to extend its influence? Do we declare its power in the conduct of our ordinary business? Do we show to our dependants that the creed which we profess is a living energy which rules our work and our pleasure? Do we labour according to the measure of our time and means to spread far and wide the principles which we hold? Do we at least set before us some such pattern for our conduct, and as we fail from manifold weakness, turn again to the life of Christ for guidance and strength? The question is one which most nearly affects us, and it is suggested by every detail of our common duty. For so alone shall we fulfil our work; so alone shall we deserve our Christian name; so alone shall we contribute to the victory of our faith; so alone shall we hasten the coming of the Lord, for whom we look from heaven, who shall one day change our vile body that it may be fashioned like unto His glorious body, according to the working whereby He is able to subdue all things unto Himself.

*To subdue all things unto Himself.* These words of the apostle are indeed the substance of our faith, the clear description of its victory. They contain all that is true in what I have said, and depths of wisdom which words cannot express. Think on them in care and trouble and business, and you will learn their force. They tell us that our faith is an energy of life—a power to transform and perfect,

and not to destroy, whatever we hold dearest on earth. All things—all natural duties and joys, all human sorrows and sufferings—can thus receive and reflect in some measure the image of God's presence, and so far they work His will in us and make us like to Him. Such is the Christian's faith. Such is the Christian's victory.

May God grant to each of us this faith, this victory!

## XXI

*These things have I spoken unto you in proverbs : but the time cometh, when I shall no more speak unto you in proverbs, but I shall shew you plainly of the Father.—ST. JOHN xvi. 25.*

IT has been often said that we are inclined to exaggerate the importance of a conflict in which we are ourselves engaged ; and there are aspects in which the saying is true. But it is far more deeply true that we do not rate highly enough the dignity of our own life or of the common life of our age. Our attention is caught by that which is fleeting and variable sooner than by the grander unity which lies beneath change. A discord strikes upon the ear more sharply than the harmony which it breaks. Even in old times Plato used to teach that the din of earth alone drowned the heavenly music to which the innumerable spheres move on their courses. But though our senses are dull the divine voices are not stilled. The great order goes forward, and we contribute to its progress. Spiritual powers mould us and our labours, and with us the whole fashion of the world. And at last the mist which clouds for the present our work alike and our life, crowns both in the far distance with a golden glory.

Thus it is that great ages and great men are

unintelligible till time has revealed their essential character. A conqueror sweeps over a continent with his armies, and his victories seem the fruit of selfish ambition or recklessness, till it is seen that his wise forethought has prepared the way for better forms of thought and life. A poet scatters his writings about him, and without more care passes into a life of obscure repose, to be forgotten, as we should think, till at last he is recognised as the sovereign interpreter of human character. A prophet with stern and vigorous faith keeps alive in a captive people by warning and exhortation the hope of a future deliverance, and he is met by the simple answer: *Doth he not speak parables?*

For it is necessarily to the divinest presence among us that we are most blind. This, above all other things, needs the trained eye to discern it. And among the lessons of the Gospels none is more striking than the revelation which they make to us of the natural incapacity of men to recognise among themselves the working and the Person of God. The failing belongs to no one age. It is as common now as it was in apostolic times. But the spectacle of it there where it is patent and confessed may serve to quicken our apprehension to some of the open mysteries of life.

In this view the latest discourses of our Lord which have been lately brought before us are fullest of instruction. They set before us what He was and what He had done, and how far the apostles had fallen short of understanding His Being and His work. "Blessed," indeed, His disciples were beyond others, and yet chiefly blessed by the unconscious

possession of a hope which they could not realise. After they had heard lessons such as no man ever spake ; after they had felt love such as no man had ever shown ; after they had learnt by word and deed that Christ was the Resurrection and the Life ; when the voice was silent and the miracle wrought, they knew not who He was whom they followed. *Show us the Father, and it sufficeth us* was the last petition which they addressed to Him. And with what accents of tender expostulation must the answer have fallen on the ears of each one of them, as it falls on ours : *Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known Me ?*

To us the blindness of the apostles seems inconceivable. If *we* had enjoyed the outward and personal revelation which was granted to them, we fondly think that doubt could have had no place in our hearts. The work, the power, and the hope of life would have been felt to be infinite. We should have been wholly transfigured by the reflection of the Saviour's image. So we think when we are least sensible of the spiritual influences by which our duty is still hallowed. We idolise the past because we misunderstand the present. We do like the Jews of old, who built the tomb of the prophets whom their fathers had killed. A changed position and not a quickened eye makes that plain which was hidden before. Distance has established for us the true relation of what was seen at first only in detail. The mystery of the Presence of Christ has been laid open. The enigma of a divine age has been solved. We know "that there has been a glory on the earth." But yet we willingly forget that that very

revelation to which we look back in our best moments with yearning and almost regretful desire was to those to whom it was given a revelation in proverbs. It was not for them what it is for us. Nay, more—most marvellous truth—that outward manifestation of Christ was not so clear or full or energising as that which is even now being made to us if we open our souls to receive it.

The earthly life of our Blessed Lord in relation to His disciples was indeed one great proverb. It had a familiar aspect in harmony with the common life of other men, and beside this there was in it a meaning, vast and undefined, reaching to the very springs of all life. What this was, which was alike shadowed forth and veiled in words and acts, after experience alone could show; and all later history is, in its truest sense, the partial interpretation of it. For the time it was dark or even undiscoverable. The overpowering influence of the Lord's bodily converse with the people hid from them those higher views of His nature which are incapable of being confined within a limited form.

We cannot, it is true, dwell with too great earnestness upon the reality of Christ's manhood; we cannot picture to ourselves with too great vividness the circumstances of His ministry; we cannot apply to our own needs with too great confidence the sympathy which flows from His actual participation in our sorrows; but at the same time we must remember that the Lord's assumption of the present weakness and limitation of humanity was but for a time, and so far a hiding of Himself from us. By His Resurrection at length He transformed the

corruption of our nature, and as the Risen and Ascended Saviour is still most truly with us to the end of time.

*It is expedient for you, He Himself said, that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you.* His departure was the condition of that eternal fellowship between Himself and His disciples, confined by no bounds of time or place, which is offered to us. As long as He was seen under the laws of earthly being He could not be the source and centre of the spiritual life of the world. The very intensity of passionate devotion hindered the right appreciation of His divine majesty and work. "Touch me not," He said to her who had loved most—"cling not to Me, so as still to keep Me with you as you have known Me in old time, for I have not yet ascended to my Father." Here first was the end of the Revelation in Proverbs, when the Lord was seen in the perfection of manhood seated at the right hand of God.

For us, even if in our daily life we know it not, this vision is realised. For us the hour has come when Christ declares to men openly of the Father. We live in the midst of a Revelation of which that recorded in the Gospels was only the beginning and the parable. To us is given, as to St. Paul, to know Christ not after the flesh, but in the fulness of His sovereign power. We look back upon long periods which show His working in manifold forms, and help us to see *how* He works now. And if we dare draw any conclusion from the parallel development of the old dispensation, we seem to stand upon the verge of some great crisis in the government of God.

On us, once again, the ends of the ages appear to have fallen. We may, if we will, see Christ in the experience of souls and in the full growth of His Church; and yet does He not say to us, when we have witnessed His glorious acts, and even ministered His gifts, as once to Philip, *Have I been so long time with you, and yet have ye not known Me?* The risen Christ is with us as of old time—in our griefs, in our doubts, in our work—and our eyes are holden that we should not know Him.

It may seem unreal to speak of the Revelation of Ascension-Day and Pentecost under which we live as showing more plainly of the Father than that which Christ gave on earth, but reflection will show that it is so. The form of the revelation is different, as the original words of the text indicate, and its scope is wider. It is not made in the way of familiar intercourse, but with an authoritative voice from heaven. It is not written in the memories of a few believers, but in the interpretation of nature and in the vicissitudes of empires. *The field is the world*; and it is our privilege to look forth upon the world in the light of the Gospel, and watch the varied growth of the one Divine Word. That which was at first necessarily confined within a narrow horizon we see now reaching beyond the utmost limits of thought. Christ claims universal sway, and more or less clearly it makes itself everywhere felt. And at the same time this unfolding of truth is, in one aspect, natural. The progress which we contemplate is continuous and not broken. The later Revelation simply unfolds and applies the lessons of the former. Its superior clearness lies not in the

introduction of any new elements, but in the historical development of those which existed from the first.

If each man stood alone, it might be said that no progress in Revelation is possible. All that we can know is included in the possibility of the creature standing face to face with the Creator. But it is the great message of Christ that we are *not* alone. And as knowledge and experience widen, and we feel more and more powerfully how closely man is bound to man, how closely man is bound to the material world, we feel also that Christianity has anticipated our wants, and that the plainer revelation of the Father which springs from the exaltation of the Lord, brings again hope into the course of history, and life into the organisation of nature. Not in one way (this it teaches us) but in many the divine truth is apprehended; not in one way but in many the divine will is fulfilled; not in one way but in many the divine order is furthered. Some unconsciously or unwillingly, some even of envy and strife, advance the supreme cause to which we are all pledged. But however it be, each new fact which is discovered in the economy of creation, each new result which is observed in the life of man, is to the Christian a revelation of His Father: in them he hears his Lord speaking from the throne of His majesty in warning or encouragement.

For the plainer Revelation which is promised to us is a Revelation of the Father—not of our Father only, but of the Father of the whole world. And according as we apprehend this we are more blessed than saints in former times from whom vast realms

of being were hidden which are disclosed to us. To fulfil this the Spirit of God is shed abroad in our hearts, whereby the great thought may find expression. Following this, according as it is given us to do, we know more and more what life is and what it may be. For in this lies the strength and glory of our calling. In this the promise whereon trusting we can face the mystery of evil in men and states. In this the charm which invests with more than the splendour of Eden our earth which the Son of God has visited, and whose elements He has taken to Himself. In this the consecration of all that we are and all that is about us to a divine use. In this Faith finds the ground of its confidence, Hope the accomplishment of its aspirations, Love the fulfilment of its prayers.

For prayer is the necessary issue of any real sense of the Fatherhood of God in Christ—prayer, as the text teaches, whose virtue is in the reality of the relationship out of which it springs. He who loves Christ as he sees Him, he who believes that He came out from God, is himself loved of God and receives whatever he asks. Thus the way to heaven is open on every side of us. The Lord reveals Himself in those who bear His name. The Father is made known in His works.

Under such a dispensation we are called to labour. Towards the fulness of this open revelation we are charged to strive. Only let us not desert the post in which we are placed for the contemplation of any other which seems nobler or holier. Let us not neglect the dimly-seen glories—faint “shadows of eternity”—which lie around us, for

others which distance has made clearer. The work is *here* and *now*. This place also is holy ground. This time is not unblessed by divine voices. Not in proverbs but in plain utterances Christ speaks to us, but that we may hear them we must listen patiently and in silence.

So listen, and the message which witnesses to the present fellowship of earth and heaven shall be borne in upon your souls. So listen, and the restless din of conflict shall die away, for in Christ you shall have peace. So listen, and in the consciousness of answered prayer your joy shall be full.

## XXII

*Wherefore He saith, When He ascended up on high, He led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men.*—EPHES. iv. 8.

WE are met to-day to commemorate the closing scene of our Lord's first sojourn upon earth, to bear witness to the fulfilment of the redemption which He wrought, to look forward to the glory of His kingdom. There must be something wanting in the fulness of our Christian sympathies if such a festival can wake within us no thoughts of faith and love and hope; if that day which fourteen hundred years ago, as we read, spread joy through the whole world, shall find no welcome among us. It cannot, indeed, fail to strike every one that while the Birth and Death and Resurrection of our Saviour are the very measures of our year, His Incarnation and Ascension are almost unregarded. The beginning and the end escape our notice. The mystery of God's love is forgotten in the fulfilment of man's hope. The glory of Christ's triumph is lost in the recollection of His victory. And yet we may be sure that the Ascension—for of that alone I would speak now—has some special meaning for the Church—some special meaning for

us—or it would not have always formed a distinct article in the Christian Creeds.

Like the Incarnation, the Ascension is at once an end and a beginning—the close of one dispensation, the dawn of another. Taken together, these wondrous miracles sum up our faith. The one marks the union of God with man: the other the union of man with God. Two Evangelists have recorded each mystery, two have omitted them. The peculiar character of the Ascension is, however, seen in the fact that it is at once the last event recorded in the Gospel and the first recorded in the Acts. It limits and unites the life of Christ and the history of His Church.

The period of preparation by which it was attended suggests a comparison with the other crises in Scripture history which were ushered in in the like significant manner. For forty days Moses was on the Mount before he received the Law. For forty days Elijah tarried in Horeb before he obtained the revelation of God. For forty days our Lord Himself fasted in the wilderness before He began to proclaim glad tidings to the world. For forty days the spies examined the promised land—the figure of our heavenly country. For so long repentance was offered to the Ninivites. For so long, according to Ezekiel, the typical punishment of God's people was to last. Only once more that period is mentioned in Holy Scripture, when it is said in the narrative of the flood that the *rain was on the earth forty days and forty nights*. Some may see in this only an accident; yet surely they are wiser who, with the earliest of our Christian

teachers, find in the minutest dealings of God with men a wonderful harmony, and delight to trace it in its varied forms.

It is enough for us to notice the differences which distinguish the forty days after the Baptism from these forty days after the Resurrection. At first Christ was led to the wilderness: at last He was bound by no local ties. Then He was a-hungered and found no food: now He knew no bodily wants, and yet He ate with His disciples. Then He refused the kingdoms of the world which Satan offered: now He bids the apostles proclaim His power to the uttermost parts of the earth. Then He repelled the Tempter who bade Him cast Himself from the pinnacle of the Temple: now He is parted from His disciples and rises to the throne of God. The devil departed from Him at first but for a season: now at length the powers of darkness have been overthrown. The angels who ministered to the Saviour now minister to His servants. The time of conflict is followed by a time of peace.

It has often been said that the Ascension is implied in the Resurrection—that it is impossible to avoid assuming some such close to the period of our Lord's personal presence among men. However true this may be, there is that in the Scripture narrative of it which fancy could have ill supplied. No eye saw when Christ burst the fastenings of the grave, for the fact was proved by His appearance afterwards; but from Mount Olivet He rose while His disciples gazed up to heaven and still felt His blessing, because then alone could they be

witnesses of His exaltation, and yet assured of His love. Christ was raised from the dead by the operation of God's Spirit. He ascended, as it appears, by the exertion of His own will. There were no angels to carry Him from among men, as they carried the body of Moses; no chariot of fire to bear Him in a whirlwind, as Elijah was borne. A cloud received Him from the apostles' sight, and He passed beyond the sphere of man's natural existence to the open presence of God.

The Ascension, we have said, is related to the Resurrection as the triumph to the victory. The one is the ground of our hope: the other is the image of our glory. Christ not only conquered death, but He lifted mortality to heaven. He rose not only from the grave but from the earth. When, in the fervour of her joy, Mary would have clung to the Saviour who was restored to her, then followed that touching rebuke: *Touch Me not; for I am not yet ascended to My Father.* "Seek not to hold Me by the power of human affection," as the words seem to mean, "for I must lead you to a higher life. Look not on Me only as the Master to whom you have ministered, but as the God who has saved you. Henceforth earth has no hold on Me, as its prince had no part in Me before." Christ not only ascended up on high, but He led captivity captive.

These words, which St. Paul has adapted from the sixty-eighth Psalm, will illustrate my meaning. David is there speaking of the Mighty Conqueror—the God of Israel—their Guide from Egypt—before whom the powers of Nature and the might of kings gave way. His hosts have come back from the battle

laden with spoil; He ascends His holy hill in triumph, and His enemies follow as captives in His train. So, too, Christ—the Head of our Christian body—is crowned as conqueror. He has bound the strong man, and chained the powers of darkness, and put them to open shame. And yet more than this: not only has He subdued His enemies, but He has transformed them into His servants. Not only has He rescued man's body from corruption, but He has exalted it to heaven. That which was once the devil's is now taken by Christ to work His will. Captivity itself is made captive. Our bondage to sense is transformed into service to God.

In this respect it is that the thought of Christ's Ascension is to us unspeakably precious. It tells us that we shall rise again, not indeed to enjoy a perpetual continuation of an earthly life, and assures us that these bodies of ours shall not be lost, but raised to God. It tells us that our home is not here, but in our Father's house; and that we—with all that makes us men—shall dwell there. And it is in this hope, full of joy and comfort, that we find the antithesis of our faith to all ancient systems. The wise man rejoiced that he was not tied to an immortal body: the Christian thanks God that *his* body *will* live for ever.

The Ascension is, indeed, the visible symbol and pledge of the exaltation of the earthly into the heavenly; and while we realise in it the past manifestation of the Saviour's glory, surely, my brethren, it is no less full of instruction for us in the present. If we be risen with Christ, our hearts will not linger long on earth. If we have a new life, it will not be

spent as the mere perpetuation of our former habits. It will not be enough for us to have overcome death unless we subdue the body, in which he has placed his stronghold. There may, indeed, be some pause during which we shall dwell on the scene of our conflict, and assert our victory over temptation; but then we shall ascend heavenward and Godward, and rest in Christ. Then He will raise our human powers and common life to something of a diviner nature. He will aid us to conquer the enemies whom we bear about in ourselves, and make them work His will. And as our reason and understanding grow wider and clearer, we shall find more reflection of heaven in the world which sin has clouded—more signs of God in the life which man thinks is only for himself.

The Ascension has yet another lesson for us. We may not gaze up into heaven only to watch the Saviour as He leaves us: we must look there for the Judge who shall come again. Christ has indeed conquered sin, and has redeemed humanity, but as yet all things are not put under His feet. There is a creation groaning for a new birth, a kingdom yet to come, a Church to be cleansed from stains and healed from divisions. But it shall not always be so. There is a time appointed for the restitution of all things. The King shall return from the far country. The bridegroom, though He tarry, shall still come. The earth shall yet be the inheritance of the meek. Now Christ's human nature is withdrawn from us, but the Son of Man shall hereafter be seen upon the clouds of heaven. He who spake through the prophets in old time still, indeed,

speaks to His people. The Word still expresses the Father's message. But the "Man Christ Jesus" has left His brethren for a season. He is present with us by His Spirit, present with us sacramentally, but in His humanity He is now seated at the right hand of God as our Mediator and Advocate. To borrow the Old Testament type, we are as the Israelites watching in the outer court—that symbol of the world—while our great High Priest has entered into the Holy of Holies—watching till He shall appear again surrounded by the glory of God's presence, to proclaim that the sacrifice is accepted and the atonement finished. His prophetic work is ended ; His priestly office is even now being fulfilled ; and day by day we pray that He may enter into His kingdom. How sincerely, how faithfully, how anxiously, our own consciences must answer.

But I said that Christ—Christ in His perfect nature—is still present to us sacramentally. Here, my brethren, and on this day He has spread a feast for us, and bids us to His Table—to-day in memory of His triumph, and in prospect of His kingdom—to-day because He has given us a pledge that our whole nature, and if so, our whole life, can be raised to heaven. It may seem strange to some to hear the invitation at such a time, when we seem busy in other matters, finding occupation in our daily routine or diversion in our ordinary amusements. And yet do not misunderstand me if I say that the invitation is the more pressing on us because it *does* come to us in the middle of our work ; because it *does* call us away from common tasks to enjoy the communion of our Lord ; because it *does* ask for

devotion in the midst of our labours, and sacrifice in the midst of our pleasures. In this it expresses the true meaning of our Christian profession, and finds a fit utterance in those words which we shall soon use—the oldest relics of a Christian liturgy—“Lift up your hearts. We lift them up unto the Lord.” It is a voice which tells us that God claims no mere Sunday worship, no mere religion of times and seasons, but a full and hearty consecration of our whole being. It is a voice which tells us that His presence may be felt and His will obeyed in the playground, the market, the workshop, the study. It is a voice full of love and tenderness and mercy, of peace and hope, and yet mixed in it there are tones of warning; for it tells us that He who now calls us from our common duties to meet Him as a Saviour at His Table, may so call us at some time to meet Him as a Judge. Our whole life is in the main made up of the lighter matters of business and relaxation, and it is our whole life which God demands. He alone, my brethren, who claims the sacrifice can make it fit to be offered; but let us with the deepest gratitude remember He is ever waiting to answer the feeblest prayer and increase the weakest faith. So let us now ask for the help which He offers, lay hold on the promises which He makes, obey the command which He gives; and then go forth each to our proper work, offering that very work to Him as our reasonable service, striving to raise each faculty nearer and nearer to heaven, that we may realise the meaning of Christ's Ascension, and hereafter share His glory.

## XXIII

*But the end of all things is at hand: be ye therefore sober, and watch unto prayer.*—I PETER iv. 7.

THESE words present to us one element in the apostolic teaching which we commonly put out of sight, or if it is forced upon our notice, as in such a passage as this of St. Peter in the Epistle for the day, we are unwilling to dwell upon it; we shrink from inquiring what such a phrase meant when it was first used, and what it still means for us. And yet the idea which the passage contains permeates the whole of the New Testament. Everywhere the establishment of Christianity is connected by the apostles with some vast change in the world which they feel to be imminent. They speak as men who stand on the threshold of a new order. Old things are in their eyes already passing away. No language is too strong to express their sense of the crisis in which they are living. The time is short. The Lord is at hand. Already they are translated into the kingdom of the Son of God.

When we fairly weigh such expressions and compare their apparent meaning with what seems to be the steady flow of the great stream of human life since the first age, it is hardly surprising that we

should be perplexed and seek by some evasion to escape from the admission of the contrast. And so it is that we miss the greatest lesson of all history. Till we can in some measure apprehend the transition of which the apostles spoke, the two great festivals between which we stand to-day have no real meaning for us—the festival of the Ascension in which we see humanity lifted up to God, the festival of Whitsuntide in which we see God coming down to hold unceasing converse with man. But when we practically seize the import of the facts which we thus commemorate, then we can understand that the issue for which the first believers looked was indeed consummated. The establishment of the Christian Church on these facts was literally a new birth of the world, if, as we believe, the world is rightly summed up in the human and not in the physical order. It marked an end as complete as death: it marked a beginning as glorious as the Resurrection. We may carry back Christianity into Judaism or Paganism, we may carry forward Judaism and Paganism into Christianity, but the society which reposes on the faith in Christ ascended and the Spirit given has been reborn; it has passed into fellowship with a new order of being; it derives its life from new sources; it is directed to a new goal.

Like all other spiritual truths, this vast revolution was symbolised by an outward change—the change from the Jewish state to the Christian Church. Hitherto God had been pleased to set His name in one place and manifest His Presence there. The laws by which His worship was regulated limited its extension. His chosen people were called rather

to the work of witnesses than to that of evangelists. They preserved a true conception of the majesty and the love of God ; they proclaimed a future redemption for mankind ; they summed up in their religious life the continuous experience of all past time. But all this they were enabled to do by their isolation. They were spiritual representatives of humanity, but that they might be so they were, so to speak, a spiritual caste.

Now let us once substitute for that visible temple, in which the old dispensation was summed up, the glorified Body of the Lord ; for that local presence the universal mission of the Comforter ; for the abstract idea of God, the historical revelation of a divine Saviour ; for the gathering of the Gentiles to Zion, the taking up of humanity to heaven ; for the temporal consecration of history, its eternal transfiguration ; let us once feel that in the Ascension the seen has been united with the unseen ; that all men are bound together by one Spirit in Christianity ; that the historical life of the Son of God is spiritually reproduced in the progressive development of the Church ; and we shall then perceive what were the momentous consequences which were finally sealed by the last desolation of the Holy City ; we shall perceive how truly the apostles could say in the prospect of it that the end of all things was at hand.

It is true that we do not often consciously realise the magnitude of the revolution which has thus changed the whole relation of man to God, as far as we can apprehend it ; but none the less the influences which spring out of that crisis are moving us at every moment. And when we do pause to consider

the destiny of the world or of each one of ourselves, we know that there is opened before us in the work and Person of Christ a magnificence of promise which exceeds all hope and exhausts all labour. We only are faithless and then we think the Gospel fails. We ask where is the promise of Christ's Coming; we plead that all things continue as they were from the beginning, when indeed the end has come to us though our eyes are holden that they should not see it.

This, then, is what I wish to set plainly before you this morning, that the first establishment of Christianity as the one divine religion irrevocably marks the essential regeneration of the world. The types and symbols by which men had been trained before still may have retained their use, but they were summed up in facts; they were pressed backwards to something accomplished, and not forwards to something needed. At length, in the fulness of time, man was seen in all his weakness and in all his grandeur. On the one side only to be saved by infinite love, and on the other capable of personal union with God. No thought can go beyond teaching which embraces every human capacity and meets every human want. Thus if we wish to sum up shortly the characteristics of the new order, to feel how the end came, we see that the outcome which we know rests upon a twofold revelation—on a revelation of sin, and a revelation of redemption—given to us in Christ, in which is finally shown what humanity is and what it is the divine will that it should be. For this men before were dimly feeling, now attaining to this, now to that fragment of the

truth ; from this men since have drawn their strength, casting themselves trustfully on the unseen, and adding each their particular offering to the gathered wealth of the past.

Christianity is a revelation of sin. No one indeed can live long under any circumstances without feeling the strange discords of life. He is out of harmony with himself, out of harmony with the world around him, out of harmony with that higher order which he instinctively apprehends. But it is in the life of Christ that we are enabled first to regard this holier harmony in its true relations. In old times and even now men have been tempted to accept the evil which they have felt in themselves as a necessity of their nature, or even as a condition of good. But in that life it is seen to be wholly foreign to our proper being and unutterably hateful to God. In that life selfishness, which is the final root of sin, is presented in ceaseless conflict with love, and vanquished by Him who was very man. In that life we have a measure of the width of the great gulf between God and man which sin had opened, since nothing less than the Incarnation could bridge it over. If once we present to ourselves how Christ visited men, and why ; if we transfer to experience the conceptions of infinite sorrow and infinite majesty with which that act has made us familiar ; if we can present to ourselves, however imperfectly, in images from our own time, the facts of the Gospels, we shall know that in the Coming of Christ there is a revelation of sin the full meaning of which we have not yet made our own. Poets had pictured heroes redressing wrong by valour, and even conquering

suffering by endurance ; but Christ triumphed not only *over* suffering, but *through* suffering over its source ; and *Himself took our infirmities, and bare our weaknesses*. Saints had felt the temptations of the flesh, and had striven by an impossible divorce to separate their bodies from themselves ; but Christ took to Himself our body, and living the life of men, tempted in all points like as we are, *condemned sin in the flesh*. Statesmen had learnt from the annals of the past to recognise an inevitable residuum of hopeless misery as the condition of general progress ; but Christ came to show that such evil is unnatural, because it is foreign to man's true being ; and unnecessary, because it is not according to the will of God. Thus sin is revealed in its essence to be the opposite of love ; it is shown to be in us intrusive and superable ; and yet, lest we should think lightly of it, the cross meets us at every turn as the price of our deliverance. Whatever interpretation we may give of the efficacy of the sacrifice, this at least is clear, that it was for sin, for our sins, that Christ died.

And a still deeper prospect is opened before us. From the Temptation to the last hour, when the prince of this world came and found nothing in the Lord, the conflict with sin is represented in the Gospels as not with sin in man only, but with sin suggested by spiritual powers outside man and yet capable of acting upon him. And however terrible the thought may be, it falls in with all else which we can know or imagine of the relations of human existence. If it adds to the solemnity of life, it adds no less to its grandeur. For it is under no eternally

divided empire that we are called to labour, where the light and darkness are to coexist for ever in balanced antagonism, but for Christ who shall reign till all enemies are put under His feet, and the last enemy that shall be destroyed is death—death, the final issue of sin.

Now it seems clear that life, whether social or individual, which is based upon such a view of sin, as compared with any life before Christ, is a new life: old things have passed away. And this will be yet clearer if we take account of the revelation of redemption by which it is completed.

For if Christianity brings before us, as nothing else could do, the barrier which sin has placed between man and God, and the conflicts which it has raised in man's own being, it also presents with inexhaustible fulness the completeness of the atonement, whereby man is made at one with God and at one with himself. Historically it begins with the Incarnation and closes with the Ascension: it begins with the coming down of the Son of God to earth; it closes with the raising of the Son of Man to heaven. And in that order lies the sum of truth. God comes to man that man thereafter may be transfigured. All is wrought only in Christ. So it is that the broken harmony is restored; so it is that permanence is reconciled with change; so it is that our indivisible nature is made wholly divine.

And this belief in the completeness of restoration which is assured to us in the Resurrection of Christ, in whom we also are raised, explains the mode in which the future is dealt with by the apostolic writers. They do not, as we might have expected,

set before their readers a spiritual life alien from the present, but rather a continuation of the present under conditions infinitely ennobled. Their aspiration is not to be *und clothed* but to be *clothed upon*; not to lose anything of that which goes to make the fulness of their true being, but to receive above it a glorious accession of celestial power. The scene of anticipated activity which they display to believers is the earth which had witnessed their trials, renovated indeed and purified even like themselves. The form in which they regard the great change is that of a Presence—a revelation of Christ in His glory—whereby all shall be transformed, because in His sight all that is false and transitory shall disappear and the good be seen in its eternal beauty.

Thus the continuity of life to which Christianity witnesses is carried on from the seen to the unseen. At the same time, the world in which man labours now, which disciplines him and yet yields to his guidance, is not dissevered from his future. Nothing lies beyond the range of the redemption thus revealed. The unity of creation is restored in the unity of the new creation; and amidst the unimaginable grandeur of a glorified world the single soul retains its priceless worth. *In this rejoice not, the Lord said, that the spirits are subject unto you; but rather rejoice, because your names are written in heaven.*

It may well seem, when we allow ourselves to dwell on these vast thoughts, that they are not yet incorporated into our common life. In that sense the end has not come. But from the time when they passed into the social heritage of men, from

the time when a Church was built upon them, the end was at hand. A new order was begun which we can acknowledge to be distinct from the old in its spring and in its issue. An ideal was offered to inspire man's efforts, to which the accumulated victories of unnumbered generations will only approximate.

To feel the reality of this critical transition is our privilege and our necessity. Most of our time is spent in dealing with works of the old order, and they have precious lessons to teach us; but we shall never learn them till we distinctly apprehend the position which they occupy. Kings and prophets desired to see the things which we see and did not see them. The noblest among ancient thinkers would have found an answer to their deepest questionings in one of the days of the Son of Man, and that was not given them. But let nothing blind us to the spectacle opened to our eyes; let nothing rob us of the communion offered to our souls. The world which is set before us as the scene and the monument of our labours is the world in which Christ lived and died—the world which waits in travail pines for the manifestation of the sons of God. The society in which we are called to fulfil our part is nothing less than the Body of Christ through which He is ever being more perfectly shaped by the harmonious combination of that which every joint supplieth. We cannot forget—we cannot surely be willing to live as if we forgot—that on Calvary Christ died and from Olivet ascended to heaven. And if we carry with us to our work, as we all may, the memory of that

revelation of sin, of that revelation of redemption, we shall know that St. Peter's words have found their fulfilment, and that for us all things have become new.

*Be ye therefore sober*, the Apostle adds, *and watch unto prayer*. *Be sober*, for the splendid visions on which you are enabled to look are not for the imagination but for life ; *watch unto prayer*, for your strength lies in constant fellowship with Him who, though unseen, is ever near to help you.

## XXIV

*And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.—ACTS ii. 4.*

THE festival which we meet to celebrate to-day is in some sense the birthday of the Christian Church. More than eighteen hundred years have passed, and the memory of that great Pentecost, when the Spirit was first poured out upon the small company of believers, is still fresh. The life then given to our forefathers is as yet vigorous and active; the promise by which they were supported is unexhausted; the work assigned to them is unfulfilled. Nay, more, this life, this promise, this work, is ours. That first gift of the Spirit is the commencement of the dispensation under which we are living; and bears the same relation to the ministry of the Holy Ghost as the Nativity to that of our Blessed Lord. Whitsunday is indeed the anniversary of the foundation of our social hopes, which even now are slowly advancing towards accomplishment; the beginning of Christ's kingdom, which is silently conquering the varied powers of oppression and evil; the symbol of its true character, when all its citizens were filled with one spirit and one thought, knowing no national interests or private differences.

The circumstances of the great event which has

thus changed and changes the fortunes of the world have been already brought before us in our Services. The earthly work of Christ was done, and He who had come down from heaven had been received again in the fulness of His human nature to His throne at the right hand of God. Death, the grave, the earth had each acknowledged a Conqueror, but the Conqueror had passed away, and His little army was waiting in anxious hope for that array of promised power in which they should go forth to assert His victory. Ten days had elapsed since the Ascension, and the disciples were *all in one place with one accord*. At last the Day of Pentecost had fully come, to complete and crown the memories of the Passover. The festival on which they were met may have suggested hope, for according to the Jewish rites, a sense of calm thankfulness was at this season substituted for the anxious feeling of deliverance. The first-fruits of accomplished blessings were now offered in the Temple, in place of that hurried paschal meal which spoke of haste and danger and fear. The harvest then begun was now ended. The sacred cycle—that week of weeks—was finished; the victory was assured, the triumph was celebrated. It may have been that the thoughts of the disciples daily traced the antitypes of these old events in their Master's life. They too could tell of a hard-won victory and of a glorious triumph, which as yet, however, was incomplete, and they may naturally have looked for its completion on a day so full of hope. The offerings of Pentecost may have recalled the scene of the Temptation or the discourse at Capernaum,

as they remembered that the food of man was not that bread alone which they then presented in the Temple, but the Word of God; and so they may have turned in faith to Him who was indeed the Bread of Heaven, and have looked with awakened hope for the fulfilment of His promise. If, indeed, the later Jewish tradition be true, it can hardly have been otherwise. For according to this the day of Pentecost marked the first giving of the Law, and it might well seem that in the full harmony of the divine plan the beginnings of the two dispensations should coincide, and the new law of love rise, as it were, out of the old law of ordinances, as its fulfilment and not as its abrogation.

However this might be, we at least may trace the analogy and acknowledge the lessons which it contains. The thunders of Sinai die away in the rushing of that mighty wind, which was the familiar emblem of the Spirit's outward action; the lightnings are softened into those tongues of living fire which typify its inward energy. The promise was fulfilled; the power was given. *All were filled with the Holy Ghost*, and at once their work was clear. The men who had fled from the hall of judgment, and doubted by the open grave, knew no longer fear or misgiving. At once they used the gift of God to declare His glory, and spoke with a spiritual utterance of all *His wonderful works*. The curse of Babel was at last reversed. There a kindred multitude was divided by a confusion of languages: here scattered strangers were united by the unity of a heavenly voice. That was the issue of human selfishness: this the end of divine communion. How

the miracle was wrought we cannot tell. The result shows that it was most true and most striking ; and if the language of common feeling be rightly said to be universal, surely we can understand that the deepest expression of inspired devotion may have been heard at once by all in the tongue wherein they were born.

But the true greatness of the miracle, the true lesson of the day, lies not in the transient sign, but in the lasting effect ; not in the fire-crowned preachers, but in the sincere Christian ; not in the first gathering of the new converts, but in the progress of the universal Church. The lesson of Pentecost is for us and for our children as truly as for the first age. The changes which the Spirit wrought then it can work now when unhindered by unbelief. Once at least its full power was shown visibly to the world, that men might look back and know the blessings within their reach—within their reach, for the Scriptures do not tell us of another race than that of which we are born, of another Saviour than Him in whom we believe, of another Spirit than that by which we may be filled. The chasm between the first ages and the present is formed not by the will of God, but by the faithlessness of man. We too live in an age of miracles, but we want the seeing eye. To us also all things are possible, but we dare not assert our power. May God only grant to us a better knowledge of this ; may He fill us with His Spirit, and a mighty change will be wrought in society and in ourselves like that which followed the first preaching of St. Peter.

The issue of Pentecost was, as has been said, the foundation of the Christian Church. *On that same day*

*there were added* to the Church *about three thousand souls*. Without preparation and without design, a community was formed, which in three short ages conquered the mightiest empire which the world has seen and curbed the fierceness of savage tribes. At once the Spirit of Christ asserted His dominion, and in one clear example the history of the Church in all time is set before us in that simple company gathered by repentance and faith, and characterised by self-denial and fellowship. The same personal conditions are still required: the same help is given. And are not our circumstances the same? Are there none among us who have put Christ to shame, forsaking and denying Him, so that we too should be *pricked to the heart* when we hear the tidings of His coming judgment? Are there none among us who think it wild enthusiasm to look for any special marks of God's presence in the world, so that we too should ask *what we shall do* when we hear of the signs of the last days? Are there none among us whose thoughts are centred in self—in rest, in pleasure, in private interests—so that we too should turn with earnest gaze to that first company of Christians, who lived from day to day in gladness and singleness of heart, busy with prayer and praise, having all things in common?

For the true result of this day of Pentecost was not so much the saving of individuals as the construction of a society; and it is in this respect that it has the deepest lesson for us. In an age like ours, when knowledge is increased, intercourse increased, wants multiplied, when competition knows no bounds and success becomes more difficult as ambition grows

keener, is it not well that a day like this should set before us the beginning and end of our Christian faith, when *all were filled with the Spirit*, and knew no private wants, no personal rivalry. *All were filled with the Spirit*: it was no special blessing of the teacher, but the sign of the Christian. They had *all* things in common: there was no reservation of any peculiar object, but one hearty sacrifice. And these are the two points in the teaching of this Whitsunday which, by God's help, I pray may be fixed on all our hearts, that as the end of Christianity is to establish a true fellowship among men, so is this fellowship a fellowship *of* all and *in* all. This is the end at which we should aim; and this is the end which we shall gain exactly in proportion as we are filled with the Spirit.

Christians, I say, are all bound in the fellowship of a common work. We are apt to limit the office of the Christian teacher to one class only; but it was not so at the first. Then it was felt that each believer had some special task, some special gift, varying according to his ability, yet alike conducing to one great purpose. Fire from heaven hallowed each offering which was made to God. And as it was then, so will it be now, if we are not faithless. Each of us has a life to give for Christ—a life bound up with other lives and destined to work to the end of time—a life, all that we have and all that we are; and Christ will receive all and bless it in His service—the common work, the common task, the common duty, the routine in which the years of most of us are spent, no less than the brilliant exploit which rescues an army or saves an empire.

For the Christian fellowship extends not only to all persons but to all things. The community of goods which existed among the first Christians was but the outward expression of that deeper communion of feeling which should penetrate our lives. Not only should we strive to feel that we have each something to do for Christ, and to assure ourselves that we are doing it, but—harder still—we must not rest till we can sympathise with others and feel that they too are fellow-workers with us, bound to us by the common tie which binds us all to God. Yet how often is the case far otherwise! We withhold the look of kindly interest which might tell a humbler brother that we see in his daily labour a service loyally rendered to our common Master. We suppress the hearty prayer which might assure us that we are sharing with the rich and powerful the cares and perils of the state.

And if we feel that it is indeed a hard thing to realise the fulness of our Christian faith, if we feel constrained by the presence of our own needs and isolated by the intensity of our own cares, let us look to that Holy Communion in which we are this day invited to join, the symbol and pledge of truest fellowship. Let us kneel in that heavenly service side by side, as many as feel any true desire to serve Christ and to further His cause, and offer afresh to Him the living sacrifice of our souls and bodies, and He will most surely clothe us with fire from on high to do His will. So we shall go forth each to our special labour, to do it *for* Him and not for ourselves, to do it *with* others and not in proud loneliness, trusting, believing, loving, *all filled with the Spirit.*

## XXV

*Now there are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit.*—1 COR. xii. 4.

THE festival which we are met to celebrate to-day is the festival of the birth of the Christian Church. It was as on this day some eighteen hundred years ago that that divine Being was revealed among men who gives to them the new principle of social life ; on this day that the curse of Babel—wherein people is separated from people by varieties of languages answering to varieties of thought—was seen for a brief space to be done away in the fulness of a spiritual sympathy ; on this day that the messengers of the Gospel were clothed with that power from on high in the strength of which they went forth to all the world conquering and to conquer. And the blessings of that revelation, of that sympathy, of that power remain still unexhausted and unimpaired. We may leave them unregarded, unacknowledged, unused ; we may close our eyes against the brightness of their light ; we may withdraw our hearts from the action of their warmth ; but the pentecostal gifts—the tongues of fire which visibly rested on the first disciples—burn still throughout the earth. Their radiance may be dimmed by want of faith,

their quickening heat may be checked by want of love, but they *are* still ; and as God gives us grace to seek them, they are still effective for our guidance and for our inspiration.

The first outpouring of the Spirit was, I have said, the birth of the Christian Church, in the life of which we all share—the birth, that is, of a new society ; the union of men under new conditions and with new hopes ; the gathering of nations together into a vaster whole as before families had been gathered into nations ; the outward embodiment of a fellowship towards which all great and tender souls are ever striving ; and yet more than this, the consecration of social existence, which is unstable and fleeting, by an eternal and infinite Presence.

Such thoughts, since they have taken an outward shape, influence us all more or less, but their action is, for the most part, secret and silent. They are unspeakably glorious, but they are often unobserved because they are universally diffused. They are like the air and the sunshine, common to the world ; and like the air and the sunshine they are enjoyed without the devout gratitude of joy. For this reason I wish to suggest, as shortly as I can, one or two subjects for reflection this morning, which may help us to feel somewhat more distinctly what are the peculiar features of that Church, that divine Society whose birthday we are now commemorating, with the prayer that so we may be moved to fulfil our little parts in it with truer thankfulness and livelier devotion. I wish to point out how all of us alike who are baptized into Christ are equal in the rights of a heavenly citizenship ; how the obligation of

these equal rights constrains us to offer for the common good the special service which God has fitted us to render ; how we are encouraged to rise in faith and aspiration to the calm of that perfect peace into which the struggles, the sorrows, the sins of life shall be at last resolved. I wish, in a word, to see myself and then to show to others the words of the apostle—the promise of Whitsunday—written over all the contrasts and conflicts, over all the ministries and duties, over all the resolutions and repentances of our daily pilgrimage: *There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit.*

First, then, we have to notice this new thing which was manifested in the Christian Church, that all men are called to it, and that in it all men are equal. The thought of our equality in virtue of a common humanity and a common redemption is in some sense familiar to us, but it was a startling novelty when the apostles first proclaimed it. At that time creed was set against creed, race against race, class against class, and beneath these divisions there was nothing realised as deeper and more enduring. The opposition of Jew and Gentile, of Greek and barbarian, of bond and free, was regarded as inherent and absolute. And even now I fear that the true Gospel of one manhood is often hidden from our eyes by fanaticism as much as by pride. We are confused by the outside of things, and so our vision is disturbed. We see differences of rank, of knowledge, of wealth, and we forget that these are but as the dress of men. Some perhaps arrogantly separate themselves from their fellows because they are a little higher in station, or a little wiser, or a

little richer : others again no less vainly seek to reduce external circumstances to a uniform level. But both alike fail to realise the nobler equality of the Christian Church. Array a man in every human dignity, and how much nearer does he approach the infinite majesty of God? Let the scholar know all that can be known, and he will confess that the last lesson of his knowledge is the apprehension of ignorance. Let the rich man's barns burst with his gathered stores, and yet in the end the voice will come to him : *This night thy soul is required of thee.* In all these things we admit that what attracts us is shadowy, unsatisfying, transitory ; but, on the other side, the Christian is a child of God, a member of Christ, an inheritor of the kingdom of heaven, and the gift of Whitsuntide seals to him his birth-right. Only let him strive to understand better day by day what this birthright is, and, be he high or low, he will feel that no grandeur of descent can compare with a divine sonship ; be he learned or ignorant, he will feel that no treasures of wisdom can compare with fellowship with Christ, in whom all things consist ; be he rich or poor, he will feel that nothing which perisheth can compare with that which abideth incorruptible in the heavens. He will feel that there is an equality of Christian manhood which does not destroy, which does not put out of sight the differences of earth, but uses them as the means of its manifestation.

For, in the second place, trivial and weak and fleeting as all that may be by which we are outwardly divided one from the other as to birth and education and means, yet we must find in these the

instruments which God gives us wherewith to do our work for Him. All indeed are equal in Christ, all are one in Christ ; but they are equal because they are wholly devoted to Him, and they are one because they have rendered the sum of all their powers to the service of His Body. *There are diversities of gifts.* No two men can have exactly the same endowments or the same position. But for all there are blessings corresponding to their parts ; and each part is essential to the highest good of the whole. This is enough for us. It is not within our power to judge what is great and what is small. We see but little in the vast course of events, and that little we understand most imperfectly. But even as it is, our limited experience may teach us that for strength we do not always lean upon the strong, nor for counsel always look to the wise. It has happened, I fancy, within the knowledge of us all that in some great trial support has been sent through the feeble to whom Christ had made Himself known, and wisdom through the simple whose vision had been purified by faith. This at least is clear, that we dare not reckon any one's office as unimportant. The power of a lifelong work may be revealed to us only in a look of sympathy or in a word of kindness, it may never be revealed to us at all ; but we know that every life is full of infinite opportunities, and that every Christian life is, by God's blessing, sooner or later brought to fruitfulness. It is this confidence which gives dignity to all labour. It is this confidence which brings back peace when we are troubled by the apparent littleness of our achievements and of our aims. We would do—so we think in our better

moments—some great thing. But Whitsunday, with its manifold graces, enables us to take heart again. Wherever God has placed us, He has placed us to do Him service there and not elsewhere: in that one way and not in another. It may be that He has laid upon us the heavy responsibility of government: it may be that He has given to us the simpler task of loyal obedience. But whatever our lot is, we owe to Him an account of that which He has committed to us, and of nothing else; and He will ennoble whatever we strive to do in the light of His Presence. In this glory all human efforts are purified and blended together. They are many and they are one. *There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit.*

And so we come to the third point of which I spoke. One mark of the Church, the Christian Society, which was born as on this day, is, as we have seen, that it embraces all men on the equal basis of their redeemed manhood; the second that it claims the consecration of the peculiar powers and circumstances of all; and that which we must now notice is that, in all its vastness and in all its variety, it is inspired by one eternal and divine life. Men and families and nations come into being and flourish and decay, but the Church lives on for ever. There are doubtless seasons of trial and anxiety in its progress, like that in which our work must be done, but we can draw courage from the experience of the past. We can watch and we can wait. We do not desire to prescribe what the heavenly voice shall say to us. It is sufficient to be assured that as we listen the one Spirit will speak, and when

we understand His message we shall at last know the old truth better and more fully. Thus the meaning of our faith is made plain as from age to age, and nothing is lost. Whatever *is*, is eternal. Here on earth the counsel of God is half shown and half hidden in many parts and in many fashions, but it finds its completion in heaven. We can see the beginning, but we cannot see the end. We can see this, that there is among us a principle of unity stronger than our divisions and more enduring than time, if we can see no more. We are indeed often unable to trace its operation or even to recognise its presence, but it is active wherever men look to their one Father; it is active wherever they look to their one Lord; it is active wherever they lay their hearts open to the influence of the one Spirit, who works in many ways according to the needs and faculties of men.

From the great day of Pentecost even until now He has dwelt with His people. He has never been fully known, and He has never been wholly silent. Something, it seems, He would teach us through our restless strivings after the great principles which underlie the Christian Society—the universality, the variety, the oneness of spiritual life. And if the distractions of our time fill us with misgivings, let us without self-will wait for lessons which in due time He will most certainly make known.

If the divisions of our own Church, the jealousies, the one-sidedness of teachers, the coldness of people, bring unutterable sadness, let the sorrow be converted into prayer, and He will separate and preserve all that belongs to the maturity of its life.

If we are oppressed with the recollections of our own failures and sins, with the consciousness that our weak voice (we have no more) has often been silent in the great chorus of the Sons of God, let us lay all before Him, and He will purify and quicken the soul which He claims as His own temple.

As the year goes on, and the difficulties and the wearinesses and the disappointments of our several works thicken around us, let us turn back to the thoughts of Whitsunday, and through these God in His great love will give us strength and patience and hope, teaching us by all, as we can gradually embrace the lesson, that there are *diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit—diversities of gifts* to meet the wants and the necessities of every individual believer; *the same Spirit* to interpret, to hallow, to unite the varied ministries of life.

## XXVI

*Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for Thou hast created all things, and for Thy pleasure they are and were created.*—REV. iv. 11.

THIS day not only reminds us of a very great and solemn doctrine which lies at the root of our Christian belief, but it forms a marked point in the course of our Christian year. Some among us, I trust, who try to understand the meaning and order of our Prayer-Book, have noticed that the whole period from Advent to Trinity is full of great festivals in memory of the chief events of our Saviour's life, while there is not one from Trinity to Advent. This is a striking fact, and we cannot doubt that it has a grave purpose in it. That purpose, then, I take to be this: that we first learn the history of the Lord's life, and then we are taught His law; first we learn what He has done for us, and then we are taught what we have to do for Him.

Since, then, the Christian year is divided into these two chief periods, you will see, I think, why Trinity Sunday should stand between them, and be, as it were, their common centre. It is not in memory of any event in the Saviour's life, nor is it again designed to afford a lesson in any practical

duty, but rather it gives a summary of the divine truths implied in the work of Christ on earth, and shows us the nature of that faith by which our actions are made holy in God's sight.

To-day we are invited to think upon the great article of our belief as Christians: we are called upon in an especial manner to consider the nature of Him whom we profess to serve—of Him whom we call our Father, our Saviour, our Comforter—of Him who made us, who redeemed us, who sanctifies us—of Him in whom all things live and move and have their being. Such thoughts as these cannot but seem very solemn and serious to all of us. We are assembled here to give that worship and praise to One which we should refuse to the mightiest lord or king on earth, and it is therefore very needful for us to bear in mind whom that glorious Being is, and why He claims our service, that we may render it to Him with a better understanding and a warmer heart.

It would be vain to attempt to explain the mystery of the Holy Trinity—"three Persons in One God"—which is a mystery because our poor minds are limited. Even heathen men of old felt that the knowledge of God's nature was impossible. A great king asked one of the wisest of them to tell him what God is. The sage asked for a day to think over his answer. The day passed, and when the king came, he asked again for *two* more days; that time passed, and again the king came, but he found no answer ready, and as he wondered the sage said, "Ah! sire, the more I think of God, the harder do I find it to understand Him." We know, indeed, much

more than this old philosopher knew, and yet there is much that we can never know on earth. There is another beautiful legend of Christian times which will explain what I mean. It is said that one of the wisest of the Christian Fathers was once walking in deep thought by the sea-shore thinking on the mystery of godliness, and he was struck by the sight of a child who had hollowed out a little pool in the sand, and was pouring the water into it with a shell. As he smiled at the idle play, the child said to him—for indeed the story says that it was no child but the vision of an angel—“You smile, and yet I shall have emptied the sea with my shell before you have found out the mystery of the Holy Trinity.” And so it is, my brethren, we may labour and reason, and yet we shall not understand it. Why then, it may be said, must we believe it? Just for this reason, that the doctrine is to be a help to our life, and not a satisfaction to our curiosity. All the best and noblest and most useful acts we do spring from believing and not from knowing. We sow and we believe that the harvest time will come, but we cannot know it. And so to believe that God is our Father in Heaven ; that He is our Saviour, having died for us on earth ; that He is our Comforter, speaking to our hearts even now, is indeed, as I hope to show, a source of great hope and love and strength to us as we journey on our Christian way.

This, then, in well-known words, is the substance of the Creed which we repeat, honestly and heartily, I hope, from Sunday to Sunday, that we believe in God the Father—*our* Father too, who made us and all the world—in God the Son who redeemed us

and all mankind, and in God the Holy Ghost who sanctifies us and all the chosen people of God ; and these three Persons are One God. Now, like all the other articles of the Creed, this belief enjoins duties upon us : if we really believe anything, that belief must affect our conduct. The text which I have chosen will, I think, explain how a belief in the Holy Trinity should work upon our lives. There we read that the four-and-twenty elders, the representatives of God's servants in all the earth, fell down before His throne and cast their crowns there, saying, *Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power : for Thou hast created all things, and for Thy pleasure they are and were created.* In other words, "Thou art worthy to receive glory, for Thou art our Maker ; Thou art worthy to receive honour, for Thou art our Saviour ; Thou art worthy to receive power, for by Thee alone can we do anything." What these elders said we too must say, my brethren, and feel now, if we wish to share their triumph and their songs hereafter.

We must then give glory to God our Father. Is it not a marvellous thing, when we reflect upon it, that God is willing to receive glory from us—that His ears are open to our praises and thanksgivings ? A great prince may care but little for the words of a poor man ; and yet the Lord of Lords is pleased to welcome the grateful voice of the poorest of His creatures. And surely we must be eager to give God glory, if we think at all of Him, for He is the source of all our good, from whom comes down to us every perfect gift. We read in the Gospel that the Samaritan leper who was cleansed came back to

Him who had healed him to give glory to God ; and we too were strangers to the commonwealth of Israel, and stained with the leprosy of sin, and God has made us His children and washed us in the blood of His Son. The blind man whose sight was restored gave glory to God ; and our eyes too have been opened that we should see things which prophets and kings sought in vain to see—things which even the angels desired to look into. This spirit of thankfulness and gratitude we may be certain brings a blessing with it. Abraham on receiving the promise gave glory to God, and so he became the Father of the chosen people and the pattern of believers. And so, on the other hand, selfishness and disregard of God in prosperity unfailingly brings a curse with it. Herod was arrayed in robes of state, and seated on a throne, and greeted by the praises of thousands ; but in the pride of his heart he gave not the glory to God, and he was eaten of worms and he died.

How is it then with us, my brethren ? If it be so joyous a thing to praise God, and so fearful a sin to withhold His praise, are we very careful to share in the song of these elders, and to say to Him with our hearts as well as with our lips, "*Thou, O Lord, art worthy to receive glory.*" Thou hast given us health and strength—a sound body and a clear mind—Thou hast given us a cheerful home and honest friends—Thou hast given us the seasons in their course—the sunshine and the rain—all this Thou hast given us, and in return we bring to Thee the sacrifice of praise." This is, indeed, to believe in God our Father ; this is to believe in Him in deed and not in word, when we are willing to recognise the signs of

His love in the common blessings of peace and plenty with which our life is crowned. This alone is a belief in God which can give joy even in sorrow, for we know that He is still a Father correcting us even as His own loved children.

For it is very true that if it be a privilege to praise God, there is something in it which may fill us with awe. How can man stand in the sight of his Maker? And thus there is need that we should believe not only in God the Father, but also in His Son, our Saviour. And to believe in Christ is to give Him honour. We all bear Christ's name; we have all received His cross upon our brow; we have all been pledged to His service throughout our lives; and thus we are bound to honour Him, to keep His commandments, and to follow His example. This is truly to love Christ, to keep His commandments. We are dead in Him, that we may also live in Him. His life should be the pattern of our lives; and if we do not strive humbly and heartily to follow in His steps, how can we give Him honour? He calls us to follow Him, and can disobedience be reconciled with faith? It is, of course, impossible that we can always see the waves and winds rage horribly round us, and yet walk fearlessly on the waters; but even then, when we begin to sink, like Peter we must go to Him only for support, and not go backwards of ourselves.

How is it then with us, my brethren? Are we Christians in heart as well as in name? Do we honour our Saviour in acts as well as in words? When we read the Gospels, do we think that in every

work of patience, humility, and love He has left us an example, that as He did so we are to do to our brethren? If it be not so; if at heart we do not pray that it may be so more and more truly with us, I do not see how we can join in this thanksgiving of my text—I do not see how we can find any comfort in thinking on the solemn mysteries of this day.

But Christ has now passed away from earth; more than eighteen hundred years ago He came to His own, and they received Him not. They crucified Him, and He went back to His Father from whom He came. He died for us, but how can we be assured that we have a God present ever with us? Even in this, that He promised to send a Comforter, even the Holy Spirit, to His people, of whose first outpouring we heard last Sunday. Thus, you see, the Christian believes not only in God the Father and God the Son, but also in God the Holy Ghost; and to Him we must give power; or, in other words, we must look to Him as the source of all true power and the support of our being. This is often a sure test of a Christian heart. The false believer thinks that all is done by his own might and virtue. The Christian knows well and gladly acknowledges that his power is not his own, but inspired by God's Spirit. The Christian knows his own heart so well, with all its weaknesses and doubts and misgivings, that he would despair if he had to trust in himself alone; but he knows that that Spirit which hath begun a good work in him is able and willing to bring it to a good end. The false believer is blinded by his self-conceit and walks boldly on to ruin, armed with a reed only against the fiery darts of Satan.

How is it then with us, my brethren? Do we ascribe all power to God the Holy Spirit? Do we thankfully allow that all that is good within us is not of ourselves, but of Him? That He is the spring of our life, and the strength of our work? That He alone is the author of every good thought and the conqueror of every evil imagination? This is to believe in the Holy Spirit as we profess to do; this is to begin on earth the hymn of the saints in heaven.

Thus you will see that the song of the elders is one in which we can all join—in which we must all join every day, in our common daily work, if we are in earnest with our religion, if we really wish to be godly, if we truly believe in the Holy Trinity. That blessed doctrine may, indeed, be above our comprehension, but we can show its spirit in our life. The wisest as well as the most ignorant—the richest as well as the poorest—yea, even the most afflicted as well as the most happy, can in his inmost soul say in the field or in the workshop or in the lonely chamber or in the public church: “Thou, O Lord, art worthy to receive glory, for Thou hast given me as a Father every good thing which I have; Thou art worthy to receive honour, for Thou, as my Saviour, hast died that I may follow the example of Thy life; Thou art worthy to receive power, for Thou, by Thy Spirit, art the only strength of my head or my hand. Thou hast created all things—not me only, not man only, but all the beasts of the forest and all the flowers of the field, and for Thy pleasure they are and were created. Receive my praise, O Lord, and make me fit to be with Thee for ever.”

## XXVII

*Jesus saith unto him, Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known Me, Philip? he that hath seen Me hath seen the Father; and how sayest thou then, Shew us the Father?—ST. JOHN xiv. 9.*

THE Gospel of to-day offers for our consideration a scene which seems at first sight strange or unintelligible. At the close of His earthly work the Lord spoke to His chosen disciples of what He was yet to do and what He was, and they could not understand Him. He spoke of the home which He would make ready for them by His departure, and the way by which it should be reached, and Thomas said: *Lord, we know not whither Thou goest; and how can we know the way?* He spoke of His union with His Father, and of the revelation given in His own Person of the Being and will of God, and Philip said: *Lord, shew us the Father, and it sufficeth us.* And they who were thus perplexed and doubting were men who had followed Christ throughout His ministry, and left all to be with Him. Philip in especial, whom we commemorate to-day, was one of the first to welcome the Saviour's call, and to bear to others the glad tidings of the Messiah whom he had found. Philip had been proved by Christ at the working of that great miracle in which the Lord showed Himself to be the true bread of life. Philip

had been permitted to help in introducing Greeks "to see Jesus," and so, we may believe, prepared the foundation of the Gentile Church. And yet now at the last it seemed to him that something was wanting in his vision of divine things. For himself it was not enough to have "seen Jesus." He had not looked beneath the veil under which the glory of Christ was shrouded. His eyes were not opened to see what we see, the brightness of the Father's glory, in the Person of the Son of Man. He was eager to learn more of God, as feeling that that knowledge alone could suffice to satisfy his wants, but he failed to recognise the very presence of God with him. He gave expression to his misgivings, and the loving answer came, full of boundless promises and unfailing strength, and with it the sweet reproof, *Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known Me, Philip?*

We cannot err in the same way as Philip erred, but we may err in a like way. We are all familiar with the history of Christ's bodily presence upon earth. We can only wonder that any who had seen His works and heard Him speak as never man spake could doubt who He was. But are we equally assured of His spiritual presence, which is not less real, among ourselves? Do we practically believe that God is with *us* by the mission of the Comforter as truly as He was with the apostles by the mission of His Son? or rather do we not also, in moments of desolation and distress, in the prospect of change and isolation, cry even as Philip cried: *Lord, shew us the Father, and it sufficeth us?*

There is no one, I think, who will not confess that such a thought has been his. With closed eyes we crave for more light and other light than God has given us. With closed ears we sadly murmur that God's voice is silent on the earth. And yet the words of the Creed are on our lips which tell of a work of the Holy Ghost wrought out now visibly in the world, and reaching forward to the unimaginable glories of an eternal kingdom.

But though we are faithless, God has not left Himself without witness; and as in other ways, so also by these sacred festivals He reminds us of His Presence. The sense of fellowship with the saints and of fellowship with God mutually support and deepen one another. Now we rise from that which is nearest our human sympathy to the more awful contemplation of the Divine Majesty. Now we pass from before the glories of the eternal King to the vast company which surrounds Him and reflects His brightness.

Each for ourselves, we people heaven with those whom we have known and loved, and the Church sanctions the instinct by the commemoration of Apostles and Martyrs. These are our common friends. By communion with them we are raised to the thought of one family of God, and already live in the light of the unseen. By the belief that this communion is possible we witness to a Presence of God among us, through whom alone it could be realised.

The saints, it has been said, present partially and in detail that which Christ unites perfectly in Himself. In them we may see faint reflections now

of this side, now of that side of His character, just as in old time patriarchs and prophets prefigured it. They bring Him in some sort nearer to us, and in them we may see the tokens of His action. The distinctness and variety of their natures sanctions the like variety among us. The consecration of their powers is a promise of what the Lord is waiting to accomplish still.

And for this reason it is that we join our outward profession of a belief in a Communion of Saints with that most holy Communion which is the sure pledge of its fulfilment. It is in Christ alone that we are united with all who have gone before into His rest, and with all who shall follow after. He is the Vine and they and we are branches. He is the Head and they and we are members. He is the Way by whom a passage is opened from earth to heaven. He is the Truth in whom is gathered up all that is and is abiding in the thoughts and works of men. He is the Life through whom all things consist. And when we commemorate what He has done for our fathers in old time, He offers Himself afresh to us that we may through Him have fellowship with them and with their deeds.

Such is the meaning of our Service to-day ; such is the blessing with which it is joined. And may not the Lord then say to us, even as He said to Philip : *Have I been so long with you, and yet have you not known Me ?*

May God grant that we may from day to day know Him better and recognise His presence in these and all other sources more gladly !

## XXVIII

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

THESE words, which occur in one of the Psalms for the day, place before us a view of our common life which it is difficult for us to realise ; but according to the inscription of the psalm they were written under circumstances which were themselves a commentary on the truth which they express. Hard pressed by Saul, David had taken refuge among the Philistines. The future king of Israel could see no place of safety except it was among the enemies of God whom he had often spoiled. Even then his hope failed him. He was discovered and brought before Achish, and escaped only by feigning himself mad. But still he *did* escape. Even in a strange land and at a heathen court, cast out by his own countrymen and watched by treacherous enemies, he felt the personal presence of a mighty Helper, and has written from his own experience for our learning that the angel of the Lord encampeth about them that fear Him and delivereth them. For our learning—for let us not think that the assurance belongs to some other age or some other race, and

not to ourselves in the midst of our busy competitions and restless pleasures. The words are indeed addressed to us and to all times, as long as the love of God and the wants of man shall remain the same. Faithlessness alone can hinder the mission of these blessed spirits who are still sent forth to minister to the heirs of salvation. The past is our hope and pattern; and as on a former occasion I endeavoured to trace an outline of what Scripture teaches us of our great adversary, so to-day by God's blessing I wish to direct your attention to another aspect of the spiritual world—to the angels, the messengers of God, whose office is clearly portrayed in the words which I have read.

The existence of spirits busy in the affairs of men is not so much a doctrine of revelation as an instinct of mankind. It is perhaps impossible to conceive of an infinite Being without the intervention of secondary beings by whom He works. The action of the one Spirit seems to involve necessarily the varied ministry of many. But however this may be, Scripture does not formally announce their existence, but assumes it. It does not tell us what they *are*, but what they *do*, something of their relation to God and ourselves, and that not by set precept but in living act. From the beginning to the end of the Bible, from the history of the patriarchs to the visions of St. John—may I not say from the creation to the consummation of the world?—their presence is revealed to us in scenes which are exceptional only so far as they show us the unveiled mysteries of our daily life.

... In speaking of the scriptural doctrine of Satan, I

showed that the revelation of his personality and power belonged to the later periods of Jewish history, and that the historic manifestation of his terrible energy was coincident with the life of Christ. It is not so with the angelic ministrations. These are described with equal distinctness from first to last ; and if there be any progress in the doctrine, it is only that which is common to all revelation, as its circle widens from the chosen family to the chosen race, from the one nation to the many nations, from the kingdoms of the earth to the fulness of humanity itself.

There is something, I think, very touching in the first recorded message of an angel of God, and to our ears it may sound strangely. When Hagar fled from the face of Sarai, the angel of the Lord found her in the wilderness and said, *Return to thy mistress, and subdue thyself under her hands.* Patience and self-control, such are the earliest precepts which the messenger of heaven brings to a suffering woman ; but with them is combined a blessing, for he said : *I will multiply thy seed exceedingly, that it shall not be numbered for multitude.* From this beginning the record of divine providence flows on with even current through the age of the patriarchs. In the convulsions of the physical world, in the trials of personal faith, in the anxieties of domestic life, in the bitterness of family dissension, in the loneliness of bereavement and in the loneliness of death, the presence of God's angel, recognised or remembered, brings deliverance or strength. At Sodom, at Moriah, at Hebron, at Mahanaim, at Bethel, and in Egypt, the patriarchs

acknowledged the personal care of their God in the services of His messengers.

The history of the family was a prelude to the history of the nation. When the people of Israel went at length from the land of their bondage, the angel of the Lord went before their camp to keep them on their way through the terrible wilderness, and bring them to the rest which was prepared for them. The journey was finished, the mouth of the heathen seer was filled with a blessing when he sought a curse, the conquest was assured even where it was not achieved, and in a fresh series of outward signs God showed to His people the presence of His Spirit among them. In times of rebellion and division, in times of despair and oppression, in times of sinful confidence and of trustful self-abasement, the angel of the Lord wrought among Israel the issues of repentance and faith, of chastisement and victory, in the field of Bochim and by the brook Kishon, appearing to Gideon as he threshed wheat by stealth, and to the wife of Manoah in her loneliness, stretching the destroying sword over the city of David and sweeping with a pestilence through the camp of the Assyrians.

Meanwhile the prophets were unfolding wider views of the ancient faith. The God of Israel appeared under the more glorious title of the Lord of Hosts. The scene of His majesty was transferred, as it were, from earth to heaven. The angels were seen ministering to His glory or declaring His perfections. The way was prepared for a spiritual kingdom; and Daniel was allowed to record the ministry of spiritual power in Persia

and Greece, that all the nations of the world might work together for the final establishment of the reign of Christ.

But while these greater works of angelic care were revealed to men, instances were not wanting in the prophetic age in which personal deliverances were wrought by the personal messengers of God. On two occasions, most opposite in time and circumstances, "the angel of the Lord" relieved His faithful confessors from the peril of death. When Elijah fled from the wrath of Jezebel and sank wearied in the wilderness, with the prayer that his life might pass away, the angel fed him with heavenly food, so that in the strength of that meat he went, like a second Moses, for forty days and forty nights to Horeb, the mount of God, to receive a new and glorious vision of the Lord. When Daniel lay in the lions' den, condemned as it seemed to certain death in spite of the king's favour, and yet strong in faith, *God sent His angel and shut the lions' mouths, so that they did not hurt him.* In persecution and in exile, in the anguish of seeming isolation and in the strength of realised communion, the same help was at hand; and He who was seen to guide nations by His spirits was seen to guard by the same spirits the souls of His servants.

The age of the prophets passed away, and with it the outward miracles of the first dispensation. A people tried by prosperity and purified by suffering was left to trace in the chequered course of life the Divine Presence which was before sensibly revealed to them. In part they were strengthened to deeds of heroic valour by the remembrance of

past deliverance ; in part they defaced the simplicity of the scriptural teaching by the admixture of Eastern superstition ; but the belief still lived, and in the fulness of time an angel announced to men the Advent of the Saviour. Angels foretold the birth of His forerunner. Angels proclaimed the Nativity to the shepherds. Angels were sent to minister to the Infant Jesus. And when the work of Christ began, angels still attended Him. At His Temptation, at His Agony, at His Resurrection, at His Ascension, angels ministered to Him. He who is our example as well as our God received the services of the beings who worshipped Him, and if He did not call down the twelve legions to destroy His enemies, He received the help of one who strengthened Him in the hour of His bodily anguish.

The earthly work of Christ was done, His last promise was fulfilled, and it might have seemed that the service of angels was at an end—that at the close of that dispensation which was specially given by their word and committed to their charge, they would cease to serve upon this earth of ours, as many have thought that the visions of earlier times were foreshadowings or foretastes of the coming of Christ. It might have seemed that the Incarnation had superseded their office, that the recollection of a Divine Lord would more than supply all the personal confidence in God's presence which they had inspired before, that the gift of the Holy Spirit would more than fulfil all the special ministrations of tender care which they had discharged. But it was not so. Our Lord had scarcely begun to teach when He declared that through Him the vision of

the patriarchs should find its true accomplishment, that through Him the great gulf between heaven and earth should be again spanned, and angels ascend and descend upon the Son of Man, and that not during His personal sojourn only, but while He still lives in the Body of His Church. The history of Christianity explains and attests His words. The first persecution of the apostles was relieved by the angel of the Lord, who opened the doors of the prison in which they were confined. The first Gentile was admitted to Christian fellowship by the intervention of an angel. An angel first guided St. Paul into the countries of Europe, and cheered him on his voyage to Rome. Herod proposed to slay St. Peter as he had slain St. James, and the angel of the Lord released him from his bonds. The king received the blasphemous adulations of the multitude, and the angel of the Lord smote him in his pride because he gave not God the glory. St. John was cast in exile upon Patmos, and he received by an angel the Revelation of the last time. That revelation is one continued record of angelic ministry. In the government of the Churches and in the devotion of the saints, in the execution of judgments and the publication of the everlasting Gospel, in the conquest of evil and in the triumph of the righteous, angels are seen fulfilling the word of God. These are the fellow-servants of men. These are the guardians of the twelve gates of the city of God.

It would be easy to fill up the outline which I have thus hastily drawn, and to indicate the distinctive lesson of each angelic ministration, in presence, in vision, in dream, as part of a living

commentary on God's action in the world, but I have said enough to show that the doctrine of a secondary spiritual agency is inwrought into the whole fabric of our faith ; that it is confined to no stage of revelation and no condition of society ; that it is not only consistent with the omnipresence of God, but in some degree explanatory of it ; that it is not only unrepealed by the Incarnation, but rather raised by it to a more noble prominence ; that it was active when the Creation was first completed ; that it shall be active when Christ comes again to judgment ; that it is declared by facts as distinct as any which the Bible records ; that it depends on promises as explicit as any which the Spirit has given ; that it is universal, national, and personal ; that it extends to the great mysteries of the Gospel and the passing needs of the least of Christ's little ones. But there is yet one aspect in which we have not regarded it,—I mean the material agency through which it works. Scripture refers to the direct ministry of angels much that we attribute to the "laws of nature." The wind, the cloud, the fire, the pestilence, the stroke of death, perhaps the very virtue of healing waters, are assigned to the action of personal beings, whose presence has been openly shown from time to time to assure our faith. And it is this that makes the belief most practical. I fancy that there is no one who has not longed to recall the ancient creed of classic times which peopled the earth with countless spirits in wood and stream and mountain, who has not yearned towards the fantastic legends of a later age with a deep regret. Let us listen only

with simple faith and the longing and regret will be transformed into a holy gladness. Scripture hallows the instinct which it recognises. It tells us that the old belief was not vain though it was distorted; that all around us is guided by spiritual powers, varied and yet harmonious; that the world is not a vast machine, as men speak now, working by some dead law, that it is not even a mighty tree, according to the truer fiction of the North, growing with a single life, but the complex issue of the personal work of countless hosts accomplishing the will of God. It tells us that the law describes only the mode of working and does not reveal the agent; that messengers of God are about us on every side; that in the suddenness of outward bereavement and in the fulness of outward blessings we may see the effects of their ministry. It tells us that the ground on which we stand is holy ground; that if we fail to comprehend the reality of God's personal presence, we may feel it in the presence of His spirits. It tells us that His operations are manifold, and yet that the powers by which He works are truly one.

Nor is this all. The ministry of angels is the perfected type of our work, the very titles of angels are those which we claim. Are they the messengers of God: so are we, charged to declare one to another the truth we know. Are they the sons of God: so are we, by the power which Christ has given us. Are they called the "watchers": such is the charge which the Lord has laid upon us. Are they called the "holy ones": such is the character which we are commended to secure. Do they fulfil the will of

God faithfully, cheerfully, perfectly : day by day, morning and evening, we pray that we may do that will on earth as they do it in heaven. Such is angels' work : such is the work of man ; and may God grant to us a true feeling of the spiritual glories of our common life, a clear insight into the mysteries of the world, a deep consciousness of the end of our being, that at last angels may bear us when we die to recline on the bosom of Abraham at the great feast of God, and that we too may become like the angels, being the children of the Resurrection !

## XXIX

*The wages of sin is death ; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.*—ROM. vi. 23.

THERE are many words with which we have been so long and so intimately familiar that we never pause to ask ourselves what we mean by them. They form the basis of our reasonings, but, like the foundations of a building, we do not notice their depth or structure; nay, for this very cause that they do underlie our common discourse, we cannot without a special effort gain any true idea of them. Now "life" is such a word as this. We all use it and argue about it, but can we explain it? I do not now wish to trouble you with the discussions which have been raised in the endeavour to embrace in one large definition all the various classes of beings which are said to "live." It will be enough that we should turn our thoughts inward, and regard the marvellous blessing of human life in which we all share alike. Think for one moment on the infinite chasm between life and nothingness. On this side there is the glow of health, the consciousness of bodily vigour, the full exuberance of strength and spirits: on that a dreary void. On this side there is the keen sense of the countless

joys with which the earth is filled, the glad delight in sunshine and beauty, the rich treasures of a creative mind: on that a dreary void. On this side there is a marvellous power of traversing the whole world in a moment, of holding communion with all the noblest and the best of men, of rising with the chorus of angels even to the throne of God: on that still the same dreary void. Whichever way we turn we see within us a crowd of powers and feelings which minister to our happiness and quicken our susceptibility; and the sum of these—this treasure beyond all treasures—we call “life.”

You can all add much to what I have said; and it is a subject which we shall do well to consider. For the more we examine into the depths of meaning which lie in that small word “life,” the more shall we marvel that we can use it without awe. Compared with life all earthly things are valueless. Without it all wealth were vanity, all beauty darkness, and all glory gloom; and this priceless blessing belongs to each one of us.

Whence then did it come? We were not, it is clear, our own makers. The first ground and pledge of all our hopes can have come from God only. However deeply we may search, this will at some point be the end of our inquiry, *And God breathed into man the breath of life, and he became a living spirit.*

And what gratitude do we show to the Author of such a gift? Even in its humblest and saddest state men judge life to be a blessing such that only a madman would willingly cast it away. And yet I fear that few words of thanksgiving ascend to God

from us—I will not say for life only, but for the countless joys with which He has been pleased in His great mercy to crown *our* lives.

It is true, however, that we may look at this human life of ours yet in another light. It is a warning as well as a gift; a prophecy as well as a blessing. I have spoken of the strength and gladness of youth; but there is also the weakness and sorrow of age. Is then this body born only to wax and waste away? Shall corruption at last claim it for its own?

I have spoken of the energies and resources of the mind, of the finer delights of imagination and understanding; but the prospect is at last clouded, the eye grows dim and the head grows faint. Is then this mind to rise only that it may fall again? Shall forgetfulness at last cover all things?

I have spoken of the subtle and mysterious workings of the spirit, by which it claims a fellowship with earth and heaven and God, rising above all time and space. But a weight is on its wings. The burden to which it is bound brings it to the dust. Is then this spirit given only to be vanquished? Shall Death at last be conqueror?

A Christian alone, perhaps, can feel the deep solemnity of such doubts as these, as he alone can solve them. To him the mystery of life is real and terrible, and as his sense of sin and godliness is clear and active, so does he groan inwardly for the manifestation of Christ's triumph. If in this world only we had hope, surely we of all men should be most wretched, St. Paul says—we, that is, who have learnt to prize aright the joys and promises it

brings ; we who have mourned over the fruits of sin in others and in ourselves, and have prayed with our heart as well as with our lips for the coming of His kingdom ; we who have felt something still wanting in our fullest joy, in our deepest prayers, in our noblest actions. But, thanks be to God, each questioning of man is answered in His Word. Corruption, forgetfulness, and death shall not triumph. This chequered life is itself a faint shadow and a first pledge of another which is changeless ; nay, more, a true beginning of it to the Christian. God has given us a temporal life : and the gift of God is eternal life in Jesus Christ our Lord. He hath quickened us together with Christ.

What has been already said of the idea of life generally will help us to form a truer notion of this "eternal life"—this life which we live in Christ. Body, soul, and spirit are combined in an inexplicable manner to contribute to the fulness of our present joy. So likewise Holy Scripture tells us it shall be in the world to come. Christ rose from the grave perfect man, and in Him we too shall rise in the completeness of a glorified humanity. He can preserve blameless each part of our nature until His coming, that at last it may be transformed to the likeness of His glorious image, and reflect the unclouded brightness of His person.

The life which we have in Christ is, I have said, eternal life. That wondrous word "eternal" answers to some idea fixed in each of our souls, and I shall not try to define it. It is enough that our own experience teaches us how vain it is to measure hope and joy, fear and sorrow, by days and years,

and not by the intensity of their working. And so Holy Scripture tells us of no change, no succession, no time, in the world to come. The sun and moon and stars—the measures of our earthly periods—shall have passed away, and all shall exist at once in the immediate presence of God.

And who, my brethren, whose life is not hid in Christ, shall bear that Presence? Who may lay open the secrets of his heart before His eye who is too pure to behold iniquity? A natural instinct told the heathen mythologist that the glance of the great Judge would turn the life-blood of the wicked into a fire that should burn for ever.

But while we do not attempt to explain what the life of the Christian is, it is well that we should bear in mind that it is something true and real apart from the special modes in which it shows itself.

In this world we know that wealth and wisdom, and even spiritual power, are merely endowments of life; just as pleasure and converse and imagination are manifestations of its energy: but they are not life itself. They are only because that first exists. And so Holy Scripture speaks of Life Eternal. It is not the manifold delights with which the New Jerusalem shall be filled—those streets of gold and songs of angels and deep visions of the universe. If we truly live these will be ours: but we must gain life first. The sun would shed no gladness on a corpse. Music would wake no echo in the dead. And this is Life Eternal, that we may know the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom He has sent—God hath quickened us together with Christ—

Christ is the Life, and they who are in Him shall live for ever.

We said, if you remember, that our natural life was no creation of our own, but God's gift. We were in no sense the cause or the instruments of our own being. It is clear that nothing that a man can do can bring him life. If he acts he lives already. He may cherish his life, he may destroy it: but that is all. A course of crime and carelessness must, we know, bring him to the grave, but life comes from God alone. It is the same in spiritual things. We cannot gain for ourselves a new birth, but we can stifle the life which God has given us when He made us His children. The wages of sin is death—sin earns death for its votaries as their proper reward—but the free gift of God is eternal life.

If we fix our minds carefully on the meaning of such words or thoughts as these, my brethren, can we ever dream of imputing our Christian life to any works, to any worthiness of ours—to anything but to God's good will in Christ? It is not because we have deserved it that He has made us His children and grafted us into the Body of His Son, but by His grace we have been saved.

Still, as I have said, the gift once made must be turned to good account; the charge once entrusted to us must be fulfilled; the life once given must be cherished and sustained. We may, after all, be branches of the true Vine, but unfruitful. We may be stewards of the true riches, and unfaithful. We may be sons and heirs, but, like the Prodigal, we may squander our inheritance and join ourselves to the prince of a far country.

The words of my text will help us to discern whether we have indeed that eternal life which knoweth no change—that eternal life which, as St. John says, abideth in the Christian—that eternal life whose presence is realised even here on earth.

God hath quickened us together with Christ. If, then, we be really living, we are living in Christ. The efficacy of His life and death is not applied to us from without as some instrument to save us, but we are made one with Him, so that His death is our death, and His triumph our triumph.

And what a mystery is this, my brethren, that we, poor and weak and sinful as we are, can ever be incorporated into Christ—that in Him we can, again, be made living souls inspired by God's Spirit. And more wonderful still that while we are yet on earth this mighty change can be realised. But it is so written for our learning, and let us rejoice with all reverence while we believe that we may live *in* Christ as very members of His body; that we may claim as ours the righteousness which He has wrought, the sorrow which He has suffered. At the same time, we must remember that there is a fearful contrast to all this. The Christian has eternal life *now* only so far as he is one with Christ, and to be cut off from Him, to be without Him, to know Him not, that is real death—death more terrible than our darkened minds can understand at present.

Thus then, my brethren, at length we have, I think, gained a clearer notion of those words "eternal life"—of its meaning, of its source, of its present reality. Knowledge of God, fellowship with

Christ—that is eternal life begun on earth, to be consummated in heaven.

And how is it then with us? Are those words like faint, meaningless sounds in some unknown dialect? or do they in very truth describe the groundwork of our hope—the life in which we work and speak and think? The question is one clearly in which we are most nearly concerned, and the answer must be ready if we deal honestly with our own hearts.

The living are full of action. If, then, we still live in Christ, we too shall act in Him. His life will be our pattern, and His works in some sense our works. *The works that I do*, He Himself hath said, *shall ye do also ; and greater works than these*. He fed the hungry, healed the sick, and raised the dead, and can we too do this? Yea, my brethren, and greater works than these. There are some hungering for the bread of life which *we* can send to them ; some palsied with crime whom *we* can guide to the fountain opened for all uncleanness ; some dead in sin whom we, by God's help, can awaken to a new life in Christ.

There is room in this our little world for spiritual miracles like these, and each one of us is called to work them. Yet it happens too often that our faith fails us in the hour of need. We profess to be quickened together with Christ, and yet we make few efforts to do as He did, ever going about to heal the sicknesses and to supply the wants of His people.

The living are full of feeling. And if we still live in Christ, our hearts will be guided by His rule.

He sighed, you will remember, when the deaf man was brought to Him. He wept by the grave of His friend, and when He looked for the last time over the devoted city of God. The sight of sin in the fearful ruin which it had wrought among men and nations moved even Him to tears who was the Son of God. And are the signs of sin to us most sad and mournful? Or do we try to throw a veil over them—to hide them from our hearts—to forget them? Do we shut our eyes to the evil around us, lest we should be called upon to witness against it? Or, worse than all, can it be that the prospect or the record of sin supplies us with amusement, I cannot say with pleasure—that words of unutterable terror become to us an ordinary jest?

The living are full of thought. Their spirit is ever busy, and He who lives in Christ must seek to think as He thought. He will follow Him to the desert and the mountain to pray alone. He will follow Him to the synagogue and the Temple to pray with God's people. He will reprove no one who casts out devils in His name, who conquers great and open evils, because he follows not in his company. He will refer to Scripture for the proof of His words; and to His life for the witness of His sincerity.

Thus will the Christian in body, soul, and spirit strive, according to the measure of his strength, to follow the example of his Lord, in whose life he has been made partaker. Thus will he seek in every point to realise his fellowship with Him, who has hallowed every element of man's life. Thus will he begin, by God's blessing, the transformation which

shall be completed hereafter, by which every part of his nature will be made conformable to God. Thus will he find in Christ one ever present to help and guide and inspire him. He will know that it is indeed in Christ that he acts and feels and thinks. Even here things will assume in his eyes a robe of immortality as he views them in the light of God.

*The gift of God is eternal life: this is eternal life, that ye should know the true God, and Jesus Christ, whom He hath sent. God hath quickened you together with Christ.*

God grant, my brethren, that we may all feel the blessedness of these words! May He bring them home to our innermost consciences! May He cause them to be indeed the very ground and joy of our being while we sojourn here, as they will then certainly be when all the pomp and pride and glory of the world shall have passed away!

### XXX

*And not only they, but ourselves also, which have the first-fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body.—ROM. viii. 23.*

ANY one who has made any serious effort to compare the language of the Bible with the rules of his daily conduct must have been struck with their strange and apparently irreconcilable contrast ; and this exactly in proportion as he has been truly anxious to find in his ordinary work something to answer to the words of his daily prayers and the spirit of our public worship. We shall see, I hope, that this contrast is not necessarily a division ; and yet we must feel that it exists. It shows itself in many ways even where Christ has been most deeply inwrought into the whole fabric of society. We may see it in the great world around us. Scripture speaks of the kingdoms of this world as lasting for an hour when compared with that kingdom of heaven for whose coming we pray from day to day. And yet it seems as if our thoughts were practically confined to the narrow limits of our own age. Thus, for instance, the war which is now desolating two great nations moves us more deeply and occupies far more of our thoughts than that greater and more

fatal struggle between good and evil going on always round us and within us, of which this is but one small part. Scripture tells us of one thing needful; and yet it seems as if our best and greatest men were cumbered with much serving. Scripture tells us that the doctrine of the Cross shall always be distasteful, a stumbling-block or folly; and yet we assume that the cause of truth will everywhere be our passport to acceptance.

Or to take an example of another kind. If a being from some other world could see us all gathered here this morning for a common purpose; if he could hear the services in which we have joined; if he could mark the sorrow of our confessions, the joyousness of our thanksgivings, the minuteness of our prayers; if he could follow the lessons of warning and hope held out to us in God's Word; if he could realise the extremity of our need and the boundlessness of God's love, he would surely fancy that our thoughts must ever centre on visions of heaven. And yet to-morrow how little will be left of the tone and teaching of to-day! How little will be left directly we have passed each to our own homes from the more immediate presence of God! However earnestly we may wish to cherish and to carry about with us high and holy feelings, a crowd of interruptions, whether of business or of study, will distract and occupy our minds. The routine of work will succeed to the calm contemplation of God, and it will seem for a whole week as if only a few weary moments can be given to that which we ourselves pronounce to be the end of our lives.

We may look even deeper than this. Each in himself can find the same contrast. There is not one among us, I can well believe, who has not felt at times something of spiritual joy, when he has done some duty, or conquered some temptation, or offered some prayer heartily by God's help. It has seemed to him as if a new world were opened to his eyes on which he must gaze for ever. And yet as he gazes the glorious vision fades into common light—nay, too often it is clouded by sadder darkness. Earth and earth's daily cares claim his attention and occupy his mind.

Such being our position here—restless and unstable, now touching heaven and now sunk to earth—men have found for themselves two methods of relief. Some have said: Banish all thoughts of heaven, that you may dwell with undisturbed delight on the pleasures which Nature has scattered round you. Live for the hour. Why think of the future, when the present is sufficient to satisfy the soul? But, my brethren, do we not know that the soul refuses such satisfaction as this? Do we not know that thoughts of the future will visit us unbidden? that voices from another world do speak to us in accents which we cannot mistake, in grief, in sickness, in bereavement?

So, then, others have said: He who would live rightly must cast aside all thoughts but the thought of God. He must, as it were, go out into the wilderness and separate himself from his fellow-men. He must acknowledge no tie, cultivate no art, indulge in no amusement. The single thought of heaven is all too vast for life—but surely this view

is scarcely less false than the other. God has not placed us in the world in order that we should flee from it. He has not endowed us with keen perceptions of beauty that we should blunt them by neglect. He has not bound us together by ties of family and companionship that we should rudely burst from their hold. He has not made us dependent on one another for the common necessities of existence, in order that we should make ourselves hermits, and exchange the blessings of society for selfish loneliness.

There are instincts in our nature—there are dangers in the world. The Christian knows both these truths, and by God's grace he would learn from both a lesson of temperance. He has a body which must be taught to obey: he has a soul which must be taught to command. He finds in their conflict, whether in himself or in the world at large, a deep source both of sorrow and of hope. He groans because he is cast down by the passing triumphs of evil; and yet withal he waits not for the destruction, but for the redemption of his body. He knows that his Saviour has raised the corruptible into incorruption; that He has hallowed by divine energy the sum of human powers; that in His triumph is the type and pledge of the Christian's victory; that He has given us even here the first-fruits of the Spirit.

And let us inquire for a few minutes, my brethren, whether this which St. Paul sets before us is the way in which we look upon life: whether we find in it any cause of real sorrow, any spring of lasting and growing hope; whether it has for us any basis more substantial than a dream, and any end more blessed than our own pleasure. There is indeed

great cause for sorrow all about us. For when we first begin to reflect upon life, we must feel that we are not alone ; that we cannot view ourselves apart from the world in which we live ; that the thousands of poor creatures who crowd our streets and fill our prisons are bound to us by as close a connexion as that which binds us both to God ; that our relation to them is not to be set aside by heartless almsgiving, or even by a passing word of kindness. Sin which assails us has wrought their misery. We are tied to them even by their wretchedness. The meanest of all, whom we care not to look on, has a soul for which Christ died. And I do not know that any spirit is more unchristian than that which would make light of suffering, whether of body or mind. Our Blessed Lord offers to us no pattern of such indifference. On the contrary, it seems as if His sorrows were more acute than ours can ever be, because He could trace all suffering to its origin in sin. He could groan when He saw with divine power the ruin which sin had spread over the world. He could even pray that the cup of death might pass from Him, because death was to Him as the penalty of sin.

And are we, then, my brethren, in any way conscious of such feelings as these ? When we see disorders in the world around us, even in the material world, do we ever groan in spirit—feel, that is, real and true sorrow for evils of which man is the cause ? Or do we think it is a light thing, in which we have no concern, if an earthquake desolates a fertile province, if the land lies untilled, if seeds are parched by drought, and harvests blighted ? It may not

even occur to us that we have anything to do with such things as these, if they do not directly affect us ; and yet we must remember that the earth was cursed for our sakes ; that it shares our pains, as St. Paul says in the chapter from which my text is taken ; that it anticipates in some mysterious way the future restoration of man, and the consequent recovery of its first blessedness.

But to go a step farther than this : do we at this time ever mourn over the horrors of war, with sincere and simple grief ? So it was our Blessed Saviour mourned when He thought on Jerusalem compassed with armies, and then captured by her enemies. There is, indeed, a glorious pomp in war ; there is something stirring in the thought that men are called upon to preserve a noble name and maintain a just cause. But the price is human lives—nay, may it not be, human souls ? and it is an awful thing to turn this greatest tragedy of the world into a mere source for our passing interest and excitement.

The spirit of strife, however, is not confined to nations. Even among ourselves there is on many sides bitterness and contention. There is in every society the strong who would turn might into law, and the weak whose only hope here is in the generous help of his friends. And when we see this, does it fill us with any sorrow ? Do we grieve over the faults of our friends as if they were our own ? Do we make any effort to restore the harmony which sin has broken ? Do we wait for any restitution of all things—for the great day of redemption, when order shall be restored to earth and man ?

But we have not yet come to the simplest meaning of our text. It is not enough that we should recognise the presence and the power of evil in the world around us and in the society of which we form a part. It is not enough that we should be filled with grief, often unavailing, for miseries too vast for us to contend with it, and bad influences which we can only meet by faith and prayer. There is a source of trouble still nearer to us, which we carry about with us, which is a very part of our nature. And do we then groan over the strife and contention in ourselves? Do we feel that there is any battle now being fought within us between the love of God and the love of self, on which eternity depends? Are we looking, indeed, for any redemption of our own bodies? Are we conscious that they are at present claimed by some foreign power? Do we make any effort to rescue them from the dominion of evil.

These, my brethren, are truly questions of daily and hourly interest to every one of us; and they suggest the only right answer to all the difficulties which are felt in adjusting the claims of heaven and earth. You will notice that it is the redemption of his body for which the Christian waits. And what does that mean but that he is assured that his whole life, because his whole being, can be brought into God's service. He will not then any longer seek to loosen bonds which may be hallowed by godly fellowship. He will not refuse to cultivate powers which may help him to discern and lay open more traces of God's working. He will not neglect any of the little duties and courtesies of life, every part

of which may be made acceptable to his Father which is in heaven.

The simplest illustration will make my meaning clear. The day of work is different from the day of rest—but different in form only, and not in spirit. Our ordinary business is as truly a part of our Christian life as prayer, and both equally can be offered to God. The essence of the prayer is in the spirit which faithfully pours out to an Almighty Father the wants and failings of a loving child. The religion of our business is in the hearty zeal which would remember Him in the work which He has fixed for us, and do it as in His sight.

These are not, indeed, idle words; nay, rather, I have not yet given them their full force. We not only *may* but we *must* work for some spiritual power. A choice of masters only is left to us, and I dare not shrink from setting it before you plainly. Every act of our lives is offered to God or to Satan. We cannot live for ourselves, as we did not make ourselves. And if we put forth no effort to redeem our body—to vindicate its energies from the powers of evil—we may be sure that it is used in their service.

And this, then, is our work—to wait for the redemption of our bodies of which God has assured us, and each according to the measure of our strength to hasten its fulfilment. This faith, this effort it is which can give dignity and harmony and purpose to our whole life here. This it is which can give a reality and a religious value to the smallest detail of our ordinary duty; this it is which can give help and comfort in the countless disappointments and vexations by which our days must be chequered.

For let us not think that when our choice is made, when our faith is fixed, when our hearts are really in the work, that then the trial is over. To the last we shall be sorrowful though always rejoicing, cast down yet not conquered, baffled yet not discouraged. Conscious of our weaknesses, humbled by our failings, we shall groan inwardly ; but at the same time life will assume a noble and heavenly proportion as we labour more and more earnestly to inspire it in every part by a spirit of godliness. The consciousness of our struggle is the real assurance of our victory. His case alone is desperate who has felt no difficulties, grieved over no sins, and found nothing hard in life. But to him who knows that every daily act is part of his Christian conflict, there are stores of joy which none else can know. It will not matter whether it be in a word of kindness or in a work of duty, whether it be in the exercise of the body or in the training of the mind, God's blessing will be felt in all he does, as His Presence is recognised. And if His Presence be not recognised, still we cannot hide ourselves from His sight. The Saviour, indeed, departs, but the Judge stands by us.

Let us then think on these things, my brethren : think that He who must be worshipped in spirit will yet receive the service of your daily work. That He who has redeemed your souls, has redeemed your bodies too. That if the fulfilment of their redemption be not yet accomplished, still even now He hath given us the spirit of adoption, by which we are made from day to day more conformable unto His image.

You will all see how such thoughts as these fall

in with the special character of our Services to-day. We are reminded that we can now offer to God something, not only of our time, of our thought, but also of our substance, in acknowledgment that we owe all, even this, to Him, and that He has promised to bless all. A collection to provide for the reverent fulfilment of divine worship is an opportunity of sacrifice, of consecrating the first-fruits of what God has given us in a special manner to His honour. You have already heard this morning how prayer and almsgiving naturally go together as parts of our public service—how the gift is fitly linked with the petition—and you will readily connect that truth with the reflections which have occupied us this evening. Prayer is the utterance of the soul which feels the many sadnesses of life—which groans within itself; almsgiving is the confident assurance that God will hallow that which he bids us in any way bring to Him; that He will redeem the body, all that is earthly, all that is in our eyes perishable. And it is an especial privilege to contribute in any way to the beauty and impressiveness of our common worship here. This house is alike the home of all. Here we meet as members of one family. Whatever here lifts up our thoughts, whatever tells us of offerings gladly rendered to God, is a joy for all, a lesson for all. And all, according to their means, are now invited to share in the effort to make our services more and more acts of devotion and sacrifice, not only by prayers, but by alms; not only by the confession of wants, but by the acknowledgment of blessings. And so may God, in His great mercy, help us to find the true way of bringing all the parts

of our life together! May He give back to us transformed, as He is ever waiting to do, what we give first to Him! May He manifest Himself to us in our daily work, and hallow the sacrifices which He has encouraged us to bring to Him!

## XXXI

*Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into His death?—ROM. vi. 3.*

THESE words from the Epistle for to-day, which I have taken for my text, must have sounded with far clearer meaning on the ears of those to whom St. Paul wrote than on ours. At first probably we do not see any fitness in the figure which the apostle uses. We are familiar with the form of the sentence, and so we inquire no further. Nor is it hard to see why this is so. If we enjoy countless advantages by living in a Christian land, and growing up day by day under the influence of Christian rules and in the use of Christian language, it is no less true that this habitual familiarity with holy things brings with it peculiar difficulties. We cannot see the special character of our profession brought out into clear light by contrast with the profession of others. We cannot estimate aright the cost of our warfare as we are bound to do because we do not observe the forces of our adversaries who lie in wait around us. Nearly all now bear Christ's name, and we are gradually led to think that that in itself is of little importance for good or for evil. In common

language a Christian is only another name for a man. But it is not so that Holy Scripture speaks of those who have entered even nominally on Christ's service and have been enrolled in His household. That name and that enrolment, in which we all have an equal share, tells us, or should tell us, always that we are God's children and soldiers, heirs of a heavenly inheritance. And if we are engaged in such service, surely it is well that we should reflect how we were pledged to it. If we are looking for such an inheritance, surely it is well that we should think often of the terms under which it was first promised to us. Thus it is that the Epistles are full of allusions to baptism, which is at once the type and the pledge of the Christian's hope. And, above all, the passage which I have chosen brings the subject most impressively before our minds in its personal relation to each one of us. But, as I said, we are unable from our position to understand at once the full meaning of the language used. To us baptism seems to bear no resemblance to death. There is nothing, as far as we can see, common to the font and the grave, though it is in this way that St. Paul speaks. The few drops of holy water with which the unconscious infant is sprinkled bear little resemblance to the stream into which in the first age the full-grown convert descended that he might rise from beneath its waters to a new life. But if the form be changed, the reality still remains. What baptism was to the first Christian, that it may be to us now. The lessons which it taught then it may still, by God's blessing, teach us. If it set forth a death then, it sets forth a death now. If it was then

the beginning of a new life, it is the beginning of a new life now. If it has lost anything of its former power and meaning, it is because *we* have changed, because we look for less and believe less, and not because differences of age or climate can remove that which God has fixed. And so we can use the apostle's words, and repeat the question to you which he addressed to the Romans of old. *Know ye not, my brethren, that as many of us as were baptized into Christ were baptized into His death?* Know ye not that that sacrament from which we derive our Christian name declares the true nature of the position in which we stand to the world at large, and points out the spring of our present strength. For what is it to be baptized into Christ's death but to die even as He died, and to share the blessings which by His death He gained for us—to die to old motives and old hopes, and to live only in Christ? And these are the thoughts which I would ask you to bear away to-day. I would ask you to reflect that that baptism which we have all received, and at which we all assist, as often as any are dedicated to God in this place, signifies at once a death and a life—a death which we must all realise and a life which we may all enjoy.

At first, when the Christian found himself cut off from the sympathy of those whom he had loved, excluded from the daily occupations in which they were engaged and from the seasonable amusements in which he had indulged, because they were bound up with the old religion, it was not strange that baptism should seem indeed to be a death. It was the clear mark by which the old and new were divided. But

it is far otherwise now, when everything borrows its outward form from Christianity as it did then from heathenism, and not to profess to be a Christian is itself to be strange and singular. We do not ourselves remember when we were not Christians—we know no one who does not claim the title. There is no outward help which may impress upon us the truth that as Christians we are separated, set apart, dead, in a word, to motives which might have influenced us if we had not known Christ; and so it is the more necessary that we should inquire earnestly whether we show any practical belief that we are indeed baptized into Christ's death and dead with Him; or whether we have lost the reality with the appearance, the spirit as well as the part of martyrs.

Now the first idea which we associate with death is the severance of old ties, the end of old hopes. The dead can be moved no longer by the claims or the pleasures of earth. And this likewise is what our baptism should be to us. The Christian may act outwardly as others, but what he does must be inspired by a different motive and directed to a different end. Christ takes the place of self, and heaven of earth; so that where another looks for his own gratification, for his own honour, for his own present interest, the Christian regards his Master's will and his Saviour's glory. And is there any sign in our daily life that we are dead with Christ? Is there any mark whereby we may know that we are moved by a spirit different from that which moves those who have not heard of Christ? Is our daily work done only for our own pleasure and for our own advancement? or with the constant

remembrance that every act is at once a discipline and a sacrifice? Are we content to secure at any rate the praise of those with whom we have to do, and to avoid their blame? or do we try to shape our conduct according to His law before whom all secrets are laid open? Do we endeavour to make our business as light as possible, using every means, allowed or forbidden, which may abridge our labour? or do we seek more and more to make every act an act of worship rendered with our whole soul, because God claims it? These questions you can each answer for yourselves, and your answers will tell you whether you are faithful to your profession. For if we regard only ourselves and our fellow-men, if we regard ourselves and our fellow-men first—if we seek to escape from every difficulty instead of conquering it—if we pray not for the bread of life whereby we may be supported from day to day—if we press not forward to that heavenly kingdom of which we claim to be citizens—then how do we differ from those who have never heard the Gospel? How can we say with any faith that we who have been baptized into Christ have been baptized into His death?

There is, however, another idea besides this of the interruption of old ways, suggested by the name death, the idea of perfect equality. In death all are equal. The pomp of rank or wealth, the pride of beauty or wisdom are idle shadows over the grave. And so it is with Christians. If they be dead—dead to the vain ambition and restless self-seeking to which they are naturally inclined—then are they all equal, all members of one body, united in a common work, and supported by a

common strength. The Christian knows no difference of time or place or rank. All these things belong to that life which has passed away. And as he embraces in his new love the whole world for which Christ died, he finds his soul filled with an overpowering sense of the dignity and duties of his position. Though he be the humblest in earthly fortune, he has a glorious ancestry, ennobled by deeds which grow ever brighter as time flows on. The lineage of kings is but of yesterday when compared with that of which he can boast. He thinks on the patriarchs of old who rejoiced to see the Saviour's day in the distant future ; he thinks on the saints and martyrs who followed His footsteps and listened to His words ; he thinks on all the great and good who have caught some dim reflection of His life, and with all alike He claims fellowship—fellowship by his baptism into Christ's death. Nor can he stop here. He sees around him the poor, the weak, the suffering, and he recognises them indeed as brethren, offering every help to soothe their troubles, and ready to deny himself that he may aid them. And is this the spirit in which we, my brethren, try to realise the meaning of our baptism ? Do we look upon that as bringing us into a real and lively union with all who bear Christ's name ? Do we think that to despise or injure our neighbour is indeed to despise and injure Christ ? For we have no choice given to us whether we will be Christ's servants or not : all that we can choose is whether we will be faithful servants or unfaithful, good soldiers or traitors. For we are part of a vast army, surrounded by those whom we may imitate or

succour. And do we feel any joy in thinking on our true brotherhood with holy men of old? Do we make any serious effort to guide, protect, and comfort those who need our help, not by idle caprice, but of steady purpose? If we see the thoughtless wandering, do we with gentle earnestness lead him to the right way? If we see the weak oppressed, do we with ready courage uphold his cause? If we see our friend full of grief, do we hasten with cheerful heart to share his burden? If we do not, how do we show that we are all united in one body? Do we not rather forget that we who were baptized into Christ were baptized into His death?

But hitherto I have said little of that which is indeed the very point of the whole text. It is not only that we were baptized into death, but into Christ's death, and so made partakers of the infinite blessings which He purchased for us by His sufferings. Christ died that He might rise again and lift our human nature with Him from the earth, and hallow for ever all our powers and faculties. He died not to lose that which made him man, but to unite man himself to God. He died not to lay aside His body, but to raise it again a glorious body, fit for the life of heaven. And His death is at once the image of our own and the only source from which our death can draw its virtue. As Christians we are not to cast away our gifts, but to offer the costliest which we can bring, like those Magi of old, at the feet of Jesus. We are to use to the full all that God has lent to us, but to use it for God, and as God's. And this we are to do not in our own strength, but as dead, and alive only in Christ. For

this it is which alone can give us strength as often as we seem to fail. It is not we who act, but Christ in us. I spoke of the new hopes and motives by which the Christian life should be guided ; and if at times we are conscious, as we must be, that we have sought our own pleasure, and broken God's law, still let us not despair. We are dead in Christ, and yet we are called upon to do to death those enemies of His within us who still assail our hearts. For that which is begun shall be carried to the end in due time, if we faint not. Let us only turn more earnestly to Him whose promised help cannot fail if we faithfully seek it as He has bidden us. Let us forget those things which are behind, and ever reach forward to a higher standard of duty, and a fuller measure of usefulness. But above all let us not wait for some easier or more promising field for our labours. Our work is to be done in the very place where God has placed us, and you well know how much there is to be done each within your own circle. We can all bear about with us as the apostle did the dying of our Lord Jesus in our common business. We can all grieve with effectual sorrow at daily signs of injustice and unkindness as we labour to remove them. We can all show how the whole body suffers when one member offends the Spirit of Christ, and the fear of punishment or disgrace takes the place of the fear of God. For us and for all the victory has been gained by Christ. In Him the weakest is strong, and He is waiting to help. He died for us, and we have been baptized into His death. No new pledge is wanting whereby we may be assured of His love. And that love is

almighty. If we have David's heart we shall have David's blessing. If we turn to the Lord, as we read this morning, He will put away our sin. If we have hitherto lived—or sought to live—in ourselves and not in Him—if we have forgotten Him whom we are pledged to serve—if we have refused to hear Him when He called—yet He is all in all. He is in us, and He can make us conformable to Himself. By His working He can subdue all things unto Himself, and transform all common earthly duties with a heavenly power. And so not only shall we be buried with Him, but also we shall rise with Him, and be with Him forever in the Presence of God.

## XXXII

*And His disciples answered Him, From whence can a man satisfy these men with bread here in the wilderness?—ST. MARK viii. 4.*

THE record of the feeding of the four thousand, which has been read this morning as the Gospel for the day, brings before us in a striking light the twofold aspect of our Lord's miracles. They are works at once and lessons, or, to use the language of the apostles, they are "powers" and "signs." In the former relation they take their place among the facts of the universe which reveal the great laws of God. In the latter they illustrate the subordination of the physical to the moral, and lead us to feel a divine presence in the great sacraments of Nature. It is of no moment that the laws which miracles set forth cannot be traced at every instant in outward operation. Antecedently to all experience, we cannot presume to prescribe what will be the mode in which God will manifest His will. We believe that He will never deny Himself, and He is Light and Truth and Love and Life. If, then, we can see, as yet, however dimly and imperfectly, that the miracles of our Lord tend to open to us new views of the economy of the world, to re-establish broken

harmonies between the aspirations and the powers of man, to figure in sensible forms the infinite tenderness of divine compassion, to foreshadow the great defeat of sin and death, then we shall welcome them as signs of our heavenly King, declaring His Presence and setting forth His will. To speak of miracles as "suspending" the laws of Nature is to neglect or rather to deny their essential character. Here as everywhere the weaker force is overpowered by the stronger, but both produce their full effect. The result is, so to speak, the issue of a conflict. There is a relation between the effort and the object even in the works of Christ. *This kind, He said, goeth not out but by prayer and fasting. I must work the works of Him that sent me, while it is day.* Or to show yet more closely the unity of all divine action—that is, at once of the creation and of the preservation of the world—*My Father worketh hitherto, and I work.* In these last marvellous words the whole question is summed up. There is no sharp distinction between the "ordinary" and the "miraculous" working of God. In both the element of life and being absolutely escapes all analysis. We know something of the mechanism and phenomena of life, but life itself, its beginning and its close, is at least as great a mystery as any miracle. In this way, then, the "powers" of Christ claim to take their proper place among the events of history, as deeds truly wrought for men and among men. But this is not all: they are, as I have said, lessons also, pregnant each with a peculiar meaning. Each work is an acted parable—a sermon addressing us not merely by the

lively scene of imagination, but by the realities of life.

The general truth of this statement is attested by the teaching of our Lord Himself. When the renewed labour of future apostles was rewarded by the great draught of fishes, as we lately heard, the teaching of the memorable event was pointed in the words, which began and typified the history of the Church: *Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men.* The multitudes fresh from the miraculous feeding by the shores of Gennesaret, followed Christ, and straightway He spoke to them of the bread of heaven, the heavenly manna, and raised their thoughts from natural to spiritual wants, from *the meat which perisheth to that meat which endureth to everlasting life.* For *thirty and eight years* a sick man had lain powerless by the pool of Bethesda. After the healing word was spoken, Christ found him in the Temple, and then laid open before him the source of all suffering: *Behold, thou art made whole: sin no more, lest a worse thing come unto thee.* The woman who touched the hem of Christ's robe was instantly restored, but it was not till she had confessed her Saviour that she heard the words: *Daughter, be of good comfort: thy faith hath saved thee.* The Pharisees blasphemed when the man blind from his birth confessed the divine mission of Him who had healed him; and *Jesus said, For judgment I am come into this world, that they which see not might see; and that they which see might be made blind.* Once again, in the presence of the hopeless mourner, when the grave had closed over him whom He had loved, *Jesus said unto Martha,*

*I am the resurrection and the life*, not at some future time only, when earth shall restore her dead, but now and at all time. And at His voice Lazarus came forth from the tomb, bound hand and foot with grave-clothes, that we may be henceforth not faithless but believing, and hasten to obey, even against all hope, Him who calls us from our earthly bondage to a higher life.

The existence of this unquestionable symbolism in the general scope of our Lord's miracles suggests the existence of a continuous undercurrent of spiritual meaning beneath their details. The events, if we look at them with any care, are seen to be no mere duplicates, but marked severally by distinctive features. Those which have the closest mutual resemblances are yet separated by a variety of minute differences which change the specific character of the lesson. It would be strange if it were not so. The works of Christ, no less than the words of Christ, were perfect. They met the circumstances of the case not by a rude approximation, as with us, but by absolute fitness; and their very individuality clothes them with a permanent power. This may be seen in the records preserved to us of the two miraculous draughts of fishes, or of the two miracles of feeding. If we take the latter, we shall confess probably that a casual reading conveys little impression of any difference between them, yet I believe that a more minute comparison of their details will leave no doubt as to their substantial diversity. The feeding of the four thousand will be seen to form one of a group of Gentile miracles. This is shown most clearly in St. Mark. The first

is that noble triumph of faith in which the Syro-phœnician mother wins the recovery of her daughter by unparalleled devotion. The next, the healing of the deaf and dumb man, whom Christ first led aside from the multitude before *He sighed and said, Ephphatha: Be opened.* The third, the feeding of the multitude. In each the scene is in a heathen district. The first was wrought *on the borders of Tyre and Sidon*, the next *in the coasts of Decapolis*, the last still on the eastern side of the Sea of Galilee, which Christ now approached from that quarter; for when the work was ended, He passed over with His disciples to Magdala. One other detail, preserved by St. Matthew, is itself decisive as to the Gentile origin of the multitude in this last case, for when they wondered at Christ's works, it is said that *they glorified the God of Israel*,—the God, that is, as the whole context shows, of a strange nation.

It would be impossible now to examine at length the mutual relations of this group of miracles, which close (as you will find) with marked significance a great period of the Lord's ministry. I would rather ask you to do this for yourselves, and, believe me, the subject is a fruitful one. But if we confine our attention to the miracle before us to-day, we shall see how each detail contributes to enforce its special lesson when contrasted with the previous miracle of the five thousand. There the multitude was apparently part of a pilgrim-caravan, *for the passover, the feast of the Jews, was nigh.* Here a multitude gathered from a Gentile region waiting for present help. There the divine support was given at once, *when*

*the day began to wear away*: here after a delay, *when they had continued with Christ already three days*. There the disciples first offer counsel to the Lord: here He calls attention Himself to the patient crowds. There help was not far off *in the villages and the country round about*: here there was danger lest if the people were dismissed they should *faint by the way*: for *divers of them came from far*. There the question was: *Shall we go and buy two hundred pennyworth of bread?* here *From whence can a man satisfy these men with bread here in the wilderness?* There the difficulty seemed to be to make existing resources available: here to find resources of any kind. The apostles, when they had seen the one miracle, yet do not seem to have expected the other. Evidently the conditions were changed. Hope for the Gentile was yet far off and even unlooked-for, after the Jew had been fed with heavenly food. At last it was only realised when endurance had overcome trial, when natural strength was exhausted, when obvious supplies had failed, when intercession was silent, by the spontaneous love of a Saviour who was from the first waiting to be gracious.

I have said nothing of differences of number and some minuter details in the two narratives, but no one, I think, can read his Bible carefully without feeling that there is in it a mysterious symmetry of parts which he cannot yet fathom. It is possible, no doubt, to crowd our own fancies into the text with rash irreverence; for there is an irreverent credulity as well as an irreverent scepticism. The safeguard against this is in watchful patience. It

is enough if you will study Holy Scripture with the firm conviction that every word has its work. What its work is we may not see clearly in every case, for the written revelation of God is spiritually discerned. Yet we shall see enough, I know, to save us from that precipitate and false love of candour which urges many to surrender outworks of Truth which faithlessness alone can make assailable. We need not less criticism but more—more calm, more searching, more complete. Let us only listen lovingly, and what seemed a thunder-clap will be found to be an intelligible voice from heaven. Let us gaze steadfastly, and the dazzling light which dims our outward sense will reveal a vision of God. When the adversaries of Stephen closed round him he looked up into heaven and saw the Son of Man standing on the right hand of God—standing to welcome to Himself His faithful witness.

It follows from what has been said that the spiritual sense of the miracles is not a mere accommodation, but belongs to their very essence. Thus the Gospel of the day speaks to us with a direct lesson of comfort if ever, as well may be, our hearts fail as in our life-long pilgrimage. The question of the disciples is one which we often ask, at least in spirit, when we contrast our work with what may seem the nobler work of others, our circumstances with the more favourable circumstances in which they are placed.

*From whence can a man satisfy these men with bread here in the wilderness?* It appears to us to be impossible to fulfil Christ's commands. The very

nature of our work is against us. Our time, we say, is occupied with a dull routine which exhausts the faculties without really exercising them. Our energies are confined within definite limits which we may not pass. There is no scope for free and generous exertion. We would labour much if we might choose our own field, but here the return is uncertain and at best scanty. Vain delusion! Whatever lies before us, poor and mean and trivial as it may seem, is the work of God. We dare not weigh in our earthly balance the issues of life. Fame, honour, reputation, eminence are only reflections, or too often shadows, of worth and heroism. Great and small are terms relative to our little world. We can labour honestly and heartily though we know not to what end. When David kept his few sheep in the wilderness he was gaining strength to rule over Israel. When Paul sat at the feet of Gamaliel he was gaining wisdom to proclaim the mysteries of Christ. And thousands there have been in every age whose names are written only in the Book of Life, who have silently spread blessings around them from the study, from the workshop, from the lonely chamber, from the crowded camp, which yet live among us.

*From whence can a man satisfy these men with bread here in the wilderness?* Our situation, we think, is peculiarly difficult. The tone of our surroundings is uncongenial to devotion. Temptations are many and powerful. There is no quarter to which we can look for immediate help. If it were otherwise we too should be changed. As it is, we yield for a time and wait for altered circumstances to display

our true character. And yet shall we allow that right has no inalienable power: that truth and purity are mere accidents of outward things. It was in the wilderness that Christ revealed Himself as the supporter of His fainting people. It was in the wilderness that the manna fell, the type of Him who is the bread from heaven. As it was in old time so will it be now. Let us not doubt. The sense of our need is the condition of God's help.

For let us not be mistaken. If the wilderness is to be crowned for us with the beauty of Eden; if our difficulties and trials are to be changed into blessings, we must first be found waiting upon Christ. It may be that we shall wait long. It may be that we shall see the aid for which we had looked pass away. It may be that we shall have followed Him from far, so that a return homewards is impossible. And still if we leave Him not, He cannot fail us. He will not remove our wants, but He will satisfy them. He will not take away our temptations, but He will give us strength to conquer them. He will bless the little which we offer Him, and so it will overflow with a rich increase.

### XXXIII

*And this I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgment; that ye may approve things that are excellent; that ye may be sincere and without offence till the day of Christ; being filled with the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ, unto the glory and praise of God.*—PHILIP. i. 9-11.

*IT came to pass*—so we read in the Gospel of St. Luke—that, as Jesus was praying in a certain place, when He ceased, one of His disciples said unto Him, *Lord, teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples.* The answer, as you remember, was given in words which are oftener perhaps on our lips than any others; and though the Lord's Prayer, as we delight rightly to call it, has nothing distinctively Christian in its form or scope, though it was given to men who had not yet apprehended the character and issue of their Master's work, yet the instinct of ages has ever found in it the fullest as well as the simplest expression of human wants. But even with this model before us there are times, I fancy, when we still repeat the petition of the disciple, and long to learn how to pray. There seems to be a broad gulf between the sublime glories towards which we are taught to aspire and the routine by which we are bound, and we look eagerly for something to bridge

it over. This, we feel, can be nothing less than present fellowship with God, and prayer is at once the result and the condition of that fellowship; but how, we ask, can we shape it for ourselves? or, forgetting ourselves in the nobler duties of a common life, how can we pray for others that for us and for them a harmony may be established between the seen and the unseen, between earth and heaven? The answer once given to such a desire is a promise yet: Christ listens still to the voice which addresses Him—by the vicissitudes of fortune, by alternations of success and failure, by personal trials, by unbidden thoughts, He teaches us to pray. He teaches us to pray by the records of what men have done, and by the sight of what men suffer; by the fresh energy of faith which is seen to claim to-day the privilege of divine power; by the silent life of self-sacrifice which comes to us as a solemn message from the distant past; by the varying circumstances of our common occupations; by the unchanging utterances of inspired men which live for ever.

This morning He teaches us specially by one of these divine voices. The words of St. Paul in the Epistle seem to me to be an apostolic commentary on the prayer of the Lord. They are, if we may use the term, an Apostle's Prayer, which we can carry with us to our daily tasks. They give us in the simplest outline the sum of that which a Christian as a Christian, and not as a man only, is bound to seek for himself and for his friends. They set before us the full dignity of our profession; they open out the boundless capacity of our hope.

In a few short sentences we can see what is the method and character of the life which we are pledged to live, what is the issue to which God in His great love is ready to bring us.

Nor may we think that the petitions which St. Paul offers for his disciples at Philippi refer to a state of Christian experience wholly beyond ours. If they do, the fault lies with us. Ten years before the letter was written these men had not heard the name of Christ, and now they were ready to meet death for Him as the crown of a life of suffering. They had seen St. Paul only twice since he first preached to them, and now their gratitude and love cheered the solitary prisoner in his Roman captivity. They had indeed good cause to bear his image in their hearts. They believed that he had taught them a true Gospel—a message direct from God. But it is nothing less which he has brought to us; that message, as mighty now as then, is offered to us also. How we may make it an ever-quickening power in the midst of our complex and busy life St. Paul will teach us.

*This I pray, that your love may yet more and more abound in growing knowledge and all perception, unto your testing things that differ.* The Christian life, then, is neither stationary nor emotional. It does not consist in taking up a certain position or cherishing a certain form of thought. It is progressive and in one aspect intellectual. There are faculties to be cultivated in order that we may apprehend its many lessons; there are problems to be solved before we can apply its teaching in life. And prayer, we are taught, can alike enlarge and

quicken in us and in others the power to perceive and the power to judge.

But one condition is presupposed. Love is the original spring out of which all other graces flow. *I pray that your love may abound.* This is the power, common to heaven and earth, by which God is made known to man and man is fitted by his common duties for the presence of God. And the immediate context marks the comprehensiveness of its application and the manifold modes by which it is stirred within us. The personal yearning of St. Paul for his faithful converts, as we can see, suggested the term, and out of this fulness of individual affection the apostle passes to that deeper feeling from which all affection draws its strength. Thus the love of which he speaks is neither towards man alone nor yet towards God alone; but rather it embraces both while they still exist together as the centre of the Christian life. This love is, so to speak, the practical aspect of faith. If we believe that Christ did indeed take man's nature upon Him, and exactly so far as we believe it, we must feel drawn by His glorified humanity equally to those like ourselves whose being He has ennobled and to the Father whose mercy He has revealed. To be without love is necessarily not to know God. And in this we have the simplest test of the reality of our profession. If we do not habitually look on men as those for whom Christ died; if we do not habitually look up to God as One who sent His Son to be the Saviour of the world, we are not yet on our part Christians. We have blessings in our possession which we have never realised, power which we

have never used, a fellowship which we have never claimed.

If, however, love exist in us ; if we *do* feel, however feebly and transiently, that we are not and cannot be alone, that we are bound with our whole being equally to earth and to heaven, then the feeling will little by little change our whole nature if we yield ourselves to the action of God's Spirit. As it is not a mere emotion at first but a new principle of life, it will extend its influence over the whole range of our powers. It will widen the compass of our thought and direct the course of our action. It will, in St. Paul's words, *abound in growing knowledge and in all perception.*

In both respects, in bringing the increase of knowledge and the increase of discernment, it answers to necessities which Christian effort soon reveals to us. When we first begin to think of what life is, and what it might have been ; of suffering which now seems to be irremediable ; of sin which must, as far as we can see, work out its consequences not only on its author, but on all around him ; of the noblest faculties crushed and depraved—it is hard, I fancy, not to be filled with despair. We look for the image of God around us, and it is not. Then it is that Christian love finds its first work. The sympathy which it quickens calls out in the object to which it is directed that which is kindred to itself. Where love exists it will find that on which it can take hold. Even in the darkest spot it will discover some ray of the light of heaven, as it sees more of disappointment and wretchedness. It will embrace with a wider comprehension the great scheme of

human life. It will acknowledge that there may be a wise purpose in the long ages of gloom and the dark clouds of sorrow which overshadow the world. It will recognise at least, even under the thickest veil of misery and evil, in each poorest outcast the image of Christ. Thus it will *abound in knowledge*—seeing deeper into the mysteries of God, looking more hopefully at the fortunes of men, resting with a fuller assurance in the final conquest of sin and death.

But life is not for thought and meditation only. It is something to seize the lineaments of the divine order of the universe, but it is not all. As Christian men we must act. And love which guides us to knowledge will guide us in action also. The same faculty which detects the element of good struggling towards the light in the midst of darkness and corruption will understand best by a happy instinct how to bring it to a robuster growth. Tact is but the external semblance of that gracious tenderness by which love accomplishes the most difficult enterprises. Love can wait in patience till the passionate outburst of grief or anger has spent itself, and the sad silence which follows gives a moving power to its still voice. Love can wait in sorrow till the soul over which it watches has learnt by shameful failures the depth of its degradation, and is ready to welcome the sympathy which it refused in its first flush of pride. It can wait and it can hasten. It can bear and it can battle. As is the occasion so will it be itself. Without effort and even without forethought it will know how to rouse and how to soothe; to check and to encourage; to reveal to this one the

good which he will not acknowledge, to that one the evil which he will not fear. It will *abound in all perception*, becoming in the apostle's sense all things to all men, bringing out of its treasures things new and old, applying to the immediate need exactly that help which it requires.

For we find ourselves at every moment called upon to exercise a Christian judgment. And it is for the *testing of things that differ* that the discipline of love prepares us. Whenever the choice between good and evil is offered to us, our judgment is for the most part the expression of our past life. If that has been selfish, we shall in our moment of trial be unable to pierce below the semblance of things to their true substance. If it has been fashioned by love, then all will be open to our eyes as it really is. No images of our own pleasure will mingle themselves with the bright visions of work to be done for Christ. No shadow of self will eclipse the light of heaven which shines upon our path unto the perfect day. *The testing of things that differ* will be in that happy case but another name for *the approving things that are excellent*.

Such is the method of the Christian life as St. Paul has drawn it in his prayer for the development of love. Its issue answers to the spirit by which it is filled. *I pray*, the apostle goes on to say, *that so ye may be sincere and without offence till the day of Christ; filled with the fruit of righteousness, which is by Jesus Christ, unto the glory and praise of God.* The words are pregnant with meaning. Not one is superfluous: not one fails of its proper work.

The Christian in whom love has had her perfect work is *sincere*: he allows no dark places in his heart. If he has difficulties he faces them; if he has weaknesses he takes account of them. He offers his whole nature to God, and by God's Spirit it is all transfigured.

He is *without offence*. He walks firm and erect amidst the dangers which lie around him, for his eye is fixed upon a heavenly beacon which is never clouded. Even now the light of his Lord's Coming is around him. The end to which he looks is *the day of Christ*.

But even so he is not alone. He has a work for others, manifold and yet one. He is *filled with the fruit of righteousness*. Deeds of mercy and justice, of self-denial and self-sacrifice, of sympathy and courage are the natural growth of his soul, for Christ works through him, and such deeds shall live for ever, for they are done *to the glory and praise of God*.

St. Paul prayed that those whom he loved best might be Christians of this mould; and can we frame any nobler ideal for those who are dearest to us? And yet this ideal, than which nothing can be more sublime, is one which we can all reach. It is for all stations and for all characters. The Apostle's Prayer no less than the Lord's Prayer is for each one of us. It is so Christ teaches us now to pray; and trusting to Him, let us pray for ourselves and for others, that here and in us love *may abound in knowledge and in all perception*; that the sense of our fellowship in a common inheritance, in a common faith, in a common work may open to us nobler

views of duty and furnish us with wiser skill in fulfilling it. Let us pray for ourselves and for others that here and in us love may be the judge of doubts ; that self may be forgotten in the conflict of opposing claims ; that each choice we make may leave us stronger for the future, more clear-sighted by the exercise of a wise discrimination, more vigorous by the action of a steady will.

The rest we can commit to God. He gives us our place ; He gives us our powers ; He will use for the fulfilment of His will all we are and all we have. If we come to Him in Christ, He will supply all our needs, He will keep us blameless to the end. The *fashion* of our life shall *pass away* with the *fashion of this world*, but we shall live as those whose citizenship is even now in heaven, whence we eagerly expect, as a Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall change the fashion of the body of our humiliation so as to be conformable with the body of His glory.

## XXXIV

*Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword.*—ST. MATTHEW x. 34.

THESE words, which we read this morning in the second Lesson, fall on our ears with a strange and almost an unintelligible sound. They are at variance with all our ordinary notions of what Christ's work was. They seem to contradict the song of angels by which His birth was ushered in. They are, so we must think, a strange interpretation of the working of a Gospel. They speak of conflict when we look for repose, of division when we look for unity, of a perilous work to be done when we look for a calm assurance to be realised. And yet they are Christ's words—His words to us as to all ages, and when they are most forgotten then they are most needed.

In times of external quiet, when God does not call upon us to stand forth openly in His cause, it is hardly surprising that we should forget the terms of our allegiance to Him. In times of outward prosperity and well-being, when all around smiles upon us, it is even natural that we should forget that this joyous life is in very truth an unceasing

battle in which we are willing or unconscious combatants. In times of general philanthropy and common kindly feeling, when no one in word denies his duties to others or affects to despise them, it requires an effort to realise that we stand between conflicting hosts of light and darkness, a spectacle, it may be a sorrow, to angels. And so it is that it is well that when words like the text meet us we should not dismiss them as though they had no articulate voice for us, but rather we should face them as Jacob faced the angel, and, as it were, wrestle with them till the day break, if haply they may thus leave us a blessing. The words, I said, are addressed to us, and they do not stand alone. For to us the command is given to enter at the narrow gate which few find; to us the warning that we must through much tribulation enter into the Kingdom of Heaven; to us the charge to contend—contend with the agony of effort—for the faith once delivered to the saints. On our brows the cross was signed when we were received into Christ's Church, in token that we should fight manfully under His banner to our life's end. Now is danger, suffering, toil, war, manifold in form yet unchanging in essence: the fruition of rest is hereafter.

*Not peace, but a sword.* The words are written in the whole history of the Church from then until now. The martyrdom of Stephen was the first occasion for the extension of the Gospel, and the law of its progress has never varied. For three centuries Christianity maintained an open struggle with the strongest power which the world has ever

seen. To be a Christian was to be exposed to contemptuous tolerance, or to the deadly violence of popular outbreaks, or to the systematic persecution of those in power. The war might have seemed unequal; but God was on our side, and He triumphed through weakness. The faith of the poor cast down the weapons of the strong; the folly of the Gospel won to its side all that was noblest and best in ancient wisdom; a new Rome was built as the home of a Christian emperor. The victory was won, the triumph exceeded all human hope; but peace was not yet.

Christianity could not save a society which was moulded and inspired by paganism. It had hardly entered on the field of conquest when it was called to a new struggle. It had succeeded to the throne of the world, but it had to train new subjects beneath its sway. The time was come for fresh races to play their part in history, and the Church was their appointed mistress. Again she taught by suffering.

*Not peace, but a sword.* For three more centuries hordes of barbarians poured over the fairest provinces of Europe. Christianity alone was unconquered. Men were found in those times who, alone or banded together in holy brotherhood, could stem the tide of desolation and divert it into fertilising channels: men like the Irish Columban, who awed the most lawless chieftains by the grand severity of his life; men like the Saxon Boniface, who in the extremity of age rejoiced that he was worthy to die for Christ. Again and again the wild flood swept over our own island, but the bulwarks of faith rose secure above them. The famous legend of the

battle on the Dee side was fulfilled in spirit a hundred times. When the contest waged sorest a fresh legion of Christian soldiers rose in their white robes from the lustral waters and turned to flight the armies of the aliens. The names of kings and heroes have perished, but the names of men like Rustyd and Dudno live on—lowly men who held the light which was given to them as a beacon above the storm. So again the victory was won. A new family of nations was gathered in the fold of Christ: but peace was not yet.

*Not peace, but a sword.* The nations were christianised, but the poor were forgotten. It seemed as if the Church, when she exerted the power, had contracted the vices of feudal sovereignty. The history of the middle age is a long record of conflicts between the spirit of the Gospel and the spirit of dominion. Now in this way and now in that the work of God went forward. New powers were called out, new aspects of truth were laid open, new treasures of the Gospel were discovered. But each step was won by conflict and only opened the way to future warfare. You all know in what way those centuries of partial division ended. When the full time was come the outward unity of Christendom was broken. Christian was armed against Christian in an unnatural strife. It seemed as if the words of the Lord had so gained a strange and terrible meaning. But we now are allowed to look back upon that age of the Reformation and see how men, who owned no fellowship on earth, were yet enabled to work out each some fragment of divine truth and hand it down to us. But with the larger view of

the capacities of Christianity, and the truer view of its adaptation to every variety of thought which we owe to them—larger and truer, I believe, than was ever vouchsafed to any earlier age—we have received also an inheritance of division: *not peace, but a sword.*

Even in this sense the words hold true of our age, and we may not neglect the meaning. But they have also another and a more personal sense. They speak to each one of us in our own peculiar work. In that our battle is to be fought; in that the critical power of Christianity for us is to be manifested; in that we shall find that the Gospel comes not with the soft voice of rest, but with a sterner call. Do what we will, we cannot hide from ourselves that life has for each a dark and sad side. Christianity does not remove it, but through the gloom it points us to the light. It does not take away the contest, but it assures us of the victory.

And this it is which we are in danger of forgetting. In an age like that in which we live the sterner aspects of life are commonly obscured. Every external influence tends to make men superficially alike. We begin by being tolerant of the opinions of others, and we end by being indifferent to our own. We are content that our course should be smooth, when each real advance must be made over evil met openly and conquered. We are ready to move with the multitude when it is too often an aggregate of weakness like our own. We do not know and strive to know more and more that Christianity is still a power to conquer in every domain of action, inexhaustible as the circumstances of human

conduct, manifold as the varieties of human endowment.

From this inactive repose Christ's words in my text rouse us. They offer us a test of our life. If we are conscious within ourselves of no conflict; if we have found no special work to achieve with toil and sorrow; if we are simply desirous to be as other men *seem* to be, and not anxious to consecrate to God's service and by His help all we have and all we are, we cannot satisfy it. But still again the voice comes to us to-day, and may we yet listen to it! Life is not easy, for if it were it could not be glorious. Its work is not uniform, for if it were there would be no scope for every individual labourer. Where there is no battle, there can be no victory.

*Not peace, but a sword.* But the words cheer us when we find the conflict of life hardest. It is Christ's will that it be so. And He has placed us in a noble post. Now more than at any other time His service calls for the varied energy which each faithful heart can bring. If we look around us and within us we shall see how He calls us all separately to His service and welcomes us all with every power which we offer. He will most surely, as we pray, arise and help us.

Let us only look back if we would know what He has done in past ages through the noble using of His servants, and learn by that what greater things He is waiting to do for us. So in His good time shall the cry of battle be changed into the psalm of thanksgiving; the sword shall be exchanged for the palm; and at length there shall be peace—the peace of God.

## XXXV

*Submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God.*—EPHES. v. 21.

THESE words, as you will remember, follow directly after those which occupied our attention this morning. They carry on the lesson which we learnt then into a new region. Those set before us the spirit of inward thankfulness in which as Christians we are enabled to look upon the circumstances of life: these set before us the spirit of unselfish devotion in which as Christians we are directed to regard the relations of life. Those teach us how to meet the events, these how to fulfil the duties which in the Divine Providence are assigned to us. And if we consider the words attentively, I believe that we shall find in them one of the very central rules of Christian action. Here if anywhere the contrast between the promptings of our natural spirit and the teaching of our Lord is sharp and decisive. For at a time when all around us is clothed in the dress of Christianity, and when the language of the Gospel is current even where its truths are refused, we must seek for the decisive signs of faith far down in the motives of our conduct. To assume the Christian name in St. Paul's time was to

proclaim oneself (as men thought) a scholar of peasants and fishermen, a worshipper of a crucified malefactor, the scorn of the wisest in the world, an outcast from God's chosen people. The presence of a temper of humility was then indicated, at least in some degree, by the outward profession of belief. But with us it is far otherwise. We are Christians by descent, by custom, by education. We have made no sacrifice to bear the name of Christ, and our outward circumstances do not constrain us to decide what sacrifice we are prepared to make that we may realise its power. But if we turn to the New Testament we shall see that Christ demands nothing less than our whole selves, and by the words of His apostle He describes our work. This work in its essential traits is not that to which our inclination at first leads us. The character which naturally attracts our fancy is the very converse of the Christian character. The Gospel everywhere speaks of endurance, of humility, of gentleness ; it offers its consolation to the feeble and the broken-hearted, and gives its blessing to the meek and the poor in spirit. It describes Christians as servants one of another. It speaks of wealth as a temptation and not as a prize ; of authority as a charge and not as a distinction. And how little are we able to see the type of real heroism in Paul the aged, the homeless, the prisoner, abandoned by his friends, weighed down by the care of all the churches, troubled, perplexed, persecuted, yet withal rejoicing that he had fought a good fight, and through bereavement and death gazing on the vision of his victor's crown. Do *we* not rather in

imagination hang by the chariot wheel of some mighty conqueror, whose will is never bent by mercy, and whose deeds are never checked by law ; who defies the banded nations and conquers them ; who refuses sympathy and reigns alone ; and bow ourselves by some strange impulse before the idol of selfish power ? Or, to descend to a lower sphere, do we not dwell on the accounts of successful audacity and brilliant wickedness, accepting for the time excitement for happiness, licence for freedom, recklessness for bravery ? That we have this tendency within us to idolise power and boldness and independence in themselves is a proof that as Christians we have yet a great work to do ; for, while we are held by their charm, we could not dare to plead the cause of the great tyrant, or of the successful, selfish, unsympathising man, of the bold outlaw, nay, even of the rebellious boy, before Christ's judgment-seat.

The whole world, indeed, has pronounced against this false independence by which we are fascinated. If we could people a state with our imaginary heroes, life would be impossible in a place where no bond of union could exist, and where even selfishness would, as it were, be imprisoned in self. And thus it is that, apart from all Christian teaching, every society is held together by laws of mutual forbearance. The citizen offers his wealth, his time, his very life to his country, that he may receive the protection of its laws and feel the influence of its greatness. The son or the brother learns to give up his amusements and his will that he may enjoy the fulness of a father's blessing and the ready return of

affection. Each neighbourhood, each fellowship of men makes demands upon all who are included in it. Something must be done and something must be left undone without regard to our individual wishes if we are to enter in any degree into the fulness of human life, into the fulness of human happiness.

We have all experienced this a thousand times. The constraints, the promptings which belong to our natural position in the world are so inwrought into our whole being that we hardly separate them from ourselves. But hitherto the corresponding influences of that divine brotherhood into which we are brought by the Birth and Death and Resurrection of Christ have not equally passed into the texture of our lives. Yet they are indeed more energetic and more prevailing than any other if we rightly consider them.

But the mutual submission which is required of us by the laws of society and of family falls far short of the Christian standard. The strength of natural affection helps us to give up much for our nearest friends; but Holy Scripture tells us that all men are our brethren in Christ. The instinct of courtesy smoothes the external roughness of social intercourse; but the judgment of Christ regards the motive and not the appearance. The impulse of benevolence leads to noble acts of devotion; but that devotion which the Holy Spirit teaches is ever present in all the commonest details of our life, converting all into one great sacrifice to God.

And it is in this that we have the full account of that submission of which St. Paul speaks. It is

a sacrifice—a sacrifice of ourselves, a sacrifice for others, a sacrifice to God.

*It is a sacrifice of ourselves.* Nothing is more common than to find those who are ready to yield at the first pressure of force or persuasion—whom a single word can divert from their purpose and a passing invitation carry in a strange direction. We have all felt how hard it is to say “No”; we have all confessed how often this difficulty has led us to do that which we utterly disliked. But when we give way thus, we give way through weakness and not through charity. We pay a tribute to man and offer no sacrifice to God. Submission in the Christian sense is an act of strength and not of weakness; a victory and not a defeat; a victory over self, felt and realised. This, then, is the first characteristic of that submission to one another by which we must each endeavour to fulfil St. Paul’s words. It is not the easy, thoughtless, indifferent acquiescence of a mind which is alike incapable of resolution and resistance; but the calm, steady, deliberate denial of his own wishes by one who knows well the value of that which he forgoes, and knowing still forgoes it. It is, as I said, a sacrifice of self.

*It is also a sacrifice for others*—not for one only, but for all among whom God’s Providence may place us. If the command were given us to submit to the good and the generous and the great—to submit to those whom love constrains us to follow with eager and watchful service—to submit to those who seem born to rule by their kingly nature—to submit to those who are placed above us by the

ordinances of social life—there would be but little self-denial in obedience. But there is no limit to the precept. As Christians we are simply told to submit one to another ; and thus we have opened to us a boundless field for the trial of our faith. Every act of our daily business may furnish us with a test whereby we may know whether we are indeed serving God. For we cannot really serve God except through our fellow-men, in whom He has told us to see the image of Himself. For instance, He sends His special messengers to us—the poor, the sick, the suffering, the orphan, and the widow—and how do we fulfil His word in their behalf? Do we ever moderate the exulting tones of our own joy, that we may listen with sobered ear to a tale of sorrow and speak simple words of comfort to a mourner? Do we ever conquer the morbid sensibility by which education has quickened our faculties, that we may understand the struggles of the needy and lighten them by true sympathy? Do we ever check the burst of impatience with which we are inclined to receive ill-timed advice, and gather from the kindness of the motive fresh affection for our counsellor? In these and countless other ways we can submit ourselves one to another ; and all life is most fruitful in such means of discipline. I do not speak now of that hearty submission to authority which is the corner-stone of our whole fabric ; but of that mutual submission among yourselves, of equal to equal, and of greater to less as well as of less to greater, which finds a place in your everyday work. And do not think that these things are trifles : it is out of these trifles

that a character is formed, as a life is made up of hours, or a flood of drops of rain. There are few crises in life, and our conduct in these is the result of the habits of our years of quiet. And how are you then using your time of trial here? How do you welcome the hourly occasions which you have for self-denial? It may be that we are intent on our own business when another urgently claims our help: can we cheerfully lay aside our occupation to remove his difficulty? It may be that our explanations are misunderstood or neglected: can we patiently extend and repeat them? It may be that we are blamed wrongfully; that our motives are misrepresented; that we are slighted; and can we bear all these little trials, becoming all things to all, submitting ourselves one to another, sacrificing ourselves and that for others, that by God's help we may win some to His service?

Thus we come to the third mark of Christian submission which I noticed: *it is in the fear of God*. This fear is at once the motive and the limit of our submission. Our submission is a sacrifice for Christ, and offered in the fear of Christ. There can be no submission where His honour is endangered; and then only is submission true when His will is its final object. For Christian submission is very different from mere courtesy or benevolence. It is rendered not because it is required by outward circumstances, but because it is due to Christ who appears before us; for Christ indeed presents Himself to us in all who need our aid and claim our sympathy: and what a thought is this, my brethren, to carry into our daily life. Poets have told us

that they can see God in all the material world ; but surely it is a more touching sight to see Christ in every fellow-man. In this way the fear of God is the motive of Christian submission, and it is also, as I have said, the limit of it. Here lies the last thought which I wish to offer to you. We have seen that Christian submission does not spring from weakness. It is true also that it does not lead to weakness. Of all men the Christian is really the bravest. No other is free from meanness or littleness of soul as he. Philosophy can boast but of few martyrs, while Christendom counts her glorious army by thousands. The Christian submits indeed because he is at liberty and not because he is a slave—because he is bound by none of the false conventions of honour and fashion which chain those who boast of their freedom. Once for all he has surrendered himself to God, and fearing Him he can fear no one else ; trusting in Him, he can need no other help ; working for Him, he can need no other motive. Through submission he has passed to independence. He is free because he cannot do evil, and by God's grace he can do all else. His whole life is made up of contrasts. He is feeble and yet he is strong ; he is not easily provoked, and yet he is very jealous for his Lord ; he beareth all things, and yet he is intolerant of wrong. He thinketh no evil, and yet he examines the motives of action. He may be a reed shaken by the wind, and yet he can reprove princes. He looks to his Saviour as He received the weary and heavy-laden, and also as He rebuked the hypocrisy of lawyer and priest. He bows his head to bear his master's yoke,

and he stands quiet to face the powers of darkness. He is melted by the first sight of human suffering, and he stands undaunted by the terror of death. He knows how to win by humility and how to conquer by force; how to refrain his tongue, and how to proclaim the message of his King; how to sacrifice himself wholly, so that he may find himself again in God, preserved blameless unto Christ's coming. For at last submission will be crowned by sovereignty.

*Submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God.* There is no lesson, I think, which we need more at the present time. There is among us, throughout the country, much uneasiness and discontent and self-assertion. There is a restless anxiety lest old privileges should be disturbed; there is a strong determination to press to the uttermost the argument of power. And all this comes from the want of a living sense of our special relationship one to another, of our common relationship to God in Christ. We do not for the most part *submit ourselves one to another*. And I am not speaking now of that which belongs to any particular state of life. There is a Christian submission of the rich to the poor just as truly as there is a Christian submission of the poor to the rich—of master to workman as of workman to master. He that is greatest of all among us is servant of all. But I do earnestly desire for all to whom I am bound by any debt of service, I do earnestly desire for all Englishmen, that they should give to the world an example of self-sacrifice in their common life as they have given in their national life. I do

earnestly desire that we should all habitually ask ourselves not what we can claim, but what we can give ; that we should think first not of our rights, but of our duties ; that we should not rest till we feel our mutual dependence as a fact and not only as a thought, till we practically recognise our divine and ineffaceable kinsmanship through our Saviour. I do earnestly desire that we should fulfil with growing purpose the apostle's charge, and, in a word, submit ourselves one to another, as being not our own but Christ's, and strive through all the temptations of selfishness to render to those for whom He died, in His name and by His strength, the living sacrifice of all we have and all we are.

## XXXVI

*Redeeming the time, because the days are evil.*—EPHES. v. 16.

ALL who have paid any attention to the passages of Holy Scripture which have been appointed for this morning's service must have felt that they are marked by a very solemn tone of warning and exhortation. As we are now drawing towards the close of the Christian year, our Church invites us in a more especial manner to self-inquiry and self-denial. In the first Lesson she leads us to the source from which we draw the penitent supplications of our Litany. She tells us of the Lord's controversy with His people for their ignorance, injustice, and idolatry, and sets before us the vision of a people humbling themselves before the Lord in answer to those very words with which her daily prayers are opened. In the Gospel she reminds us that the possession of a blessing is no assurance of its continuance; that it is possible for us to attempt to enter the kingdom of heaven unworthily as well as to refuse all allegiance to its sovereign; that *many are called, but few chosen.*

In the Epistle she points out to us the practical lesson which we ought to draw from these our mani-

fold dangers and privileges. For there, in one brief sentence, St. Paul expresses the character and the cause of all that is peculiar in our Christian life, when he enjoins us to *redeem the time* allotted to us, *because the days are evil*.

At first sight these words must appear strange and mysterious, my brethren, when they speak of time which another has occupied and taken for his own—of time to be redeemed—of time which must be rescued from the power and influence of some mighty enemy—of time which must be gained for our daily work—of time which must be wholly consecrated to God. We say, indeed, very commonly that our time is our own, and that we can do what we please with it. The idle man is supposed to have his time at his own disposal; and yet if we think for a while it must be clear to each one of us that there is an ever-present, ever-active source of sin in the wide world—in our own homes—in our own hearts, which is ready to check and hinder every good design we make, which is always at hand to fill our lives with unholy thoughts and words and deeds. It must be clear to us that *our* days are scarcely less evil than those in which St. Paul lived; that our season of trial is fruitful of many temptations; that the battle-ground of our life is already occupied by many deadly foes; so that indeed, without God's aid to enlighten and guide and strengthen us, the days we spend are rather Satan's time than our own; for so far as they are spent without Christian thought, they are spent according to the will of the great enemy of our souls.

*The days, I say, are evil*, as we may see in the

world around us. Can there be any one here whose heart has not been saddened by the signs of want and ignorance and suffering which stain all that is noblest and richest and happiest in this Christian land? It may be painful to think that homeless wanderers seek a precarious shelter under the shadow of our palaces; that the voice of those who are pining away in sickness, lonely and uncared for, mingles with the music which gladdens the ears of the wealthy; that thousands know not the name of Him who died for them, through whom they claim true brotherhood with princes and with us. It may be painful to think of this, it may seem unfit for the strong and the hopeful and the gay to dwell on such visions of distress, and yet the reality is infinitely more painful than words can represent it; and to us—to all of us—both now and always, God has given the charge to teach, to comfort, and to aid all who need our sympathy and help. We cannot too closely familiarise ourselves with the scenes of wretchedness by which we are surrounded if we are willing to do our duty in softening their horrors. Our own conduct even in the first years of life may soothe or aggravate them. And soon, very soon, it will be the peculiar office of the youngest among us to listen to the cries for knowledge and for bread which the poor raise to their richer and wiser neighbours. We shall see in the journey of life many a poor traveller wounded and wearied by the wayside who will call on us for succour and support. And if we hear them not, God hears them, and records their fruitless prayers in the book of His remembrance.

Our neighbourhood, again, may teach us that

the days are evil. Can there be one here who has not felt shame and grief when he has seen some act of dishonesty or unkindness—when he has heard some word false or unholy—when he has observed laws broken and cautions disregarded, because God only was present to detect and punish? Can there be one here who has not at some time wondered that divine things are so little thought of? that the Bible is so little used from day to day? that our common conduct and our general life bear so little likeness to our promises and professions?

And if we look within we shall then feel little surprise that the days are evil. Even the most careless among us must have felt alarm, though but for a moment, when he has become conscious of his utter inability to do the good which he purposed, to keep the resolution which he made, to avoid the evil which he has condemned. Doubts arise, but they are not resolved by prayer; fears startle us, but they are not hallowed by repentance; dissatisfaction comes over us, but it is not calmed by earnest labours in God's cause; and so each fresh temptation finds us less prepared to meet it. The days are evil, and our time is unredeemed.

Still, my brethren, our time—our season of trial—is short, and much must be done in it. Each moment is irreparable, and it must be accounted for hereafter. *We*, at least, have no ground for excuse or extenuation. From our baptism we have been pledged to serve God manfully to our life's end. We have known His will, we have received His blessing, we have been made partakers of His Spirit, and yet how are our vows fulfilled?

How do we accomplish the work which He has given us to do for others? How do we redeem our time by making it an occasion for extending His Truth?

It is not possible for us to live alone; it is not possible for us to bound the influence of our being by our existence in this world, even if we would. And this is one of the most solemn lessons of life. Every one of us is now a teacher of good or of evil; every one of us is spreading a blessing or a curse around him; every one of us is a source of infinite happiness or misery, extending far beyond the bounds of life and time; every one of us is working for God or the devil in every thought and word and work, consciously or unconsciously, willingly or unwillingly, yet most surely and most effectually. Silently and certainly the image of our conduct is reflected in the action of our friends. They quote our example as an excuse for evil; they recognise in our self-denial a reproof of their own selfishness. And so the character which we have formed will be traced in years and ages yet to come by signs of good or of evil. God grant that we may think seriously and prayerfully on this, bound as we are by every tie of love and duty to seek the good of those whom we call our friends!

How, again, do we redeem our time by our personal use of it? Can the idle be said in any way to redeem his time? Is the self-indulgent one who fights under Christ's banner? Do you think that one thoroughly in earnest would find many "spare moments" while he must see so much of God's work left undone around him? Let us reflect once again

on the holy titles which are given to each one of us. And can you then believe that a *member of Christ* will have no acts of charity and kindness to perform, as he seeks to sympathise with all the trials of those near and dear to him? Can you believe that a *child of God* will ever find no one among his brethren who needs his advice and aid? Can you believe that an *inheritor of the kingdom of heaven* will ever fail to have some words of prayer or praise to offer to his Saviour?

How then is it with us, my brethren, who are all *members of Christ, children of God, and inheritors of the kingdom of heaven*? Do we in any measure fulfil the duties which are placed upon us? Do we strive to redeem our time, by using it all zealously, actively, faithfully in our appointed work?

There are, indeed, very many who cannot be called idle and listless, whose example, however, is not less dangerous than theirs. You may see them restlessly and busily engaged in a thousand ways, without plan or purpose, without any lasting progress or success. They have no time to listen to words of warning and counsel, even if the din of their own preparations did not exclude all other sounds. They are careful and troubled—cumbered, like Martha, with much serving. They begin a work, and straightway abandon it for some new one. They advance a few steps along one road and then hastily return to try another. But this is not to redeem the time—to be hurried and harassed by countless conflicting schemes, to have no leisure for thought and judgment, to do all things badly because it does not seem enough to do one well.

On the contrary, the Christian's work is orderly. He consecrates his life and energies to some particular object, towards which he toils without haste or impatience. He knows that there is but one true way, whatever goal he may wish to gain, even Christ Himself, through whom and in whom he does all things, consecrating to Him the time which he has redeemed, and looking forward with a sure and certain hope to his reward in heaven.

For time is the price of eternity. It is not enough for us to labour for others in this season of our mortal life; it is not enough for us to do our earthly business, we have also to work out our own salvation, seeking first to gain a home in heaven. Still, we must not fancy that it is our duty to display our religion always. It must be deep, but not loud. It must be ever-present, but not obtrusive. It must harmonise with the whole tenor of our conduct, combining by one great principle all the trifling details of common duties. And yet there are occasions on which God calls us to redeem the time by devoting it specially to His service. He invites us to His house and claims the homage of our hearts and lives. He is near us morning and evening when we pray in common for a blessing on our ordinary engagements. He has promised to be with us when we meet from day to day as families called by His Name, and looking for His help. He enjoins on us to seek Him in our own chambers, studying His holy Word and communing with our hearts. He calls us at stated intervals to renew our fellowship with Him in that service which Christ Himself instituted in memory of His

death. And can he, do you think, be said to have redeemed the time which he has spent in the outward worship of God whose soul has been absent, whose thoughts have wandered, whose very voice has been silent? Can he be said to have redeemed the time which he has passed in the peculiar presence of God who has known no reverence and awe before Him—who converts His Bible into a book of routine, and finds therein no comfort or warning or reproof? Can he be said to have redeemed his time who is not ready to present himself before God when he is more especially invited to commemorate that love which is the very ground of his hope? A heathen king once said that that day was lost in which he had conferred no benefit on a friend; and shall not we feel that day indeed to be lost on which we have returned no thanks to God for the numberless common blessings which cheer and gladden us, in which we have not sought in gratitude to extend to others the hope which we feel ourselves?

Thus at length shall we truly redeem our time. Thus at length shall we feel that it is a priceless treasure and not a weary burden. For without God's Spirit men seem to think that time is an enemy to be killed, and not an opportunity to be used. They have a vast store of "pastimes," as they are called, and labour to invent new plans to disguise the progress of those hours which will soon seem of unutterable value. But hereafter all will be too late. The gift which of all we value least is alone irreparable. Fresh honours may be gained to replace the ancient glory of which accident has bereft

us. Fresh riches may be heaped up a thousandfold greater than those which fortune has taken away. But time can never be recalled or replaced. Now only can it be redeemed. And yet while we cherish all the other blessings which we have with care and diligence for ourselves or for our friends, our time is offered to all who will take it from us. And who can tell how long his season of life will last? Who can tell how soon he may be overtaken by sickness, when the memory of each wasted hour will rise in judgment against him, and fill with unavailing regret those long days when we need most to be comforted by the sure consciousness of God's love?

And do not think, my brethren, that the time which you have redeemed for the service of Christ will lie heavily on your hands. Do not think that the excitements of boisterous amusements or the repose of inactivity can be compared with the full delight of silent communion with God in doing His will. There is a sense of weariness in the best of earthly pleasures, because they are not infinite like the soul. There is an element of fear in the surest of earthly blessings, because the very world in which we live shall one day be consumed. But the Christian knows no weariness and no fear. He looks back humbly on the past, and knows that a Saviour's grace has blessed his imperfect service. He labours heartily in the present, and feels that the Holy Spirit is guiding and strengthening him. He glances forward hopefully to the future, and sees afar his Father's house, in which he will find a mansion prepared for him. Then at length will he know those endless blessings which eye hath not

seen nor thought of man devised, which shall spring out of the time which the Christian has redeemed in God's name and by His aid. Then each seed of good sown here in labour and trouble, in patience and sorrow, in danger and difficulty, will bring forth the fruit of eternal joy. Time passes on and the names of heroes are forgotten. The deeds of those who have centred on themselves the hopes and fears of mighty peoples—who have filled up a great space in the history of nations and in the minds of men—gradually grow dim; and even if they survive till these heavens and earth pass away, yet they will be no longer remembered in the world to come unless they are recorded in God's Book. But the name, the glory, and the joy of the Christian shall last for ever. He may have been unnoticed, despised, afflicted here, but his time was redeemed, and God's blessing set upon all that he did in faith and hope and love.

So then, my brethren, may we each strive daily, with more and more earnestness and prayerfulness, to redeem and devote to God the few short days and years in which we must prepare for an endless being hereafter! May we do all things heartily as unto the Lord, neglecting no duty as far as in us lies, wasting no opportunity, living always as those who know that God's eye is upon them, that His Spirit is with us helping our infirmities, that His Son has died for us that we may truly live to Him! Then will our time be redeemed, then will an eternity of joy close our anxious pilgrimage on earth.

This may God in His great mercy grant to every one of us!

## XXXVII

*Pray without ceasing. . . . Brethren, pray for us.*—I THESS. v. 17, 25.

I HAVE chosen these words for our consideration this morning in the hope that they may place vividly before us something of the relation in which we stand to one another, and gather up in a brief compass thoughts which cannot but be present to most of us. They were written, as you will remember, by an Apostle who *laboured more abundantly than all others*, in the earliest of his letters which has been preserved for us. They give a general precept and they attain a special petition. St. Paul tells his readers what they are to do under all circumstances; he tells them also what they can do for him. And in both respects his teaching contains most precious lessons for us.

It is indeed impossible for the Christian preacher ever to address a congregation without insisting in some degree on the duty and blessings of prayer. We do not meet to speculate about it, but to use it; and an old father, who by the completeness of his self-denial and the unrivalled grandeur of his labours was no uncertain witness, nobly said that "life itself is one unbroken prayer." For so it is

that, from day to day and from hour to hour, prayer is the very bond of our spiritual being, the sign of our highest nature, the memorial of our divine origin, the anticipation of our heavenly home. It is faith working by love and cheered by hope. We act, and it strengthens the effort; we speak, and it points our words; we think, and it hallows the growing thought.

In this way, as we look upwards and onwards in the fulfilment of our common everyday duties, the essence of prayer must underlie all that we do and say, so that we can see how the command to pray without ceasing may be most truly fulfilled; yet it can never be superfluous to endeavour to form a more distinct idea of what we mean by prayer, of the position in which we place ourselves in praying, of the wider blessings which flow from it.

One, then, of the simplest and most instructive of the many aspects in which we may regard prayer is that of an act of fellowship. It begins in fellowship with God: it issues in fellowship with man. We feel at first in praying that we are in the presence of *our* Father, and then we come to know Him as the Father of whom every fatherhood in heaven and earth is named.

Prayer is, I say, in the first place an act of fellowship with God. Saying a form of words or babbling to ourselves is not prayer. To pray involves a sense of divine nearness at least as much as a sense of human want. How such fellowship can be possible, how the creature can thus at pleasure come personally before his Creator, and how further

the faith of man can move the will of God, how our faltering petitions can work together with His watchful tenderness, is a mystery which we cannot hope to solve. But it is a mystery where darkness is full of hope. It limits present knowledge and prophesies of future power. It is a pledge of immortality which no suffering can withdraw—a spring of strength which no use can exhaust. And yet there is another side even to this truth. To pray is to seek—nay, in some sense to enter into—the presence of God. To pray carelessly, then, is to dishonour God openly. We may well tremble at such a sentence on our own daily sin. But even as we feel most keenly the guilt of despising the blessing which we have sought, so are we thereby prepared to pray again. We may have hurried into God's sight before from habit or from constraint or from the example of others: now we have a plea to urge—that we may be taught to pray better. For a real want is the basis of true prayer. We must feel the need of God before we can heartily desire fellowship with Him; and this need is revealed in every recollection of past weakness.

Again, prayer is not only an act of fellowship with God; it is also in the highest sense an act of fellowship with men. No one, I fancy, could and no one would wish to pray for himself alone. The most earnest prayer for ourselves will be coupled with the most earnest prayer for our neighbour. To sue for another's good is, as we have all felt, to secure our own. Nor is it difficult to see how this must be so. We approach God only in Christ, and in Him we see all for whom He died. The feeling

of our own need of forgiveness and need of help draw us closer to those whose frailty we see in ourselves. The love of which we have known some fruits when the nearness of God has been found to be a joy and not a restraint, kindles love in us. We have to see Christ in our neighbour as well as our neighbour in Christ. We gain a dim insight into that state where we shall *know even as we are known*. We include in an act of complete self-devotion all with whom we are united by an eternal bond. The soul opened to God is alone able to take within its embrace *all* the sons of a common Father.

If you have followed me thus far, and recognised that prayer—true prayer—is such an act of fellowship between God and man as I have described, springing from an urgent need, supported by a constant faith, consummated in a world-wide sympathy, you will at once accept the practical lessons which I would draw from this view of our subject.

These lessons belong severally to the two ideas which we have already noticed—prayer as fellowship with God and prayer as fellowship with man. In regard of the first, we all need a more vivid perception of the presence of God ; in regard of the second, we all need a more trustful reliance on mutual help. Meditation is, I believe, a means towards gaining the first : association towards gaining the second.

Every one will admit the duty of gathering our thoughts before engaging in the Services of this place or in any of our stated acts of devotion. We admit the duty, though, as at least I know of myself, we do not habitually regard this to be in

fact what it is, the foundation of our after prayers. And still it is true beyond all doubt that we must diligently look for God—that we must in some sense find Him—before we can pray to Him? Can we not then seek, each one of us, to secure some moments for silent recollection when we would come to God's presence, before any petition finds expression in words? The bowed head and waiting heart befit us best until a silent messenger assures us that the Lord has revealed Himself. And more than this—for though nothing can be farther from my wish than to encourage any morbid restlessness of sentiment, if I speak from my own experience I may hope to meet yours—I would ask you to use the same intense effort we all need, I fancy, from time to time to picture to ourselves, as best we can, the majesty of God when in the midst of seeming prayer we start up to the sudden consciousness that our thoughts have wandered far from the words of our lips. In such cases, I would say to those who recognise their failing, retrace, if it may be, each step, till every unregarded petition becomes at last the utterance of the soul; or if that cannot be so, gather up your thoughts in one momentary act of self-abasement, and pause until you can continue your service in a renewed conviction of God's presence.

Nor may we limit this seeking for an immediate vision (as it were) of God to special and public services. On the contrary, we are all familiar with swift fancies which flash through our minds, we know not from what source or to what end. These messengers from an unseen world, whether they are of evil or of good, may become occasions for

the instantaneous acknowledgment of our heavenly allegiance. The temptation of an unholy imagination will fly before the hearty ejaculation *Thou God seest me*. The thought of kindness and love will be fixed by the momentary ascription of praise to the Lord. And in the still routine of life pain will be lightened when the eye rests on the image of Christ's suffering. Labour will be cheered when we think of Him to whom in the end every task is rendered. In this way work will become truly prayer, not an engrossing distraction, not an ostentatious display, not a declaration of individual power, but a duty in the discharge of which we have met God and welcomed Him.

Meditation answers to one part of our nature, association to the other. We need isolation, and also we need sympathy. Our Sundays, our festivals, our common services meet this latter want in part, but they do not satisfy it. We cannot at once ascend to a fellowship so vast as that with the whole Church. And a natural yet dangerous reserve hinders us too frequently from claiming that more personal union which lies within our reach. Yet it is in this, I believe, that the beginning of our strength lies. *Out of weakness we are made strong*. Let us then confess one to another our failings and claim each other's aid. There are many ways in which we may do this, and some may offend our judgment or imperil our humility. Others are above all suspicion of danger. Of these the simplest is to unite with some friend in a common subject or a common time of prayer. If we are exposed to a peculiar temptation we shall gain incalculable strength in resisting it

when we know that we are sustained by the silent intercession of another. If we find it hard to observe stated seasons of devotion, an engagement with others will support our wavering resolution. So we shall be alone and yet not alone, when that sacred spell of spiritual fellowship binds us with those whom we love best. Our hopes, our aims, our perils are in the main the same. Our noblest instincts are still fresh. There is no necessity for outward union, for that in very many cases would be full of peril if not of harm.

There can be no time at which such thoughts as these are inappropriate, but to-day they seem to me to have a very special fitness for us.<sup>1</sup> The position in which I stand to this great parish is in many ways very peculiar, and yet I feel it to be a very responsible one, and my one hope of fulfilling my work lies in the distinct acknowledgment that we are all pledged to a common duty accomplished in the sight and by the help of God, quickened and sustained by continual seeking for a Divine blessing. Therefore it is that I say in St. Paul's words: *Brethren, pray for us. Pray without ceasing.* Pray for *us* to whom the weighty charge of spiritual oversight is given. Pray for one another, that each in his due place may contribute to the well-being of our whole body. Pray without ceasing, as knowing that there is no fragment of life which has not a point of contact with that which is unseen and eternal. Pray regularly, earnestly, definitely, as you know what is needed and learn what you can severally do, and you will gain and give blessings

<sup>1</sup> This was my father's first sermon at Somersham.—A. W.

beyond all that you can imagine—gain blessings for yourselves and give blessings to those whom you love, which, in whatever form they come, will survive all change and bear fruit to everlasting life.

For such prayer, such fellowship in prayer cannot be vain. The history of the Church, the history of our Lord Himself, as recorded in the Gospels, is the history of prayer fulfilled. It is easy to say that the age of miracles is past, but I know of no voice from heaven which has ever revoked the words of Christ, wherein He places no limit in power, no limit in time to the efficacy of fervent prayer. The sentence *Whatsoever things ye ask when ye pray, believe that ye received them, and ye shall have them*, is as true now as it was when the apostles went forth to the conquest of a world. Other means are restricted in their distribution, but prayer is within the reach of all, and foreshows already the true equality of souls. Other means are limited in their application, but prayer is universal in its range, and silently blesses him who would reject the voice of open counsel. Other means are exhausted in the using, but prayer grows mightier by practice and brings the greatest fruit when self is most forgotten.

In order to give distinctness to these reflections, I have just invited you, my friends, to meet me next Sunday—the first Sunday of our Christian year—at Holy Communion; that so, in that supreme act of fellowship with God and man, our prayers may be united for one end. In every life, and especially in the common life of a large body such as ours, there must always come times of disappointment and misgiving and failure; and when these times come,

it is an unfailing comfort to recall the spirit and the strength in which the life was begun, and to feel in that recollection the assurance of a unity deeper and more abiding than any passing difference. So may we then meet, by God's blessing, on Advent Sunday, not a few only, but as it were in full numbers, to show one to another that we are fellow-labourers in one great cause, bound one to another because we are bound together in Christ, strong only by His help, and resting without doubt in His promises.

## XXXVIII

*O give thanks unto the Lord, and call upon His name : tell the people what things He hath done. O let your songs be of Him, and praise Him : and let your talking be of all His wondrous works. —PSALM cv. 1, 2.*

SUCH a festival as that for which we are here met together is fitted to bring out some aspects of worship and life, of Christian worship and Christian life, which we are apt to forget. The great Psalm of which we have just read the opening words will illustrate my meaning. It was probably written for use in the Temple service, and it is, as we must all have felt, a stirring call to entire thankfulness on the part of God's people in acknowledgment of His unfailing faithfulness. Elsewhere, as in the next Psalm, we find the history of Israel so treated as to show in dark colours the wilful and rebellious spirit in which they misinterpreted and misused the divine gifts, but here there is no thought but of the works, the wonders, the judgments of the Lord, who through every vicissitude of strange yet salutary discipline remained *always mindful of His covenant, and remembered His holy promise* in the house of bondage and in the desolate wilderness. Through sorrow and joy, through want and wealth,

through slavery and freedom, He trained and blessed a nation, trained and blessed them for this end, *that they might keep His statutes and observe His laws.*

Looking, then, to the chequered course of that marvellous history of five hundred years, the Jewish Psalmist could well call the heirs of the ancient covenant, *the seed of Abraham*, gathered in the House of their God, to read the lesson of the past and make the scene of worship a scene of thanksgiving. He could say with the persuasive authority won from long experience: *O give thanks unto the Lord, and call upon His name: tell the people what things He hath done. \* O let your songs be of Him, and praise Him: and let your talking be of all His wondrous works.*

So the Psalmist could say to Israel in old time, and his call, my brethren, is made upon us too to-day. Five-and-twenty centuries have added to its power. Calvary and Olivet have fulfilled what Moriah and Zion foreshadowed. And we on our part answer it now more or less consciously by our presence here. We take to ourselves the lessons of the Psalm. We witness, if we pause to interpret the meaning of our assembly, that thanksgiving is an essential element of worship; we witness also that life is a divine service answering to a divine guidance. These, then, are the two thoughts which I desire to connect with our meeting, and I ask you to consider whether in doing this I am not putting into words deep feelings of your own hearts, which give dignity to your work as choirs in the House of God and ennoble the very weariness of duty.

We witness, I say, by our meeting here, that

thanksgiving is an essential element of worship. It must be so. We have only to look to our Prayer-Books to learn how small a place is occupied by the recital of our own needs when we come before God. What we ask for ourselves may be briefly summed up in the petition, that we may be enabled, in whatever way, to serve Him better as a nation, as a church, as individual believers; and for this end we endeavour to move our souls to livelier devotion by dwelling with words of praise on His majesty and love, by confessing one to another what He is and what He has done, by listening to the records of His will, by taking upon our lips the hymns of saints. Our highest act of worship is called a Eucharist, a Communion; a thanksgiving that is, and a fellowship; a thanksgiving to God, a fellowship with God and man. And we shall all remember how the ascription of glory to the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, one God, ever recurring as a solemn refrain, binds our whole service together as a song of triumph, one great *Te Deum*. Now if this be so, if praise occupies this foremost position in Christian worship, then we shall see why music has there also an equal place. Music is the proper language of praise. Music is to feeling what language is to thought. And as we remember that in the imagery of heaven the occupation of the hosts before the throne is shown to us under the figure of endless praise, so music alone of all the delights of our present life is connected with the life of the future. Nor is it hard to read the parable. Praise represents the only offering which man can make to his Creator, and music is the one art which is the peculiar expression of his own nature. The

sculptor tries to reproduce in their most perfect beauty the forms which he sees, but the impulse comes from without. The painter tries to present every effect which can be attained by colour, but again the impulse comes from without. The true musician, on the other hand, has no outward model or rule. He speaks from the heart to the heart. Harmonious chords are not the imitation of anything in the external world. They come from within the man himself: they are the speech of the emotions.

It is right, then, that we should bring to God that which in a peculiar sense He has fitted us to bring. In some shape we shall all bring it. But our offering, though the same in kind, will be different in form. Now we shall rejoice to listen when the voice of thanksgiving ascends in an anthem which requires for its execution the utmost delicacy of professional skill. Now we shall claim our part in the grand unison which bears the full feeling of a multitude in one stream of stately melody to the presence of God. Let us be glad that there is room in our worship for the completest consecration of the art and for the simplest rendering of the instinct of measured rhythm. Both are gifts of God. Both are proper vehicles of His praise. Even as we thank Him for the sunlight, whether it is reflected in the thousand hues of the garden or in the level splendour of the broad, unvaried plain, so the soul can pour out its grateful sacrifice, now in the richest work of genius and now in the plain tones of the people's song.

This is our first point. Praise, thanksgiving is a necessary element in our public worship.

Again, as I said, the joy, the thanksgiving which finds utterance in the music of our Church Services must spring from a true view of what life is, if it is to be real and constant. *Of what life is.* Let us face the thought. The words of Hezekiah which some of us heard this morning hold good for us even in a fuller sense than he could realise: *The living, the living, he shall praise Thee.* The earth which the Son of God hath visited, the life which the Son of God hath shared, have been made known to us with more glorious capacities than to the men of old. And yet do we not often put off the thought of joy? Do we not find strange questionings rise within us when we look around us and into our hearts? Are we not tempted to ask whether we can sing the Lord's song when we see on all sides profaneness and violence and unchecked passions? when we are perplexed by the doubtful issues of national policy and burdened with the load of private care?

My brethren, I would not seek to hide or to disparage one of the trials which we have to bear. I would not close my eyes to one sin or to one sorrow which darkens our prospect. I would not try to find in an imaginary future forgetfulness of the present. No: but looking full on the chequered picture of good and evil which each day presents, and recalling the Psalm which has so far guided our thoughts, I can be sure that God is working out His loving purpose among us, be sure that there shall never be one lost good or one victorious evil, be sure that we are now called to the dignity of divine labour which cannot be fruitless. We all need more

than we know to make this conviction an abiding power in life. It is assuredly given to each one of us, if only at rare moments. For who has not at some time had revealed to him the vanity of all outward measures of happiness and success? Love and death—love which discovers the joy of self-sacrifice and death which brings the unseen to the soul of the spectator—love which lays down life and death which lays open life—show us a truer standard. If then, even at these rare moments, we have grasped their lessons, we shall take heart when we stand in what seems to be a doubtful struggle. They will have unsealed a fountain of thanksgiving in us whose streams will flow for ever. They will have enabled us to know that the humblest life is a gift of God, a power of God, a gift made precious by the thought of the Giver, a power made fruitful by forgetfulness of self. They will have constrained us by a secret compulsion to acknowledge that there is that beneath the surface of things which witnesses to the presence and to the accomplishment of an eternal purpose of righteousness and mercy. Loss, pain, want, the vision of right delayed and wrong set up, will try and trouble us. But what then? Even here we shall confess that God fulfils Himself, and we shall repeat at last, not with the sad accent of forced resignation, but as fellow-workers confident in the progress of His cause, *Thy will be done.*

In saying this, even if the phrases are unfamiliar, I am only putting into other words the teachings of the Book of Psalms, which is the inspiration of our Church songs. In that Book the present life, with its most startling contrasts and riddles, is made the

spring of human praise, even though Christ was seen in promise only. Nowhere can we find a more pathetic exhibition of the deepest griefs of man than in that Book, which is an epic of the soul. We have mingled together in it the cry of the forgotten, the lamentation of the exile, the confession of the broken heart. Wickedness is there in its short-lived prosperity, and righteousness appears to be forsaken. But what then? From first to last there is the abiding knowledge that the Lord reigneth. *Sunshine and storm fulfil His word.* The present may be dark and the future may be hid in thick clouds, but with Him is the fountain of light. So it is that the Book opens with a word of blessing and closes with a great hallelujah. The blessing God has already given us: and may He in due time give to us the final hallelujah!

If, then, the Psalter, with its one great strain in many moods, is our interpretation of life, made luminous by the Incarnation, if this is the habitual expression of our thanksgiving, we can see what a Church Choir is, to whom especially the Psalter is committed: how the members of a choir are ministers and preachers, charged with a most solemn service and a most noble message, set so to study and to render words often obscure and difficult which have gathered round them the sacred memories of two or three thousand years, that they may awaken and embody the thoughts of to-day. In such a work (need I say it?) there is no place for self-assertion, for vanity, for display; in such a work any personal consideration is lost in the common end; in such a work from first to last the presence

of God is a quickening and chastening influence ; in such a work an offering is brought of that which God has given, that the gift may be hallowed and increased a thousandfold. Yes, my friends, members of our Parish Choir, you have first to bring from common life to divine service a bright and precious endowment, and then you have to take it back again consecrated by the holy use to your own homes. Your work is not finished but rather only begun and made possible in Church. You are, if I may so speak, the representatives of the congregation among your friends, lay ministers in a most true sense. With you to a great measure rests the general judgment which will be formed of our worship. If you are careless or indifferent, if you are seen to be busy only with what you have to do yourselves, if the lips which have sung God's praises are stained afterwards, I will not say by evil but by light and foolish words, if the great thoughts and lofty hopes to which you have given utterance are forgotten when your stated work is over, what will your friends think, what must you think yourselves, of the Faith which you are called to interpret? The question may not be heedlessly set aside or hastily answered. But if, on the other hand, you find, and let others see that you find, in psalm and hymn and anthem a help for prayer and a help for watchful attention, if the chant which you have raised in the house of God is heard over and over again in the cottage or in the field, or if the vision of great sorrows and great trials, not unblessed by God, with which you have grown familiar through the experience of David and the singers of Israel, rise

before your eyes in dark days, do you not know, know with an assurance which is itself a priceless reward, that you will proclaim your Christian Creed with a force which will reach where we clergy cannot find entrance?

Nothing less than this you are called to do: nothing less than this God will give you power to do. Think, then, very highly of your work and office. It is for God and from God. It is a telling forth of His glory, and a thank-offering for His goodness.

Think very humbly of your work and office. You know your failures and your weaknesses. You have learnt even through successes that by yourselves you can do nothing.

Think very thankfully of your work and office. It is a privilege and a safeguard to have an appointed place and a marked duty in the Church. And he who has found a new occasion for gratitude has found a new source of strength.

So thinking, highly, humbly, thankfully, you will find joy as you spread joy. Your songs will pass into your own lives and beyond them. Christian hymns have again and again in past ages kindled and sustained faith. They can kindle and sustain it still. The choir is a missionary force in the enterprise. The choir brings the work of worship into the midst of the people and claims their heart as one. The choir asks and hallows the service of powers which express the common joys of life. The choir helps us to feel with fresh enthusiasm what holy men have felt through *a thousand generations*. The choir is ever repeating to us, not in one

tone but in many, the call which we have heard to-day :

*O give thanks unto the Lord, and call upon His name : tell the people what things He hath done.*

*O let your songs be of Him, and praise Him : and let your talking be of all His wondrous works.*

May God in His love, for Christ's sake, give us the will and the strength to obey the voice, to proclaim our faith to others through the countless ministries of daily life, and to deepen its hold upon ourselves by the intercourse of thoughtful sympathy !

## XXXIX

*And he said, He that shewed mercy on him. Then said Jesus unto him, Go, and do thou likewise.—ST. LUKE x. 37.*

ON former occasions, when I have been allowed to speak here at a Harvest Festival, I have touched on several obvious lessons which the Service suggests: on the lessons of patience and progress and hope; on the great thought of the present as the seedtime of the future, out of which the life to come will grow by a necessary law. To-night I wish to mark two other lessons which seem to me to belong to it—the lesson of dependence, and springing out of that, the lesson of sympathy. And I have taken a most familiar passage for my text in the hope that these harvest lessons may perhaps hereafter be called back to our minds by words which will again and again sound in our ears. For so it is that through our gathered experience Holy Scripture does speak to us with ever increasing power. As we ourselves grow older and as things change around us the old becomes ever new. We look upon the record from a different point of sight, and the parts group themselves together in new combinations. We look upon it in a new light, and what perhaps we had not

noticed before grows radiant with unexpected brightness. It is so with the parable now before us. I suppose that we can never read it thoughtfully without finding some fresh power in it to meet new circumstances; and at the same time the central truths of the divine narrative always rise sharp and clear before us to crown each special lesson which it supplies. It is with these central truths that we are now concerned, and we cannot mistake them. As we picture the scene we cannot fail to interpret it. Every outward barrier which separates man from man—the most ancient, the most powerful, the most sacred—are for the time seen to be broken down. If it be but for a moment, in the vision of the wounded traveller tended by the outcast we look on men as being what they truly are, children of a common Father, bound one to another by ties which, however much they may be concealed, cannot be broken, because they answer to a relationship to God. The parable, in other words, speaks to us of a law of limitless sympathy based on the fact of absolute dependence. We owe to our fellow-men all we can give them, because we owe all we have to God, our Father and theirs.

This being so, you will at once see how the parable gives point to the lessons which I desire to commend to you, and how the lessons bring before us at least one side of the purpose for which we are now met together. We are met to offer our thanksgiving for a completed harvest, and to offer our alms for the relief of the sick and suffering. We are met, that is, to solemnly acknowledge

our dependence upon God, and to show practically our sympathy with men. By this acknowledgment of dependence, by this expression of sympathy, we are lifted out of and above ourselves; and we cannot receive any greater blessing for the strengthening and cheering of our own lives than that the feelings to which they answer may be purified and deepened within us.

Most of you will remember how the context in which the parable stands adds force to these thoughts which I desire to connect with it. It was spoken in answer to one who had right views of faith and duty, and who still had difficulties in carrying them out. The young student of the law who came to Christ had correctly read the divine commandments which it was his duty to explain. He was honestly desirous to do that which might show the reality of his religion. So far I trust that we are like him; and we are, if I dare judge from myself, like him also in this, that we are too often ready to justify ourselves if we are brought face to face with claims which for one reason or another we are unwilling to satisfy. To us, then, no less than to him the parable of the Good Samaritan is addressed with all its moving power. It tells us that what we believe and know must have a direct influence upon all we think and do. It tells us that God has set no limit to the debt of human love. It tells us not that we can earn life by our works—that was what the lawyer vainly wished to do—but that we must strive to set forth the life which Christ has freely given us by the faithful endeavour to fulfil the noblest instincts of our nature. It tells us that as men we are all

debtors one to another because we are all debtors to God. Or, to apply the teaching more directly to our particular case, it tells us that He sends the rain and the sunshine, the springing blade and the swelling ear, as blessings to be acknowledged and used, as we have opportunity, to claim the divine privilege of ministering to all who need our help. It enforces, in other words, those lessons of dependence and sympathy which, as I have said, we are come together to set forth, and which I desire to bring home to my own heart and to yours.

*The lesson of dependence.* What do we mean by a Harvest Thanksgiving? If I interpret the meaning of the Service rightly, it is, I fancy, commonly very much misunderstood. For it is not designed to be principally a thanksgiving for any special abundance granted to ourselves: it is not designed to be principally a thanksgiving for any exceptional fertility of the season. No doubt, if it has pleased God in His great love to bless us or our country in a signal manner, we are bound to render Him our grateful homage for the blessing. But even if it be otherwise, even if our crops have disappointed us, even if we are called upon to face the prospect of scarcity and trial, the duty and the idea of the Service remain the same. A Harvest Thanksgiving seems to me to be in itself the open confession of our belief in God as ever working around us and in us, silently, secretly, mysteriously, in all which we call Nature. It seems to be the voice raised to Him who, though we behold Him not, from day to day fills our hearts with food and gladness. It seems to

be a glimpse opened for a moment upon the heaven which lies about us in our most common work.

The thought of the unceasing work of God among us is, my friends, a great and ennobling thought, and it is a thought which ought to be familiar and real to us. We speak of God Sunday by Sunday as our Creator and Preserver; we bless Him for our creation and preservation. Yet the words, I fear, are often lightly spoken, and no one of us can ever think of them as he ought to think. Day follows night, spring follows winter, rest follows labour; we see the earth clothed year after year with fruitful beauty; we see our children grow up around us in health and vigour. And do we not take all this as a matter of course? Do we not assume that it must be so, as if things made and preserved themselves. If some startling interruption to the common order happens—if a flood desolates the fields, or a man is stricken down suddenly—then, it is true, we speak of “a *visitation* of God.” But as long as all goes well do we equally bear in mind the *presence* of God? Do we not rather practically look on the world and live from hour to hour as those who fancy that God is *not* our Preserver, that we do *not* live and move and have our being in Him, that He “comes” to us at rare intervals, and not that He is always with us?

If it be so, as I believe we shall confess it is, this our Harvest Thanksgiving sets the truth before us, which we are inclined to forget. We meet here to acknowledge one to another, and, if we may be so enabled, to learn better, that it is God Himself who works in those fixed ways which we observe, who

makes this succession of seasons in which we trust ; that without Him there could be no life, no movement ; that if He were to withdraw Himself from the world for a moment all would cease to be. Let us be clear on this. Never have men traced out before with the same devotion and success as in our generation the processes of Nature, the order of changes through which each living thing passes, the certain laws, for so we must regard them, by which all living things act and react upon one another ; but never have they declared more plainly that the principle of life itself is beyond all explanation. That principle we see as Christians in the immediate power of God Himself, unseen, yet always present.

The thought is, as I said, great and ennobling, and it is a thought also which cannot but bring us all closer one to another. If we strive to see God clothing the grass of the field and guiding the sparrow which falls to the ground, not only will the world on which we look and on which we work wear a grander and more solemn aspect, but, above all, our fellow-men will be brought very near to us as sharers in the one life of Creation, the one life of Redemption.

The lesson of dependence on God passes at once, as you will see, into *the lesson of sympathy with men*—the second lesson of the day's Service ; and if our Harvest Thanksgiving has the meaning which I have endeavoured to point out, every one will feel how rightly some act of universal charity is joined with it. Dependence in which we are all equal is coupled with sympathy which we all require. In virtue of our common lot we are called upon to extend to others what sooner or later we shall

ourselves need. There are indeed many ways in which we may show sympathy to our neighbours in simple things—by the kind word, the silent look, the cheerful example which gladden intercourse; but there are other greater troubles which we cannot reach by our single efforts. The strong man is made helpless by a sudden accident; youth is threatened by lingering disease. To provide for these accidents, to avert these evils, we must bring our offerings together that we may gain the assistance of the highest skill to deal with them. And some at least in this parish know with what ability and tenderness and patience the sufferings of the poor are relieved in the great Hospital for which I ask your alms. Many too, I believe, have learnt there lessons of faith and resignation which will follow them through life and beyond it. For my own part, I never visit a hospital without being most deeply moved and humbled. I have seen there, as some of you must have seen, the young and vigorous who have been in an instant maimed for life, old men waiting for possible relief through days of agony, children lying still and helpless for weeks or months; and yet I have never, so far as I know, heard one word of complaint or impatience. The hospital is indeed a great school of God; and it is well for us all to strive to learn its lessons. Nor are these lessons without their own great reward. For do you not think that the Samaritan who stopped even in danger to minister to the wounded traveller was really happier than the priest and the Levite who thought only of their own safety? For him the first victory of love would bring confidence in

the sense of fellowship with God through man: for them the confession of selfish fear would people every dark hollow during their dismal journey with shapes of terror. And so it always is. The irksome duty faced, the costly sacrifice made, leave us stronger and richer. It is indolence and not effort which exhausts. It is niggardliness and not generosity which leaves behind the feeling of poverty. We can always find excuses, it is true, for leaving undone what we ought to do. But though the excuses may satisfy others, they do not satisfy ourselves. Something whispers to us in a low but peremptory voice that we have fallen short of what was possible for us, and that we are weaker for the failure. We have not given what we could have afforded to give of time or thought or money, as the case may have been, when God asked it of us through the least of His children, and we know that for this we shall see Him henceforth less clearly, and feel His Presence with less assurance.

For there is just one other thought suggested by our subject which I wish to notice, and it is this, that opportunity is the test of character. Opportunity—the self-questioning, for example, of a festival like this, of circumstances like these—does not make us what we are, but in some measure it shows us what we are—grateful, loving, large-hearted, or the reverse. We may be quite sure that countless little acts of cowardice and self-seeking had hardened the priest and Levite against the claim which was at last suddenly made upon their devotion. We may be quite sure that countless tender services of generous love had prepared the Samaritan to imperil himself

without hesitation in the hope of saving a stranger and an alien. *They* had not contemplated or resolved upon desertion so disgraceful: *he* had not proposed to himself an offering of devotion so complete. But when the trial came it showed the men as they had grown to be. It showed in the one case the accumulated results of selfishness, and in the other the accumulated results of sacrifice; it showed the real hollowness of that which had hitherto seemed holy in the sight of men; it showed the divine spirit active in one who had been regarded as a religious outcast; it showed the fatal difference between a true faith which was divorced from faithful action and instinctive piety which was loyally obeyed.

And as it was in old time, so it is now. It must in the end be disastrous for us to cherish a creed which finds no expression in our lives. It must be disastrous to crush down the promptings to liberal sympathy which rise in our hearts. As Christians let us, my friends, pause from time to time to satisfy ourselves that by God's grace we do work in the spirit and by the help of our faith; that we do believe that we depend upon God in every seed which we plant, in every breath which we draw; that we do render back to Him as He has blessed us; that we do endeavour, in all the conflicts of interest and circumstance and character, to see one in the other, brethren, children of one Father. We shall, I fear, be soon forced to acknowledge that many who are without our all-constraining belief in the Gospel are more active than we are in reforming our criminals, in elevating our poor, in raising the aims of national policy. But even so we shall be stirred by their

example to worthier labours. Wherever we read of an act of devotion, wherever we read of an act of sacrifice, in each lofty word which sets forth the grandeur of the Divine work, in each golden deed which reveals the possible nobility of man, if there be anything true and honest and just, anything pure and lovely and of good report, which makes our heart beat fuller, quicker, gladlier, we shall hear the clear command of Christ addressed to us, *Go, and do thou likewise*. Let us only think, when each appeal is made to us, as I appeal to you now, what answer we should wish those to make whom we love best, and then take that as the charge of Christ Himself: *Go, and do thou likewise*. Do what the still voice within you bids you do with supreme forgetfulness of self, with absolute trust in God. *Go, and do thou likewise*. Faith in Christ furnishes thee with a motive of irresistible force; faith in Christ furnishes thee with an instrument of inexhaustible strength.

## XL

*And He humbled thee, and suffered thee to hunger, and fed thee with manna, which thou knewest not, neither did thy fathers know ; that He might make thee know that man doth not live by bread only, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the Lord doth man live.—*  
DEUT. viii. 3. (ST. MATT. iv. 4.)

THESE words, as you remember, describe to us the purpose of the long discipline of Israel in the wilderness. The people were removed from the abundance by which they had been surrounded in Egypt to a region utterly wild and desolate, that so they might learn in visible ways their absolute dependence upon God. The lesson was learnt, though in sorrow and with grievous murmurings, and from that time onward, through more than three thousand years, the Jews have clung, under unexampled sufferings, to their faith in a present God.

Once again the same lesson was shown more gloriously, when the Lord for our sake fasted forty days and forty nights in the desert, and the devil bade Him use His divine power to satisfy His want. He could indeed have done so—He did use His power in later times to satisfy the wants of others—but He left Himself wholly in His Father's hands. He could wait in sure confidence till the issue became clear. He knew once for all what Israel

came to know through the experience of forty years. He therefore met the suggestion of the tempter by the moral of the Exodus: *He answered and said, It is written, Man liveth not by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.* As if He would remind us of the ground of His assurance, and show that the power of God is not confined to any one mode of action, though He does in fact, for the most part, act in what we feel to be one way, that the counsels of God reach beyond the range of our present knowledge, that our strength is to wait even if the familiar help be withheld, that in our *patience we shall win our souls.*

Such thoughts cannot fail to come home to us to-night. We cannot but ask what we mean by a Harvest Thanksgiving, when the issue of the year has been to most of us disappointment and loss. And such a question ought to be answered. Above all things, we ought to seek reality in religion. It is vain, and far worse than vain, to affect a form of gratitude while the heart is inwardly complaining. Better at once to stand aloof in the bitterness of pain than to imperil the sincerity of our faith. And the question can, I think, be answered. The text suggests to us some larger views of life which give back the ground of thankfulness. As we dwell upon them, perhaps God may enable us to give Him true praise; to feel that, though much be taken, much remains; to look beyond the present moment and the present pressure; to strive to gain for our joy, with an effort which is itself cheering, the invigorating assurance that *man liveth not by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.*

There is, I know, danger in using this language: there is a danger lest we substitute phrases for a practical frame of mind. But on former occasions I have endeavoured to point out that our Harvest Thanksgiving is not a thanksgiving for unusual and exceptional blessings, for peculiar blessings on our neighbourhood or our country, which commonly come at the cost of others, but the stated and solemn acknowledgment of our general dependence upon God, for life with its manifold powers and opportunities and blessings, for the succession of the seasons, which does, in ways that we cannot measure, minister to our health and strength, for a general providence which in its ampler range may require some sacrifice from us in order to secure the well-being of brethren near or distant with whom we are bound by ties invisible perhaps and yet most sure.

And in saying this I do not mean that we ought to strive after an unnatural aloofness. Christianity is the very opposite of stoicism. There are times when we cannot but be deeply affected by that which is nearest to us. It is God's will that it should be so. He is speaking to us through our own particular circumstances. But in order that we may rightly hear His voice, it is necessary that we should listen patiently also to its larger utterances. And in this respect few who remember the terrible anxieties of last year, when day by day we were dreading the outbreak of a European war, will not acknowledge that in the face of that overwhelming catastrophe, which has been averted, our personal losses are as nothing. So far—and we may, I think, keep a good

hope—the clouds which but lately hung darkest over us have not broken in storm. Let us then at least, in the retrospect of the year, not forget the fears which have not been realised, when we reckon up the hopes which have not been fulfilled.

And we may perhaps go yet further. We may without presumption seek to place things in their natural connexion on a large scale. I can remember well, as many who hear me remember, how twenty years ago our people were looking with dismay on the steady advance of a great plague towards our shores. It seemed as if it must reach us the next summer. That summer of 1860 came with pitiless rain. Men were sorrow-stricken for the harvest; but the cholera did not come. In a manner which we had not thought upon those storms had burst in blessings over our heads. No one could fail to read the lesson when it was ended, and we can still turn back to it.

Without attempting to apply this example to our present experience directly, we can, I am sure, learn from it that our first view, our first fear, is not always justified. Something lies behind which, if known, would change our hasty judgment formed in the moment of disappointment. We all indeed practically acknowledge this. Is there one of us, for example, who would dare to take the responsibility of moulding the season after his own will?

Such a suggestion helps us to feel in some degree the vastness, the complication of that system of Nature which is God's will for us. And while we may in some particular case learn at a later time to see clearly how that which was for the time dis-

astrous for ourselves was helpful on the whole, and therefore in the end for us, in other cases such knowledge may be denied us. But this partial ignorance does not invalidate our partial knowledge. Enough is shown us to strengthen our hearts in the position of the saints. We can have no wish to make life easy if we are conscious of the power of man. That which we do need is the confidence that a purpose of love is being wrought out in it. That confidence lies in our faith. Nothing outward can shake our faith in Him who *sent His Son into the world, that we may live in Him*. The circumstances in which we are placed furnish the conditions of living: they do not make the life. I would not indeed for an instant disparage the value of the instruments of action: I would not seem to say that we ought to regard with indifference the possession or the loss of abundant means for fulfilling our separate ministries. But I do say that that which we feel in our souls to be highest and best is essentially independent of this transitory furniture of life. I do say that the recollections on which we dwell with the most abiding satisfaction are not of occasions when we were visited with unwonted prosperity, not of those which were marked by special success, but of those rare crises when even in little things we conquered the promptings of self, when we accepted a sorrow and kept down repining, when we counted it joy to suffer for the truth's sake.

And this brings out the thought which I desire most to insist upon. The happiness of life cannot be secured and cannot be destroyed by external conditions. We all confess this truth in word

and we all live more or less as if we denied it. Still, have we not all found that there can be no stable happiness for us as long as we think of ourselves, and make ourselves the centre of our hopes and efforts? And shall we not admit that as a nation we have been falling into this sin? Do we not feel that during the last few years we have in various ways been seeking to surround ourselves with personal luxuries? I am not speaking of any one place or any one class. But in the natural order of things this has been our temptation, and in part we have yielded to it. In dress, in amusements, in manner of living we have come to disregard simplicity. We think that the charge to "endure hardness" was intended for other people and for other times. We have asked, not in words but in action, to be left alone.

In such a state of feeling to be left alone is to be left to death: it is leaving the sleep-pressed traveller on the snowdrift. And perhaps God in His mercy is even now sternly rousing us for nobler endeavour. He is taking away from us some of the accessories of life, that we may see life in its true grandeur. On former occasions seasons of distress have affected particular classes. Now all classes are touched, and as we go higher, touched more sharply. The teaching is for our whole nation, and happy shall we be if we heed it.

*Man liveth not by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.* Yes: we may even dare to say that man liveth by the word which denies the fulness of his accustomed sustenance—liveth in some better sense, if he is so led

to think of the deepest issues and realities of life ; if he is so made to turn for a brief space to that character which is independent of all that is transitory ; to consider how that has grown up within him which he would wish to be eternal, which is eternal ; to inquire how far the sweetest charities of life, the thoughtful tenderness which gladdens the home, the loving self-sacrifice which ennobles labour, the largeness of heart which truly unites societies, are undisturbed by those accidents of abundance or scarceness with which we are inclined to connect them.

Our imaginations are dull. They are distracted by the surface of things. Here, as in all things, we learn through suffering. Some of us perhaps can remember how a serious illness has thrown light upon dark questions, how it has placed the objects on which we look in a truer proportion to one another, how it has invested with a new charm that which we have before counted common and of little worth. And periods of national distress are, so to speak, illnesses of the people, capable of bringing home to us lessons not less precious.

It must rest with each one of us to determine how we as citizens can embody the lessons in action. If our hearts are set upon the end I do not think that we shall miss it. It is no doubt a hard task which is set before us ; but the difficulty is a measure of its worth. There is no promise that life shall be easy or tranquil or free from care ; but there is a promise that *all things work together for good to them that love God,—to them that love God,* to them that rest trustfully upon His broad counsels,

and offer themselves as ready ministers of His will. It is this spirit which transforms trials. It is this spirit which draws due instruction from each aspect of the Divine working. *In your patience*, Christ Himself said, *ye shall win your souls*. Even that which seems to be most certainly our own is not our own till it is thus conquered.

Life is indeed at once more simple and more mysterious than we commonly suppose. Our own part in it, as far as we see, is soon played, but we know that the effect of this brief action not only upon ourselves but upon others is incalculable. We can then thank God if through the discipline of sons He teaches us to take a juster measure of what we need for our work and of that which is required of us, if He reveals to us the issues of life in the contemplation of Christ's Death and Resurrection, if He blesses a necessary sacrifice to the strengthening of our self-devotion. We can thank God if He makes us to know, like the Jews in their day of trial, that *man liveth not by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God*.

Such thanksgiving is indeed the sign of a new and divine life. It may be uttered with a feeble and uncertain voice, but if it be real it cannot be fruitless. We are richest when we have fewest wants. We are strongest when we rest on God in Christ. That wealth of self-denial, that strength of self-surrender will prepare us for every claim of duty, and by God's gifts they are never beyond our reach.







