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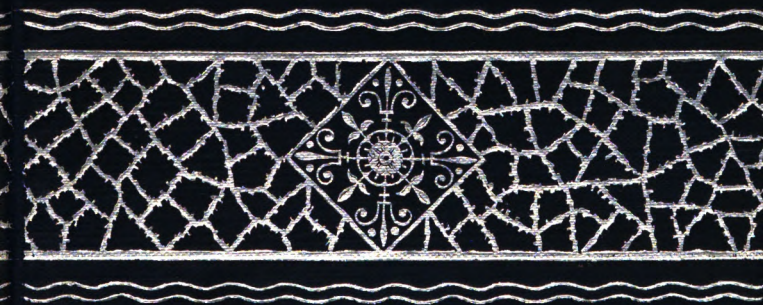


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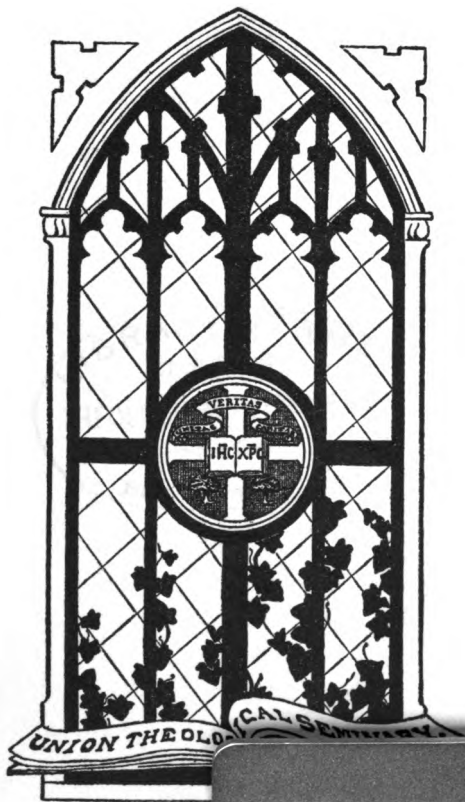
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# THROUGH FIRE AND FLOOD

"We went through fire and through water:  
but Thou broughtest us out into a wealthy  
place."—*Psalms* lxi. 12.

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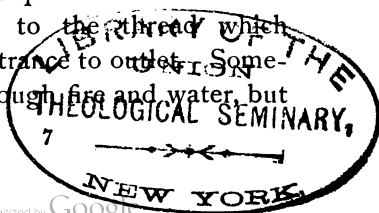
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## PREFATORY WORDS

THERE is a purpose running through our lives. We may not always see it, but it is never absent. God, our Father, is eager to do the best possible for each of us; to realize the utmost blessedness and usefulness that are within our reach; in the words of the psalmist, "to perfect that which concerneth us."

This purpose threads all the incidents of life: its temptations, its common round and daily task, its crushing sorrows, its anxiety and care. It is for us to follow on, believing in the divine purpose, as the explorer of subterranean passages holds to the thread which reaches from entrance to outlet. Sometimes we go through fire and water, but



He always brings us out at last into a wealthy place.

In the meanwhile God will provide, will shelter us under His wings, restore us when we fall, vindicate us when we are misunderstood, and ultimately receive us to Himself. Through apparent failure He will unweariedly prosecute His loving design, never failing, never discouraged, never abandoning His quest. The only thing that stays Him is the unbelief that does not believe, or the disobedience that buries the talent of opportunity.

F. B. MEYER.

# THROUGH FIRE AND FLOOD

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## “SHUT UP TO FAITH”

GALATIANS III. 23

GOD, our Father, greatly desires that we should believe in Him, because through faith alone we must derive from Him the supplies of life-power in virtue of which we can realize His ideal. A single illustration will suffice to show how needful faith is as the bridge of communication over which the resources of God may pass into our lives.

In a period of anxiety and perplexity some friend or relative of yours comes to your house and takes his seat beside you. He would have you confide the entire story of your circumstances to his safe-keeping, while in return he offers

whatever of sympathy, resource, or prudence he can command. But before this an incident had transpired, or a piece of information had come to your ears, with respect to him, which has entirely destroyed your confidence in his character and good intentions. You can no longer believe in him; and as the inevitable result a barrier of ice is raised between you. Across that gulf you cannot go to him, and he may not approach you. He may be wise as Solomon and strong as Samson, but so long as you do not believe in him all is fruitless. Whereas the resources of a much poorer soul may greatly succor you, as they pour into your heart, because you thoroughly believe in his honesty and sincerity of purpose.

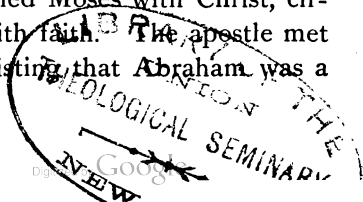
If only a soul can believe in God, to the extent to which it believes it can obtain anything that is in God's heart to bestow. God is the All-giver; giving does not impoverish Him—so far from

this, it is the condition of His blessedness; but He greatly deplotes that He cannot do what He would, or give us all that He might, because of our unbelief.

Now there are two ways by which He leads us to faith: first, He shuts us up to it; and secondly, in the moment of despair He reveals its way or law. Thus we are shut up to the faith which is afterward revealed.

#### I. LET US UNDERSTAND THIS METAPHOR

This epistle was composed against the teachings of the Judaizers, who, following in the track of the apostle, insisted on circumcision as necessary to salvation. They were willing enough to admit the claims of Christ if only the Levitical system were maintained as of equal validity. They combined Moses with Christ, circumcision with faith. The apostle met them by insisting that Abraham was a





Gentile before he became a Jew, and that the promises were made to him as a simple believer while still in his Gentile condition, and long before he became the progenitor of the Hebrew people. Those promises could not, therefore, be annulled by circumcision or the Levitical system. They, at least, must stand, as the granite rocks are not removed by the accumulations of after-ages.

The apostle then proceeds to answer the very natural question as to the purpose of the law and ritual associated with the great name of Moses. "Wherefore then serveth the law?" He replies that it was introduced, not as a means of life, but as a means of showing men their inability to get life, and thus to shut them up to the way of faith in the promise and covenant of God, given aforetime to Abraham.

That phrase "shut up to" is very significant. It is as though the law were jailer-like in its aspect, though loving

and tender at heart, and went slowly down the grim prison corridor, at the extremity of which the soul had suddenly found itself. There are many doors on either side. One is labeled Perfect Obedience, another Punctilious Performance of Rite, another Strict Morality, another Good Resolutions; all these are locked before the gaze of the soul, by none of them is escape possible. But the jailer leaves one door without turning the key. It is that which leads not only into freedom, but into very favorable circumstances; indeed, it communicates with the Father's home. All other doors are locked and barred that the soul may not be able to pass through one of them, but may be shut up to this one, which will insure the greatest amount of bliss.

We will suppose a prisoner in the Castle of Chillon, whose gloomy walls rise over the Lake of Geneva, its stones worn with the pacing to and fro of the Bonnivards that have dragged out their lives

within those gloomy precincts. He is there on a false charge; but an individual outside, a man in authority, is well able and willing to befriend him on condition of his making application. There is, therefore, a conspiracy of silence among all his friends; he sends letters to wife and son, to lawyer and physician, but none answers his appeal, till, every door being closed, he is compelled finally, as a last resort, to apply to the one who can immediately succor him most effectively.

Thus God, in His eagerness to drive us to faith in Himself, shuts every other door, that the soul, weary, worn, fluttering, hard-pressed, may flee for refuge to the hope set before it, may be shut up to the faith which is revealed.

## II. LET US ILLUSTRATE THIS METAPHOR

Abraham was doomed to wait year after year, and compelled to witness the

gradual failure of all natural likelihood of having a child. His marriage with Hagar did not better his position, for Ishmael could not be his heir. In the utter hopelessness of nature he was shut up to faith.

Israel, on the banks of the Red Sea, with the mountains on the one side, their foes on the other, and the sea in front, could not help themselves. Whither could they flee? How escape? They were shut up to faith in the Hand that alone could cleave a path through the mighty waters.

This great apostle, in his endeavor to live a pure and holy life, tells us that he spared no pains or care or endeavor; but the more he strove the worse he fell. Approving of the law as holy, just, and good, after the inward man, he found himself brought into captivity to the law of sin in his members. Finally he was shut up to Christ and to the way of faith.

Luther's experience was precisely similar, only in the direction of justification. He sought peace with God by austerity, fastings, and vigils, till he became wasted to the last degree of strength. At one time it was only by the singing of the choir-boys that he could be revived. Conscience failed to be appeased until, in despair of all else, he found himself shut up to the faith that was graciously revealed.

### III. THIS WILL ENABLE US TO LEARN TRULY TO USE OUR FAILURES

They may be traced to many causes. For instance, our ideals are constantly rising. Therefore we cannot rest with what satisfied us yesterday. We must always be a pilgrim host, following the beckoning pillar, but needing ever augmenting grace, which we are sometimes slow to seek.

Or after we have realized some high point in the Christian life we have for-

gotten to distinguish between spiritual and intellectual attainments. In the latter, when once we have acquired a piece of information, or discovered the solution of a problem, it is ours ever after; but in spiritual matters we can only hold our position, as we have acquired it, by faith. All depends on our attitude. If there is relaxation and unfaithfulness there, relapse is inevitable.

Or we are harboring a traitor, who is constantly sapping our inward energy.

Or we have ceased to grow in grace and the knowledge and love of God. And to cease to grow is to decline; not to advance is to recede.

Or we have not lived in fellowship with God, nor sought the aid of the Holy Spirit, nor fed our souls with the Bread of Life, by reason of which our spiritual strength is diminished and brought low.

But the most fruitful source of failure is our own resolute energy. The newly

awakened soul is at first sure of success. It is set on a new life; surely God will help. It makes a strenuous endeavor and fails. It grieves over its failure and tries again, more carefully and resolutely than ever, only again to fail. But again it girds itself to the effort; it will be more watchful and careful. All to no effect. Bruised and beaten, it sinks to the earth in despair. Then one of two alternatives suggests itself: either to yield to despair or to discover that God has shut up every door in order to drive it to faith, afterward to be revealed; for it is at such times that God makes a revelation of the way of faith.

Which of these alternatives is yours? Perhaps *despair*. You have come to the conclusion either that you have never been regenerated, or that the ideal of the gospel is too high for such as you. But neither of these is true; only that God has been beating you back from all besides—forcing you from the bare ledge of rock, that you may learn the

luxury of flight; casting you into deep water, that you may be compelled to swim. God desires, at all cost, to break you of this habit of independence of Himself, which is worse than mortal sin, and to force you to trust and rest.

It was very good and wise of your heavenly Father thus to deal with you, for if He had permitted you to justify and sanctify yourself you would have instantly given way to self-congratulation and self-reliance, and made your own endeavors your idol. Self would have monopolized your attention. But selfhood in any form means, in its ultimate outworking, hell. So God drove you, by repeated failure and by bitter temptation, by disappointment and heart-brokenness, from all opportunity of glorying in yourself, that you might fall back on His almightiness.

Now turn from the contemplation of your failure, and look heavenward; see the morning of hope breaking in crimson glory, for God is revealing the way



of faith. Embrace it gratefully and lovingly, and never diverge from it again. Follow this track till it leads you out into the glory. Bless the love which dared to give you pain, and allowed you to be overwhelmed in defeat, that you might be obliged by the very stress of your condition to venture on the blessed freedom of those who are no longer under tutors and guardians, but are the freed children of God, the heirs and joint-heirs of Christ.

#### IV. THE WAY OF FAITH

There are three phases in this: in relation to *suffering*, *being*, and *doing*, respectively.

When we are called to suffer, we are tempted to adopt a stoical attitude, or to abandon ourselves to hopeless grief; but either of these positions is mistaken and wrong. The true and only Christian temper is to accept all as being permitted or appointed by the Father's will to effect

some gracious result, and then to hand over the pressure of the pain and grief to Him. We must cast our burden on the Lord, believing that He will carry our sorrows as He has borne the chastisement of our peace. "Take this intolerable load, O blessed Burden-bearer, which at this moment is pressing my soul down to the ground and making me dwell in darkness, as one long dead."

When some new ideal of Christian living has been presented to us, and we long after it with exceeding eagerness; when repeated failure has shown us our inability to realize it; when we feel as though we can never attain—then to turn to the living Saviour, and ask Him to be in our hearts all that He has taught us to desire; to transfer to Him the responsibility of working in us to do, as He has already wrought in us to will—this is rest and peace. "Rise up in me, O Spring of Living Water, bearing me with Thee to those heavenly places where I

already am in the purpose of God, and long to be in actual experience."

When we are called to undertake some work for God for which our strength seems utterly inadequate, then to believe that we may be strengthened with all might by the Spirit in the inner man, and to claim it, to act in the belief that God never calls to a work without becoming personally responsible for its accomplishing—this is the secret of spiritual efficiency and success. "Be in me, O strong Son of God, to do by me all that Thou hast called me to; may I strive according to Thy working, working in me mightily."

This is the way of faith, and happy are they who are shut up to it. In no other way can we find peace and power in perfect combination and balance; and happy are they who, by failure, disappointment, and the shutting of all other doors, have been shut up to this.

## “SIMON! SIMON!”

LUKE XXII. 31, 32

THE time was the night in which our Lord was betrayed; the place either the upper room or the descent to the Kidron; the speaker our blessed Lord; the object of His solicitude, Peter, so eager, so vehement, and so deeply loved.

It was the familiar name by which his mother knew him and Andrew called him, and by which he was addressed by the companions of his early manhood. It touched a tenderer chord in him than Peter, his official name, could have done. The Master spoke to him as a man might speak to his kinsman or bosom friend. “Thou man whom I love, beware! the kestrel is hovering above thee, the foe

is stealing up the pass; watch and pray, or thou wilt enter into temptation!"

There were many signs patent to Christ's loving eye that danger was nigh this soul. He needed not divine omniscience to assure Him of the danger that menaced His friend. As *man* He could detect the storm-signals of the approaching trial.

Within an hour of this, with flushed face and angry gesture, Peter had striven for the foremost place in the little group. Later he had vehemently resisted the Master's proposal to wash his feet, unwilling to see Him stoop so low, and annoyed that he had not done what his Master did not scruple to do. Still more recently he had insisted on being able to follow his Lord, though it were to death, by the strength of his resolution, the energy of his determination. He had vauntingly said that he would die, if needs were, but nothing should stay him from following through death and

the grave to any place in the wide universe to which Jesus was about to betake Himself. In all this there was so much of the vehement assertion of the flesh that it was easy to discern the sapping of the foundations before the final crash of the battering-ram against the wall.

The sea-walls of Holland only yield to the shock of the billow when they have been previously undermined by the percolation of the streamlet, hollowing out the embankment at their base. The oak is felled by the tempest only when its heart has been eaten out by the worm. The soul is not mastered by sudden assault unless it has first lost ground in matters too trifling to arouse alarm. But when it yields in these there will be no hope of it standing against the hour and power of darkness. If you should fall to-morrow, and then look back on to-day and yesterday, you will be able to trace the beginnings of that attempt against your soul which shall have ended

so fatally. Many moves are made before the player calls "Check!" but the check-mate is the result of a plan that started with the commencement of the game. The deer is stalked down after hours of stealthy approach. It is worth Satan's while to manœuvre for days before he lands us in a fall which is destined to leave a scar on our heart for all after-time. We are not ignorant, alas! of his devices.

The Lord sees all this web of evil while it is being woven about the souls whom He has redeemed; and if we had His sensitiveness to the approach of evil, His yearning love, we should be aware of it also, both for ourselves and others; we should be warned in time, and repent. But for ourselves, we seem too stupefied and infatuated to heed the warning signals exploding as our train rolls over the metals; and for others, we are hindered by a false charity, or a vague fear of offending them and losing their good will should we warn them of

the perilous symptoms we have detected. But warning voices do speak to all. Christ lets none drift to the rapids without crying from the bank, “Beware!”

But Jesus knew of Simon’s danger as *the Son of God*, to whom the secrets of his heart were laid bare. It would appear that He had been watching a scene in the heavenlies closely akin to that depicted in the prologue to the Book of Job. Satan is there represented as coming before God with the boast that he had gone to and fro in the earth, meeting no opposition, every door open to his pass-key, every road free of turnpike toll. God, however, reminded him that there was at least one heart that stood true to Himself, like a castle keep in a country overrun by the devastating bands of the foe. “Hast thou considered My servant Job, that there is none like him on the earth, one that feareth God and escheweth evil?”

To this Satan answered that Job’s



goodness was based on selfishness. "It is little to Job's credit that he is good; see what Thou hast done for him; he knows well enough where the secret of his prosperity lies; touch but his substance, his health, or himself, and he will curse Thee like any other sinner." To this challenge the Almighty replied by giving Satan leave to touch all but Job's life. But the challenge failed, for the more this saintly soul was tested the more evident did the true metal of his character appear.

A similar transaction seems to have been witnessed by the vigilant love of the Lord in that dread hour. This is the only way in which we can understand the marginal rendering of the Revised Version: "Satan has asked, and obtained by asking, that he may sift you as wheat." The metaphor is borrowed from the farmer who sifts his wheat, casting it up against the east wind, till the chaff is removed from the grain. It was as if

Jesus had overheard the great enemy of souls saying, "These men whom Thou hast given to Thy Son are weak and worthless enough; they only follow Him for what they can get; their motive is to win the thrones and royalties of His kingdom, and when these vanish they will vanish too. They are not worth Thy care; all the pains Thou hast expended on them are in vain. Give them over to me, and I will vindicate the truth of my words. Let me sift them, and Thou shalt know them to be but chaff." This is the fundamental difference between Satan's temptations and God's. The former are to bring out the evil, the latter to evoke the good; the former to detect the wood, hay, and stubble, the other to reveal the gold, silver, and precious stones.

You ask why God permits Satan to tempt men, giving him permission to exercise his malicious stratagems and lure them to their fall. It is a deep

mystery, part of the permission of evil to which in this world we have no clue ; but it is easy to see that the power of evil is carefully safeguarded. In the *first* place, from the two illustrations we have already considered it is clear that Satan can have no power at all against us without first asking and obtaining permission ; and in the *second* place, he cannot go beyond a certain point. This is clearly established by that memorable saying of the Holy Ghost through the apostle : " There hath no temptation taken you but such as man can bear : but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able ; but will with the temptation make also the way to escape, that ye may be able to endure it." In the *third* place, it is clear that the ordeal of temptation is highly salutary, for the Spirit led the Lord Jesus into the wilderness for no other purpose than that He should be tempted of the devil

What, therefore, might have appeared to be an unmitigated evil has been transformed into good. Where sin has reigned unto death, grace has reigned unto eternal life. Out of the eater has come meat, and out of the strong sweetness. This is the prerogative of God's grace. He does not stamp out evil by force, but makes it subserve the best interests of His children and the coming of His kingdom. The Apostle James goes so far as to say that there is a blessedness to be gotten from the endurance of temptation which is the richest heritage of the saint.

One main purpose of temptation is to reveal our real selves. It is surely better for the fire to show how much ore there is in the nugget than that the miner should be buoyed up by false hopes and quit the gold-fields too soon; better for Gideon to know before the fight how large a proportion of his followers are craven cowards than discover

it when a panic has broken out among them in face of the foe ; better for us to know how much character we really possess than to awake on the shores of eternity to the shrinkage to almost nothing of what we had spent our lifetime in accumulating.

The foundation of true nobility is self-knowledge. We must know that we are wretched, miserable, blind, and naked, before we shall be prepared to welcome the heavenly Merchantman, who visits us as a peddler the cottages of the poor. But we have little chance to know ourselves. The world either flatters or misunderstands us ; our friends shrink from the odium of correcting our faults ; we compare our best qualities with the worst of other people, much to our own credit ; we seldom care to institute a very searching examination into the state of our souls. There is probably, therefore, no way in which we can be led to know ourselves except by temptation, when

Satan is allowed to winnow us and discriminate between the chaff of self-assertion and the grain of genuine godliness.

Thus it befell Peter. He did not know himself, but was content to estimate his strength by the vehemence of his resolves. What he desired and meant and intended, that he thought he was. No ordeal seemed too severe for him to encounter, as he viewed it from afar. "Let the waves break; am I not Peter? You shall see them scatter in clouds of spray. I will die with the Master, but there is no fear of my denying Him. If you think so, you do not know me." All such boasting is of the flesh, and must be excluded, else men would win their way to heaven by the strength of their own right hand, and this would turn heaven to hell. Wherever there is the magnifying of self there is the seed-germ of hell; and it is for this reason that God's one effort is concentrated on showing the vanity, futility, and worth-

lessness of the self-life, in order that we may be weaned from it to desire and receive out of His fullness grace for grace. Peter must be shown the folly of trusting himself, that he may be prepared for Pentecost, and its revelation of what Christ can be and do within the heart of man.

It is a painful process. The soul has to witness the destruction of its fairest hopes, the downfall of a religiousness on which it had fondly relied. One by one the foreshores which it had built to protect its beach are swept away. Surprised, agitated, and at its wits' end, it runs hither and thither, as ants do when their nest is suddenly disturbed. The fabric which it had taken years to rear is destroyed, as the homestead of a settler before the forest fire, and he is doomed to see his all engulfed in the raging furnace. But it is only in this way that we can be brought to an end of ourselves and the beginning of God,

But through it all we are not forgotten; the Master says, "I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not." And if Satan had succeeded in his request, surely Jesus must in His.

On the moon-lit slopes of Olivet the Master spent sleepless hours pleading for all the disciples, and especially for Peter. He did not ask for him to be spared the ordeal, but that his faith might not fail. "When he has denied Me, and uttered those bitter, blasphemous words, may he not become hardened and despairful; may he still long for Me, may My look suffice to break his heart, may the angel of mercy take his hand and go forth with him as he goes out to weep, and may My slight message on the resurrection morning suffice to bring him back to Me. He must be tempted, else he will miss an invaluable lesson; he will assuredly fall, because he has failed to take My warnings to gird himself for the battle; but



let him not distrust My love, let not his faith in My redeeming pity fail."

It was thus that Jesus prayed, and prays. Not now on the slopes of Olivet, or on the mountains of Galilee, but in heaven the Shepherd watches the sheep, the High Priest pleads for His own. Though no eye watches for thee now, His is never off thee; though no loving heart forecasts thy peril and warns thee, He is ever on the alert to warn; though no voice is raised in supplication on thy behalf, His rises like a fountain night and day. He that keepeth thee shall neither slumber nor sleep.

However greatly we have sinned, let us never mistrust the watchful, forgiving love of Jesus. All sins are light compared to this; all may be forgiven but this. Nothing but this shall separate us from the love of God, which is in Jesus Christ our Lord.

## BENEATH THE SHADOW OF HIS WINGS

HEBREWS IX. 5

WE should have been glad indeed if the eloquent writer of this epistle had felt at liberty to speak more particularly of these sacred mysteries. To have heard them expounded by his burning words would have been a high privilege. But as this has not been granted to us, we may at least look to the divine Spirit for a torch to light our way for some few steps into this labyrinth of sacred imagery.

We never forget that the ark and its contents, the tabernacle or temple and its equipment, were emblematic and typical of the things in the heavens, and

through them we aspire toward the heavenly things themselves. Probably these would be all too bright for mortal eyes, and therefore the opaque medium was requisite. Thus we view an eclipse through smoked glass. From the photograph of a planet's transit across the sun's disk we can more perfectly discern the nature of the sun itself, as would be impossible with the naked eye.

THE CHERUBIM must be distinguished from the seraphim. The cherubim are associated with the redeeming love, the seraphim with the burning holiness, of God. We meet the cherubim first at the gates of Eden, where, with drawn sword, they keep the way to the tree of life. This was a beneficent and loving errand, else man had hopelessly added to his sin and doom. "The Lord God said, Behold, the man is become as one of us: and now, lest he put forth his hand, and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live forever: so He drove

out the man : and He placed at the east of the garden cherubim, and a flaming sword, to keep the way of the tree of life."

After centuries had passed the cherubim appear again, modeled in gold, of a piece with the golden lid of the ark, bending over the mercy-seat, as though to penetrate the mysteries that were hidden in its types—the slabs of the law beneath, the golden lid incrusting with blood because sprinkled on successive days of atonement, and between their bending forms the mild and holy light of the Shechinah. Thus, in after-days, the saints were wont to appeal to God as one who dwelt between the cherubim, and urged Him to shine forth, to stir up His strength and come to the deliverance of His people.

When Solomon built the temple he added to this typology, following the plan given him by David, his father, who received it from the Spirit of God. In

addition to the bending forms over the ark, he made two figures of erect cherubim, whose wings stretched from one wall to the other of the holy place, as though to ward off all danger, and shield such as came there for shelter and succor. It is to these that the inspired writer here makes reference. He says that the mercy-seat was shadowed by the wings of the cherubim—of the two that bent low toward it, and of the two that stood erect with outspread pinions.

THEY WERE CHERUBIM OF GLORY. Ezekiel descants much on the glories of the cherubim. He tells us how closely they were identified with the throne of God on the one hand, and with the wheel of nature on the other. They bore upon their wings the firmament on which the throne rested; their movements regulated the revolutions, the rise and fall of the wheels that so vividly portray the course of nature.

The cherubim are surely embodiments

of the divine nature in its goings forth to save and bless men. Of their four faces, one is as a man, betokening the intelligence and benignity with which God regards us; a second as a calf, representing the patience with which God toils on our behalf and bears with our failures; a third as a lion, suggesting the royal strength of the Lion of the tribe of Judah; a fourth as an eagle, reminding us of that dominion over the prince of the power of the air, of that majestic indifference to storm, of that strong parental care which bears its young on its untiring wing, each of which has its correlative in the nature of God.

Cherubim of glory! theirs is the glory of close association with the divine nature, of identification with the divine attributes, of intelligent coöperation with the divine will. Their every movement is harmonious with the loving purposes of the divine heart. "They excel in strength, hearkening to the voice of

His word." They excel in majesty and beauty. To any one of them might be addressed the words of Ezekiel, "Thou sealest up the sum, full of wisdom, and perfect in beauty. Every precious stone was thy covering, the sardius, topaz, and the diamond, the beryl, the onyx, and the jasper, the sapphire, the emerald, and the carbuncle, and gold. Thou art the anointed cherub that covereth. Thou wast perfect in thy ways from the day that thou wast created."

O glorious cherubim! would that we were fair as ye are, as devoted, as full of the love of God! Yet ye are but servants of our King, our Brother, the immortal Lover of our spirits, while we are His heirs and joint-heirs. He is not ashamed to call us brethren; nay, the spirit of the Son is in our hearts, crying to your God and ours, "Abba, Father." Some day, in the excellent glory, we may see your beauteous forms; but, in the meantime, ye speak to us of

all the love of our Father's heart, for ye are His ministers, sent forth to minister to His children, and to act as their convoy to His home.

SHADOWING. Whatever the cherubim be, they set forth the divine energy and attributes as they canopy and overshadow believing souls. Frequently, therefore, in Scripture, we are reminded of the protection which is afforded by the outspread wings of the Shechinah. Boaz congratulated Ruth that she had come to trust under the wings of Jehovah. David prayed that he might be kept as the apple of God's eye, and hidden under the shadow of His wings; he extolled that excellent loving-kindness beneath the shadow of whose wings the children of men might put their trust; and how many have adopted his glad outburst, "Because Thou hast been my help, therefore in the shadow of Thy wings will I rejoice"! Among the tenderest words of Him who spake as man



never spake were the yearning expressions of His desire that He might have been allowed to gather Jerusalem as a hen gathers her chickens beneath her wing. Ah, yearning heart of Christ, how oft hast Thou been disappointed since!

Bunyan says that the hen has four different calls to her brood: one when twilight begins to darken toward *night*; another when she has come across some dainty for their *food*; another of *danger*, when the hawk is hovering in the air; and yet another of yearning *desire*. It is thus that He calls, in whose nature every kind of love has its origin and fount. Whatever is meant by the wing of the mother-bird—warmth, shelter, tendance, the nearness of love—all is realized and gathered up in the symbol of the overshadowing wing of the cherubim of glory. Come to the mercy-seat, and thou shalt find thyself under the wing of the attributes of God, sworn and pledged to help thee. “As birds flying”

the Lord will defend thee. The very being of God will be interposed between all that threatens and thy cowering heart. His thought, His patience, His strength, His supremacy, these are His cherubim, these thy defense and aid, these the overshadowing wing.

THE MERCY-SEAT. We must get there, aye, and live there, if we would dwell beneath the covert of the overshadowing wing of the attributes of God, of which the cherubim are emblems and embodiments. Let us see how to reach it, as we trace the steps of the high priest on the day of atonement.

Clad in simple white, linen tunic, linen turban, linen girdle, he went alone through the holy place, and approached the curtain of separation, embroidered with cherubic figures. His first act on passing through the veil was to swing to and fro the golden censer, filling the apartment with its sweet fragrance and veiling films of smoke; next he sprin-

kled the blood of the bullock, purchased for himself and his sons, seven times before and upon the golden lid; and, as the blood made peace and guaranteed his welcome, he looked up and saw those strong, noble forms gleaming through the wreaths of smoke, and knew that their wings, spread over his head, were emblematic of the love that yearned over him and his, and of the strength pledged to his defense.

Retiring from the sacred shrine, the knife flashed in the sun as he plunged it in the goat, which represented the offering for the people. He caught its flowing blood in the golden vessel, and proceeded to do with it as with the bullock's. In that moment, in him as their representative, all Israel, just then massed without, stood before God, was accepted by virtue of the blood that was shed, and sheltered safely under the shadowing wings of the cherubim. It must have seemed to the pious Hebrew

as though his people were at rest and in safety beneath the sheltering love of Jehovah, guaranteeing their safety from all attacks of men and devils.

The type needs no words to elaborate its meaning. We must take up our abode in the most holy place if we would dwell under the shadowing wing of God. "He that dwelleth in the secret place of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty."

It is a delightful thought that whatever was symbolized by the holy of holies, whatever is its correlative and analogue in the nature of God, is ours, not to enter for a transient yearly visit, but to become our home and abiding-place. The veil has been rent, the separation between us and the innermost fellowship with God is abolished, the way into the holiest has been made through the blood of Jesus, we are free to enter thither with all boldness, we are invited to live there forevermore.

This is the position of every believer to-day in the purpose of God, and by right of union with the great High Priest; but let us never rest till it is ours also in happy and blessed realization. In other words, we must by faith claim, and by faith maintain, our portion in the innermost place, face to face with the uncreated light, which we do not dread, because the blood speaks peace; and we are, therefore, under the wing of God—His angels ministering; His attributes defending; His love, in which fatherhood and motherhood blend, brooding and fond.

Are you fleeing from the justice of a broken law? Get to the mercy-seat; there the wings of incarnate love wait to protect you.

Are you cowering before the threatening storm of care, trouble, soul-anguish? Make for the secret place of the tabernacles of the Most High; there you shall find refuge under the wing of

God's peace, that passeth all understanding.

Are you surrounded by the strife of tongues? Flee from the windy storm and tempest to that serene hiding-place, where the cherub wing is a strong defense against the breaking storm.

Are you menaced by the assaults of the great enemy of souls? He is no match for the least of God's angels, who is representative of the divine kingdom and power and glory. Shelter then beneath the wing of that God who makes His angels swift as winds, His ministers pure as flames of fire. Better still, put the love and grace of God between your soul and everything.

## GOD'S PURPOSE FULFILLED THROUGH DISAPPOINTMENT

ROMANS I. 10

THE apostle was very eager to visit Rome. He said as much to his friend and biographer, Luke, after a great revival had crowned his work at Ephesus, and before that terrible uproar which nearly cost him his life (Acts xix. 21). He said so, shortly after, in this epistle, both here and in the closing chapters, composed during his brief stay in Corinth, when about to go up to Jerusalem with the offerings he had been engaged in collecting on the behalf of the poor saints there.

It would seem as though this plan were not the result of his own scheming

merely, but had been communicated to him by the Spirit; for at Jerusalem, while a prisoner in the Castle of Antonia, just after his rescue by the chief captain, and in the night following the day on which his nephew had brought tidings of the plot against his life, the Lord stood beside him and said, "Be of good cheer, Paul: for as thou hast testified of Me in Jerusalem, so must thou bear witness also in Rome" (Acts xxiii. 11).

This visit had been matter of his very earnest prayer for years that he might be permitted to set his feet within the great metropolis. Without ceasing he made request if by any means he might have a prosperous journey, by the will of God, to come to them (Rom. i. 10); and he besought his converts to strive together with him in his prayers that he might come unto them with joy, by the will of God, so fulfilling the cherished project of many years (Rom. xv. 23, 29, 30).



*What was his reason for this great anxiety?* Rome offered many attractions for the art-lover, the aspirant for fame, the votary of pleasure, the seeker for human power; but none of these had any fascination for the apostle, who lived in quite another sphere, the world being crucified unto him and he unto the world. He went to Rome because it was a great strategic center for the accomplishing of his life-aim.

He felt that he was raised up for a special purpose, and intrusted with two long-hidden secrets, which had been specially made known to him. Each of these concerned the Gentiles: the one, that they might be fellow-heirs, on an equality with Jews, in the church of God; the other, that Christ was prepared to indwell them, the hope of glory (Eph. iii. 7; Col. i. 26). He desired to promulgate these secrets to the utmost extent of his power and opportunity. Life was short, every moment precious; he

was desirous, therefore, to exercise a wise economy over his time and energy, and sought to disseminate his teachings from the most important centers.

Not that he refused to deal with individuals. His willingness to consort with the few women that gathered by the riverside at Philippi is evidence enough of the importance he attached to work among the ones and twos. But he sought, on the whole, the larger cities and towns, that in these he might scatter the seeds of gospel truth, to be borne far down the streams of population as they passed out into all the world. It was probably this thought that made him so eager to visit Rome.

Rome was the metropolis of the known world. In her Forum stood the golden milestone, from which roads radiated to every part of the empire. Her senators and citizens afforded the raw material out of which the governors of important provinces were being manufactured.

Her soldiers were constantly being commissioned for distant service, and were liable to be sent to Britain in the west, the Persian Gulf in the east, or the heart of the African desert on the south. How important, then, to influence this mighty city! Win Rome for Christ, and the whole world would be affected. Capture the citadel, and the adjacent fortifications must sooner or later surrender.

The strength and energy of the race seemed focused in Rome; hence this man, who felt that he was under obligation, "a debtor," to every man, realized that his life-mission would be incomplete unless he had proclaimed under the shadow of the golden palace the unsearchable riches of Christ, making all men see the fellowship of the mystery which from the creation had been hid in Christ.

Some reader may be pining for a great opportunity of influencing his fellows. We sigh for our Rome, for some notable

platform, some coign of vantage, some arena with its expectant crowd waiting to see us magnify Christ, whether by life or death. We plan and strive and pray for this. That young soul looks for its Rome in the foreign mission field, and this one in a pulpit at home. The maiden counts on zenana work, the youth on bazaar-preaching. The one cry and aspiration of each is to see Rome. Oh, to leave an impress on leading minds, to mold those who mold others, to carve the name of Jesus on the stones which bear up the temple of human life and thought!

*Now notice how Paul got to Rome.* His prayer was answered, and the ambition of his life fulfilled, far differently from his expectation. When he first thought of reaching Rome he had no idea of going otherwise than as a free man, able to do as he chose. He said, in effect, "After taking these offerings to my countrymen in Jerusalem, I am

thinking of making an extended journey westward, and shall visit Rome on my way to Spain." He had enjoyed liberty of movement so long that it does not seem to have occurred to him that it might be forfeited. But so it befell. While in Jerusalem he was set on by an infuriated mob, cruelly beaten, rescued only by the Roman soldiery, and finally hurried from Jerusalem to Cæsarea, where he spent two years in prison. Those years must have passed slowly.

Often he must have wondered why God allowed him to be prevented from fulfilling his cherished purpose, and how He would answer his many prayers. The divine plan, however, finally appeared, as the forms of the mountains through the thinning mists. Confronted with the threat of Festus to take him back to Jerusalem for trial, he had no alternative but to appeal to Cæsar's bar. Shortly afterward, as soon as a suitable ship offered, the apostle found himself

one of a batch of prisoners, under the guard of Roman soldiers charged to convey them safely to the capital. It was a trying and disastrous voyage, involving ultimately the loss of the cargo, the wreck of the ship, and the escape of the crew to shore with little else than their lives.

After three months' detention in Sicily a ship was secured which was sailing for Italy, and the apostle landed at Puteoli, setting his foot for the first time on Italian shores as a prisoner, the companion of murderers and malefactors, and, for aught the loiterers on the pier knew to the contrary, as deeply dyed in crime as any felon in the gang. Thence he trudged up the great Appian Way, chained to a soldier, suffering indignity and contempt, exposed to the contumely and cruelty of his guards, were they so minded. This was not quite the fashion in which he had thought of reaching the goal of his hopes.

On reaching the city he was still an

ambassador in chains. Night and day he was bound by iron fetters to a stout Roman legionary, who after four hours on duty made way for a comrade. In this way two years were passed. But since in all probability no soldier was on duty more than once, the apostle was thus able to speak earnestly and tenderly to some hundreds of the pretorian guard.

Thus his mission to Rome was fulfilled—not in the crowded hippodrome or synagogue, not in the ear of eager multitudes, not before the gaze of philosophers and poets; but through the individuals who, under these strange conditions, came into direct contact with his fervid soul.

We come each one to our Rome in the same way. The business man is tied by engagements he cannot cast aside. The professional man is limited by the demands of shoals of letters, by the exigencies of his position, by the claims of those who seek his help. The invalid is

tied to the couch, the mother to the cradle, the child to the school, as tightly as Paul to his soldier!

"Remember my bonds!" often comes from our lips; but we come to find that, through what had seemed to cramp and fetter, we are being led into opportunities of service which in no other way would have fallen to our lot. While nailed to the cross, unable to move hand or foot, we finish the work which our Father gave us to do.

*The apostle's joy* abounded in the midst of his affliction. None of his epistles breathe so much content as the Epistle to the Philippians, written from Rome. Twice he bids his friends rejoice in the Lord. He speaks about the peace that passeth all understanding, and tells of his having learned the lesson in everything to be content. He hardly mentions his restraint. He rejoices that what has happened to him has fallen out rather for the furtherance of the gospel. He



realizes that the great purpose which he had always cherished as likely to be fulfilled at Rome was being realized—Christ was being magnified in his body. In his purpose and hope he was, therefore, not ashamed. He knew that God had answered his prayer beyond what he could have asked or thought, and he was satisfied.

So shall we be satisfied one day. We shall look back on our bonds, and see that they were connecting-links with the great system of human hearts, that they yielded the material out of which the wires for God's messages were drawn. We shall see that our prison was our pulpit. We shall discover, as Paul did, that the presence of the soldier was necessary to guard us from assaults which might have impeded our usefulness. And as we review the way in which God answered our prayer we shall be able to say thankfully and trustfully, "He hath done all things well."

## THE POWER OF THE KEYS

MATTHEW XVI. 19

ON this occasion, in a sequestered resort outside the frontier of Palestine and at the foot of a mighty alp, our Lord asked two very important questions. The time was ripe for asking them. For more than two years He had gone to and fro among men, not telling them who He was or trumpeting His claims, but giving them every opportunity of knowing Him. The cross, however, had begun to loom on Him, like the steeple of Boston Church seen far out at sea, and it was necessary to gather up the results of His life-work, and to bring the somewhat indefinite conceptions that were floating in solution in men's minds to a definite, crystallized form.

“Whom do men say that I, the Son of man, am?” The reply was conflicting. The disciples had heard many different conclusions, expressed by devout and thoughtful individuals, or passing through vast crowds like a breeze through the trees. Men felt that Jesus was no ordinary man. He was evidently akin to the greatest names of the great past. He was of the class to which Jeremiah and Elijah and John the Baptist had belonged; but who and what He was had clearly not been apprehended by the most far-seeing. Probably the Master was not greatly disappointed. It was not to be expected that the people would instantly break from the fetters of long tradition and recognize in His features the lineaments of the Messiah.

“But whom say ye that I am?” It was a momentous question, the answer to which would prove just how much His life and words had wrought toward a true and just conclusion. Should the

answer be as conflicting as the conclusions of the crowds, there would be nothing to show for months of careful teaching and patient toil; there would be grave risk in transmitting to these men the task for which they were designed, of witnessing to the world at large what they had found the Christ to be.

But there seems to have been no hesitation. Instantly, and in the clearest, strongest words, Peter, as the spokesman of the rest, confessed that the Master had approved Himself to be the Christ, the Son of the living God—a confession which must have sent a thrill of pleasure through the heart of the Man of Sorrows, to whom such moments of loving recognition were few and far between. This was the greatest moment in the apostle's life. The Master's eager "Blessed art thou!" and the assurance that it had been revealed by the Father, filled him with joy. Jesus turned with a smile of recognition and tenderness on His apos-

tle, saying, "Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-Jonah; this confession of thine shows into what close relations thou hast been permitted to come with the Father; this is not the result of thine own thinking or conceiving; it has been revealed to thee by that eternal Being of whom thou hast spoken." Several great announcements followed.

A distinction was clearly to be made between the man who made the confession and the substance of the confession. While the former was a stone (*Petros*), which might become, as in the present instance, a stumbling-block, the latter was the bed-rock on which the church would stand unmovable against all assaults of earth and Hades. "On this fact, that I combine in Myself the long-expected Messiah and the Son of the Eternal, My church is to stand through all the ages."

Then, again, it became clear that He was to be the architect of His church—

His the plan, and the selection of the materials, and their imposition on the rising walls of the edifice, which was to stand out amid all other buildings both in majesty and durability, as Strasburg or Cologne Cathedral above the dwellings of the townsfolk around their mighty walls.

Another thing was revealed in these momentous, epoch-making words: that the church was yet to be built. Some of the materials had already been excavated and shaped. The Old Testament saints might be compared to a lot of quarried stones awaiting the hand of the Architect, but the true foundation of the church could only be laid in the deep excavation of the grave in Joseph's garden. The present age, as the Holy Spirit by the Apostle Paul clearly teaches us, is preëminently that of the church. Its foundation-stone was deposited when Jesus died, its top-stone will be fixed when He comes again.

Yet, further, it must never be forgotten that the church is one. "I will build My church." Its materials would be contributed by every kindred and people and tribe, but it would be a unity, all its parts conforming to one design, all its materials combining to one effect. Many churches, but one church; many members, but one body; many folds, but one flock.

But we are concerned principally in asking what the Master meant when He gave Peter the power of the keys and assured him that heaven would concur with what he bound and loosed. It is noteworthy that in the next chapter but one (xviii.) the Master gave the latter authority to the twos and threes gathered in His name. Whatever was implied in these emphatic words referred, therefore, not to any one man, however exalted in spiritual attainments and office, but to the great mass of believers meeting in little groups, not only in cathedrals and

consistories, but by riversides, in dens and caves of the earth, or in humble conventicles.

In point of fact, every good man has the power of the keys. It was customary among the Jews, when they conferred the degree of doctor of laws, to hand to the newly made doctor a golden key, which would open the receptacle of the sacred law. Similarly, whenever we have been made partakers of Christ, we are invested with the power and privilege of admitting others to the same mansion in the Father's house to which we have attained. By our example and words we can explain the mysteries of the kingdom, can teach others how to enter and enjoy them, can encourage them by unfolding all the blessedness and comfort to which they will most certainly be admitted, can remove difficulties and answer questions. The mother can open the kingdom to the little child whom she is teaching to lisp



the name of Jesus; the teacher, with his class gathered around him, showing, in the simplest words, how each boy may pass through the gate into the kingdom of grace and peace; the pastor in the homes of his people, or the preacher in the pulpit, teaching, exhorting, or witnessing to the truth as it is in Jesus; the experienced inquiry-room worker, pointing seeking souls to Christ, and expounding the way of life more perfectly—these, and such as these, are using the power of the keys, and admit souls through one gate after another into the kingdom of God.

*There is the gate of the new birth.* “Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.” The key to this gate is faith. As we believe, we enter; and as we teach others to believe, they also enter. Oh, it is angels’ work to go about among dying men, dead in trespasses and sins, lifting on high the Crucified, seeing the gleam of faith break

over their faces, and knowing that, at that very moment, they have been born into the kingdom of heaven, of everlasting light, and of never-fading glory.

*There is the gate of the child-heart.* "Blessed are the poor in spirit; for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." The key to this gate is humility. Therefore Jesus said, "Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall in no wise enter into the kingdom of heaven." But humility is hard to learn; this key goes hard in the lock; it seems as though it were the last lesson that the Spirit of God teaches. In His school the highest is the infant-class; we end by sitting on the lowest form. The humble heart, that seeks not high things for itself, but for the love of God is willing to wash the feet of fellow-disciples, is in the kingdom and can show others how to enter.

*There is the gate of a holy life.* "Except your righteousness exceed the right-

eousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no wise enter into the kingdom of heaven." The key to this gate is obedience; to do what Jesus says, because He says it, and to do it gladly, lovingly, and continually—this is the way into that blessed realization of the kingship of Jesus which is known as the kingdom of heaven. To have His commandments, and keep them, is to be in the kingdom; to teach men so is to open to them the gate, and admit them to the fellowship of the saints in the reign of the Son of God.

*There is the gate of self-sacrifice.*  
"Blessed are they that are persecuted for righteousness' sake; for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." The key to this gate is love—love to Christ, love to all men for His dear sake. They who love Him so much as to be willing to suffer for Him the loss of all things, who are prepared to sacrifice all that men hold dear that they may redeem and help

the lost, who will pour forth their heart's blood as the juice of the purple grape is stamped out in the autumn vintage—who can doubt that these are in the kingdom of light and love? And as they inspire others with their own spirit, as they beckon onward the feeble-minded and ready-to-halt by the heroism of their example, as they make the passion for self-sacrifice contagious by the beauty of their example and the magnificence of their heroism, they use the keys, unlock the doors, and conduct souls into strange new experiences of blessedness. Unlike the medieval legend, instead of roses turning to cinders, the cinders of obloquy and hatred change to flowers; the hiss of the serpent utters the benedictions of the throne. Darkness and obloquy are subterranean passages to secret treasures, which have been realized only by those who, in saving others, have refused to save themselves.

None can use the keys save those who

are prepared to suffer and, if needs be, die. It was this that aroused all Peter's opposition. Jesus had said that He must be delivered to the Gentiles to be put to death; in no other way could He open the kingdom of heaven to all believers when He had overcome the sharpness of death. This might be the way of heaven, but it certainly was not the way of man. So Peter took Him aside and seriously remonstrated: "This cannot, shall not, must not be. Spare Thyself. Can the Messiah be crucified by Gentiles? Can the Son of the ever-living God die?" How little did he realize that he was saying aloud what Satan had never ceased to whisper in the Master's heart! It was mere human policy. To follow this advice would have rendered needless the cross and shame, and made the Saviour's scheme of redemption abortive.

If you would open the kingdom to men; if you would bind them, so far as

words can do it, in living union with the King; if you would loose them from all that binds and fetters them, so as to free them for the service of God—then you must be prepared to sacrifice, suffer, and, if needs be, die. But out of all this will come something of that function that Peter exercised on the day of Pentecost, and afterward in the house of Cornelius, when he opened the blessings of Pentecost to thousands.

## “IRREPARABLE FAILURE”

MATTHEW XXV. 30

“CAST him out!” It is the Master’s voice, but how unwonted the accent and tone! Is this the wrath of the Lamb of which we have heard? Is this the untowardness which He shows with the untoward? Who is this man? Why is he to be cast out? What has he done? My soul, listen carefully, for his fate may concern thee much more nearly than thou drest; and if only thou wilt learn the lesson now, thou mayest be saved the horror of his doom.

*This parable has to do, not with our salvation, but with our service.* It has no message for the unconverted. In reading the Bible we should be careful

to see whether a message is addressed to us before we apply it to our case. For the unregenerate and unsaved the pages of Scripture are full of expostulation, entreaty, and promise. Let such turn to them, and leave this parable exclusively to those who have been saved by the free act of God's grace, adopted into His family, and constituted His household servants. All the solemn teaching of this parable is for thee, Christian soul! Ponder it well.

*This parable has naught to say of the final judgment, but of the Master's reckoning with His servants at the end of the present age.* That the great white throne will be set up is undeniable. It will close the history of time; but with it we, who by faith stand in Jesus Christ, shall have nothing to do except from its eminence to view the process of that final consummation. How could they be judged *then* who were judged in the person of their Substitute on the cross?



How should they stand at the bar who are wedded to the Judge, as bride to spouse? How should it be possible that there should be any need of deciding their destiny, for whom it was settled when they first believed? They cannot come into condemnation, because they have passed from death to life; but when the Master comes back from His journey into the far country, and gathers His own around Him on the threshold of the marriage feast, He will reckon with each of us as to the proceeds of our service.

*The outer darkness of this parable is not that of hell, but of the bitter disappointment of a wasted life.* Thou art so sure of thine acceptance with Christ that thou comfortest thyself that there is no fear of thy coming into the place of torment; but beware, for this parable, together with many similar allusions, teaches that there may be an exclusion from positions of joy and service in the other life which will fill the unfaithful

servant and the disobedient child with anguish over an irremediable mistake.

# I. WHO WAS THIS?

*He was one of the master's own slaves.* Notice the emphasis of the Revised Version. There had been a time when perhaps he had been ground down by the bitter tyranny of a cruel owner, despairing of life; but he had been purchased at great cost by the master whom afterward he was so shamefully to requite. In the first rapture of that deliverance he had covered his feet with tears and kisses, vowing the most enthusiastic and devoted allegiance. For long his master had only to say to him, "Do this," and he did it; and he seemed well to deserve the place of honor accorded to him when, on the eve of his long journey, his master called him to his side and intrusted him with a talent.

*He was not a many-talented man.* Very moderate ability was his! An

ordinary, if not a commonplace, man. Not an Augustine—bishop, preacher, theologian, man of affairs, saint. Not a Luther—Reformer, statesman, commentator. He had one talent, like the man who can speak, but not write; who can manage finance, but not preach; who can organize, but cannot inspire young hearts. Such men abound in every Christian congregation. It is better so. The world is less likely to be converted by the few richly endowed than by the many of average ability, each of whom uses his talent to the uttermost. But the one-talented men are the most tempted to do nothing. They can do so little that they easily become discouraged, saying, “I have but one talent; I may as well hide it in the earth. What is the good of it against the evil of the world?”

*He had no idea that he was a wrong-doer.* A good husband and father, a man of strict morals, held in high repute by his fellow-servants, he led a quiet

and respectable life, he feared his master, and the only damnatory fact was that buried talent. Still he had not for a moment thought of keeping it for himself; he was not a second Achan. He was only holding his master's property intact, carefully keeping its bearings in the garden or field where it was deposited till it was required of him. But this quiet, decent, respectable man was startled from the slumbers of a life by hearing himself called both wicked and slothful! It was as though a fire-ball crashed through the roof of the house of his life, setting it in flames, and burning it suddenly to the ground.

Seest thou thyself in this? Thou wert once the devil's slave, but, purchased at a great cost, thou becamest Christ's. Ah, the rapture of thy first enfranchisement! Thou art not many-talented, but thou art not devoid of spiritual gift and faculty. In the first days of conversion thou wert ardent

enough, and no enterprise seemed too great for thee to try thy hand at; but thou hast sadly slackened. Thy life is outwardly respectable, but what shall be said of thy service to thy Master, Christ! Beneath the fair beauty of thy complexion may not consumption be working at the seat of life; and, after all, when Jesus sums up thy service, may He not say that thou hast been wicked and slothful?

## II. WHAT WAS HIS CRIME?

Had he disgraced his master's name? No. Had he spoken contemptuously of his master? No. Had he misbehaved himself to the other servants? No. His crime consisted *not* in doing wrong, but in not doing right. The words of Christ are full of the crime of *not doing*. The man that had not on the wedding garment! The virgins who took no oil! The priest and the Levite who did nothing for the wounded trav-

eler! The nations that "did it not to the least of these"! The salt that was savorless! The servant who knew his lord's will and did it not! The world says sin consists in doing wrong. Christ says it also consists in not doing right, in not fulfilling your opportunities, in not using the intrusted talent.

Is there some avenue of Christian service beckoning your feet which you studiously avoid? Is there some life to which you ought to minister which you persistently neglect? Is there some faculty of holy helpfulness wasting within you, or employed simply for your gratification or emolument, and not for the sake of God or man? Then take heed lest you should be committing the crime for which the unprofitable servant was cast into the outer darkness.

### III. WHAT WAS HIS DOOM?

(1) "*Take ye away therefore the talent from him.*" It is not necessary to wait

for the end of life ere this sentence takes effect. What we do not use is taken away from us by the inevitable process of natural law, which, indeed, is but another name for God.

If you purchase tame pigeons, mottled with every variety of color dear to the fancier, and let them loose in an uninhabited island, it is only necessary to leave them to themselves for a few years to lose all that you paid so dearly for; for on visiting that island after such a period you will find it inhabited by pigeons of a dark, slaty blue. You do nothing, but you lose all.

A garden may be full of fruit and flowers of every description, the result of careful and costly culture; leave it but for a few months, and it will revert to a tangled waste. You do nothing, but you lose all.

When the doors of the Bastile were thrown open at the French Revolution, a few shrunken figures staggered for-

ward into the light. Most were idiots; a few had preserved their reason by compelling their minds to compute figures and solve problems. Had they not done this, they too must have lost all mental power. Do nothing for the mind, and you lose all.

There are three conditions in all kinds of life: *balance*, which is extremely rare; *evolution*, the growth toward the completer realization of the ideal; *degeneration*, the dropping down toward the bottomless pit. If we do not climb, we descend; if we do not grow better, we grow worse; if we do not add, by use, to the talent, it is taken away.

(2) "*Cast ye out the unprofitable servant.*" The outer darkness is the absence of light, of the light of the Bridegroom's presence, as described in the former parable. Heaven itself, if Christ's smile did not rest upon us, would be outer darkness. It is the sense of having missed His "Well done." You may



share in the benefit of His salvation and yet forfeit His radiant acknowledgment of your faithfulness.

Six times in this gospel do we read of the wailing and gnashing of teeth, which in each case are associated with the disappointment of those who hoped to be included in the blessedness deserved by others, but not rightfully theirs; they were excluded from it at the moment when they thought that they had gained their point. The children of the kingdom finding their seats occupied! Tares which thought themselves like enough to wheat to be classed with it! Fish which never expected to be detected as bad! The man who, having got into the wedding feast, thought he would be permitted to stop there! The servant who never anticipated that his misdeeds in the long night of watching would come to his master's ears! These abandon themselves to the manifestation of despair. Take heed, servant

of Christ, lest those tears and cries and bitter regrets be thine!

The teaching of this parable is therefore very necessary and salutary. We need to ponder it. It is not enough to be numbered among God's elect souls; we must remember that His judgment begins with His own household; that He reaps where He did not sow, and gathers where He did not straw; that there will be a judgment-throne at which we must be manifested, a fire through which the results of our life-work must be passed.

## “A NEW START”

PHILIPPIANS III. 12

How close the apostle comes to us in these words! He stands beside us, and puts his hands on our shoulders, saying, *Brethren*. Not as the seer to whom the mysteries of the kingdom were made known; not as the founder of churches, or the author of epistles which will outlive the classics; not as the apostle who had seen the Lord, and the rebuker of Peter, but as the simple, humble Christian, he says, *Brethren*.

Evidently there is *no finality* in the Christian life. If Paul could not reckon that he had apprehended, surely none of us can. Let us remember that when he wrote these words he had accom-

plished the wonderful journeys described in the Acts, established the churches addressed in the epistles, and passed through the privations and trials enumerated in his first letter to Corinth. And yet he felt that he had not attained or was perfected. Not perfected! Had he not been caught up into the third heaven, and heard unspeakable words? Not perfected! Had not the Lord Himself assured him that His strength was perfected in His servant's weakness? Not perfected! Had he not been so anointed of the Holy Ghost that from Jerusalem and round to Illyricum he had fully preached the gospel? Ah, wonderful man, surely *we* may never dare to reckon that we have attained or apprehended that for which we were apprehended by Christ Jesus our Lord!

There is finality in conquest: Alexander wept on the confines of India because there were no more worlds to conquer. There is finality in discovery: when the

secret of the north pole is once learned there will be no incentive for polar expeditions to drift with the ice from one continent to another. There is finality in the power of the artist when his hand is paralyzed by age. But there is no finality for those whose life is hid with Christ in God, because they are called, not to do, but to become; not to explore the finite, but the infinite; not to live within the limits of time, but to become the pilgrims of an eternal hope, beckoning them through the ages.

“That I may know Him.” There can be no finality to that sacred study, since the subject is God incarnate. “And the power of His resurrection.” There can be no finality there, since He hath been raised to the right hand of the Majesty in the heavens. “Being made conformable unto His death.” There can be no finality there, because there are unexplored depths of meaning in His cross, into which angels gaze in

vain. "To attain to the resurrection from among the dead." This is a spiral that circles up forever around the jasper throne. "To be conformed to the image of the Son." Surely, in the meridian noon of heaven, we shall be compelled, as we contrast our stature with His, to cry, "Not as though we had already attained, or were already perfect. We count not ourselves to have apprehended, but we press on!" Ever pressing on through dateless eons to become more like the Fairest of the sons of men.

There are three positions taken by the apostle. He is ever descrying further unfoldings of the high calling of God, which he was apprehended to apprehend. As he sees them, he forgets, so eager is he to realize them, all that he has hitherto gained; so the mountain climber forgets the prospect that ravished him on a lower spur, when he espies a loftier coign of view beckoning him from above, and without regret pursues his upward

way. Lastly, the apostle presses on to take hold of that for which Christ took hold of him. Always between two sets of things, those behind and those before, leaving the one and pressing eagerly toward the other.

CHRIST HAS APPREHENDED THOSE WHO BELIEVE TO RECEIVE THE SPIRIT OF SONSHIP. "Because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father." It is, as the Apostle John says, a wonderful thing that we should be called children of God, and that such we are. The angels and the inhabitants of other worlds were passed by, and the Son of God stooped to take our nature, that He might give to all who receive Him power to become the sons of God. Partakers of the divine nature! Heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ! Born of incorruptible seed, and adopted in an irreversible covenant! Such is our prerogative, if we believe.

But even greater purposes are cherished in Christ's heart. He desires that we should feel as sons, that we should know our oneness with Him and His Father, that the cry of "Abba, Father" should come easily from our lips. He desires that the same Spirit as fills Him should tenant our hearts.

Have we apprehended this? If not, let us now leave the things behind—doubt, uncertainty, hesitancy, alternations of hope and fear like the crest and trough of the waves—and let us reach out toward this blessed assurance of sonship, which lies before, like a star beckoning the voyager. Let us, in this, apprehend that for which we have been apprehended.

CHRIST HAS APPREHENDED US FOR ABSOLUTE CONSECRATION TO HIMSELF. His ideal for us is given in His own attitude to the Father. He was the Servant in whom God was well pleased, who never spoke or acted except



as it was given Him of the Father. To do the will of Him who had sent Him was His one aim and joy. For this He apprehended us. Slaves to do His bidding! Soldiers to please Him who had chosen them for the holy war! Vehicles and channels through which to impart Himself to a dying world!

Have we apprehended this? In too many cases it is clear we have not. We have been content to yield Him a portion of time, money, strength, and love; to be sometimes on fire, at others lethargic; now counting all things but loss, and again keeping back part of the price; giving our money as if we were entire owners of it and might dispose of it as we chose; making our plans and asking Him to bless rather than issue them. We must sorrowfully confess that we have not counted all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus our Lord. We dare not say that to us to live is Christ, or that our su-

preme aim is for Him to be magnified in our body, whether it be by life or death.

But let this be a thing of the past. Let us leave it with the many weights and sins that lie behind. Let us come to the cross, the door-post of the house of salvation, and ask that the lobe of our ear may be bored to it. Let us yield ourselves to Him that He may set us apart for Himself, and fulfil in us His own ideal of what consecration means. Before us is the vision of the Master hastening to the cross, saying, "For their sakes I consecrate Myself." Let us reach forth to apprehend and obey that radiant ideal.

CHRIST HAS APPREHENDED US FOR DELIVERANCE FROM KNOWN SIN. We have been too satisfied to be saved from sin's penalty. We have weakly yielded to besetting sin, under the excuse of temperament, infirmity, and heredity. We have been prone to think that the

fullness of His salvation could not be manifested in natures so frail as ours. But Christ's ideal is holiness and righteousness *all* our days, deliverance from all iniquity, the unspotted robe, and the pure heart. For this He apprehended us. Nothing short will repay the agony and bloody sweat; nothing less will satisfy the Bridegroom's heart, who longs to present the bride to Himself without blemish.

Have we apprehended this? Too often we have not. But why should not the present be the time and place for leaving our inconsistencies, failures, and besetting sins behind us forever, counting them among the things that are behind, and reaching forth to the symmetry and loveliness of Christ's conception of what a Christian should be? And be sure that He will never give the vision of a life which He is not prepared to realize. If He walks on the sea and beckons a soul to come to

Him, His bare word will sustain it, His grace will be sufficient, His hand outstretched. Only believe that there is before you a life strong and sweet and beautiful. Race toward it. Step up to it. Claim it by a living faith, and let it be yours *from now* henceforth.

CHRIST HAS APPREHENDED US FOR THE ANOINTING OF THE HOLY GHOST. In all things we are to resemble Him. He put no hand to the plow of His life-work until He had been endued with the Spirit from on high, set apart and anointed for His divine mission, filled with the power of God. Similarly He withheld His church until she, too, had passed through the same divine equipment for the completion of the ministry which He inaugurated and intrusted to her. "Be filled with the Spirit. Receive the Holy Ghost. Tarry until you are endued with power from on high. Await the promise of the Father." "It is to as many as the Lord our God shall

call." It is thus the Master speaks, and at the moment of our conversion. He arrested us with this intention in His heart, that we should know all that can be known by man of the empowering and indwelling Spirit of the Highest.

Have we apprehended this? It is too evident that we have not. There has been much activity in our lives, but little abounding fruit. The demons have withstood us, sightless eyes have received no sight from our touch, the paralyzed have heard us bid them walk, but have received no power, withered hands have touched our garment's hem in vain. We have ministered the gospel, but there have been no signs or wonders as corroboration. We have struck the Jordan, but the river has flowed on as before, refusing a passage. It is very pitiful! This is not what Christ intended when He placed His arresting hand on us and said, "Come ye after Me, and I will cause you to become fishers of men."

Let us not be content with our ineffective service, but leave it behind forever. As far as we can, let us forget it and reach forward to those blessed possibilities that await us in Jesus. If we have known already some measure of the divine anointing, let us not count this to be a reason for resting content. The dew may evaporate, the sweet savor of the oil is exceedingly volatile, some fatal leak may steal away the fullness we have received. It is needful to seek and obtain successive infillings and anointings, always approximating to a closer apprehension of God's high calling in Christ Jesus.

Michael Angelo, on one occasion, entering the studio of his young pupil Raffaele, and finding his style too cramped, drew a chalk line across it, and wrote at the foot of the canvas the word *amplius*—broader, fuller, wider. That is God's perpetual word to us in relation to the filling of the Holy Spirit.

We can never have enough to satisfy His yearning desire. When we have apprehended most, there are always unexplored oceans and continents beyond.

CHRIST HAS APPREHENDED US FOR FELLOWSHIP IN HIS PRAYERS, SUFFERINGS, AND THRONE. "God is faithful, by whom ye were called into the fellowship of His Son."

Let us put this thought into an allegory. A rich banker has no son to succeed him in his business; his sister has married a man in poor circumstances; their only child is a bright, fascinating boy. One day when he has left school and is needing a business appointment, the banker visits the house, lays his hand on the lad's shoulder, and apprehends him with an offer of a situation in his business, but he does not reveal the purpose that lies deep in his heart. The lad begins at the bottom, but as one berth after another opens before him he steps up to each in turn and fulfils its

duties perfectly. He apprehends each part of his uncle's ideal as it is unveiled. Finally, one memorable afternoon, years having passed, the banker calls him into the private parlor and offers him partnership. This was what he intended from the first, but could only communicate as he found his protégé prepared to avail himself of his opportunities and show himself worthy.

Jesus apprehended us to be His partners and companions in His sorrows and joys, His temptations and victories. Let us not refuse so high an honor, but, renouncing our low conceptions and aims, apprehend that for which we were apprehended.

But there can be no finality. The nearer we get to Christ the more we shall realize the majestic proportions of His character. No one can estimate the magnificence of Mont Blanc from Geneva. Only after hours of traveling toward it does the traveler know how great



it is. So with the person of our blessed Lord. And if we encounter the Apostle Paul, a million years from now, in the meridian light of heaven, and accost him, we shall hear from his lips words similar to these we have been pondering : “ I count not myself to have apprehended : but forgetting the things which are behind, and reaching out to those before, I am pressing on.”

## LIFE WITHOUT MIRACLES

JOHN X. 41

BEYOND the Jordan! To the Jew living in Jerusalem that meant banishment indeed. The district there was called Perea, and it was comparatively desert. There were a few mountain torrents which made their impetuous way down to the Jordan, patches of fruitful soil, and a few scattered villages; but for the most part the population was poor and sparse, and destitute of the culture which reigned in Jerusalem. Why, then, did our Lord come hither to spend the last hours of His life? Would not Nazareth welcome Him to His early home, or Capernaum provide Him a resting-place in a marble palace washed by the caressing waters of the lake He

loved so well? Would He not be better lodged at Jerusalem in the palace of Caiaphas, the pretorium of Herod, or even the temple itself? Alas! all these were shut against Him by the relentless hate of His enemies. Perea alone could offer Him a resting-place.

There was a peculiar fascination attaching to Perea. It was the place where John had first baptized. Those desolate hills had been black with crowds gathered from all the land to hear the crying of that trumpet voice; those waters had been the scene of countless baptisms; the people around had many a story to tell of the appearance and life of the grand young prophet who had met his tragic end in the dungeons of Herod's castle. And as the disciples wandered over the ground in company with Christ, memory recalled the spot where some of them had been baptized, or others had seen him designate Jesus as the Lamb of God. Christ's own

mind must have been strangely moved by conflicting thoughts as He contrasted the radiant dawn of His ministry in this spot with the overcast skies that had since darkened above Him.

No sooner did our Lord find Himself in comparative safety than He threw Himself into His much-loved work of preaching the gospel, working miracles, and healing all who were diseased. Crowds gathered around Him—many from the immediate neighborhood, some from a greater distance; but as they stood on that memorable spot, old memories were stirred; the place, with its surroundings, even to the stones that lay in the river-bed, forcefully reminded them of the great life set as a jewel in these rugged scenes. They confessed the mighty gulf which severed him from Christ—"John did no miracle;" but they gladly emphasized the fact that all things which he had spoken of Christ were true.

## I. GOD'S VINDICATION OF APPARENT FAILURE

To the eye of the casual observer the Baptist seemed to have failed. The morning star had paled before the sunrise; the crowds who had gathered round the Bridegroom's friend ebbed slowly and steadily away to follow the Bridegroom Himself. His disciples half reproachfully said, "Master, He to whom thou barest witness beyond Jordan, the same has commenced to baptize, and all men come to Him." The faithful few that gathered around him must have deeply felt that they were the adherents of a dwindling cause, which was destined gradually to come to an end. And this was only a prelude to the immuring of this brave soul within the dark walls of Herod's dungeons. Like an eagle with broken wing, the Baptist lay spent and powerless. And there captivity, the lack of the ministry of nature, which had been second only to the voice of God, the in-

ability to understand why Christ did not deliver him, if He were indeed the Messiah, led to a still greater lapse, and he sent to ask whether Jesus of Nazareth were after all what he had announced Him to be. "Art Thou He that should come, or look we for another?"

Finally, down the long corridor, the executioner came to his cell, the sword gleamed, the dissevered head fell from the body, and from that subterranean prison his spirit returned to God. How sad and disastrous seemed such a termination to a life which had once been the center of the national thought and movement! Was it not all a failure? Had not John made a profound mistake in following his lofty ideals? Had not God Himself deserted His faithful servant? Was it after all a real voice that spoke from the opened heaven?

A brief interval passed, and they that dwelt on the earth rejoiced over him and made merry, and sent gifts one to another because he had tormented them

that were on the earth. Then God took up the cause of His faithful martyr, and vindicated him through the tribute which the crowds paid his memory as they gathered in Perea. "John was true," the people said. "What he said has been verified by the event." He had said that Christ was from heaven, and above all, and *it was true*. He had said that Christ was the true Bridegroom of faithful souls, and *it was true*. He had said that the Father did not give Him the Holy Spirit by measure, and *it was true*. He had said that He was the Lamb of God taking away the sins of the world, and *it was true*. John had said many other things about Christ, which they had treasured and now recalled. But among them all there was no statement made about Christ which was not true. This strengthened their faith in the Lord Jesus, but it also vindicated the Baptist as the true prophet of the Most High.

Thus it has often been since, and may be for you and me. About that mother's grave you may gather and say, "She was not brilliant or greatly remarkable, but she spoke true words of Jesus Christ which will never die." So of some Sunday-school teacher, or minister, who seems to have been a voice crying in the wilderness, and to have passed away before accomplishing any lasting monument: "He did no miracle, but he spoke true words for Christ." Do not look for success or dread failure. Go on day by day, fulfilling the task of the day, and leaving the results with God. You know not what you are doing; you are scattering seeds which will yield harvests when you lie beneath the sod of the valley. God will vindicate you, and some day, as men recall your memory, if they say that you wrought no miracle, they will also say that whatever you spoke of this Man was true.



## II. THE TEST OF EXPERIENCE

These are days in which the Bible is greatly discredited. There are those who appear to delight in hunting out discrepancies in the venerable record of God's dealings with men. The higher critics in many cases appear to me to be devoid of that reverence for the Spirit of God and the religious life of men which should make one inclined to trust them. In many points they contradict each other, and few of their decisions are likely to remain unchallenged when a few more years have passed over. The true policy of the Christian church is to wait until the critics have agreed among themselves and we really know what are the conclusions that they unanimously present.

In the meanwhile, it is doubtless a matter of concern to many Christians to know how to hold to their confidence in that sacred volume which they had been accustomed to consider the authoritative

Word of the Most High. To read the books which are constantly pouring from the press would take more time than most of us can afford; to understand and combat their objections would take greater scholarship than is within our reach. Even if we were to canvass the matter to the bottom, it is not probable that our evidence would be taken, in the court of general opinion, as against scholars and literatists. What, then, can we do? May we not adopt the method suggested by our text, and vindicate the truth of the Bible by comparing its statements with what we have discovered through personal association with the Lord Jesus?

The Bible says that the peace of God comes to those who trust in Him who died on the cross under Pontius Pilate, and was raised again according to the Scriptures. We have come, and trusted, and found peace. All that the Bible said in this respect is true.

The Bible says that if we open our hearts to the Spirit of God He will infill them with a holy hatred of sin, and with the hunger and thirst of a new life. We have acted upon the suggestion, and have been delivered from sins which had cursed and defiled our whole life. All that the Bible said in this respect is true.

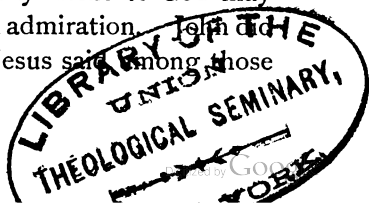
The Bible says that if we make our requests known to God through Jesus Christ He will abundantly answer them ; and hundreds of answered prayers, as we review them, attest that what the Bible said in this respect also is true.

The Bible says that Christ's gospel is the antidote of death ; that for those who believe in Him death is abolished, and the fear of it at an end. Now, we had been all our lifetime subject to bondage, but have forgotten to fear since Christ has shed upon our hearts the rays of immortality and life. In this also what the Bible said was true.

In these and in many other particulars we have verified for ourselves the Word of God, and are able to affirm, from the platform of personal experience, that all it says of Jesus Christ is true, and therefore it shall still be our guide through the unknown.

### III. THE OPPORTUNITY OF MODERATE ABILITY

You may be very discontented with yourself. You are no genius, have no brilliant gifts, and are inconspicuous for any special faculty. Mediocrity is the law of your existence. Your days are remarkable for nothing but sameness and insipidity, always spent within the same small room, tethered by the same short string, and surrounded by the same ignorant and uncongenial people. Yet you may live a great life, and one on which angels on their way home to God may loiter to look with admiration. John said no miracle, but Jesus said among those



that were born of women there had not appeared a greater than he.

Set yourself to say true things about Jesus Christ. You cannot preach the set speech or studied discourse, but you may always set forth what you have known and seen of Him who still manifests Himself to loving and believing hearts. John's main business was to bear witness to the Light, that all men through Him might believe; and this may be yours and mine.

*Do it privately.* John did not only speak of Jesus to the throng, but when standing with two of his disciples, looking upon Jesus as He walked, he said, "Behold the Lamb of God!" Let us use the opportunities of daily life to speak of our dearest Lord.

*Do it experimentally.* "I saw, and bare record," said John. We cannot have the opened heaven and the audible voice, as he; but these are not the best evidences, for, though John had enjoyed

them, he doubted. We have a more sure basis, because we may daily see and handle the good Word of life.

*Do it unostentatiously.* John was content to be only a voice, if men would think of Christ. Be willing to be only a voice, heard but not seen; a mirror whose surface is lost to view, because it reflects the dazzling glory of the sun; a breeze that springs up just before daylight, and says, "The dawn! the dawn!" and then dies away. But this can never be till we are altogether taken up with Christ; and when that happens there will be no effort to speak of Him, nothing unnatural, forced, or strained, no breach of the laws of Christian courtesy. "I should have told him to mind his own business," said a gentleman to his wife, when she told him that a man of God had spoken to her about her soul. "If you had heard him speak," was the reply, "you would have thought that that was his business."

Do not long after wealth; the men who have done most for the world have been those who could truly say, "Silver and gold have I none." Do not long after position; some of the worst men that ever lived were nobly born, while the uncrowned kings of the race have sprung from the ranks of poverty. Do not long for genius; it is very doubtful whether mere genius has done much for the world. It is inclined to be spasmodic, fluctuating, unreliable. Be content if you can do no miracle; live to give the world a true conception of the unseen Lord. Put away self-indulgence, whether of the sense or thought, for this will undermine the better qualities of the heart. Carefully check impatience, uncharity, and insincerity of speech or manner. Embody in heart and life the meekness and gentleness, the purity and truth of the Lord Jesus. Do the commonest and smallest things as beneath His eye. Are you beset with chafing irritations

and annoyances? Bear them as the martyrs the pillory and the torture chamber. If you must live with uncongenial people, set to their conquest by love. If you have made a great mistake in your life, do not let it becloud all of it, but, locking the secret in your breast, compel it to yield strength and sweetness. You may do all these things by the peace of God, and without brilliant talent; and acting thus you will do more real good than rank, with its aristocratic bearing, wealth, with its golden shower, and genius, with its meteoric flash.

We are doing more good than we know, sowing seeds, starting streamlets, giving men true thoughts of Christ, to which men will refer one day as the first things that started them thinking of Him; and, of my part, I shall be satisfied if no great mausoleum is raised over my grave, but that simple souls shall gather there when I am gone, and



say, "He was a good man; he wrought no miracles, but he spake words about Christ which led me to know Him for myself." John did no miracles, but whatsoever things he said of this Man were true.

**“WHERE IS THE LAMB?”**  
**“BEHOLD THE LAMB OF GOD!”**

GENESIS XXII. ; JOHN I. 29

AN old-world story, which comes from the calm, meditative Eastern life—can it help us in these great Western cities, with their swift and arrowy currents, always rushing so fast and bearing us with them? Yes, because it is ever the same heart, which beats alike under the flowing robes of the Arab sheik and the broadcloth of the European or American man of business; the same agony of hope and fear, the same passions, the same marvelous mystery of life. This is why the Bible, which deals with these deepest questions, can never grow old. Every generation looks into its calm depths and sees its own face.

It was a great joy when that little child budded on the old tree of Abraham's life. He had suffered much : when he left Charran, tearing himself from kith and kin ; when Lot chose his own path ; when he denied his wife, and knew that he had acted ignobly and meanly ; when he saw the plain of Sodom smoking as a furnace. But his greatest trouble for years had been that there was no childish prattle in his tent which he could recognize as the absolute fulfilment of his hope and love. The tent had many treasures, all but the treasure he desired most. And, though it was promised, it was hard to wait. Surely it is harder for men to wait than for women. Somehow we expend ourselves more in sitting still than in strenuous action. This waiting cut the furrows deep in that brow. But when the child came, the aged pair, for different reasons, called him Isaac, i.e., "laughter." Sarah remembered her laugh of unbelief ; Abra-

ham forgot his sorrow, and his mouth was filled with laughter and his tongue with singing. He grew young again; his features softened and mellowed with an unearthly light. And when the little feet could toddle, the old man could go nowhere without taking the child. That touch of baby fingers on his withered hands—how exquisite! Those incessant questions—how delicious! That trust which nestled to him—how absolutely satisfying!

Often as he saw the Canaanites around engaged in their horrible religious rites, offering up their children to Chemosh, Ashtaroth, Milcom, or their equivalents, he must have said to himself, "I could never do that, I shall never be asked to do it, I should never live through it; Thou wilt never ask it of me, wilt Thou?" But God did: "Take now thy son, thy only son Isaac, whom thou lovest, and offer him as a burnt-offering on one of the mountains of which I will tell thee."

Did not his heart stand still, as though transfixed and petrified? Did it not seem as though it were impossible to go through the ordeal? Did not the Gethsemane cry break from those strong lips: "If it be possible, let this cup pass from Me"?

Men say that God had no right to issue this command; but we have no right to disconnect the beginning of the story from the close; it is imperative to take it as a whole—the call to offer Isaac with the arrest, "Lay not thy hand upon the lad." God gave His servant the opportunity of showing that he loved Him as absolutely as the idolaters around their deities, and then stepped in to teach him that He did not require the last terrible act of immolation. It was enough that He was first in His servant's loyalty and affection, and he might take his beloved Isaac back again to be the light of his old age. God does not want to take His laughter-

making gifts away from us; He only desires for our own sake as for His own that we should hold them in Him, making Him first; giving them to Him to receive them again from His hand, through the altar of sacrifice, with the added luster of resurrection and immortal bloom.

#### I. ISAAC'S NATURAL INQUIRY

They had often been on similar errands before. When the old man went to worship God he loved to take the lad with him, and he always carried the wood, so soon as he was able, while the father's hand bore the fire and knife. On all other occasions also the father carried a lamb in the bosom of his dress; but on the present occasion it was lacking. It suddenly occurred to the quick-witted lad as a strange omission, and he turned to his father with the words, "My father." When God spoke to Abraham he was wont to answer calmly, "I

am here where Thou hast put me ;” and so he replied to the challenge of his son, “ Here am I.” It is well to possess our souls in patience, to dwell deep ; to let God’s peace sentinel our hearts, so that we may not be perturbed or disquieted by any sudden alarm. Then Isaac said, “ Behold the fire and the wood : but where is the lamb ? ”

That cry, articulate or not, has in every age arisen to human lips. The Jew asked it as he brought hecatombs of lambs and slew them till their blood flowed in crimson streams. Where is the Lamb which is to make these lambs needless, the substance of which these are shadows, the reality of which these are types ? The blood of these can never take away sin. Where is the Lamb whose one sufficient sacrifice and oblation shall suffice once and forever ?

We all instinctively repeat the inquiry, Where is the Lamb ? It is not enough to tell us of the divine clemency which

forgives our sin and remits its penalty ; we want to know how it is done, how such treatment consists with the demands of a broken law, with the claims of outraged justice, with the asseveration that the soul which sins must die. The forgiveness which is to appease our conscience, calm our fears, answer our questions, must stand foursquare with justice, must be consistent with equity and truth. God must be shown to be just, while He is the justifier of the ungodly.

Yes ; when you and I are met with the memories of past sins, we shall need the Lamb ; when we tread the verge of Jordan, we shall need the Lamb ; when we soar to worlds unknown, we shall need the Lamb ; when we stand in the presence of the eternal God, we shall cry as Isaac did, "Where is the Lamb ? Where is He whose blood shall atone, whose mind and sacrifice can avail to cancel the past, to give peace to the con-



science, and to answer the challenge of the divine order of the universe?"

## II. THE ASSURANCE OF FAITH

"God will provide Himself a lamb." Fear strove with faith in that aged breast; but faith would not give back a single inch. God would provide; somehow God would show a way which was consistent with His promise, with the parental love He had inspired and permitted, and with the present demand, that seemed so terrible and forbidding. There must be some solution of the whole, which would be perfectly satisfactory when once it was revealed. It might not be unveiled till the last moment, but as certainly as God was God it would emerge.

He probably did not tell Sarah, when they started in the early dawn, of the tragedy which seemed to threaten them. Why should he? It were useless to give her pain; they would most certainly.

return together. And when he uttered a brief farewell to his young men, he simply said that the lad and he were going forward to worship, and would presently come back to them. He distinctly used the pronoun *we*, because he was so sure that God would provide, though how he could not tell, but the Lord would provide.

On the floor of the mosque which now crowns Mount Moriah, the marble in one place is broken by a piece of the limestone rock, the summit of the hill which juts above its level surface. This is said to be the identical spot where the angel of the Lord arrested Abraham's uplifted hand; and if so, it is the identical spot where God stepped in to provide for His servant's dire extremity.

Probably no creature has ever entered so closely into the experiences of the great Father's heart in the supreme act of Calvary; but even Abraham stopped short of the final extremity of anguish:

he was spared, but God spared not Himself, inasmuch as He spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all.

Do not be afraid of God : dare to obey Him ; dare to lay your precious Isaac into His arms ; be sure to trust Him utterly with your dearest and costliest. He has not wished to despoil your life of its grace and joy, only to see whether He is first and best. He will provide for you. Do not look to the right or left, but to Him only ; you may have to come to the mountain-top, with its limestone ledge, but in the mount of the Lord the deliverance shall be seen : He will provide Himself the Lamb.

This was the message of all the prophets. They told in varying tones and metaphors of speech that God would certainly provide a Lamb. The noblest of them said that One would be led as a lamb to the slaughter, and would stand as a dumb sheep before her shearers.

And the heart of man received and certified their predictions, so sure was it that God could not leave man's soul in the Hades of corruption and disappointment, but would somehow show the path of atonement and redemption, and at length justify the prophetic instincts of those whom He had taught to hunger and thirst for righteousness.

### III. THE ANSWER OF THE BAPTIST

"Behold the Lamb of God, that taketh away the sin of the world!" I conceive of John the beloved speaking thus:

"In my youth I was the disciple of the greatest of woman born; strong, sinewy, with flashing eye and trumpet voice, he never lowered his glance or quaked before any—no, not even before Herod—till one day, as a few of us were gathered near him, we saw him suddenly change color, as a simple, peasant-like stranger passed across his vision at a

little distance. He pointed toward Him, and said, 'Behold the Lamb of God!'

"We did not particularly regard Him then; but on the following day the incident was repeated. Again our master indicated this simple, lowly Man as the Lamb of God, and we followed Him, saw where He lived, and left all to identify ourselves with His cause.

"Three years after I saw Him hanging on the cross, His brow wreathed with thorns, His body rent with wounds, His soul broken with anguish; it seemed to me as though He were burdened by a weight that was not His own, and were dying for sins which He had never done; and there came back to my mind the words of my master, 'Behold the Lamb of God, that taketh away the sin of the world!'

"Years after that, when in Patmos, with no sound to break the stillness but the scream of the sea-bird and the break

of the wave along the coast, the azure veil of heaven was rent, and I beheld the jasper throne and heard the chant of the seraphim; then in the midst of the throne, and of the living creatures, and of the angel throng, I beheld the Lamb as it had been slain, and again recalled the words which I heard on the other side of the gulf of tears, 'Behold the Lamb of God, that taketh away the sin of the world!'"

It is a true witness. God had laid on Him the iniquity of us all. Himself the Priest and the Victim, He transferred to His own head the curse and penalty of our sin; He was made sin for us; He bare our sins in His own body on the tree; He was accounted accursed because He represented those whose sin had brought them under the frown and curse of divine justice; He put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself. God forgives the penitent believing soul, not simply as an act of divine clemency, but

of justice. His pardon is based on righteousness. The just claims of His holy and righteous law have been met; nothing more can be asked or required. He is faithful to His Son and just to His claims on our behalf when He pardons and accepts all those who come unto Him in faith.

Behold Him! little child, and mature man; trembling penitent, and dying saint; youth with hope, and age with regretful memories! Behold the Lamb of God! Look, and look again! Let life become one prolonged and steadfast look, till the transforming beauty of Jesus pass into your features, as His peace shall guard and keep your heart. Then eternity will unfold still new delights in Him, in whom all that is lovely in character, all that is strong and just and righteous, blend in perfect harmony.

## "THE DIVINE VINDICATION"

REVELATION VI. 9-11

THE veil is drawn from before the seer's gaze, and he beholds the progress of war, pestilence, famine, as they decimate the populations of the world. These are scenes that make the heart turn sick. We ask, Has God forgotten the race for which His Son died? Is it after all the devil's world, given up to the wild passions of demons, effecting their full designs through men? Is there no hope or help but that the corruption that is in the world should pursue its course until it drops to pieces before the disintegrating forces of evil? Then the veil parts, and we see "God within the shadow, keeping watch upon His own."



What an evidence is given to us of the innumerable multitudes of those who have sealed their testimony for **Jesus** with their blood in that one of the seven seals is devoted to their condition and cry! It is as though one-seventh part of the history of mankind was concerned with the sufferings of those who have died for the Word of God and the testimony which they held.

The blood of the martyrs has always appealed to God from the days when Abel's cried to Him from the earth, which opened her mouth to receive it. From the arenas of Roman amphitheatres; from the rocks of Switzerland, down which "the bloody Piedmontese roll'd mother with infant"; from the hillsides of Scotland, whose heather was encrimsoned with the life-blood of the Covenanters; from the dungeons of the Inquisition, and the cities of the Netherlands, whose streets Alva made run with blood, there has always gone up an

appeal to the judgment of the righteous Judge. God has a great reckoning with the world, and especially with that infamous system which has drunk the blood of the saints and the blood of the martyrs of Jesus. Through the ages as they pass, inarticulate though it be to man's ear, in many cases not formulated into a cry by the sufferers themselves, the appeal is ever entering into the ear of the Lord God of Sabaoth, "How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost Thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?"

I. THE SCRIPTURAL RECOGNITION OF  
THE SUFFERER'S RIGHT OF AP-  
PEAL TO THE DIVINE VINDICA-  
TION

*It is necessary to distinguish between the various phases of the divine judgment.*

(1) The judgment of the world-spirit, which took place at the cross of Jesus. "Now is the judgment of this world," .

the Master said. In point of fact, though our Lord seemed to be the One on whom judgment was being passed, yet, in the sight of eternity, the prisoner at Pilate's bar and on the Roman cross was really judging the whole system of things by which He was being put to death, weighing it in the balances, and pronouncing its doom.

(2) There is the judgment-seat of Christ, the "bema" at which the servants of the King will have to stand at the conclusion of the present age, and render an account of the way in which they have used His talents.

(3) There is the judgment of the nations, of which our Lord speaks in Matthew xxv., a judgment which will apparently turn very largely upon their treatment of His brethren, the Jews, and upon their mercifulness to all who are in suffering and need.

(4) There is the judgment of the great white throne, at which God will explain

His reasons for His dealings with our race, and pronounce the final destiny of death and Hades.

But the judgment to which the martyrs appeal is apparently none of these. Throughout the Scripture, from the earliest days, God's saints have discerned just behind the veil of time and sense a judgment-seat, like that set up at the gate of every Eastern town, open to the appeal of every sufferer, of all the down-trodden and oppressed, and to which the plaintiff may 'go at any moment, lodging a complaint against high-handed wrong. No sooner is the blow struck, the patrimony wrested from the poor by injustice, the unrighteous act perpetrated, the malicious report concocted and circulated, than the oppressed may turn instantly and claim vindication on the part of Him who is inaccessible to bribe, or fear of man. When the Apostle James is remonstrating with those who had kept back the hire of their laborers,

he says, "Behold, the Judge standeth before the door." This is an instance of the consciousness that prevails throughout Scripture of the proximity of the judgment-seat. It is a profound mistake to think of God's judgment being reserved for the future only. It is always in process. True, He has appointed a day in which to judge this world, but He is judging it every day. Of course we shall stand before the judgment-seat of Christ at last, but let us not forget that we are standing before it every moment, and that at any hour those whom we have wronged may appeal from us to it.

*Notice the character of the appeal admitted:* "Wilt thou not judge and avenge?" There is a distinction between *avenge* and *revenge*, between *vengeance* and *revenge*. For the latter there is no room in the nature of God. He is not swept by passion; He did not even revenge the death of Calvary, ex-

cept with the hot coals of the day of Pentecost. Revenge carries with it the thought of malignant retaliation; avengement is the impartial act of the judge; and when martyrs ask God to avenge their wrongs, the primary thought is not the suffering of those who have wronged them, but the vindication of their character and of the moral government of the world. They say in effect, "Lay not this sin to their charge, but let it be known that Thou art God, and that the heavens do rule."

*The appeal may be made by the individual.* The Psalms of David are full of these appeals:

"Arise, O Lord, in Thine anger,  
Lift up Thyself against the rage of mine adversaries. . . .  
Judge me, O Lord, according to my righteousness,  
And to mine integrity that is in me."

Jeremiah perpetually appealed against the opposition of his age:

"O Lord of hosts, that judgest right-

eously, that triest the reins and the heart, let me see Thy vengeance on them: for unto Thee have I revealed my cause."

And of the supreme Sufferer it is said that "He committed Himself to Him that judgeth righteously."

*The appeal may be made by a community.*

In one of His parables our Lord depicts the church as a widow, bereaved of the presence of her Lord, oppressed by an adversary, and coming repeatedly to seek the righting of her cause: "Avenge me of mine adversary." So through the present age the church is ever lodging her complaint and appeal. She does not, and cannot, defend herself. She is as a flock of sheep in the midst of wolves; her one resort is flight into the presence of her Lord, saying, "Judge me, O God, and plead my cause against an ungodly nation: O deliver me from the deceitful and unjust man."

## II. THE AWARDS OF THE JUDGE ARE NOW BEING EXECUTED

We must distinguish between those which run into eternity and those which are limited to time. It is of these that we have to speak. God hears the cry of the poor, and avenges them; not simply beyond, but on this side of the portal of death. If we had quicker discernment we should no doubt see the daily infliction of those penalties which high-handed crime has deserved. And they are of the same nature as the wrongs which they avenge.

If a man sheds the blood of his fellow, by the hand of his fellow his own blood is shed (Gen. ix. 6).

When Adoni-bezek's thumbs and great toes were cut off he recognized the justice of God's requital, in that seventy kings, having their thumbs and great toes cut off, had gathered their meat under his table (Judges i. 7).



The man who had made the mothers of Israel childless was hewn in pieces by Samuel, and his mother rendered childless among women (1 Sam. xv. 32, 33).

As the result of inspired insight into the ways of God's providence, the Psalmist said :

“The Lord hath made Himself known,  
He hath executed judgment :  
The wicked is snared in the work of his own hands ;  
In the net which they hid is their own foot taken ”  
(Ps. ix. 15, 16).

Do not take the sword, our Saviour said, at the moment of His arrest ; they that take the sword with the sword shall perish (Matt. xxvi. 52).

The man who deceives women will be deceived by women. As by his vice he has brought anguish into the home of the working-man, so through the daughter of the poor his own child shall be made to stumble.

The publican who has brought indescribable woe on families by his sale of

drink shall live to see his own family decimated by the use of intoxicants.

A man who has obtained his wealth wrongfully will live to see that wealth a curse to his children; amid it all, he will be unsatisfied as Tantalus amid the fleeing waters, while the eagle of remorse will ever feed upon his own vitals.

England sells the opium to China, but her own empire of India is undermined by the growing craving for the drug.

The last Napoleon waded to the throne through seas of blood, and at Sedan, amid seas of blood, his empire sank.

It cannot be too deeply pondered by the wrong-doer, whether he be child of God or not, that sin carries in itself the seed of its own fatal penalty; that there is no need for God to arise and take a thunderbolt in hand; if only He keeps still and allows sin to work out its own result, according to His constitution of the world, the wrong-doer will be abundantly punished. Whatever may

be the penalties of the future, those of the present are awful enough.

Track the progress of God's judgments through history. Nineveh, Babylon, Egypt, the successive empires of Xerxes, Cyrus, and Alexander, the Eastern Church, the empire of Napoleon Bonaparte—these are but specimens of instances, with which history teems, of the way in which the individual or system which has failed to realize the divine purpose, or has become laden with oppression and bloodshed, has been swept from the face of the earth by the besom of just retribution. God's fan is in His hand. He is ever winnowing the chaff from the wheat, and consigning it to the quenchless flame. Whatsoever a man, a church, or a nation sows, that also it shall reap.

### III. THE CHURCH'S WITNESS TO THE CHARACTER OF HER MASTER

The delays of Heaven are undeniably puzzling. Is there one of us who has

not sighed, often enough, "How long, O Lord? How long this reign of Satan, this oppression of the innocent, this triumph of high-handed wrong, this apparent unevenness in the awards to the oppressed and the oppressor?" From the widow, defrauded of her rights; the fatherless, mulcted of their patrimony; the poor clerk, ground down to a miserable yearly pittance on which it is impossible to live; the seamstress, whose beggarly wage exposes her to the direst temptation, the incessant appeal arises to the ears of the Lord God of hosts, "How long, O Master? How long?"

We must not, however, measure the length of God's delay by the standard of our few years, but by the cycles of His ages. Compared with the gnat's brief existence an hour is long, but with man's how short! When Jesus said that God would avenge His own elect *speedily*, He must have been thinking of the years of the right hand of the Most High, with whom a thousand years are

as a watch in the night. Be patient, O child of mortality ; Jesus comes quickly. To thee His chariots seem to tarry, only because thy days are a handbreadth ; but, judged by the standards of eternity, He rides upon a cherub and flies, He hastens on the swift wings of the wind to avenge the poor of the earth and set them at ease from those who puff at them.

In the meanwhile we must maintain our witness to our Master's character.

He is *holy*. There is no complicity between Him and the powers of darkness.

He is *true*. He said that He would destroy the works of the devil, and He will. He said that He would come again and take us to Himself, and He will. He said that He would adjust and restore the desolations of the ages, and He will. He is true. He lays judgment to the line, and righteousness to the plummet, with unerring accuracy ; and at last the whole church will burst

into the ascription of adoration, standing on the sea of glass, and saying, "Great and marvelous are Thy works, O Lord God, the Almighty; righteous and true are Thy ways, Thou King of the ages."

In the meanwhile white robes are given to the martyr throng, the attire of priests, that they may join in the universal appeal to Christ to come. The "and see" of the older version is rightly omitted by the Revised Version in verses 1, 3, 5, 7. Each event that sweeps across our world only stimulates the more eager and intense demand that Christ should make haste and come to adjust all wrongs, to vindicate righteousness, and to take the kingdom for God, even the Father. And in answer He says, "Behold, I come."

## DEATH A PARENTHESIS IN LIFE

REVELATION I. 17, 18

DEATH was a very familiar thought to the little church at Ephesus, from which the holy apostle had been torn. It was no uncommon experience for young maiden or aged man to be suddenly transferred from the ranks of the militant to those of the triumphant church. There was therefore a special aptitude in this vision of One who had Himself become dead, but was living on the other side of death, in all the radiant glory of an assured victory. It showed that the enforced plunge into the sullen waters of the dark cave of death would conduct the diver under the teeth of the black portcullis into a summer sea.

*The Christian doctrine of resurrection differs altogether from Plato's reasonings about the immortality of the soul.* Deep in the heart of man there rises the spring of an immortal hope. As corn is indigenous to every soil, so belief in the immortality of the soul is part of the constitution of every child of Adam. It is instinctive, necessary, universal. It may be tampered with, and almost crushed out of existence, but it will at any moment arise and assert itself. It played a very distinct and important part in the reasonings of the old Greek philosophers.

But immortality is not the same thing as resurrection. *Plato* was wont to say that at death the soul would leave the body like an emancipated eagle, to soar into the empyrean; but he had no conception of a future state which included the upraising of the body from the dust of death. *Christ* taught that in the resurrection the body was immortal as well as the soul; that there was a germ



of life hidden somewhere in this body of humiliation, as there is a life-germ in each corn of wheat cast into the ground, and that at His summons it would yield a body like unto His glorious body. In other words, Christ taught that not a part of man, but the whole, was destined to pass through death unto the life eternal; and it was for this reason that He appeared to John, in this significant vision, with head as white as snow, and feet that glowed like fire, and hands holding the stars—the attributes of the human form. Man was created with spirit, soul, and body. As such he has been redeemed, as such he will be restored. The Creator and the Redeemer is one; and there is naught that death shall hold as its prey, saving what is temporary and earthly. This mortal shall put on immortality, this corruptible incorruption; “then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory.”

*The Scripture doctrine of resurrection is attested by one well-ascertained fact.*

In Plato's charming dialogue of the *Phædo*, the reader will find an account of the last conversation which Socrates had with his friends. On the day of his execution his disciples went to see him early in the morning. Among other things, Socrates gave this commission to Cebes (one of the party present):

"Tell Evenus to follow me as quickly as he can, if he is wise. I, it seems, shall depart to-day; for that is the will of the Athenians."

Then he considered the question, "Why, in a case where death is better than life, a man should not hasten his own end." He finds the answer to be, "Because man is a prisoner, and has no right to release himself, being in fact a sort of possession of the gods, who will summon him at their pleasure."

"Then," says Cebes, "the wise man will sorrow and the fool rejoice at leav-

ing his masters the gods, and passing out of life."

"Not so," is the reply, "for I am persuaded that I am going to other gods, who are wise and good, and also (I trust) to men departed, who are better than those I leave behind; therefore I do not grieve, as otherwise I might, for I have good hope that there is yet something awaiting the dead, and, as has been said of old, some far better lot for the good than for the wicked."

This is very beautiful, especially when we consider the poor flickering torch by the light of which the speaker groped to such a conclusion; but we cannot fail to notice the uncertainty which lies upon his words, as morning haze over the landscape. *I trust, I have good hope, I am persuaded*—these are his strongest words. Whereas the Christian is able to say, "I *know* in whom I have believed," and anticipates resurrection and eternal life with the assurance with

which a man refers to facts that have happened within his certain knowledge.

We do not need to argue from nature, or the inequality of reward and punishment in the present life, or the intuitions of the soul, when we attempt to establish the resurrection. It is enough to point to the empty but well-ordered grave in Joseph's garden. On the night of the day of crucifixion they brought a lifeless body there, and wrapped it in the swathing-bands of death, as Mary had wrapped it in the swaddling-clothes of babyhood. All the next day it lay there; when the next morning broke it was gone, the stone rolled from the mouth of the grave, the linen clothes lying well wrapped together, the keepers trembling with fear. And those who knew Him best had been compelled to recognize that He was with them again, in a body that differed indeed from the one with which they had been so familiar, though it was clearly identical with

it; just as the perfect flower differs from the bulb you sow in the wintry soil, and yet is unmistakably the same.

Our religion rests on this fact of Christ's resurrection. Therein He was declared to be the Son of God with power; therein all His own statements were verified; therein the Scriptures were fulfilled; therein the sufficiency of His sacrificial work was substantiated and approved; therein resurrection took its place among the facts and phenomena of the world, the law of which might not be understood, but its certainty was beyond question.

But perhaps He had not really died! John, what do you say to this? "I witnessed His last moments; standing beneath His cross, I heard His last deep sigh as He bowed His head on His breast and gave up the ghost; shortly afterward a soldier pierced His side, and as he withdrew his spear-head, blood and water gushed out, and attested

His death as being already accomplished. This, indeed, was so evident that the Roman soldiers did not think it worth their while to break one of His bones; and the Roman centurion had no hesitation in certifying Pilate that His body might be handed over to His friends."

Perhaps His body was stolen! John, what do you say to this? "When the thief rifles the house of the living, or the last home of the dead, he leaves everything in disarray—the drapery of the room disheveled, the casket of the jewels broken, all that is loose and light tossed in confusion or borne away. But when we entered into the deserted tomb we found all so orderly and neat that we were convinced that the foot of violence or haste had not entered there; surely our Master with His own hand had wrapped together the cerements of death, which loving hands had wrapped about His body."

*Notice the remarkable manner in*

*which death is here referred to by the Master of life.* "I am He that liveth," or, as the Revised Version puts it, "the Living One." These words tell the mystery of His eternal being. This is the life which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us, which has neither past nor future, neither beginning nor end, and is separated by an impassable gulf from the highest life of the creature. This life, emerging from reaches of being which have no limit or shore, came down from the far eternities to the cross, reared on the place of a skull. All the life of the Son of God, which He had shared with the Father from eternity, is comprehended in this expression.

"Behold, I am alive forevermore." This life is slightly different from the former; it is not so much the essential life of the Godhead as the life of the God-man, who has taken into Himself our nature, weaving it into His own in an indissoluble union, and wearing it

forever. "Thou art a priest forever."  
"He ever liveth to make intercession."  
"Not after the law of a carnal commandment, but after the power of an endless life." The divine and eternal are both present, but they have taken on them a flavor and tone borrowed of the earthly life of the Lord, just as the waters of a mighty river will be affected by the soil over which they flow.

Between these two great words, indicating the life of the eternal God and that of the Mediator, who is God with man, there is inserted the one mysterious phrase, "I became dead." We need say nothing of the idea of voluntariness which these words convey, and which leads us to compare them with the Master's own assertion that He laid down His life of Himself. It is rather our purpose to emphasize their suggestion that death is not a condition but a doorway, not a state but a transition, not a long home but an experience, a



birth, a stepping across the frontier, the traversing of a bridge which it takes but an instant to cross, and conducts, not, as in Venice, from a palace to a prison, but the reverse. The traveler who pierces the Alps leaves behind the precipices, dashing streams, and wild grandeur of Switzerland, to emerge, after a brief period of darkness, in the radiant sunshine of Italy. Death is just that—the passing through a shadow from the light of life which comes to its edge on the one side, into the light of life which comes to its edge on the other. The expression used by the Lord clearly indicates that, in His case, death was the slightest possible parenthesis between two realms of life.

We speak of the dead; but, in point of fact, there are no dead except such as are dead in trespasses and sins. Those whom we call dead are such as have died. They have passed through death, bowing their meek heads beneath its

frowning portal, and passing out into a broader, freer, gladder life. So with ourselves. We are living now in the enjoyment of light and air, and the energy of life. If the Lord do not first come, we shall pass through the physical phenomenon that closes this mortal life, as we passed through that which commenced it, and probably shall be as unconscious of the one as we were of the other. After the briefest possible interval, such as the Bible calls "the twinkling of an eye," we shall wake up to find ourselves amid the sights and sounds of eternity.

*Beyond the article of death, our Saviour lives forever.* Lives to make intercession for the weakest and feeblest, for those that are ignorant and out of the way. Lives as our representative and priest, bearing our names before God. Lives to welcome each wayworn pilgrim as he passes through the gateway and lifts a wan, tear-worn face to be kissed

by those gentle human lips. Lives to be the fountain of life, of which we may drink more abundantly forevermore. Lives to lead us, as a shepherd his flock, ever farther into the heart of the country where the sun never sets, because the Lord has become an everlasting light.

There is life beyond death for all His saints. In the circle of His life they live. In the presence of His glory they are enlightened. The little child, taken from its fond mother; the aged Simeons and Hannahs, strong soldier-spirits and weak, tender ones; such as were saved through a storm of trouble, and those who came into harbor with every sail spread—they are all there, and await our coming. All live unto Him. We go not to death, but to life. The sun dips for a moment under the rim of the horizon, and then springs up as a bridegroom emerges from his chamber, to traverse the boundless circles of immortal and infinite existence.

*The living Christ holds the keys of death and Hades.* In death He destroyed the devil and abolished death. There was a transference of power from the prince of darkness to the Lord of life; from those strong hands which had grasped the keys with such indomitable energy since the time of Adam's fall until they were wrenched from them by a stronger than he. Smiting him to the ground, the Saviour cried, "I will be thy plague, O death; thy destruction, O grave!" And from that moment the supreme control of death and the grave and the resurrection has been vested in the Son of man, who holds it as the arbiter of our destinies and the representative of our highest interests.

The keys of death! Then not one of us can pass the portal till He unlock the door. The malice of our foes may force us toward that small slit in the long dark wall that shuts out the unseen, but they cannot force us through until

Jesus turns the key; and He will not turn it until the predestined moment has struck.

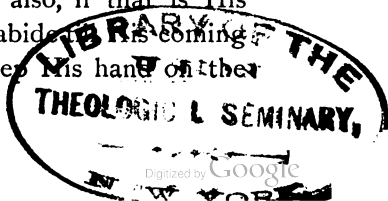
The keys of death! Then not one of our dear ones passes from us apart from His will and choice. Did the door open the other day, and let your beloved pass through, while a momentary flood of light lit up the chamber of his departure? Jesus was there. You might have detected Him had not your eyes been holden. Do not repine too bitterly, lest you sin against His perfect wisdom and hurt His tender heart.

The keys of death! Then He has the key of every grave in the quiet country parish or the crowded city cemetery. Precious in His eyes are those mounds of earth which hold the bodies He redeemed. Not one key shall be mislaid or lost. You may keep a grave decked with sweet flowers, but He is the custodian of its treasure. At the moment of resurrection He will un-

lock the door, and bid the imprisoned body arise in the likeness of His own.

The keys of Hades! He went there when He died, and passed through the dim world, announcing His victory, asserting His supremacy. With Him dwell the spirits of the departed. Each is intrusted to His custodianship. Where they are, what they are doing, their spheres of bliss, *all* lie under His appointment. In a sublime sense we may apply to Him some olden words that acquire a new meaning in this application, remembering only that Hades is palace rather than prison: "The keeper of the prison committed to Joseph's hand all the prisoners that were in the prison; and whatsoever they did there, He was the doer of it."

The keys of Hades! Our beloved are with Him. They sleep in Jesus. We shall be with Him also, if that is His will, rather than to abide in His coming again. He will keep His hand on the



door until the time appointed for its opening, that through it myriads of redeemed spirits may issue forth to accompany Him to the closing scenes of human history. Then He will open it. When the full procession is prepared upon the other side, and the destined hour has struck, the wards of the lock will yield before the pressure of His key, and the Lord shall come with ten thousand of His saints, descending into the air, coming to take to Himself His great power and reign.

The keys of death and Hades! Then it must be within His power to deal finally with each. At His word death and Hades shall give up the dead which are in them, before they are themselves cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death, to escape which we must be identified with the eternal life. On all such death hath no power, Hades no permanent hold, but they shall live and reign with God and the Lamb forever. Because He lives they shall live also!

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