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THE INWARD WITNESS

AND OTHER DISCOURSES

BY THE

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PREFACE.

MOST of these Discourses were officially delivered, as they severally show, on important occasions; and their publication is in a certain sense matter of duty. A few have been added in deference to the more or less authoritative request of some who heard them.

The title of the first Charge has been adopted for the volume, because it suggests the leading idea that runs through the whole: the indwelling of the Incarnate Son of God in the believer, as the fundamental truth of Christian life.

The volume is respectfully commended to all who have had anything to do with its public appearance; but especially to the young ministers who will find in it the ordination charges which they desired to see in print. May the Lord vouchsafe His blessing!

DIDSBURY COLLEGE,
Christmas, 1884.

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THE INWARD WITNESS OF LIFE IN THE SON.*

"He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself: he that believeth not God hath made Him a liar; because he believeth not the record that God gave of His Son."—1 JOHN v. 10.

IN these words, found at the close of the last book of the New Testament, revelation takes its farewell in a final tribute to its own evidences. A few terse, vivid, antithetical statements sum up all that has been said or need be said concerning the relations of the testimony of God, external and internal, to man's faith or unbelief.

The subject makes its appeal to you, dear brethren, by your office of witnesses for the Lord Jesus. To that office you have been set apart this day by the imposition of hands and the consecration of the Spirit. Hitherto you have been probationers, undergoing a preparatory discipline: testing yourselves and tested of others. Called some time since and chosen, you are now counted faithful, and put into the ministry. In that ministry you will have to interpret the testimony of God to mankind, and to take a most solemn part in the process of the decisions of men's acceptance or rejection. It is well

* A Charge delivered to sixteen newly-ordained Ministers, in Brunswick Chapel, Macclesfield, on Thursday, July 31, 1884.

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for you to be reminded of the nature and limits of your responsibility in so solemn a matter. Your hearts will be in sympathy with the subject while listening to the last accents of the Bible on such a theme as this.

But every soul in this assembly has almost an equal interest in the topic I have chosen. It belongs to those themes which make ministers and people one. We are in a certain sense all alike the Lord's witnesses; and while this charge is delivered none will be auditors and spectators only. Of course those to whom it is addressed will have a special lot in this matter which the congregation will not deny them; and they themselves will receive their own portion all the more joyfully because they receive it in common with you all. Let us unite in supplicating the aid of the Holy Spirit, whose witnessing office receives here its supreme tribute, that we may study together these final sayings concerning the testimonies of God externally given for faith and internally sealed to faith. Especially do you, as now ordained to this office, lift up your hearts for your privilege and expect it. While the Spirit is near to us all, He is very specially near to you this day. May you feel His power through my ministry, and my voice be lost in His!

I.

Mark first the tribute to the one object of all the external testimonies of revelation. "This is the witness of God that He hath witnessed of His

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Son." "And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in His Son." There are testimonies many and witnesses many; but to us there is only one witness of God. Looking back on all the past, the Bible, the depository of unnumbered testimonies, closes with these great words. Gathering up the voices of apostles and prophets, reducing all the books and all the records to their essence, summing all the teachings of Nature, providence and grace through the whole compass of the divine manifestations in every region of truth,—the issue, end and consummation of all is the Son of God, the life of men. The strain of revelation here ceases with the keynote that began it. The unlimited varieties of the divine disclosures at sundry times and in divers manners, on every subject concerning the government of God and our destiny, our sin and His mercy, our separation from Him and our return, our history in time encompassed by His eternity, find here their unity and "agree in one." All that we call the Gospel is here declared to be a twofold witness: as to God, He sends His Son; as to us, that Son is our life, our eternal life. I have to charge you, henceforward interpreters of the divine records, to give to these the prominence which revelation gives them.

As to the former: it is hard to exaggerate the importance of this grand compendium of the witness of heaven to earth. We must not disparage what we call the testimonies of Nature to the "everlasting power and divinity." God had not left Himself unwitnessed before His Son came. But we are taught here that the witness borne concerning His

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Son is the final, perfect and consummate revelation of God Himself. This is the last word of theology proper, lighting up all the rest, that the Father of an eternal Son through that Son created and redeemed the world. By this name he was not known to the early fathers. It was the mystery hid from, or hid in, ages and generations, "the mystery of God, even Christ," "the Firstborn before every creature," "the Image of the Invisible God," who created man in His own image and by redemption gave him back that image lost. Remember, brethren, that you are from this day forward witnesses of the Son of God. "Ye shall be witnesses of Me" He said to His apostles, and in your degree He says the same to you: "of Me first, Myself and my Person." Never forget the unspeakable emphasis of this. He left the world,—not as He should have left it on the human theory, commanding His apostles to vindicate the sanctity of the neglected name of Jehovah among the nations, but—making Himself the Filial Representative of the Godhead. "Ye are My witnesses:" it is the very language of the ancient Jehovah. You must know no truth about God but as it "is in Jesus:" you must take every doctrine to the holy mount that it may be, not abolished there, but transfigured. I must press the terse text upon your mind, "The witness of God is this, that He hath borne witness concerning His Son;" even as His Son in turn bears witness of the Father, and the Holy Spirit bears witness of both. The more firmly you hold the Eternal Sonship the more clear will be your convictions as to the Holy Trinity, as

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to the relation of the Second Person to mankind, as to the possibility of the humiliation of the incarnate Son, as to the soleness and necessary sinlessness of His personality, and as to the unlimited virtue of His atonement. Here will be one test of your future fidelity. If you testify well of Jesus, the Son of God, we shall be well content with you. Other testimonies you may indistinctly, unlearnedly, falteringly utter. On other subjects, of science and philosophy and the economy of human life, you have strictly speaking no testimony to bear: you are not witnesses of these things, though you may bring them into the service of your own testimony. Your witness is that of God, and it is concerning His Son. That you must deliver with great distinctness; and let me say that your value to us and to the church will be just what your witness on this high subject is.

In the other branch of the witness to the Son, that He is our life, the whole work of Christ has its last and greatest name. Propitiation, atonement, salvation, cleansing, and if there be any other, they all spring from and converge to life. The testimony of Jesus in Old Testament and New, in prophetic type and apostolic teaching, before His coming, when He came, and after His ascension, is always this, that from Him life flows to us. And this word "flows" at once suggests that illustration of the divine testimony which belongs essentially to our text. At the cross of Christ St. John saw—he alone records and probably he alone saw—an absolutely unique and most mysterious event, which he regarded as no less than a miraculous divine

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testimony to our life in Christ's death. The centurion cried, when he saw certain tokens that amazed him, "Truly this was the Son of God!" St. John's more personal token, as he stood hard by the centurion, was the flowing of the living blood of our redemption from the Lord's dead and riven side, and from the same dead and riven side, in the same living stream, the water of our regeneration and life. This was no natural event; had no physiological possibility; had little to do, save in the exaggerations of commentators, with any proof of the Lord's death. It was simply and purely a divine testimony. No miracle in the Gospels was more fully miraculous; nor was the voice at the transfiguration more distinct. It said: "This living blood from the dead side of the Son of God, who hath life in Himself, is My token that I receive the atonement for man; and this living water flowing from the same fountain is My token that all who believe in Him shall have within them a well of water springing up into everlasting life." This we know is the only symbolical meaning of blood and water in St. John; and his eyes were opened to read that meaning and no other in the great sight he saw when the sun shone out after the thick darkness. Let me be bold to say, that this was the symbolical, visible and real illustration of the final testimony of the epistle and of the Bible to the finished work of Christ. Just after the "It is finished," the two streams flowed together. Think not too much of the soldier's spear. "He was smitten of God and afflicted:" from above and not from below. No mortal stroke could have unsealed that treasure: it was poured out by the

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Father's hand. It was the witness of God that He was testifying of His Son. Again let me beseech you never to forget this. As the value and the beauty and the success and the glory of your testimony will be that it maintains the eternal divinity of the Son in human nature, so it will be in this that you preach and teach eternal life through that Son's atonement: in the stream that for ever washes away human guilt and stain, and in the stream that pours into man's dead soul eternal life. On these two, the Eternal Father and the Eternal Son, hangs all theology; on these two, the Son of God and the life of man, hangs all atoning redemption; and on these two, the flowing blood and the flowing water, hang all the processes of personal salvation. And again I say, my brethren beloved, that you will be all and each, in honour before God and usefulness in the church, just what your testimony is on these subjects also.

Mark now the force of this final teaching as to the external witness borne to these great truths for human probation. We need not very curiously inquire what constitutes the great external record. St. John leaves that indefinite, laying his stress rather on its sufficiency for the purpose of man's trial. There are the documents of revelation: one continuous tribute of God in heaven to His Son on earth, confirmed by every verification that the laws of human nature ought to demand. There is the visible church in the world, as conspicuous a witness of the Son of God as the sun in the heavens is witness of its creator. There is the new life already among men, symbolized at the cross by the water

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and the blood and always by the sacraments of the church, giving its argument for Christianity with strengthening force from generation to generation. But I must point out to you that the pith of this final word is, that the whole economy of external evidence is meant for every man and makes every man responsible. The light of this testimony has been kindled, and it lighteth every man who enters this world; waiting for him even as the natural sun waits for him. As to those who are without, we must always remember the Lord's words, "If I had not come they had not had sin, the sin of rejecting Me." Your mission will not require you to determine their case, and if you are wise you will leave them to their Master and Judge. But you must think of every man born under the light of Christianity as opening his eyes on a great foreordained and prearranged witness for Jesus the Son of God. Other foreordained and prearranged witnesses wait for him, but this is greater. The earth he inhabits yields a thousand tokens that he was sent into it to be at once its servant and its lord: to find in it the sphere of his probation. The family and the state wait for him with probationary obligations and responsibilities. So does Christianity. The same voice of God which gives evidence for itself in those other departments gives greater evidence here: it enforces a distinct, clear, imperative claim, the rejection of which makes God, the author of Nature and of man's moral constitution, a liar. We are so framed as to believe on fair evidence. Faith links every man with the unseen, the spiritual, the supernatural order: therefore with this life largely and still more

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largely with the life to come; accepting man's evidence for the former, the evidence of God for the latter. But the witness of God for the things of God is greater: having to do with a transcendently greater object and accompanied by special demonstrations of the Spirit, throwing the responsibility on the unbeliever. The last word of the New Testament about evidence is very bold. It is not in the modern style of apology for unbelief, which speaks so strongly of the difficulties of faith, so tenderly of the victim of invincible ignorance and prejudice, and withal so uncertainly about the Convincing Spirit. We read nothing here out of which all this might be spun.

I must therefore do my duty and charge you to remember the dignity of the Christian claim. It is difficult to say whether the apostle's language is that of indignation or of abhorrence or of sorrow or of satire. One thing is certain: it tells all preachers of the gospel and defenders of the faith—these are now and always one and the same thing—what is the attitude they must take. You must never, brethren, forget that you are champions of the honour and dignity of your Saviour and the God of truth. If men call the truth of God a lie and God Himself a liar you must not be cold apologists; nor must you allow yourselves to be disarmed because these opprobrious terms are avoided and Christianity is politely rejected. The first witnesses for God and for His Christ took a very high stand indeed. They demanded men's faith as God's right: counting them to lie against their own souls who made God a liar. We too must believe that fact, and the evidence of

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fact, were never stronger in their claim on credence than in the general history of Jesus and redemption. Never came a challenge to human acceptance more mighty and with more right to be irresistible than the appeal of the Holy Sufferer for the sins of mankind, confirmed as it is by the Father's signs from heaven and the evidences of man's secret heart. This last seems to be very strong in the apostle's estimation. "He hath made God a liar, because he believes not the testimony of an outward record, and hath not trusted in the witness He bore of His Son." The lack of secret trust betrays something wrong in the very roots of the unbeliever's nature. "We are witnesses of these things," said St. Peter, your forerunner, to as perverse men as ever denied the Lord, "and so is also the Holy Ghost whom God hath given to them that obey Him." The rejection of Christ is therefore the rejection of the Spirit, and that betokens the moral delinquency of a disobedience to God. Believing that the Spirit pleads for Christ within while you plead without, you must imitate "the boldness of Peter and John." What will give you, especially the weaker of you, this boldness will appear in due course. Meanwhile, remember the dignity of your commission, and speak to men as if they ought to submit to the Lord of all and believe in Him who is the truth. Humbly, reverently, and at a great distance of course, copy the style of him who says, "He that believeth not God hath made Him a liar." To doubt God's existence is a sin and a crime against our own nature: as a sin against God it is unprovided for, because it is strictly speaking

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impossible. So to reject the Gospel is, in the man with whom the Gospel pleads, a thing that ought to be impossible, and is "without excuse."

With all this, however, remember the meekness and gentleness of your Master; always be sure that the Holy Ghost needs no anger of yours to help Him; and take care never to forget the charity which on your lips should plead the cause of the God of love. Mark that it is the claim of the Son of God, bringing life to man, that you are imperatively to assert and to vindicate, taking no denial. Your lofty and high-toned dogmatism must be strictly limited to this. You may absolutely rely on the Spirit's confirmation of every affirmation you make as to the Son of God incarnate, and His right to the homage of every human intellect, and every human heart, and every human will. You cannot expect too much from the soul "naturally Christian" when you point to Jesus as the Sun of the mental and moral world and ask every man if he sees ought. But you must always remember that till men submit to the Lord, to whom all external testimonies bear witness, you must not expect those external testimonies themselves to be of themselves availing. Do not wonder if men obstinately criticize the documents; and be not angry with them for that. Rather be extremely forbearing with all doubters whose scruples are provoked by difficulties in the external evidences of Christianity. Reserve the strength of your jealousy for the Lord Himself. Demand submission to Him first; and your wisdom will in this be justified.

But it must not be forgotten that before St. John

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speaks of the unbeliever, he has spoken of the believer who accepts the divine testimony as outwardly presented, and trusts in Him of whom that testimony speaks. The apostle does not here or elsewhere dwell on the inmost secret and mystery of believing. All the light he gives comes from the parallel here drawn. As the man who believes not is one who rejects the testimony given to him secretly by the Holy Ghost, and thus makes God a liar, so conversely the man who believes is one who receives the same secret testimony of the Holy Ghost concerning Christ. As "he that believeth not God," that is, His outward testimony, "makes Him a liar, because he hath not believed in the witness that God hath borne," that is, does not trust IN His Son, so he who believeth God trusts also in the Son of whom He bears witness. Both hear the inward testimony: the one rejects and the other receives it. Most emphatically does St. John say that "the Spirit it is who beareth witness:" to the spirit of both, but with different effect. Yielding to the Holy Ghost, the believer trusts the testimony concerning a Saviour for his sin and a life for his death. He relies on the record concerning the atonement: on the blood which flows for the cancelling of guilt, and on the promise of the living water of life. And of him it is said that "he hath the witness in himself."

II.

The objective, outward, standing testimony has become the subjective, interior, personal assurance. And this is expressed by that great saying, which

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has no parallel elsewhere, "he hath the witness in himself:" that is, the external witness which he received in faith he now HAS as his individual inward possession. Here there are two meanings: the faith that saves is attended by the privilege of assurance; and then the blessing assured of becomes testimony to itself. These two combined are to the believer irrefragable evidence of Christianity itself.

St. John does not say that faith is assurance. His meaning is not conveyed by the paraphrase, "He that believeth is one who is inwardly assured by a secret testimony of the Spirit." The converse is the truth: the believer receives and has the outward evidence more sure in an inward testimony. If this is so, we must mark the calm universality of the statement. The believer "hath"—not shall have, may have, should have, shall have as a rare and occasional privilege—the witness in himself. The series of things testified concerning personal salvation is gone over again to the quick ear of the penitent believer: not bringing him salvation, which does not depend on assurance, but telling him that he has it. This assurance, let it be remembered, is only of those few simple facts, or promises based on facts, which are bound up with that life to which all things converge in the closing Bible. There are many internal testimonies concerning Jesus which cannot be supposed to be respoken within the heart. Let us again limit our illustration, as the apostle does, to the testimony of the water and the blood. Take the latter first. The man who believes as he ought the external testimony of God speaking through unimpeachable witnesses of the crucifixion

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of the incarnate Son of God, has a general faith that Jesus was sent to be the Saviour of the world. Convinced of his sin and feeling his condemnation, he lies at the foot of the cross, as it were like St. John watching the blood shed for his redemption, until in the mystery of grace the Spirit whispers the testimony "Behold, the Lamb of God!" the first on the subject found in the New Testament and the first of a long series. Then the general "Ecce" of testimony for all, "Behold, this is the Lamb of God!" becomes the specific "Behold Him for thyself!" The interior eye sees the Saviour crucified, risen, ascended, finding infinite confidence in knowing how they all "agree in one," that is the personal deliverance from guilt. The testimony is spoken to me; as I trusted it before, and apart from any experience of deliverance, I trust it now still more. A witness from a far country has brought glad tidings. The "report is believed;" and then the spiritual eye, ear, or touch carries the testimonies to the soul and it can have no doubt that there is life for it in Christ. But this is not all. He lies at the foot of the cross mourning over his spiritual death—however paradoxical that may sound—until the testimony is heard within: "Awake, thou that sleepest and arise from the dead and Christ shall give thee life!" He trusts and "has power to become a son of God." But then the assurances, "I am the life," "I am come that they might have life," "Because I live ye shall live also," that had only filled the outward ear, are spoken in clear, distinct, soul-satisfying tones to the inward ear, bearing witness of a life eternal and divine.

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Brethren, I must charge you to be faithful on this point too. You have this day been admitted into the fellowship of a body of men who have always maintained in its purity the testimony concerning the Spirit's witness. Not that they have been peculiar in this. The inward witness, which is in the mystery of the Gospel both the cause of faith and its sequel, is so interwoven with the fabric of the New Testament that wherever a faithful ministry has been found it could not fail to be true to this doctrine. Whether called the witness of the Spirit, or the assurance of faith, or the inward light, it has been the watchword of the noblest confessors and mightiest preachers and most Christian representatives of the Christian faith. Give it, I beseech you, the high place it should have in your thoughts as a real testimony of the Spirit to the individual soul. Teach your people to expect it, and never suffer them to rest without it. Let it very frequently be the direct subject of your ministry; and let it enter more or less into the whole tissue of it. For you must not limit this witness. The Spirit is the testifier of all truth: not of one particular privilege, but of all. We make a mistake to dwell too much on one particular witness: the witness of adoption or life. St. John charges you this day to believe and teach that the Spirit seals all the testimonies of Scripture on the believing soul. St. Paul says, "we know the things that are freely given us of God:" the things universally, which are really "the things of Christ." You will hold in your hands the charter of Christian privilege; and the best and the most pleasant part of your function will be to

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unfold the promises, the prerogatives of God's people. Now you must always remember that the witness of the Spirit is for all of them. It is the assurance of the saints always, as well as of the sinner at the outset. You tell the sinner to expect the witness, "thy sins are forgiven," the prodigal to expect to hear the witness that shall enable him to say "Father," the unsanctified to wait for the silent seal that shall enable him to say "My God." Teach your people to expect the attesting Spirit on the proclamation of every promise and privilege. "It is the Spirit that beareth witness and the Spirit is the truth." But remembering all this you must not forget that prominence is given to the testimony of life, as was said at the outset.

I must ask you now to observe the distinction between the testimony concerning the life as given to us and the testimony afforded by the actual possession of the life itself. The term "hath," twice used with deep significance, intimates that the believer possesses in his own soul and in his own experience the very things about which the witness is given; and that the Son of God and the life He brings give evidence that is absolutely indubitable, bound up with the new life, being indeed the very life itself, and in its power an evidence self-multiplying to eternity. Let us dwell on these points for a short time.

The regenerate believer, whose spirit is filled by the Holy Spirit, has infallible evidences in himself that the Son of God is in him. It is not that he is conscious of being quickened to a better and nobler life, or that his old life is improved into something

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more worthy of its origin: he is divinely conscious that he has in the centre of his being a life altogether new. He is certain of the possession of a specific higher life: with the same certainty that he has of the possession of the ordinary and lower life. And he knows it to be the Son of God in his soul by the testimony of the Son Himself through the Holy Ghost. The interpreting Spirit secretly takes and shows him that word which the Saviour left to His disciples to be the permanent pledge of His own special indwelling. "I will come unto him, and manifest Myself unto him. I will come and My Father will come, and we will make our abode with him." Whatever else these wonderful words mean, they mean a secret assurance given by the Son of God that He dwells in the man who loves Him and keeps His law. That was the profound signification of those earlier words about the "more abundant life." We are familiar enough with the same truth in St. Paul's writings. Just as he has his own peculiar formula for the witness of the Spirit concerning what is done for the soul in the counsels of heaven, so he has his own formula for the witness of the inward experience. For instance, he made the beginning of his own religion "It pleased God to reveal His Son in me," and the continuance of it "I do not live but Christ liveth in me," and the end of it "That I may be found in Him." He knew that Christ, the Son of God, was in himself, as certainly as he knew that he lived in the flesh; and he everywhere takes it for granted that his fellow Christians had the same internal testimony. You remember one remarkable instance, in which he

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startles us, as he certainly startled the Corinthians: "Do ye not know that Christ is in you? Does not your examination, or proving, of yourselves shew it? Unless indeed ye be reprobate."

But St. Paul's "Prove yourselves" suggests another application of St. John's words. It may seem mystical and unreal to speak of a consciousness of the Son of God within, and the apostle really comes to our relief when he says "He that hath the Son hath the life," clearly pointing to the character of the new life as the demonstration within. The grand evidence of Christianity is the special character of the new life, as approving itself in its effects. There is but one kind of life that deserves the name. All life is not the same life: there is much religious quickening and preparatory life which has not reached the point of regeneration, or Christ thus revealed in the soul. And the difference is detected by the genuine evidences of the Son of God within. The apostle has a high and sacred idea of the internal witness to the life; and when he describes it by its effects he is rather referring to the evidences which comfort the possessor of the life than those which approve themselves to others. You observe that the whole paragraph, in which St. John for the first time introduces faith and closes the Biblical testimony about it, begins by telling of its perfect victory over the world and strength to obey the commandments. And throughout all that follows the sublime declarations concerning the grandeur of the new life seem not so much like descriptions of the way in which men can live as of the way in which God lives in men.

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I shall not dwell upon those wonderful little touches of the mystery of the indwelling Son which have been the joy of Christian men from the beginning. How they sparkle and glow here at the end of the New Testament! Collectively and singly among the most amazing words of Scripture, each one saying something that we had indeed heard from the beginning but saying it in new and most moving terms. "God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God and God in him." But of whom can that high experience be asserted? The answer is "whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God." "Herein is our love made perfect that we may have boldness in the day of judgment: because as He is so are we." What does that great saying mean? The privilege of him who has the inward witness, and in the strength of the Son of God within him purifieth himself "as He is pure" and doeth righteousness "as He is righteous:" thus being—let us not shrink from boldly uttering it—as He is in this world. What a word is this: to "overcome the world" that has enslaved and vanquished every mortal save one that ever trod upon it! The only solution is that the Son of God lives in the believer; and testifies His own indwelling by signs and wonders that never entered the mind of man outside of Christ to conceive. The inward Witness bears this witness to Himself in us.

Our theology has always paid a high tribute to the glory of the Divine life, as bearing witness to itself in the regenerate by signs and tokens of the indwelling of God in man. You must

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in your ministry keep up the strain. Teach your hearers to seek for and expect such evidences of the power of the Son of God as shall to themselves at least render all other evidence superfluous. Not that it supersedes or revokes the other: the assurance of pardon, the witness of adoption, the seal of sanctification to God. The witnesses "agree in one." St. John speaks here at least of the only testimony, and that is within. It is needless to discriminate. The believer in Christ has a testimony of the Divine Spirit to his conscience which speaks more loudly than the plea of guilt in his conscience; but he can hardly distinguish that from the sense of unutterable peace which keeps his heart and mind through Christ Jesus: which indeed is the consciousness of being so one with Christ as to be accepted not so much "for the Beloved's sake" as "in the Beloved." He has, St. Paul says, the spirit of adoption strengthening the Abba-cry of the new-born babe; but he can hardly tell the difference between that and the witness of his own new life which in its love shows its heavenly origin, that it is born of God. And St. John says that the believer knows himself to be consecrated to God "by the Spirit that He hath given;" but surely that is the very same thing as the inward witness of a life that has forsaken and abandoned and forgotten the world as a rest and finds its joyful security and perfect felicity in God alone. Dear brethren, learn how to preach on this subject from your own experience. On all questions that concern the assurance of a Christian testify what you have seen and speak what you know. "Joined to the Lord," and "one Spirit

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with Him," you will have that indistinguishable inward witness which cannot deceive or be deceived. O live so near to God, so entirely one with Him, and so wholly and perfectly in Him, that your testimony within shall always give confidence to your preaching. Have the life within you strong and full: then will its witness be strong and full. It may not always be rapturous and ecstatic, not always unperplexed by fiery temptation and doubt; but always the witness of a true life, the consciousness of which shall evermore be sure of being from God.

The inward witness of personal life in Christ is a demonstration of the truth of Christianity: not precisely of itself and as internal, but as connected with the external and collated with it. We mark that St. John's argument throughout is a very logical exhibition of the proof which springs from the exact correspondence of the witness borne by God in history and in the Biblical records with the internal experience of every one who casts his soul absolutely on Christ and stakes his salvation on the testimony borne concerning Him. "He hath the witness in himself." The idea is this: "All things that God spake from the beginning concerning salvation in Christ are so perfectly fulfilled in the true believer that he at once accepts the record in its integrity and "sets to his seal that God is true:" that is, that Christianity, with all that is meant by that vast word, is the very truth of God. Allow me to direct your careful attention to a few of the consequences of this combination of the external and internal evidence.

The first is that—whatever unbelievers may say

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—the Faith of Jesus ought to be held with the most absolute certainty by His disciples and servants and friends. The writers of the New Testament declare with one consent that true Christians have no doubt of their religion. It would be a pleasant task, young men, to collect a long series of proofs that the strain of the documents which followed Pentecost is not disturbed by the very slightest vibration of doubt. It is not that the writers were enthusiasts rapt into the third heaven and too excited either to doubt themselves or to forecast doubt in others. It was precisely the reverse of this. Each one of them somewhere or other, generally in his final words, looks out upon a future of scepticism and unbelief. There is something inexpressibly affecting in St. Paul's, St. Peter's, St. Jude's, St. John's farewell glances into the great futurity. Reading their predictions, so clear and so sad, alone and without relief, we should be thrown into despair. But we mark that precisely where they thus speak of the unbelief that is to be they assert for themselves and for all likeminded the deepest tranquillity of a secure and untremulous faith. We see as in a glass their future in our days of rebellion against the mysteries of Christianity. Nothing can surpass the sombre colour of scepticism as depicted in these books save the calm and fearless confidence with which those who depict it hold their religion. They themselves live, and what is more they represent Christian people generally as living, in an atmosphere of supernatural light and assurance, under and amidst the very powers of the world to come. And why is it so? Because in those first ages of faith every

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believer had the testimony of the Oracles reuttered within his own heart and life. The Saviour ascended into the heavens was also revealed in the interior heaven of their souls. The Holy Ghost spake over again the words of Christ, and greater words for Him than He ever spake for Himself. Their life was one constant, continuous and permanent evidence of Christianity.

Let me, dear brethren, hold you fast a little while on this most blessed theme. Remember that you are to proclaim a religion of clear demonstration, and determine to be worthy and capable by keeping your own internal experience in harmony with the outward testimony. Do not wonder that I am repeating myself: that is of no importance. Your future course will be very much shaped by the theory you form for yourself on the matter of evidences. If you resolve to let the internal at all points verify the external, and live by that law, you will be a happy man. Be very bold in your stipulation with the Holy Ghost; for He is very condescending. Dare to expect that the transcendent revelations of the Gospel shall be revealed over again in you, and thus prove their truth beyond the possibility of gainsaying. It is your privilege to have the entire sphere of your spiritual, theological, ministerial life irradiated by the central Sun which is the light of men, especially of them that believe, and most especially of those who are set apart to bear the burden of the Holy Scriptures weighted with unspeakable mysteries. This threefold gradation is not thrown out rhetorically. It must be firmly believed that the gifts of the Holy Ghost are

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in precise proportion and relation to the need of His agents. And surely there is no need more pressing than that the young minister, bearing the doctrinal as well as the ethical cross of Christ on his shoulders, and pledged to help others to bear that cross, should have a deep and clear conviction himself. I cannot think that the gentle Lord would send you out with this book in your hand crowded with things hard to be understood without replenishing you with the strength that is imparted by a profound assurance of the truth of the Bible and all its contents. You may expect a special charism of faith: more than the common privilege which all the pure in heart have of seeing God in His word.

What I commend to you as your present privilege will have, let me warn you, to be prayed and wrestled for. It is one of the penalties of your office that you will of necessity be more familiar with doubtful disputations than you would wish to be. Perhaps you would be very glad, under the influence of this realizing hour, to abjure for ever every thought that looks that way, and join the company of those dear saints who know nothing about arguments for Christianity, to whom demonstrations of the faith are like demonstrations of the reality of an external world. But that artless and lovely unconsciousness of evidence will not be your lot. That is not what St. Paul prayed for, that the Colossians might be "enriched unto all riches of the full assurance of understanding:" not, you see, the full assurance of contemplation, of intuition, of mystical vision, or even of faith; but of the working, the hardworking,

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"understanding." You must toil for, pray for, and get at all costs, plenary conviction based on the foundation of intelligent study, of careful and thoughtful examination of difficulties, of prayer to the Holy Ghost: in other words, the divine gift of assurance granted to the assiduous ponderings of the devout and honest understanding. The word suggests, though it does not strictly mean, a mighty force of interior experience before which all difficulties vanish. You shall always have it, if you take the right order with your evidences. If you keep the external and the internal too wide apart you will be in danger. Laborious investigation of discrepancies and difficulties has its value; but it always leaves something that it cannot do alone. Unless I am greatly mistaken, you will sometimes be at your wits' end by reason of doubts engendered by the very course of your reading and pastoral duty. The best among you will probably be the most tried. The probation of sifting and doubt is more or less before you all. And that word "sifting" reminds us at once of Simon Peter, our example both of the strength and of the weakness of faith. "I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not:" not so much the spiritual grace as the belief in his Lord. Whenever your hour comes, carry your baffled mind into the presence of the Lord, and ask Him to light up the whole sphere by "revealing Himself" within you. At such a time as that come to the Meek and Lowly of heart who bade the doubters learn of Him and take the yoke of His theological cross upon them, and so promised them rest. Or spread this text before the Lord, the final testimony to the virtue of

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the supreme internal witness, and leave not the presence until you know its truth.

You will not pervert my meaning when I say that this internal evidence must often stand instead of demonstration in regard to matters where that cannot be had. It would not be seriously wrong to paraphrase thus our text: "Whatever things the witness of God fails directly to confirm, to one thing He surely witnesses, the gift of His Son to the world and of the life of His Son to the individual believer." There are many mysteries in doctrine, many marvels in recorded fact, many difficulties in the history and documents of the Faith, which will perhaps never be verified by direct evidence, or have the solution of perfect light thrown on them. But wherever that is the case, the essentials are not involved. The two everlasting essentials, on which for us hang all the issues of time and eternity, are the Son of God and our life in Him. These are verified to us by undeceiving testimony. We must be content with some measure of uncertainty as to the rest. Not that I would sanction indifference as to the truth of all detail; or laxity as to the importance of unsolvable mystery. There are two extremes in our difficulties of faith: the very great and the very little. You must do your best, for your own sake and that of others, to bring all into harmony with a reasonable faith. But, meanwhile, there is no better logic than this. "The Book that brings me the Son of God and that life I have must be true everywhere and in all things, whether I can prove it or not. Cunningly devised fable could never be the vehicle of eternal truth. The clear revelation of the

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Son of God within the soul must be vicarious evidence for all those things which have no distinct demonstration of their own."

The tendency of these remarks has been to disparage by comparison external records. We must not close without a word on the other side. Supreme as the inward witness is, it must be checked, controlled and regulated at all points by the external and written word. Here is the defence of the inward light against all hyper-mystical extravagance. It has been said that the light within sheds its vicarious assurance over many dark regions of the documents: let me now add that the documents minister to the security of the inner light in return. There is no more deeply interesting page of theological history than that which records the aberrations of those who have followed the light within neglecting the guidance of the light without. Time would fail me, and patience would fail you, for the illustration of this. Suffice that I point out once more the emphasis of St. John's, "hath the testimony in him." It is the outward testimony reproduced within: no more, no less. Granted that there may be more, that the Spirit may disclose things hidden in Christ of which the Bible does not speak, it will be impossible to authenticate them to others without a renewal of the gift and economy of inspiration. False mysticism—not obsolete since the middle ages but strong and vigorous now—finds its religion in intuitions of God and His Son which, unsupported by the outward oracles, belong rather to imagination than to faith. In a pure and undefiled theology the external and the internal

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witness guard and support and protect each other. The inward witness reveals the secret of the outward records; but does not then renounce the guide that brought it into the wealthy place. That guide has not surrendered its function. There are in the records and documents of the faith promises and prophecies the gradual and ever accumulating verification of which will make the external and internal witnesses "agree in one" for ever.

"For ever:" this suggests a most important characteristic of our final testimony with which we will close. St. John speaks of the inward witness, confirming the outward, as the seal of a present decision or judgment between those who are and those who are not saved. You must mark the sudden change that passes over the strain. From the consideration of the witness given to the truth of the Gospel, the apostle glides into the consideration of the evidence given to the believer as to his own state. It might be said indeed that these are the two poles of the axis round which all revolves: the witness given to the Son of God, and the witness given to our own portion in Him.

Nothing, dear brethren, can be more solemn than the way in which the Scripture here closes with its note of judgment between two great classes. The eternal judgment, properly so called, that is, the appointed day between the present state and the future, is not mentioned here. The judgment in St. John's estimate, and in this final testimony, is not indeed past already but certainly already begun. The two lines of contrast are marked with great distinctness: faith and unbelief, having and not

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having the Son of God, having and not having eternal life, sin not unto death and sin unto death, are the alternatives with which Scripture here closes; and they are used in describing the state that now is. It is a very solemn word indeed: there are among those who hear the Gospel—with others we have not to do—two classes of men. One has the new life of the Son of God, including the life of release from condemnation symbolized by the blood, and the life of regeneration symbolized by the water. Another has neither of these. Both classes are living men, as they will be living men for ever. But one has not the true eternal life, the other has. I pray you to remember in all your ministry this lesson. You must preach the judgment that now is, as well as that which is to come. Let the words "hath" and "hath not" retain all their unimpaired significance. If the Spirit of inspiration had meant to say "shall have" and "shall not have," He would have said it: on other occasions, and in earlier utterances, the future is used and with reference to this very subject. But here at the last the inward witness is made the seal of a discrimination or judgment that has already taken place. And you must preach and teach that men are now deciding their eternal state, the future judgment being no other than the final confirmation of that which now is. The existence of the soul as mere existence is common to both and will be the same in both. The eternal life, which is life indeed, the life of the Son of God in us, is added to that existence here; and there no more will be added but the impossibility of losing it. The want of that

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eternal life, the absence from the desolate existence of the indwelling Son of God, is the condemnation to the left hand of separation from God here; and there nothing will be done to that bare existence but to seal to it the impossibility of having the Son and thus being restored to God for ever.

The application of this to the ungodly who have not the Son is not suggested; and I shall not go beyond the text on which this Charge is based. Otherwise, I might urge you to warn all men against the delusion that not having life in Christ will be found hereafter, what it is not found now, equivalent to extinction. Let me rather close with the apostle's own indication of the end for which he wrote, and all the apostles wrote, and the Holy Spirit for ever teaches and preaches through His servants, "that ye may know that ye have eternal life who believe on the Son of God." Plain as these words seem, and almost needless in their simple iteration, they are really of profound significance. They tell us what is really the conclusion of the whole matter: the end and consummation of all the ways of God with man. As the words stand in our old and authorized text, they are inexpressibly pathetic in their deep artlessness: "that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God." Let us not criticize the text of these words or argue about their meaning; but simply surrender ourselves to their sacred influence. Let us here at the last moment lose sight of our present object, cease to be ordainers and ordained, ministers and people; and receive this final lesson: to wit, that the secret of

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Jesus the Son of God in us is the pledge of eternal life, that while we know that He is in us we are as sure of our everlasting life and happiness in God as if the everlasting doors had already closed behind us, and that the consciousness of this should endear Him to us and knit our souls to Him more and more closely every day. What treasures of joy and of hope are in this word: eternal life is in the Son, the Son is in us, and we are in God for ever! The apostle speaks to us as if we had not known it before: "that ye may know!" And as if we had never believed before: "that ye may believe!" Let us now come to Him as if all our former faith were as nought; and open our hearts to this deeper experience of a knowledge that will be always and eternally new. And to Him who is our life, with the Father and the Holy Ghost, be ascribed glory for ever! Amen.

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THE INWARD REVELATION OF THE SON.*

"When it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb, and called me by His grace, to reveal His Son in me."—GAL. i. 15, 16.

WHATEVER may be the precise meaning of these words, it is obvious that the apostle uses them to mark that great change in his life which was to him a new creation. Though the thought of Christ within the soul is familiar to him, and indeed fundamental, the interior revelation of the Son by the Father's good pleasure occurs only once in his writings, and arrests our deep attention. It is a striking point of union between St. Paul and St. John: the Pauline form of "He that hath the Son hath the life."

But the specific "revelation" of the Son obviously connects itself with two other revelations that are referred to in the text. There was a previous manifestation to him when he was "called" on the way to Damascus: as he says to the Corinthians "He appeared to me also." And the Son of God was revealed in him that he "might preach Him among the Gentiles;" or "make all men see," or "bring to light," as he says to the Ephesians, the dispensation of the mystery of the Gospel. If therefore, keeping up the unity of this one idea, we regard St. Paul's

* A Discourse addressed to the students of Didsbury College, in June, 1879.

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whole career as summed in the revelation of Christ to him, in him, and through him, we shall catch the spirit of his meaning and be faithful to the ruling phraseology of his personal testimony.

This testimony is specially appropriate as an example to you, who are preparing for the special service of the ministry, and some to preach the gospel among the Gentiles. In a certain sense the words belong as we shall see to the apostle alone; and in a certain sense they belong to him as representing all Christian ministers. But, while this is the case, there can be no doubt that in every thing essential this threefold description of a Christian career is appropriate for all. To every one who becomes in the deepest meaning of the term His servant, Christ appears that He may arrest and claim him; in his heart the Lord is revealed as the secret of his life and strength; and his new life must be a perpetual reflection and proclamation of his Redeemer. Then let us all seek our own in this testimony, and while we listen ask for the influence of the Spirit of consecration.

I.

We well know with what solemn exultation the apostle is wont to refer to the great event which ended his own false life and began the true life of his Lord in him. How often did he travel that journey from Jerusalem to Damascus! What midday sun ever passed over his head that did not recall the heavenly vision to which he was "not disobedient." Now that vision or appearance of Jesus by the wayside was twofold in its design: in

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judgment as to the guilty past, in mercy as a call to the new future. And what it was to Saul it is to each of us. "At midday, O King, I saw in the way a light from heaven, above the brightness of the sun, shining round about me." Whose glory was that? The very words might of themselves explain; for there is only one Sun which in the New Testament is said again and again to eclipse the sun of nature. But here our Lord acknowledges Himself, "I am Jesus, whom thou persecutest!" It is Jesus therefore as a Lord, a Judge, an enemy of his pride, a King coming against his ten thousand with twenty thousand. This revelation is one of holy displeasure. Saul had devoted his great faculties, and his much learning, and his high social influence, to the ruin of the cause of the Nazarene. He was in the full tide of his persecuting career, when suddenly the Lord met him: not by His convincing Spirit, but, in this case and for once, in His own person; the same Lord whom Stephen saw standing and who did not sit down again until He had inflicted His blessed punishment on Stephen's persecutor. He looked upon him and, to use his own language elsewhere, he "died:" as John "fell as one dead" for love, so Saul fell from fear. For it was fear. "It is hard for thee to kick against the goad." The glance of Jesus was the same which one day will be like flaming fire devouring the adversary. After Saul became Paul he remembered that vision of judgment: "Last of all, He appeared unto me also!" As Simon Peter never forget the look that for a time at least broke his heart, so Paul never forgot the look and the voice

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that made him lick the dust. "Whom thou persecutest!" That was all the Saviour said; but hear how the penitent, a lifelong penitent, expands it when he is ready to be offered up, and after he has humanly speaking expiated his offence by a life of deep devotion: "a blasphemer, or persecutor and injurious!" Expiated, did I say? Never did this penitent feel that his offence was expiated: that first revelation of the Lord's wounded majesty survived all his wonderful subsequent revelations and haunted him to the end! It was, however, an extraordinary manifestation to the "great apostle," as we call him: though he would have deprecated this epithet, being "less than the least!" It was a manifestation of wrath, as would have been proved if he had been disobedient to the heavenly vision. As it was, he who went to put the saints in prison was made a prisoner himself, shut up three days and three nights in a deeper darkness than the loss of his sight would account for: for though he had in a measure received his commission, he understood it not and his sins were not yet "washed away." Nor had he yet "arisen" out of the prostration into which his future Master's revelation had cast him.

Thus, brethren, does the Lord deal with every enemy whom He receives and transforms into a friend. Of course there may be great varieties in the manner and effect of this external appearance to a man at his conversion. Some the Lord calls without this judicial visitation: at least, the visitation is not one that arrests in a course of mad rebellion. But few there are who enter on the service of Jesus

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without having first to fall down before the majesty of His mediatorial glory. Have you been thus smitten by the sword of the Redeemer's merciful wrath? Do you remember your own midday, when the Saviour effectually wakened you from your sleep of sin, stopped you on your way of folly and converted you thoroughly from your past life? Then you can enter into the spirit of the apostle's grateful remembrance. You have not so wonderful a tale to tell of Christ's first manifestation of Himself: the only miracle was the change in all your feeling, a miracle to yourself alone. It was to you a quiet revelation through the word by the Spirit to the inner man. Suffice that it brought down your pride and humbled you at the feet of Jesus.

But this was not only a judicial appearance to the persecuting Saul. It was also a call, as the Galatian text tells us: a call, that is, to submit to the mediatorial authority and give himself up to the absolute disposal of Christ. The set time had come when he, the elect vessel separated from the womb, was to be invited to enter on his vocation. I say, invited; for we must not regard his predestination as a decree that impressed him into the Lord's service independently of his own volition. He was set apart, but with the foresight of his own submission. The apostle himself evidently considered the whole scene as an appeal to his will through his heart: "Wilt thou be My servant? Go to Damascus, and consider well My claims; and let My servant Ananias know thy mind and purpose." He testifies that he was not disobedient. He went to the house

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which was to be for a season his prison, and there reflected: on his past Judaic hatred, on the many presentiments he had had, on the instances of his deliberate resistance of the unknown Spirit of Christ pleading with him, on the wonderful appearance, on the sacrifices he must make, on the amazing glimpse of duty set before him, and on the new world generally that was opening around to his view. He fixed his purpose at once and for ever; and when Ananias came, as Martha came to Mary, with his "He calleth thee!" the captive had already made the full surrender.

If we are the true servants of Jesus we also have renounced and yielded all. The appearance of Christ to the soul in holy displeasure is not perhaps so rigorous a necessity in every case. But no one, however early blessed with grace, enters on the perfect service of the Redeemer without pondering and yielding to His secret call. "He calleth thee!" one may say of every soul sooner or later. If you are His, you remember your deliberate obedience to the call. Perhaps you are now hearing it. I may speak to some who are still under the effect of the first appearance: prostrate, not in terror and awe and blindness, but in doubt and the pains of an unsettled purpose. Imitate the apostle, and give the solemn hours to deep consideration. Think of the foolish past. Think of the golden opportunity afforded now. Think of the great future which shall open before you. And, having pondered well, tell the Ananias that comes from Jesus that you are ready to be His servant, wholly, devotedly, and for ever.

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II.

So far all has been external. But when the apostle passes to his personal experience of the Gospel, he uses another variation on the language of Christ's appearance. It is not now the Saviour's appearing to him, but the good pleasure of God revealing His Son within his soul; and there is very much to ponder in the remarkable word itself. Though the expression occurs only here, it is one which we feel at once to be a profound and perfect definition of the whole mystery of the Christian life. Here we have no question between the apostolic privilege and that of the common Christian. It is simply the grandest and most sublime formula ever used for that doctrine of an indwelling Christ with which the New Testament abounds: at least ever since the Saviour said, "I in you and you in Me." We might indeed be tempted to think that the apostle refers to the revelation of the Gospel made to him. But that will come by and by. Meanwhile, let us hold fast this one meaning: the manifestation of the Son of God within his soul. It is the apostle's highest and deepest expression for the mystery of our new life. That Christ in us is the secret of our regeneration is the doctrine of all the New Testament. St. John says: "He that hath the Son hath the life." The Master of John indirectly said it, "I in you and ye in Me:" illustrated as these words were by the doctrine of eating His flesh, and by the relation of branches to the vine. But St. Paul has given us the widest variety of parallels. In the next chapter he says that he no

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longer himself lived but Christ in him. And, again, that he laboured for the Galatians till Christ was formed within them: as a new life is formed in the womb. But here he is very bold, and says that it pleased God to manifest or "reveal His Son in me." What could that be, what can that be—for we are speaking of a present matter—but the divine fiat introducing or revealing the Son into the soul as its new life? Hold fast, Christian brethren, that sublime thought at all costs. Let none take it from you. Suffer yourself never to be satisfied with any lower definition of the regenerate life than this. Take it in all its simplicity; and let it interpret all others, while itself is interpreted by none. It is the queen and mistress of all the definitions: all others lead up to it and derive from it their perfection. Run them all over in your mind, and you will see that here is their common crown. The genuine and consummate Christian has Christ "revealed" in him: not only "formed" as the mother bears another unconscious life; not "created" in him, which seems unsuitable; not merely given to him as if superadded; but the right word is "revealed." As the Son is revealed in the flesh, in human nature, giving a new and divine personality to that nature, which rules and sanctifies and glorifies it, so the Son is revealed in the penitent prepared by the revelation that came upon him and to him. He becomes conscious of a higher, nobler life than his own; than that which his first father gave him. His Lord is within him, a sacred, unspeakable mystery of holy life which made the apostle say "I live, yet not I: Christ liveth in me." That is the con-

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summation of all former appearances of the Son of God to the man whom He would make His own.

But do not forget that remarkable expression, "It pleased God to reveal His Son in me." This does not mean, any more than the other terms referred to, that there was a sovereign decree absolutely and independently flashing the new light of life into the soul of Paul; but it says that after the preparations in which we do something, indeed do a great deal, the act of regeneration is the calm exercise of omnipotent power: like that which commanded the light to shine out of darkness, it commands the light to shine on the soul from the face of Christ internally revealed. The final and perfect gift of the Son as a new life is the direct and absolute act of God. In the preliminaries which lead to it we must co-operate with Him. In the work of our repentance and submission under the mighty hand of the convincing Spirit, we have much work to do that never will be done for us. In our yielding to the Saviour's call we have also much to do: in laying aside every impediment and following the voice of the Lord whithersoever it leadeth us. Up to the sacred hour, the sacred moment when this sun rises upon our internal world, when the life in God really begins, we are and must be active. But when the elect and set time has come, then the good pleasure of God begins. "It pleased God:" for this most precious revelation you must wait. "Behold the handmaid of the Lord: be it to me as thou wilt!" as she said in whom He was revealed as in no other. So must you wait, until this your change come. The Son of God must be "revealed" in you: there is no word in human

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speech that more plainly expresses a distinct act of the voice and will of God. And it is most important to remember this. It is the law of a full participation in the Christian covenant, viewed under all its aspects. We offer much penitent obedience to the law ourselves; but there is a moment when the justifying word is spoken. We do much ourselves to put away our defilement; but there is a moment when we are sprinkled and fully accepted on the altar. So we must wait, amidst the full activity of the life of repentance, for that supreme word which says to the soul: "Receive My Son, your life!"

Be on your guard therefore against mistaking the deep, eternal significance of this consummating revelation. The truth we have been dwelling on is simply this: that the external manifestations of Christ unto, or upon, or around the soul are only preparatory to His full manifestation within. Do not confound the one with the other. Because they do thus confound them, or forget the relation of the former to the latter, many remain long in a state of great imperfection. They have a certain measure of life, but not the life more abundant. They have received the manifestation on the way to Damascus, but not the revelation in Damascus itself. They have had the look cast on them that humbles and invites: they are humbled and they are trying to come; but that is all their religion. They see men as trees walking: the second touch they have not received. Or, returning to the idea of our text, their life is one spent under the sound of Christ's voice, who judging and calling stands at the door.

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He has never entered Himself, though His grace may force its way in. It is a very solemn thought that much of the current religion of the day labours under this defect. It is like that of these Galatians; one concerning which the Holy Spirit says, or the church in the Spirit: "I travail for you in birth till Christ be fully formed in your souls!" How much of Christianity may be in a man without Christ! How many years may he be living with Jesus at the door, on the threshold, sending inward half His grace: but not entering yet! Am I, fellow Christians, sounding your heart? Is the word of God dividing asunder between your imperfect Christianity with Christ's revelation on you, and the perfect Christ tianity which is the secret of Christ within. If so, let me urge you to set apart a waiting hour; and never to rest until you know that the fourth day's sun has risen on the chaos, or, rather, until you know by its own evidence, as all revelation must be known, that the Son of God is the new and true and perfect life of your soul.

III.

And now let me return for a moment to the peculiar vocation and prerogative of the apostle. It might seem as if he meant to say that the Son of God was revealed within him in order that through him the Gospel of the Son of God should be preached to the Gentiles. But elsewhere he speaks as if he regarded the outward revelation of the Saviour as a necessary result of His internal revelation in every Christian. In either case the glory of

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mortal life in the flesh is the reflection of Christ's glory.

When speaking of the revelation of the Son in the soul of Paul, we could not think of any difference between him and other Christians. But now that we speak of the revelation of Christ through the elect vessel we must make a distinction. The person and work of Christ have been revealed through him as through no other. St. John was the highest medium for the reflection of the glory of the divinity of the Son; but St. Paul was the highest medium for the manifestation of His mediatorial work. And in the neighbourhood of the text he shows us how that work was revealed to him. Not having had the privilege of the other apostles to receive from the Lord's own lips the instructions which expanded into perfection at the Pentecost, he was taken into Arabia, and there taught in such a manner that he could always say, "I received nothing from man: all from my Lord Himself." There are sundry passages in the epistles to the Corinthians which seem indeed to indicate that the holy apostles were, as instruments in the revelation of Jesus to the church, almost on a level with the word itself. As from the face of Christ radiated the glory of God, so from the face of the apostles radiated the glory of Christ. And through St. Paul, one may say, some special revelations were given beyond those of all the others. Very much that the early disciples had not heard and that the Twelve had only dimly received even at the Pentecost, was made known by revelation to this elect organ of the will of Jesus. Through him in a

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very eminent sense all men were "made to see the mystery."

We glorify God in the apostolic theologian; but we feel that the best part of his example is this, that his whole life and character show us how the internal revelation of Christ must light up the Christian's whole being, leaving no part dark. Sometimes St. Paul dwells on his special prerogatives; though only when the authentication of his mission compelled him to glory. Generally, and with much deeper joy, he exults in making himself an example of the effect of an internal glory like that of his Lord streaming through into the whole economy of daily life. "For me to live is Christ." You know how constantly he speaks of himself as a man in Christ, or as one in whom Christ is: so constantly that it becomes his formula and watchword for a Christian. Let us for ourselves remember that every one of us is called to be a living epistle representing in commoner terms the living Gospel of Christ. If you seize that idea and live by it the effect will be wonderful on your life. You will come to regard yourself as simply a mirror, reflecting back to the Lord, but still more around on others, His glory. A mirror rather than a glass: not through it studying Him, though that is also true and blessedly true, but from it reflecting Him. Yet, if you look cunningly at the words you will observe that even the mirror does not do justice to the meaning. It is very much more, with all deference to St. Paul, than receiving and reflecting rays from a mirror when I am said to have the Lord revealed in me that He may be revealed through me: His thoughts more highly thought out in mine;

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His affections beating in my poor heart; His heavenly motives animating my aims and giving selfishness and self its mortal wound; His charity distending to infinity my love to God and man; His righteousness helping my righteous soul to satisfy and dare the law; His divine-human grace within me working out in the sight of heaven and earth the meaning of His own Christian religion! This is the thrice blessed revelation of Christ through us!

Finally, I must carry your thought back to the remarkable expression of the text: "that I might preach Him." You will feel better than any description the exquisite hurry and confusion of the thought that can hardly linger upon self for a moment, not even as a stepping-stone for reaching others, but goes precipitately on: "to reveal His Son in me, that I might preach Him to the Gentiles!" It is not too much to say that the very theory of Christianity to this apostle, not merely its finest enthusiasm, is that when once Christ is in the heart the whole life must be entirely His. "God shall be in all" in due time. Meanwhile, the religion of this lower earth and within the Christian Church is the whole life swayed and swayed absolutely by the claims of Jesus. Nothing is imperfect, nothing is omitted, if "to live is Christ." That is the lesson of the conversion, regeneration and obedience of Saul afterwards called Paul. And that is the lesson of the entire New Testament, and its general assembly of the Redeemer's servants. It is the glory of Christ alone that we are called once for all to reflect upon the world. This is specially, it may be, incumbent on those who are entirely and exclusively

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set apart to the ministry. Nothing must stream forth now from them but the rays of His illumination: not any lights of philosophy or science; not the poor sickly radiance of their own genius and talent; not the refracted and reflected rays of public opinion; not the light of their own schemes of divinity; not anything that is theirs. But Christ alone must shine through them. And every Christian in another and perhaps deeper sense is called to the same dignity. Then let us, beloved in the Lord, resolve this day to dedicate ourselves anew to this our vocation. Let us ask of God that the Son who is our life may be more clearly than ever revealed in us: the last film of doubt being removed. Let us make it our own business to put away everything that might dim the reflection: that so our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in us and through us in life and in death and for ever: to Whom be all honour eternally. Amen.

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MEET FOR THE MASTER'S USE.*

"If a man, therefore, purge himself from these, he shall be a vessel unto honour, sanctified, and meet for the Master's use, and prepared unto every good work."—2 TIM. ii. 21.

AFTER all the solemnities of this day, during which you have received much divine instruction, and given your final pledges, you are invited, brethren, to hear from the apostle Paul how honourable is that service to which you are called. The dignity of the Christian ministry is nowhere more impressively set forth than in these words. They cannot be better introduced than by connecting them for a moment with the writer. St. Paul is now at the close of his career. He had known personally all the gradations of the world's dishonour and all the honours that belong to the service of Christ. Every indignity that man might inflict he had received, and no secret token of his Master's favour had been denied him. But his service on earth, with its shadows and its lights, was now all but over. He was in prison, and knew that this second imprisonment was unto death. But he is still in the house of God, on the altar of which he has his own final sacrifice to offer. Before he goes he leaves his legacy. Looking round upon

* A Charge delivered in Stanhope Street Chapel, Liverpool, at the Conference of 1880.

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his fellow-servants and fellow-labourers, he inspirits them by words that are new and deeply impressive in relation to the ministry of the Gospel. The whole epistle, read in this light, is most interesting; and these words in particular have their exceeding value for you.

I.

But, though specially for you, my brethren, the words generally include you only with the congregation. The honour which St. Paul encourages us to seek is the common heritage of all who name the name of the Lord. His own service had been that of an apostle, and the crown he expected was an apostolic crown; but this he does not say. All who belong to Christ are sanctified to His service, and this their sanctification is their honour; for it makes them all sharers of the consecration of the Lord Himself on the one hand, and, on the other, it separates them to the service of the temple of which He is the High Priest.

Let us take the latter first. The words "purified" and "sanctified" belong to the phraseology of the altar and the temple. It is the blessed prerogative of all true Christians to be entirely set apart for God. That is the meaning of the word—including the ideas of being negatively purged and positively sanctified—everywhere, but especially here. St. Paul has been speaking of a great house, in which are many vessels, some to honour and some to dishonour. But when he says "If a man purge himself from these he shall be a vessel unto honour, sanctified," he has evidently passed from the figure

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of the house as such to that of the temple: he would not have said that in a great house some are sanctified. When writing to the Ephesians in old time his teaching was that the church, the true church, is a temple in which every person and every thing is hallowed to God. He is now writing in a certain sense to the Ephesians again, for Timothy is the chief pastor of Ephesus, and he is faithful throughout to the thought of the temple, every word being connected with it. We may view the church variously, and our own character in relation to it varies accordingly. If it is a kingdom, we are subjects; if a polity, we are citizens; if a school, we are disciples; if a household, we are children. If it is a temple, we are sanctified; and whenever this word occurs we are regarded as belonging to the sanctified temple of God, purged and separated from all common uses for ever, and consecrated only to Him. We have that high and peculiar dignity which belongs to everything that belongs to God: with a certain something superadded that arises out of our being instruments of His service. For all that is God's is used for His glory. In the ancient temple every vessel of every kind was hallowed, and was never suffered to be used elsewhere. In the great house of the church every member is designed to be an instrument of the divine will: a vessel to receive the unction and also to diffuse it; sanctified from the world to be for ever His in the mystical fellowship of His Son. Outside of that fellowship all is dishonour; in that fellowship the sometime forfeited honour is abundantly retrieved.

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For it must be remembered that what gives supreme honour to the Christian servants of God is that they share Christ's sanctification to the divine service. He consecrated Himself officially to the ministry of the great sanctuary; being the first and the last whose consecration was only official: that is to say, who was not sanctified from sin, but only sanctified to service. Hence our union with Him makes us partakers of His holiness. He sanctified Himself that we might be sanctified. The Spirit common to Him and to us purifies our nature into conformity with His. But that is not so much referred to here as our official union with Him as the High Priest; our religion is regarded only in the light of a consecrated service. We are joined with the Lord Jesus in His priestly office. The unction that sanctifies, the Holy Ghost, descends from Him, and we share His sanctification. This is the supreme honour of the consecrated life that it is hallowed in Christ. Since He was sanctified for us, the word sanctification has had a new meaning: it has become twice hallowed. It means that our dedication to God is not that simply of creatures brought into being to serve Him, but of redeemed creatures who are made more acceptable than ever by being found accepted in the Beloved. We are, as it were, part of our Lord. As in Him we are uncondemned, because justified in Him; as in Him we are children, partakers of His sonship; so we are sanctified in and with Him. We are servants in the unity and fellowship of the One Real Servant, honoured in His eternal honour!

Now, this honour have all His saints. "If any

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man serve Me," said our Lord, "Him will My Father honour." The unction of consecrating oil descends from Him to the skirts of His garments, to the meanest vessel and to the humblest Christian. We are a universal priesthood: therefore I am not speaking to you alone and as ministers yet. The word rejects any limitation. There is, strictly speaking, no consecration to special office in Christianity; the threefold unction descended on Christ in three offices; but from Him no longer upon any single office. Men are set apart and ordained to this special ministry, but to no special office sanctified. This word is limited to our common, universal, individual relation to Christ, our common Lord. Union with Him is the sacred, inestimable prerogative of every individual Christian. It is his birthright, inalienable and precious. And we must all take our place in the common congregation of the sanctified. Brethren, you will have in due time your special honour, but it is not to be found in your being consecrated persons.

II.

The same truth appears under another aspect when the apostle speaks of the unlimited variety of natural endowments which come under the common law of this one sanctification. According to human judgment the gradations of honour are endless; the talents and gifts dispensed by the Spirit are almost as various as the persons and features of the individual Christians. But the honour that comes from God, the honour of sanctified service is one and common

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to all, or may be common to all, varieties of endowment. We cannot be quite sure what was the precise meaning of the enumeration here. But we may make the gold and the silver stand for many varieties in the higher order of gifts, and the wood and earth for many varieties in the lower order of gifts. This is quite in harmony with St. Paul's manner. It is usual for him to dilate on the manifold differences of the Spirit's administration of talents, as if they were necessary for the symmetry of the great body, for the beauty and variety of the furniture of the house, for the diverse probation of individual Christians, and above all for the filling up of the various functions of service and usefulness. As to genius and talent the Great Dispenser acts as He will, and gives no account why some have faculties which seem only a little lower than the angels' and others are fools, as it were, in their own right as well as for Christ's sake; while the great majority are neither in the one class nor in the other, but entrusted with the ordinary ability that has no distinction. Suffice that all this beautiful gradation of manifold gifts is employed in the service of Jesus, and bound up with its success in the world. In the temple of our sanctification all our talents are received and sanctified and used.

Now, it is most obvious that the apostle signifies here that the common sanctification is the great equalizer. His argument, if I may so call it, demands that this should be equally within the reach of all, and of all alike. We cannot all be highly gifted, but we may all be richly graced. By no alchemy can we transmute our earthern vessels

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into silver or our silver into gold. Or, supposing that we may refine the silver and make the gold of our nature more fine, it is not permitted of us to ask of God another order of talents than that which He has dispensed. We are not allowed to supplicate for or expect in our regeneration a new distribution of gifts. But we may all present our request for the honour of a perfect sanctification of what we have; to that request the Master of the house will never say "Ye know not what ye ask." The unction dignifies by sanctifying what we have; and they were not altogether wrong who changed the text so as to read "He shall be sanctified unto honour." That unction descends on the richly endowed and the poorly endowed alike. Many of the humblest instruments of the Lord's will are among the most honoured, though they may not know it; and in the book hereafter to be read off names are honourably recorded that have no record below. But the unction rests also upon the eminent. Names are written with honour in that book which men on earth delight also to honour. Some of the vessels of gold sanctified to your souls' good and mine, whose words are like the echoes of the Lord still vibrating, were in their lifetime men whom the world calls children of genius. The issue of all is that the use of the talent, greater or less, makes the honour: our honour is the sanctification of what we are and what we have.

All this we are bound to say, in fidelity to St. Paul's meaning. But no one can fail to perceive that there is a difference in his thoughts between the higher and the lower vessels; and we scarcely

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do wrong in regarding him as congratulating those who have higher gifts to place on the altar. It is not in his mind to level all distinctions, even in that house the common honour of which is its sanctity. I can suppose the apostle saying: "If you have great ability, use it rather!" It is an unspeakable honour, in its own degree and measure, to be called into the service of the Church with a high order of talents and endowments; and to have a noble offering naturally provided for the altar. It is a still higher honour to have by industry and diligence improved our talents and made them as worthy as we can make them of the divine acceptance. Let us not despise this: "use it rather!" But the honour here meant is in a most blessed sense independent of the quality of the gift: it is the prerogative of the altar to sanctify whatsoever toucheth it. Its honour is in being there, not precisely in what it is. It is this, that the Lord makes it His own, and uses it.

III.

This leads at once to the central dignity of the text, and that which will go straight to the heart of all who honour as they ought that Worthy Name by which they are called: the honour of sanctified service is that it is profitable to the Lord Himself in His ministry. "Meet for the Master's use, and ready unto every good work!" there can be no higher honour than this. But here we are almost losing the figure, and the truth behind it can scarcely any longer be hid. The Master is not

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indeed the owner of the imaginary house; although it is He who once called Himself the Master of the household. But the house itself is the visible church; and in it all kinds of vessels are put to all kinds of uses. Those are the sanctified whom He will not disdain to use and make useful to Himself. This is their honour, their unspeakable honour, that they are not only sanctified in Christ, but also to Him and for Him. And again I say: "This honour have all His saints." For even yet, my brethren, I have not come to you and your distinction.

Every true Christian may aspire to the dignity—may indeed claim it as his own—to stand immediately before his Lord: profitable to Him whether only standing in silence, or running His errands, or toiling in His presence. We do not press the words too much when we say that they bring every one of us into direct contact with the Master: not merely as in the house there are many vessels the householder never sees or hear of. Here the figure of the house is fast fading into or rather glorified into that of the temple. As there are no intermediary priests so there are no intermediary masters here. We are in the immediate presence of the Being whose will is law to the universe and whose smile is the happiness of heaven. There is no honour to be compared with this in the life that now is, and none to surpass it in the life that is to come. To wait upon the Lord Jesus is to have recovered the dignity of our being. Hear the Archangel—though he had not, like us, recovered a lost dignity—"I am Gabriel, who stand in the presence of the Lord, and I have been sent to speak unto thee;"

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or St. Paul, only a little lower than Gabriel, "My Lord, whose I am and whom I serve!" Let us still remember the words, "If any man serve Me, him will My Father honour!" It is this which gives its imperishable dignity to the blessed life, and translates its commonest familiarities into "heavenly places." We must not, even in our reverence, abate our privilege. It is not merely "in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ," but "heartily as to the Lord and not to men; for we serve the Lord Christ." Here is your honour and mine, the common honour of the Christian congregation. You may say: "Others can give Him more learning, more eloquence, more money, more worthy service in all respects. I do not envy them. But I also can do my little. And that little He accepts." Brethren, seek this honour above all things: to live and move and have your being in the presence of the Master Christ; meet for His use.

I have been on the point of saying "necessary to the Lord." This might provoke demur, and is hardly justifiable to criticism; but our hearts accept it; and the words are not far from this meaning. We are, to quote the apostle's language a little further on, "profitable to Him for the ministry:" it is the selfsame word. Our Master has His ministry, as St. Paul had his; and we are all, or all may be, profitable to the Lord's ministry as Mark was to St. Paul's. Whatever other instruments He may have in other worlds, where our fellow-servants the angels wait on Him, we know that in this world we are His elect agents; His instruments and chosen vessels are taken from

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among men, not apostles and separated ministers only, but men and women as such. These are His angel spirits and ministering flames of fire. Of course there is much limitation. We have nothing to do with the beginning, nor have we to do with the end of His works; but during the process it is most inspiring to think and most overwhelming to feel how necessary we are to His ministry. We are His servants in all He does, and He uses our poor eyes, and hands, and feet as if they were His own. Somewhere or other He calls every one of us in; and we are amazed to find how important our little service is: "Whence is this to me!" There is a moment and there is a point in the common work when He looks round for each, and the Master calleth for thee! Woe to us if the service He expects is not rendered! It were better for us that we had never been born! Then shall we be vessels unto dishonour indeed! But happy the man, beyond all language happy, whose service offered in love is accepted in condescension, and rewarded even already with His "Well done!" How should the thought of this rejoice our hearts and invigorate our faculties and loosen our tongues and open our hands and make our feet swift to shed blessing! What an honour does this confer upon our poor human life! and how should the constant remembrance of it banish all unworthy feeling and unite us into the harmony of our common honour in the Sacred Presence common to us all. This should wither every selfish sentiment to its very roots; and translate our petty jealousies into holy rivalry. Every vessel is profitable to Him

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for the ministry; even I myself am and can do some good! If I am sanctified I am 'profitable; were it only that my Lord may see His own likeness reflected as in a glass, from glory to glory. It is serving Him to give Him pleasure. In the old temple, of which St. Paul was thinking, every vessel had its use: from the laver at the entrance to the golden mercy-seat and the all but living cherubim above. In our great house we are in an infinitely higher sense profitable unto Him. The very least of us on the pavement of this house is greater than the greatest in that ancient temple: because, as we have already seen, He who is greater than the temple is here, and reflects His own honour upon all His saints. But this all means each. "If a man," says St. Paul here. Once more it must be affirmed that this honour have or may have all His saints. And still therefore I speak not to these young men only, but to all.

IV.

But this suggests the next word: "prepared for every good work." And it marks the great change that must have been wrought upon our dishonoured natures before we could become thus profitable to our Lord. It is our deep degradation that sin has taken from us our capacity to do the work for which every created being is designed. And we have found our great retrieval in Christ. It is the very definition of regeneration that it is the preparing the spirit for every good work prepared for it. This, brethren, is the process of the salvation of the servant of Christ. He has done evil and not good

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all the days of his life; he is fully and freely forgiven in the court where the Lord our Righteousness presides and administers his atoning satisfaction. He is without the capacity to do the will of God, even though forgiven, unless he is renewed in the spirit of his mind; then he is regenerated through the indwelling operation of the Spirit of Christ who is Christ Himself. This pardoned and renewed soul is presented to God in His temple, laid upon His altar, and there accepted as ready for all the varieties of Christian service, henceforth dead to every other claim, and alive only to the sacred offices of the house of God. Until this has taken place we know not the powers and the capacities and the true dignity of our nature. But now we know it. There is nothing within the compass of religious duty as such—I mean the duty common to the Christian and not proper to the office-bearer—which we are not fitted for. Our feet being shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace, we can go on any errand. Our lips touched by the mystical tongs and the live coal, we can speak the words of this life everywhere. Above all, our hearts filled with the Spirit without the symbol, we are ready for every duty of devotion. This is to be a vessel of honour; or, dropping the figure, a man of God equipped for every service that man's need, the Church's advantage, or the divine will may demand of him. He cannot be prepared unless he is a son of God; for the children of this world cannot serve Him in the holiest place.

But let us mark the other side of this preparation, which is made emphatic in one word, "ready."

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There is nothing that stamps honour upon the servant of Christ like this alertness to every demand of duty, devotion and love. Both heaven and earth, God and men, conspire to honour the man who is always quick to respond to the claims of charity. The selfishness of human nature is its deepest degradation; and that is gone, or going, from him. He lives for others, not for himself; and where is honour comparable to that? Even the world's estimates grant this! He who sacrifices himself and all he has for his country is honoured of all men; far higher honour in the estimation of heaven is his who, in deep humility and obscure self-sacrifice, lives and dies for the good of mankind. Great is the dignity of him who is the ready, unreluctant instrument of the divine will, being to the hand of God what his own hand is to himself; asking no question for interest sake or for vainglory, or the desire of approval or self in any form; simply watching the indications of the divine eye and acting accordingly. O the grandeur and beauty of such a character! How does it shame the cold-heartedness of too many, whose works of devotion and charity are extorted from them by the fear of judgment or the calculation of expediency. This is the strain that runs through the Bible: "Speak, Lord, thy servant heareth!" "Here am I, send me!" in the mystical temple; and in the new temple the word of our own St. Paul, "Lord, what shall I do?" It is indeed better to go with a heavy heart than not to go at all; better to help our neighbour under pressure of conflicting motives than not to help him at all. But our privilege is to be so highly strung and finely touched

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that a look or a hint shall sway our whole being: "trembling at God's word," as it were like the aspen-tree quivering through all its leaves to the breath of the air that none but itself can feel. But no figure will express it; not even the electric current which responds to a touch and runs round the world. "Behold thy servant, ready for all. I desire not to live to myself, but to Thee! O that I could do it worthily and perfectly!" Ask of God this precious gift! If you would know the bliss and dignity of life never rest until all that hinders is removed, and from the crown of your head to the sole of your foot, in body, soul, and spirit, you are able to say, "Lo, I come to do Thy will!"

V.

Now then, at length I can come to you who are ordained this day. There is in your case a preparation and a readiness which is peculiar to your office. I must again forsake the figure. There is no mention here of vessels set apart from the other vessels by a vocation to a separated ministry. That is, there is no express mention; indirectly it appears in the context, where the apostle has false teachers in view; and we may quote his words, "ready unto every good work and word," with his own addition for your sake.

You are marked out as agents of the Redeemer's will. There are many workers whose service is very subordinate, whose usefulness is chiefly in removing obstructions from others' usefulness, or in quiet functions without a name, necessary but never again

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to be heard of. There are multitudes of sanctified Christians whom the Lord knows but not man. It is our joy to be assured that He does know them, and never forgets them.

But there are some also whose every moment is exacted for the service of the temple: vessels of the sanctuary literally, or rather men who bear the vessels of the Lord. And the readiness expected from them is a very peculiar one, even as their offices and duties are special. Their honour is—though I may seem to contradict myself—to be sanctified in a double sense, and to be meet for the Master's use in services much more like His own. Their honour is to be in readiness for the highest functions of the Lord Himself. They must be quick to catch every accent of human need and alert to fly to the help of every man in distress. Their life must be ministration to souls. I could fain ask you to stand up, and lift your right hand, and say, "From this moment will I make it my one sole care to be useful to my Lord!"

But here we have one of these most special responsibilities. Antichrist has his vessels of gold and silver and wood and earth in his service, the abomination of desolation which he brings into the sanctuary. The faithful minister must be ready to this good work: that of counteracting heresy. While there is one common honour of sanctification, they will be counted worthy of double honour who have laboured in the teaching of the saints and in the suppression of error. On this special occasion, and while your ministerial vows are fresh upon you, I am led naturally to the note with which the apostle begins;

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that the honour of our sanctified service is to be most jealously guarded by us as something that we gain and keep at a great cost. You see plainly that there is a sort of condition appended here. "If a man shall purge himself from these he shall be a vessel of honour." We must take a swift glance at the floor of the great house in order to understand this. There are false teachers, corrupters of the faith and morals of the church, propagating their pestilent errors. There are men doing what they think the work of God without His preparation; the preparation of their heart and the answer of their tongue is not from God. The house is never without these unsanctioned, unqualified practitioners in divine things. These men, the apostles of Antichrist, sent out "two and two" as here, and all who defile the temple, St. Paul calls vessels unto dishonour. As to the church, that is eternally safe; its firm foundation standeth. Its seal is twofold; the two inscriptions read together attest its stability, and one confirms the other. "The Lord knows His own and His own depart from iniquity." But that is not the final test; for what is this departing from iniquity but the purging ourselves from these; it is the same thing translated into the phraseology of the temple. The sifting process will be suddenly and perfectly despatched one day; the church will be sanctified for ever from all its defilement. But now each must separate himself! And from what kind of heretics? Their error might seem venial; they did not deny the God of heaven, or the Lord of earth. Only an ideal speculation that the resurrection was past!

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But turning from this we note the peculiar phrase: "purify from these." The whole process of our sanctification to God and His service demands that we do our own part to the best of our ability. There is always something for us to do. Before the unction descends and hallows our vessels they must be emptied of their corruption and vanity; or at least they must be entirely withdrawn from the service of sin. In many places we are commanded to do what seems the function of the Spirit alone: "Cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit;" "Cleanse your hands, ye sinner; and purify your hearts, ye double-minded!" Not only must we leave the company of loose and corrupt Christians, but throw out of our vessel everything that defileth. Then, when we have done, or while we are doing, our part He will sanctify us to Himself. He will fill the waterpots with the wine, new wine that never came from human vintage, and fill them, if you please, to the brim. Then will He also add—then, certainly, but not till then—Draw out now for the Master's satisfaction and for the good of men! Brethren, there are too many vessels in the great house that are not sanctified, because they have not been emptied and cleansed of the dregs of other and baser service. The Master can neither fill them to the brim nor draw the good wine from them for the church's refreshment, because they are not purged from these things and fit for the touch of His hand.

VI.

It is time, however, to remind ourselves that all

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this honour is the honour of the deepest humility. Whilst we are thinking of our good and acceptable service to our Master, the irrepressible question springs to our lips: "Can a man be profitable to his Maker?" The reply we give must be a careful one. There are two opposite errors we have to guard against. Our text in its phrase and structure is meant to convey at once an inspiriting and a humbling truth. On the one hand, the word honour must have its full force. St. Paul knew the difference between the dishonour of the reprobate and the honour of the saints. We must not undervalue the importance of Christian service, or the high dignity that is stamped upon human nature regenerate and sanctified. The Lord Himself is responsible. He has constrained us to glory by making us sharers of Himself and His Spirit. But it is still more important that we guard our lowliness. We may reject the figure and say that we are redeemed spirits who shall yield Him for ever the service of sanctified, free intelligence. But it is better to retain the figure and learn all its meaning. When the question was of God's honour the apostle called himself with lowly emphasis an "earthen vessel." And we must strive to combine the loftiest sense of the honour of our service with the profoundest humility as servants. "I am only a vessel, carved out of nothing, filled naturally with sin and the emptiness of vanity, and having no good in my soul that was not poured in! Only a vessel!" It may be pressing the figure too far to suggest how insignificant the utensils are in the great house in comparison of what they hold and the persons whose pleasure or need they sub-

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serve. But if we drop the figure, it is impossible to exaggerate the unspeakable lowliness that becomes us all in the great temple of God, from the least even to the greatest. What am I on the pavement of this great house, when looked down upon from above: and we are all beheld from above! What am I among so many multitudes of nobler and better servants who now and in ages past have filled these courts! And, with the Lord and Master of all in the midst, though invisible, where is all our boasting! Brethren, I have said much, been obliged to say much, of the high honour of Christ's service; that is the theme of the text. But we know nothing of true honour unless we are seeking with all our heart and mind and soul and strength to annihilate ourselves and give all the glory to Him who makes us what we are! Before honour is humility; humility is ever with honour; and humility and honour are one.

VII.

But there is a wider application of this. The apostle thinks of the doom of the vessels of dishonour, which will be also vessels of wrath. The whole process of sanctification in this life is our separation from these for ever. We may hope that we shall be worthy to be translated to the higher service of the upper house, and thus be vessels of eternal honour. I may paraphrase the text: "If a man be sanctified from all sin in time he shall be found prepared for every good work in eternity." We shall be as useful to the Master there as here; not merely the jewels of the Eternal King, the orna-

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mental furniture of heaven, or stately vessels laid up like the remembrancers of the past laid up in Zerubbabel's temple. Let us drop the figure, however. This life is a preparation for other and nobler service, such as eternity alone shall reveal. As time is witnessing the development of germs long hidden in human nature, so eternity will develop in inconceivable future manifestations the faculties sanctified here in germ. What they will be we must die—yea, rise again, for the resurrection of only One is past already—to know. In virtue of our former profitableness we shall be profitable again to our Master, in all His future ministry above. Whatever the Son of God shall do in His own house above, be sure that we shall be His elect and chosen agents. Our prerogative shall never be taken from us. And that will be our final honour, received from Him, and reflected back on Him, to Whom be the glory for ever!

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THE LAST LESSON OF SELF-SACRIFICE.*

Verily, verily, I say unto you, except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone; but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit.

He that loveth his life shall lose it; and he that hateth his life in this world shall keep it unto life eternal.

If any man serve Me, let him follow Me; and where I am, there shall also My servant be: if any man serve Me, him will *my* Father honour.—JOHN xii. 24, 25, 26.

THIS is the last of many testimonies of our Lord to the absolute necessity of self-renunciation. All the old familiar sayings concerning it are here gathered into one; and something is added to them which only the passion week and the nearness of the cross could supply. The hour had now come when the Redeemer could teach His doctrine perfectly and give it its perfect illustration. These words leave nothing out: their exhibition of the sacrifice of self presents it to us in its completeness, literally in its completeness. But the keynote of the whole is its necessity; and that must guide our thoughts. We might dwell on the text as containing a true definition of self-sacrifice, as presenting it in its utmost beauty and grace, as showing the connection between its loss

*A Discourse delivered in the Methodist Chapel, Bowdon, on Monday, May 13th, 1884, on occasion of the Meeting of the District Committee.

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and its gain, as giving us the noblest example of both, and as our Holy Master's final commendation of it to our hearts. All this might be done if we had as many hours as we have moments this evening. But we must be governed by the ruling word except or unless: one thing is needful. And if the Saviour teach us that by His Spirit, He will not fail to add all the rest. May His words sink into the ground of our hearts and bear their much fruit in our lives!

I.

Of that great law which was leading Him to the cross, and must make us follow Him thither, our Lord is about to speak in plain words. It was the deep secret of His heart; and everything that was passing around gave occasion for its utterance. The question of the Greeks suggested to Him the innumerable souls which would be the fruit of His passion; and that again suggested the necessity that He must first consummate His passion by death. But that necessity He intends to dwell upon as common to Him and His people; so He finds an illustration which will first of all make the principle general. He takes up His parable from Nature. It was the paschal week, and therefore the spring season, when the profound mystery of the death and resurrection of the seed-corn was everywhere in full operation. And in the grain of wheat which must die if wheat is to live on earth and be the food of man, our Lord, the Heavenly Poet and Interpreter of Nature, found his most apt similitude, and one familiar to all minds. It was a

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figure which, like the great reality, had been prepared from the foundation of the world.

The individual grain must die if wheat is to be continued on earth. There lies the pith of the necessity, which is the everlasting ordinance of God in Nature. Other reflections might arise and other lessons be taught. We who deeply ponder this most beautiful sentence—which has nothing to surpass it in all literature—find much else to meditate upon. But, whatever else may follow, our one and only leading thought is that in this case in order to life there must be death. To-morrow the Redeemer will use the vine as His similitude to teach that there is one life in stem and branches. Now He teaches that that life comes from death. The grain of wheat has in it a divine secret, a germ of life, which is the very omnipotence of God within it; but it must release that secret germ by being rent asunder, disintegrated, and opening its side that the living thing may issue. That it might do above the earth by accident or misdirection: when however there would be no fruit. Its perfect death must be in the earth, and its perfect resurrection must be a lifting up out of the earth. Until it return to the earth whence it came it abideth alone. It will retain its uncommunicated life for many days, indeed for long ages: in the granary, or in the dead hand of the mummy, where it was placed as a symbol of resurrection, for thousands of years waiting for its natural death, to touch the earth and die and rise again. "Except it die it abideth alone." It may indeed with other grains form one loaf and feed the life of man. But

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that is not here the question. To that aspect of the matter our Lord refers when He uses the figure of bread to denote Himself as the nourishment of our life. Here we have only to do with the law, stern but beautiful, that the seed must feed the life that springs from it with its own decaying substance. The little life takes root downwards and sends its shoots upwards; but both root and stem must be fed by the corrupting mass of the grain that thus spends itself utterly. It is to that one fact that our Heavenly Interpreter of Nature points our thought.

But it is only the other side of the same fact that this death is followed, one might almost say rewarded, by its own abundant resurrection. It is the same life that in death lives and through death rises again to large increase: the same life, and not another. Whatever may come from it was already its own. No human eye can see what God can see, what Christ saw when the grain lay in His hand, the life that is within. St. Paul indeed says that God giveth it a body as it pleaseth Him. But the illustration of man's rising is his subject, and that is not here in the Lord's thoughts or ours. The apostle refers to the one body rising again; the Lord is referring to many bodies rising from the one life that is released from the seed and rises out of the seed and is fed by it. Here is the strange mystery that no created mind can explain: that not simply what is lost is found again, but much more abundantly. This is the unfathomable wonder that should keep science and philosophy profoundly humble. But we must not leave our one point:

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self-sacrifice and its reward are one. EXCEPT it die it abideth alone. IF it die it beareth much fruit. Upon this let us fix our thought; let us learn the preliminary natural lesson before we learn the supernatural one. Here Nature is the forerunner of grace, and prepares as a teacher the way of the Lord. The grain of wheat is unconscious of the great secret it so beautifully teaches. But we can hardly help saying concerning it also that it must die and be raised up the third day.

II.

This, however, leads us at once to the Great Reality of which the seed-corn is here the figure; and that is by every token our Lord Himself and no other. He is the one supreme, solitary example of self-sacrifice in its absolute perfection: of such self-sacrifice as rises infinitely above both the analogies of Nature and the imitation of His saints.

Were we to dwell on all the points of difference here suggested we should be in danger of missing our one theme of the necessity of self-renunciation as common to Him and to us. But there are two things which it will be rather helpful than otherwise to mention. The grain of wheat loses its individual life as a grain: that is the ordinance of Nature in its case. But the Redeemer continues His own personality as distinct from the multitudes who live through Him. Again, the lives of those who live through His death are due entirely to His sacrifice of Himself. Now there the similitude of the seed

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is perfect; but the resemblance of His saints' self-sacrifice halts, as they do not give life to those whom they serve by self-renunciation. Hence, although there is a sense in which the beautiful figure suits both Him and us, in its profoundest significance it belongs only to Christ. He alone is the seed here, even as He alone was the sower in the earlier part of the history. And it may almost be said that the one point of absolute necessity, which is uppermost throughout, finds its supreme realization and perfect truth only in the Redeemer Himself.

Let us not shrink from saying how true it was that He who gave Himself for us must die if we should live! There was never any necessity so necessary as that. If mankind was to be saved it must be by His uttermost self-sacrifice. Apart from that self-imposed law, we may indeed suppose Him "abiding alone," alone, whether as the eternal Son or as the Son incarnate. He might have counted His equality with God a thing to be held fast, and left the creature which had marred His image to perish; but the mind that was in Him forbade that. He must die to atone for our sin; and, having taken our nature, He went on His way toward the cross. His hour had now come; and He speaks of it as of His glorification. He had been glorified before in the new dignity of His human estate, in the control given to Him over all Nature, in His victories over man's sicknesses and the terror of death. But had that been all He would still have continued "alone." He might have left the model of a human perfection unapproachable by us. He might have bequeathed

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to us the traditions of the loftiest teaching ever heard on earth, but teaching that could lead only to despair. He would have remained "alone," even as the Godman: the memory of a Form and Presence for a few years manifest in the flesh only to leave us again doubly bereaved. If we were to be saved by Him He must die, and rise again in a new life to pour into our ruined nature. There might be no absolute eternal necessity that He should die; but if man was to be saved there was but one way for Him to become a Saviour: the way of the cross.

Now this was in His thought as His hour drew nigh. And out of the abundance of His heart His mouth spake. It was His profound and most affecting soliloquy as He approached the end. And by expressing thus His sense of the need of His death He comforted His human heart in the prospect of the passion. "If it die it bringeth forth much fruit." This was "the joy set before Him, in the strength of which He endured the cross." He as purely and perfectly accepted His dread sufferings for our salvation as if the great offer had been now for the first time made to Him. We know that He came from heaven our predestined Saviour; and yet we must hear these words as expressing His free acceptance of His own death for our life. We know not, we shall never know, how gratefully He looked out during this awful week on the prospect of the salvation of multitudes. When the Centurion and the Syrophœnician put their trust in Him at an earlier time He saw in them the earnest of a vast harvest: "They shall come from the east and the west!" But now these

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Greeks open the very flood-gates of His desire and rejoicing. "I if I be lifted up out of the earth will draw all men unto Me." Thus He accepted the necessity of self-sacrifice for Himself and showed the profoundest meaning of His figure.

III.

I have made no application, scarcely any comment, on this sublimest of all illustrations of the necessity of self-sacrifice. We must adore it in reverent silence, as the mystery of love to which we owe our all. Yet there is an application to ourselves, which the Lord instructs us here to make. He suddenly diverts us, as it were, from His own voluntary passion, and fastens our thought on the absolute necessity of following Him in the same self-renouncing devotion with which He saved us. You hear the old tone here in St. John which you have marked in the three earlier evangelists. "If any man!" "If any man serve Me let him follow Me." Concerning Himself He spoke indirectly, and disguised Himself under the similitude of the seed-corn. But He fixes His eye, as He used to do, on every one of us now: "If any man will save himself, it must be by the same law under which I am his Saviour."

For this, brethren, is the deepest ground of the need of our self-sacrifice. We must offer up and renounce our own soul, our own life, as unworthy to exist: in the unity of the Lord's sacrifice of our sinful nature. This seems to be the profound meaning of those most solemn words: "He that hateth his life in this world shall keep it unto life

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eternal." Christ's sacrifice for us not only condemned sin in the flesh, but also condemned us the sinners in our natural state. It was as if He said: "O Righteous Father, I offer up and renounce this man's impure soul that it may die; and that My life may live and grow in him." If after that you "love yourself, or your soul, you lose it." You must, my fellow sinner in Adam and fellow redeemed in Christ, hate and renounce and put away your self: hate your soul as having been a sinning soul; and renounce it as if it had never been and you had never known it. There is the beginning, continuance, and end of the Christian religion as it pertains to the individual. But I am now speaking chiefly, as the Lord is, of the beginning: "If thou wilt be perfect" He said to a young inquirer, ambitious to be a Christian, "go away, and bury thyself, and come back to Me with nothing, and take up My cross as the token that thou hast done with self, and follow Me!" You have never yet effectually learnt the lesson of the Lord's passion if you have not come to this total, perfect, and absolute abandonment and hatred of yourself. The Great Renunciation of the Master must in this sense be copied by the great renunciation of the disciple. Your poor, faltering, ineffectual religion, for ever vacillating between the world and Him who draws you to Himself, is a melancholy comment on the absolute necessity of this entire self-sacrifice. O what a life from Him you are losing until you lose your life for Him!

But these last words give another view of the same subject. The Christian religion is the deliber-

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ate sacrifice of the old self on the altar which sanctifieth whatever toucheth it because it was itself first sanctified by the oblation of Christ. The words of our Lord recorded earlier by St. Matthew explain more fully what His meaning was here. "He that findeth his life shall lose it: and he that loseth his life for My sake shall find it." "For My sake!" The Saviour was there as here speaking of the fundamental principle of His religion. It is not a hard, cold, calculating sacrifice of the worse for the better self, or surrendering the sinner to find the saint, or laying down the present life to find the life eternal. It is all this, rightly understood; but it is also the offering up all to Him who renounced all for us. This also is the beginning, continuance and end of personal religion; and it qualifies and softens the other of which we have heard. That seemed to make us care supremely and solely for self: this makes the devotion to Another supreme. We love Him because He first loved us. Self-sacrifice is not for the better self so much as for Christ. We offer love for love; and, constrained by the devotion to us shown by our Lord and revealed by His Spirit, we give up our all to Him. It is most certain that our religion halts over its elements and alphabet until it renounces self. But it is also certain that nothing will fully cure its halting but a perfect surrender of the soul to Jesus. The combination, however, is perfection. This, nothing less than this, is the true sacrifice of self: to offer it wholly to the Lord. It is the dethroning of self that the Lord may reign in its stead. It is the blessed experience that made the apostle cry:

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"I live not I, but Christ liveth in me," and "For me to live is Christ." But we must not forget that our theme is the necessity of this surrender. And what else does the apostle mean by the word I have just used, "the love of Christ constraineth us." Our religion will give us no rest till we yield to the sweet compulsion. "I will draw Mine own to Myself." We must make the full surrender; and, until we do, are abiding alone: or, if not altogether alone, without those blessed tokens of His life in us which it is our privilege to enjoy.

"Our privilege to enjoy:" this speaks of our own interest and our own salvation; and beyond that we have not yet gone. But surely the sacrifice for self in the imitation of Christ has a meaning altogether beyond this; embracing the law that binds us to serve our Master in all the ministries of charity for others. Let me direct your attention to the order of the words. After our Lord has said that he who loveth his soul so wrongly as to keep it back from Him loseth it, and that he who hateth his life for Christ's sake shall find it, He goes on to say, "If any man serve Me, let him follow Me; let him engage in My work in My spirit of self-sacrifice." That is to say: with and in addition to and beyond his own salvation, he must be wholly the Lord's servant. The words "If any man" really mean, "Every man must serve Me;" and "Let him follow Me," means also that he must imitate Me. But if our hearts are right we know full well why the imperative is not used.

The very best definition of self-sacrifice or self-surrender is the making all of life a service of Christ

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in His ministry to man. This gives it an inexpressible dignity. If you consider closely the connection of the words, you will see that the Lord's suggestion is that every man must make the work of his Master his own. The "follow" seems to signify nothing less than "If any man would serve Me, he must join Me in My work of redemption." He was, as it were, dedicating Himself to that great work afresh at the beginning of the passion week; and His will is that we should join Him in that dedication. At the end of all, when He again made, and for the last time, that perfect oblation of Himself, He said, "I sanctify Myself, that they may also be sanctified;" and we do no wrong to put the same interpretation on that saying. He is sanctified to redemption, and we must be sanctified to it also. But this word "serve" reminds us that, only the day before, the Saviour, already preparing for the passion, had hallowed this very term: "The Son of man came not to be served, but to serve; and to give His life a ransom for many." It is the same beautiful word minister. And now He seems to say: "As I minister to men, ye must all minister to Me hereafter. Not yet; for I came not to be served in that sense until I have accomplished My own service. I came not to judge the world, but hereafter I shall judge the world. So I came not first of all to be ministered to, but I shall be ministered unto when My ministry is accomplished. And whatever ye shall do to the least of Mine ye shall do it unto Me." Every one of us, for the word is universal, must unite the work of his life with the Lord's. Some of us more closely and directly, and some of us at a

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greater distance, and with a less obvious imitation; but all must minister to Him as He ministered to man. There are some parts of our life that may seem to have very little to do with the work of Christ, but even they may be dignified by His name, and even in them His name may be glorified.

It is the "following Him" which brings out the full meaning. In all our life the mind of Christ must actuate us: the same thought must be "in us which was also in Him." St. Paul did not say "It must be;" but "Let the same mind!" So St. Paul's Master says: "Let him follow Me!" And how but by always and in everything acting as He acted who "pleased not Himself." In Him supremely was exemplified St. Paul's ideal of charity which "seeketh not her own things." Now we may make bold to aspire to this: there is infinite promise in that calm "let him follow Me." If you will, my brother, you may have in you the Spirit of Him who never from the first moment of His appearing to mankind spent one thought upon Himself. Remember that it is precisely here, and I may say here only, that He makes Himself an example. The word in "learn of Me, for I am meek and lowly in heart" prepared the way for the act of the feet-washing, which was the direct sequel of the precept of our text. After this act of unspeakable humility and self-abasement He said: "I have given you a pattern." In this, whether as God or man or Godman, He could be our example: but not in His securing of our salvation, not in the renouncing self and in finding self! In this He could and He did go before us. Remember another

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thing, however. It was concerning this that He gave us the remarkable warning: "If ye know these things happy are ye if ye do them!" Nothing has been so much lauded and magnified among men as self-sacrifice: philosophers, poets, moralists, have vied with each other in extolling it as the secret of all greatness and the soul of all perfection. It is as if the Lord had this inconsistency in view. Alas how many there are who call Him Master and Lord, and "say well;" who admit also that the crowning glory of the Gospel is in the sacrifice of Christ whole and entire for us, and the sacrifice of every Christian for others in imitation of Christ; but who in all their lives show that they have scarcely begun that fundamental lesson. We must thoroughly learn it, for it deeply concerns our salvation.

IV.

We should be doing injustice to this final tribute to self-sacrifice if we forgot the solemn sanctions with which our Lord surrounds it. It might indeed seem inconsistent with the essence of self-renunciation to be under any compulsion, whether of fear or of hope. If we are utterly to renounce self, what have we to do with either the threatening of losing ourselves or the promise of finding ourselves? All that can be said in reply to this is that no theory of self-annihilation which omits the great incentives to it has any place in the teaching of Jesus: I was going to add, in the example of Jesus, who kept in view the joy that was set before Him, and saw in these Greeks the prophecy and the promise

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of His own exceeding great reward in the satisfaction of His soul. Let it suffice to refer you again to the beautiful parallel from Nature that here underlies all. The life that springs from the death of the grain is its own life continued; and the many grains that grow from it are its own fruit and produce. We may not be able altogether to reconcile the two. But there is a reconciliation. Utter and most absolute unselfishness or self-annihilation is also the most self-regarding and thrifty care of self.

You see plainly that the emphasis falls on the reward, and especially the reward of eternity. But the necessity of self-renunciation is also urged by the threat of the eternal loss of self. The Saviour's words are very awful: there is no sarcasm in them, no satire; but their tranquil solemnity is fearful. He shall "lose himself." There must be a total loss of self: either in Him and for Him, or without Him. But the dreadful and pathetic irony, if irony there is, lies in the word "alone." He may find himself: but alone and without a friend in the boundless universe. To be "alone" is a very indefinite thing: it may have many meanings. Undoubtedly the Lord would suggest to us the melancholy thought of isolated, selfish indifference to every one but self. But that loneliness in this world is only the precursor of another. Let me, fellow-sinner, impress it on you that you must come out of yourself if you are ever to be saved. In yourself you have no hope. Begin to renounce and hate and abandon yourself, and turn your whole soul to Another, even to Him who has come to seek and save you and all the lost!

But, as I said, the emphasis is on the reward or

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rather the result of sacrifice. Reward is not the appropriate word. The soul in its purest self-renunciation does not think of that: here is the beautiful paradox and mystery of this grace. Nor does the Lord use language precisely of that kind. He rather speaks in soliloquy: "Where I am My servant shall be." "Him that serveth Me My Father will honour." Both sayings are indefinite: they point to futurity of course; but they do not shut out the present. Those who enter into Jesus, empty themselves of self, and live only in their Lord, have a great reward in the time that now is. It is an immense gain that they have not a single care left that is not His. O the peace of a self-renouncing soul! "A hundredfold in this present life!" Such devoted imitators of their Master already reap their harvest. While the Lord yet spake, and was uttering the words of entire self-sacrifice, there came a voice from heaven, giving Him a present unspeakable consolation. They thought that it thundered, or that an angel spake to Him; but it was the Father comforting His Son, and for our sake that we might be comforted too. Like Him we hear voices and have food and receive consolation that the world knoweth not of. But after all, it is the other world that brings the great compensation. There we shall be with Him. There we shall be honoured of the Father who will eternally honour His Son; and honoured because we served Him, the emphasis lying upon that. We must not too curiously ask what this means. Suffice that the Blessed Master of us all will not leave us without a bright prospect as we enter with Him the valley. Disinterested, perfectly

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disinterested service, He will not ask. He approves and loves and smiles on the beautiful enthusiasts who will not say "What shall we have?" But still He Himself says, "Him will My Father honour who serves Me in the contempt of self."

Finally, brethren, all this does not take away the essence of self-sacrifice, which still remains in its strength and severity and loveliness. It is hard to reconcile these contradictories in theory: we can best reconcile them in practice. And practically we may regard our Saviour as teaching us to regard the present life as the time of loss, the life to come as the time of gain. There is a sense in which the dying of the seed-corn covers the whole of our present probation; and the much fruit from its death covers the whole of eternity. Let us give to time the sacrifice of time; and to eternity the fruit of eternity. Let us pledge ourselves once more this day to follow our Lord, in the Great Renunciation, with His cross on our shoulders and also in our hearts, our self being firmly nailed to it for ever. And to Him who exemplified the lesson He teaches us, with the Father and the Holy Ghost, be the glory! Amen.

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THE SANCTUARY ABOVE AND THE ASSEMBLY BELOW.*

"Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus,

"By a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh;

"And *having* an high priest over the house of God;

"Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water.

"Let us hold fast the profession of *our* faith without wavering; (for he *is* faithful that promised;)

"And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works:

"Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some *is;* but exhorting *one another:* and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching."—HEBREWS x. 19–25.

WITHOUT doing the least violence to the text, we may represent the sacred writer as exhorting us here to the twofold worship which is both offered in heaven and offered on earth. In terms of the highest sublimity he bids us boldly to enter the holiest, through the High Priest over the invisible house, and present ourselves with confidence and joy before the face of God. And then he calmly descends to the lower courts, telling us with marked emphasis that we must enter into the visible assembly also. Whether it was the purpose of the Holy Ghost to impress upon us the necessity of combining

* Preached at the opening service of the Methodist Chapel, Matlock, Bath.

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these—so that, while we remember our supreme privilege to worship in heaven by faith, we must not forget the worship of sight on earth,—I need not ask. Suffice that on an occasion like this, when we are assembled to dedicate a house of prayer, nothing can be more appropriate than thus to unite them. Let us ask the aid of the Spirit of grace and of supplications while we consider that the heavenly worship does not render the earthly needless; then that the visible worship must never be separated from the invisible and spiritual; and lastly that the two are in the highest worship of the church one as the type and earnest of the eternal worship above.

I.

The tone of the passage evidently gives the pre-eminence, as it were, to the heavenly worship: to that which enters with Christ or through Christ, the High Priest, into the holiest within the veil. But when the writer so solemnly adds, "Forget not the assembling of yourselves together," he suggests that this latter has in its place and degree a deep importance of its own.

This will appear at once if we look steadily at the relation between the two; if we bear in mind that the one is the worship of the mystical and invisible church, while the other is the worship of that church, regarded as the same though now visible on earth. The Head of the spiritual body has passed through the veil of His sacrificed flesh into the heavens; and of course that body enters also in virtue of union with Him. In ancient times the typical high priest

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entered alone, representing the people still outside; and he came out from the holiest to declare that the worshipping congregation was accepted, but at the same time to show that the true Holiest was not yet opened. Our High Priest over the house of God has entered, not as representing His people outside, but as taking them with Him; and He has not come out again, but abides there to give right of perpetual access to the presence of God. There is a sense in which all the members of the mystical body are in the heavenly places in Christ; like Him, or rather in Him, abiding by faith in the upper world. The text, however, seems to connect with this a rather different view. The High Priest, separate from His spiritual people, receives them as a body of worshippers who have left their sins behind them, are washed both by an outward and an inward baptism, and are constantly, not at set times only but always, drawing near to the Triune God through His mediation, offering their gifts of worship and thanksgiving. The exhortation is to the Hebrew church as belonging to this spiritual body. It seems to say to them: "You were wont to assemble in the temple and behold the high priest go trembling behind the veil, and wait trembling yourselves until he came out again. But now all is changed: that veil has been rent; the ancient narrow holiest has expanded into heaven itself; and we all, still the people of God but not a visible nation, enter boldly through and with our High Priest. Always hold fast and enjoy your privilege. Live and move and have your being with God, through Christ. Draw nigh to Him constantly as those who dwell in His

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courts; and so dwell in His courts as constantly to be drawing nigh."

But you see at once how that might be perverted; and how necessary the other exhortation was. The Hebrews might say: "Then if we belong to Christ by faith, and by faith appear before God through His mediation, that is enough. We have done with earthly temples, and external worship, and worldly ceremonies for ever." No, the holy writer says: "We have an altar still. There is a visible as well as a mystical church; there is a literal as well as a spiritual body. We still have our earthly sanctuary, though we do not give it that name. We still have officiating ministers, though not priests. And the baptized community of Christ must assemble around His name: to offer the worship of human tongues and united hearts, to proclaim the confession of His name before men; to provoke one another to love and good works; and to carry on the work of the Redeemer in the world." Brethren, we meet here this day as representing a portion of that spiritual fellowship concerning which our Lord said: "On this rock I will build My church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." The Lord knows His own among us. But we meet also as representing the little organized community to which also He gave the name church: "Wherever two or three are gathered in My name, I am in the midst."

The double exhortation, however, gives all this a personal emphasis. The former deals with the Christian as a private worshipper, whose religion is matter of individual union with Christ and acceptance with God through Him. The latter deals with

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him as a member of the visible church who must not forget to join himself to the company and share their visible worship. Here there are two things to be noted.

The having a name and place in heaven does not suffice of itself. It seems hard to say this; and certainly there is a sense in which nothing more is wanting either in heaven or in earth than to have the heart sprinkled and the body washed with the "heavenly washing," and to be one with Christ, and to have an introduction to the Holiest through Him. What more than this can be necessary for time or eternity? How many have so thought, and regarded a name and place in the visible church as of no importance. But the same Lawgiver who has ordained that salvation is only through the name of Jesus has also ordained that those who are "in process of salvation" should be "added to the church." Those whose conscience is sprinkled from sense of guilt have their bodies washed with the baptismal water. As the one mystical church is represented by a visible body, so the individual member of that spiritual family must be a member incorporate in that visible body. I say "must:" but you will not misunderstand the word. This obligation is not of the absolute, eternal character with the obligation to stand before God in Christ in the Holiest. But the Lord has made it obligatory nevertheless.

More than that, the exhortation proceeds on the supposition that many were tempted, and yielded to the temptation, to undervalue the regular, habitual gatherings of God's people. How many arguments would be at hand: how many excuses would be

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ready! "We are freed from ceremony: that is the very glory of the new religion. God is a Spirit, and wants only the worship of spirit and truth." "Christ is at hand: to Him shall our gatherings be very soon." "I can edify myself by private meditation; and instruct myself as well at home as I can be instructed in public." All such apologies condemn themselves. There is a special blessing connected with the means of grace, which can be reached nowhere else. The hour of common worship has its own and peculiar heavenly benediction. And some of the acts of worship—such as the Lord's supper—convey their blessing ordinarily only to the assembly. Then correct your principles if they are lax; keep your place in the holiest; and value that if you will supremely; but forsake not the assembly below!

II.

Now let us look at the other side of the question. The heavenly and spiritual worship requires the earthly; and we have heard the grave warning against neglecting the visible means of grace. But we should not really miss the meaning of the passage, if we inverted it, as follows: "Assemble yourselves together in the visible house; but do not forget to enter the holiest, as the manner of some is."

Much has been said about the veil being done away in Christ, and our entering with Him into an opened heaven. But that has to do only with the spiritual church. To that there is but one house of God: faith annihilates space and makes the universe, or at least heaven and earth, one great temple. But

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the visible church meets in an outer court, before an invisible holiest, and with the veil woven, as it were, again. As we are expressly told, the High Priest is within the veil; and there He receives, sanctifies, makes acceptable, and responds to the worship presented through Him on this side. There is literally no meaning in that worship unless it passes through the veil into the holiest. But all this is so far only general: let us look at a few particulars.

Then take the gathering together itself. It is supposed to be an assembly of those who come to this place as only an outer court or vestibule of the holiest, or as the Scripture calls it "the gate of heaven." When we meet together it is to ask, and seek and knock at the door within which mercy waits. Private prayer is offered before the Father in secret. In a certain sense so also is public prayer. But there is special emphasis upon the united assembly, which gathers together to present its worship and petitions solemnly and believingly through the Great Mediator. We ought in fact to go back more or less to the old idea of the house of God with its outer congregation, waiting to offer its devotions and gifts to the invisible being behind the veil. It has been said again and again that the spiritual body is already with Christ, or enters into the Holiest through Him. Now it is well to remember that the visible assembly is still this side of the sanctuary and before the veil, and waiting to present offerings and receive benedictions through the Mediator within.

Consider the acts of worship we offer. They are supposed to be presented to God in the inner sanctuary: by which we mean rather in the invisible

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holiest which is over this or surrounds it. Here we are within visible walls, in a place not essentially different from any other place; but our hymns, our confessions of sin, our supplications, our thanksgivings, our intercessions must go into the Holiest through the mediation of Jesus. They have literally no meaning if they do not. We do not pour out our confessions to men or to each other. We deliberately utter them to Jesus the High Priest that He may unite them with His intercession for us. We do not sing our hymns into the air and utter our worship to be echoed back from roof and walls. We know that they penetrate the thin veil and are heard beyond, because our High Priest makes them His own. We present our supplications general and personal in a solemn, stately, formal manner through the Mediator. It is so in every private prayer. But it is especially so in the general assembly, and in the public mediatorial services of the united Christian Church gathered together in one.

And as our petitions must go through to Him, so His answers must come through for us. We do not see our High Priest come out and with uplifted hand bless us. But He does invisibly by His Spirit respond to every part of our service. There is such a thing as a general blessing: doubt not this, though you can hardly understand it. No one can be present with a sincere desire and honest heart without feeling the general influence of grace from behind the veil. But of course all blessing must be particular. We bless God individually; and He replies "Blessed art thou!" "Bless the Lord," they said to the priests, "for us, ye who stand in the house of

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the Lord!" The answer was, "the Lord who made heaven and earth bless thee out of Zion." The assembly in the visible house is in mystical sympathy and correspondence with the invisible assembly in the upper house. And as the flow of devotion sets in to the Holiest through Jesus the Mediator, so the flow of benediction sets outwardly into the hearts of all who wait for it. The visible assembly is dignified and glorified by this union with the assembly invisible.

Here we may pause and make a further application; or rather pursue the subject into another region. It is obvious that we may find in this union, rightly understood, the safeguard against undue ritualism. What may be said to be meant by that? Many answers might be given, but one is enough here; its central evil is the forgetting that a veil does really exist, that the courts are distinct, and that the part of Christ within the holiest must not be intruded on. We must give to earthly service what belongs to earth, and give to the heavenly what belongs to heaven. If we draw the veil or screen below; and in the long withdrawn chancel erect an altar and present a sacrifice, we are invading the supremacy of the High Priest in heaven and going back to Judaism again. There is no priest permitted or needful on earth; nor is there any altar below; nor are there any sacrifices of expiation. All these are in the Holiest. And it is a great and grievous wrong both to the heavenly and to the earthly worship to forget the dependence of the one on the other. The principle is general, wider than the mere worship, and runs through the

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whole economy. We do not see our Priest: it is the glory of our worship that we look beyond the minister to the Mediator behind and beyond him. We have no confessional and no confessor visible: we have indeed both, but they are not seen. We must accept the imperfection of our earthly worship. We are not anxious for its finished ritual. The best adornment of our poor houses is not before our eyes. We have the screen and the chancel: but both are visible only by faith. That this is so seems to many impatient worshippers to impoverish our service: it really enriches it unspeakably.

But it is obvious that we may forget the dependence of the outer on the inner court in another way. Ritualism is not our only, nor perhaps our greatest, peril. The danger is that of being content with an orderly and decent ceremonial, without ever thinking of that which entereth within the veil. We may very easily make the mistake of regarding the assembly and the sacred service as an end in itself; and suppose that we have done our duty when we have complied decently with the appointed order. It seems hard to believe that any could be so blind as to think that the demands of religion are satisfied by going through any prescribed service, and that the more elaborate it is the better. You perhaps are thinking that you make no such mistake. But you may be content to turn that service into your carnal enjoyment which you ought to make your spiritual duty. You may take a certain measure of delight in a ceremonial every part of which condems your soul. This, alas, is the evil and the offence that clings to the walls of every

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visible house of God, more or less, in broad Christendom.

It is possible also that we may come to regard that which really belongs to the outside service as the great concern: I mean the preaching and mutual exhortation which are here referred to. How many there are habitually in our congregations who forget the great object of the house of God as it is connected with the Holiest, and remember only the part of it that is connected with the service of religion below. There is, you see in the text, a certain object of the assembling together purely concerned with the duty of religion on earth: the exhortation or preaching, which is the medium of stimulant to all good works and to the promotion of diligence in expectation of the coming of Christ. If you look carefully you will see that this is a subordinate part of the worship of the Christian assembly as such. Perhaps I ought not to say subordinate: nothing can be subordinate in the sense of unimportant that keeps alive the Christian's sentiment of duty. Preaching and teaching will have a high place in the Christian assembly until He come whose coming will put an end to its necessity. But it is not right that the voice of man should be the highest charm in the house of God, and that house be regarded as a house of preaching. That again is to forget, even as the other abuses I have referred to forget, that the earthly assembly hangs on to the heavenly, and that all our service below, in the house of prayer, is only part of a worship the better part of which is not in this house at all. Let us not be satisfied with the voice of man, or the sound

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of our own voices, when we may hear and rejoice in the voice of God.

III.

In conclusion, the abundant context shows that the whole exhortation which we are now considering in both its parts has a special reference to the great future, when the assembling together and the entering into the Holiest will be separate and distinct no more, but be one for ever.

Throughout the Scripture the earthly assembling of God's people is regarded as the type, earnest, and foretaste of the everlasting assembly, the general assembly of the future world. The very house of God is, with all its simplicity, a kind of type of heaven: shut in from the world, and the place of union in the presence of God. The Sabbath as the day of gathering—the only day on which, in fact, the Christian Church as a whole can assemble—is the type of the eternal rest in God. You will also remember that the very expression here, "gathering together," is used in an affecting relation to our final meeting around our visible Lord: "I beseech you," says St. Paul, "by our gathering together unto Him." Our Lord has kept that thought in His people's hearts by the words He used on the only occasion when He spoke of the assembling of Christians. "Wherever two or three are gathered together in My name, there am I in the midst." He is in the midst, but we see Him not. He has promised, however, to come again and receive us to Himself: that where He is there we may be also. Every time we gather together around the invisible

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Lord we are reminded by everything we see and do of the time when we shall gather round His visible presence. The minister and his preaching, the liturgical books and worship, the sacramental symbols and seals, will be abolished. He will displace them all by the blessedness of His own personal ministry to us for ever. And this it was which gave a peculiar force to the exhortation: "Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another, and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching."

Again, our present entering into the Holiest is itself a type and pledge and earnest of our final entering into the heavens in a higher and nobler sense. We ascend by faith into the presence of God; and every personal act of that faith, as well as its every united act, reminds us that the time is coming when we shall enter no longer by faith but visibly and as it were by sight. The veil that keeps us from the Holiest in person is that of our own flesh. That also must be rent before we can enter. Then shall we finally be in a temple filled with the glory of the Lord, the lamp of which shall be the Lamb: the only manifestation of the Presence of God we can ever have. After all that has been said about our present entering, it is at best an entrance now with many qualifications. We enter with Christ and in Him: yet we are shut up to blind and naked faith. Sometimes, it is true, the restraint of faith seems to be burst, and we feel as if we were already in that other sanctuary. But we awake like Jacob from a dream. The time, however, is coming when the heavenly worship will be precisely as plain and

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visible as this is in which we now engage. Faith shall not be as it has been so long the master principle. We shall be ourselves where our faith now is; and the Holiest shall be our home for ever. Of that also every service on earth reminds us: keeping up a perpetual remembrance that the way into the eternal sanctuary is not finally and fully opened.

When that time comes the two will be one. The gathering around the Lord will be assembling around the High Priest in the Holiest: though both Holiest and High Priest are terms that will have lost their meaning. The mystical and the visible churches shall be one at last: they have never been so on earth, nor ever will be, until that final gathering together around Him in the heavens. The assemblies will be assemblies no more, for they shall never break up. We shall not enter the Holiest by faith; for we shall never leave it again. The two worships of which so much has been said in this discourse shall be one for ever. But it is not merely the prophecy and promise of this that the text dwells upon. The worship of earth is regarded as having for its design to keep alive this blessed hope. Happy, brethren, shall we be if our habitual attendance in this place nourishes and keeps alive the hope of that eternal worship: of that blessed day when we shall enter a congregation that shall never break up, but be gathered together around the Incarnate Saviour for eternity in an assembly which shall be composed, not of a few hundreds of our fellow Christians constantly changing, but of the universal multitude of all that shall be found in Him.

Every meeting both suggests and prophesies and

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prepares us for that assembly. Here we are rehearsing our future worship: or at any rate are cherishing, improving, and perfecting those sentiments which will fit us for that eternal gathering and that eternal service. But especially is the supper of the Lord designed to promote that object. It has a very special and affecting relation to both the higher and the lower worship of which we have spoken. As it respects the lower, it is the feast which reminds us that the Lord is gone for a season that we may "receive Him for ever." "We do shew forth the Lord's death till He come." Each commemoration brings us together around Him in hope and expectation of our final gathering into His presence no more to be sundered from Him. And in this ordinance the High Priest comes from the Holiest as it were to seal on our hearts the virtue of the sacrifice which He is pleading behind the veil. He admits us by faith into the inmost sanctuary, and gives us the blessed pledges of our union with Him. It is as if He said: "Take this and live by Me; drink this, and partake of My death. But go into the world for a season thus armed and replenished. Soon I will come and receive you into the real Holiest, the heavens of my Personal Presence, where sacraments shall be needed no more!" To Him be glory for ever. Amen.

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WE HAVE AN ALTAR.*

"We have an altar, whereof they have no right to eat which serve the tabernacle."—HEB. xiii. 10.

TO take such a text as this for the dedication service of a place of worship is like challenging controversy. The little sentence standing here first is itself a touchstone by which to test the various theories and forms of public worship which are current. They all stand or fall, are tenable or untenable, are evangelical or unevangelical, according to the interpretation they put on this verse. But it is impossible to use this remarkable phrase to advantage if it is taken alone. Like many of the pithy sentences which have been made the watchwords of opposing factions, it loses much of its controversial interest if examined in its context. Let us receive it with the light that it gives and receives in the paragraph to which it belongs. We shall find that, whatever others may say, and however they may err by a too literal or a too spiritual interpretation, we can find in it much to direct and encourage us in the public worship which we this day begin in this place.

I.

There is a general interpretation of the words, that

* Preached at one of the opening services of the Methodist Chapel, Whalley Road, Manchester.

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seems to express the solemn pathos of the writer's meaning, and at any rate will pave the way for other uses. This epistle was intended to warn Hebrew Christians against going back to Judaism, and to reconcile them to give up their sacred temple and all its associations. Now it was very hard to persuade men who had like their forefathers of many generations served God through an elaborate service of altar sacrifice, which brought Him very near to them and them very near to Him, to give up ceremonial worship entirely. It was like asking them to go forth from their city and temple into a naked wilderness again without anything to moderate to them the awful spirituality of God. That was what the Christian religion seemed to require. The New Master had said: "The hour cometh when neither on this mountain nor yet in Jerusulem shall men worship God. God is a spirit, and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth." The Hebrew Christians had been accustomed for ages to the thought of approaching heaven at an altar: that is, through a medium of sacrifice offered where God visibly accepted it. That was the great point: whether tabernacle or temple or neither, there was the altar. But they had also been educated to the accessories of a system of worship which made a thousand matters symbolical of heavenly realities. It was exceedingly hard to strip their minds of these associations. Any man accustomed from infancy to the sacrificial and ritual system, with all its beauty, its appeal to the imagination, and the assurance it gave to faith and hope, would find the Christian system exceedingly cold and hard, and be

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disposed to retort on St. Paul the word "beggarly elements."

Throughout the epistle one great design had been uppermost: to show that all parts of the old economy were done away by being transfigured in Christ. The law was on the mount of transfiguration summed up in "Hear Him!" The ritual was glorified in the heavenly Holiest. But the apostle feels a tender sympathy with his brethren. He was not always and at all points as "strong" as he seemed. He clung still with lingering love to the past, and there were secret tender associations which blended with his desire of policy to "become a Jew with the Jew." Hence, you see, he returns in the last chapter to the theme. All had been accomplished and settled in the earlier treatment: in fact exhaustively discussed. But it seems as if he would say a parting word of encouragement to his brethren, and to us who in every age want similar helps. "We have, fellow Christians, an altar. We have a perfect system of mediation: including a temple, high priest, outer court, holiest, and all the concomitants of a confident approach to God. Although you enter buildings which are not after the old pattern, and have few symbols; although you never saw your high priest, and all is purely and only spiritual, yet we have an altar and all that the altar means."

II.

But thus we evidently come to the more specific idea in the altar. Why have we in Christ a mediator, and in the Christian system a mediation, better than

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the ancient temple, though altogether spiritual? Because the cross of Jesus was the altar on which the Great Sin-Offering to sanctify the people was offered: His blood being carried into the Holiest, there to be sprinkled on the mercy seat for the removal of the people's guilt. We have that altar, that cross, as the foundation, the sure foundation of all our hope, for time and for eternity. But it is not here, it is risen: its virtue is in heaven.

There are many things in the context which would be very impressive to the Hebrew Christians, whether more or less unfaithful, who clung to the old ritual. They would be reminded, not so much of the ordinary offerings for sin and the thank-offerings, which priests and people might partake of when the blood was obtained and the fat was burnt, as of that special sin-offering once in the year which was dealt with in a manner quite peculiar. There were indeed many sin-offerings for personal faults, and for national faults, which were at irregular times slain before the door of the tabernacle, and their blood carried within and sprinkled seven times towards the curtain; after which the bodies were carried out in a clean place and wholly consumed as accursed. Nothing was eaten that belonged to these offerings for sin. But the apostle has evidently in view, and so would his readers, the great sin-offering of the day of atonement. As the theme is here dealt with you will see that the greater Antitype does not in every particular agree with the type. But a high and holy decorum prevents the writer's explaining himself fully. The great sin-offering was burnt without the camp: with this

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corresponds the awful truth that Christ was made a curse for us; His being hanged on a tree "outside the camp" or "the gate" answered to the burning. The blood was carried into the holiest: Christ carries His own blood there, and comes no more out. He has obtained eternal redemption; and we have the virtue of this altar for ever. The Hebrew would be warned. Those who serve the sanctuary cannot partake of this Christian Sacrifice; because on their principle it could not be partaken of, and also it allows no continuation on earth. And he would be led to ponder the strange fact that the same victim was accursed without the camp in its death, and yet its life was worthy to be sprinkled on the altar of gold within the veil.

Whatever might be the effect of this on the Hebrews it must have a gracious influence on us. "We have an altar" is, being interpreted, "We have the virtue of the atoning sacrifice which was presented for us on earth, where God laid on Christ our iniquities, and man's contempt and hatred did its part by hanging Him on a cross of infamy; and which is still presented in heaven, where it has been brought into the sanctuary, and is ever pleaded for His people." We look back on the atoning work of Jesus and regard it as a fact in religious history which never loses its present reality and saving value. It is true that the cross is gone; the ignominy of our Lord's death is abolished; the symbol of shame has become the symbol of highest dignity. We cannot say "We have the cross" in the same sense that we can say "We have an altar." The cross is not carried to heaven. But the altar is.

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The mercy seat was, in the ancient economy, the altar corresponding within the veil to the altar of sacrifice without. Now our Lord is at this moment standing by the mercy seat, the throne of grace, and pleading the virtue of His sacrifice. He is Himself our propitiation. He hath once for all and for ever sanctified all who are His by the sprinkling of His blood. Therefore the church as such can sing with confidence the praises of the atoning oblation : its members are now God's people as the Jews anciently were.

But in the new temple each one has the altar and its benefit. Go to the book of Leviticus and you will see that the sin-offering was for individuals, though only for such as sinned by infirmity or mistake. Here, therefore, the New Testament really surpasses the Old Testament type : our text abounds with surprises of this kind. But it does not directly refer to this, which, however, is of the utmost importance to us and must be remembered here. Before our Lord entered on His High-priestly function in heaven He tarried for a while to show how individual it was in its application. He does not bear the names of the tribes on His breastplate now ; but each of our names is individually on His lips. We have an altar of mediation and sacrifice : let us draw nigh in faith. We have an altar for our individual sin. Let us confess our transgression and expect a personal pardon and the peace that follows. Do not carry about your guilt. Come for a full forgiveness to-day, and it shall most certainly be given you. St. Paul never speaks of an altar intended for the individual ; but it is obvious that it

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must be so. He once spoke of sharing Christ's crucifixion, and of the atoning death as suffered for himself personally. Fellow sinners, whatever the ancient altar was to the individual, as sending the peace of assured pardon into his soul, our altar may be. And more! Whatever sin you have committed the Lord in heaven will forgive, if in sincerity you offer Him first the sacrifices of a broken and a contrite heart. There is no altar for penitence apart from propitiation: they are one. Let me urge you to claim your personal privilege whatever your guilt may be! Our writer might have said: "We have an altar whereof they have no right to eat who have sinned wilfully and serve the tabernacle." For, after all, there was in that case a dreadful uncertainty, notwithstanding its elaborate provisions. But our altar is for every possible offence that may be remembered before it with sorrow. The sin unpardonable is excepted simply because it is never repented of and brought to it.

III.

Once more, the text says much about eating and meats, which therefore we must needs include in our interpretation of the altar that "we have." In the ancient economy, as in all the sacrificial worship of the world, the altar became a table, where the God represented by the priests fed with the worshippers, the feast being the flesh of the sacrifices. The offerings which were partaken of by the offerers were the annual passover for the people, and the peace-offerings brought by the individuals. The flesh was supposed to be presented to God first on

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the altar, and then the offerer and the reconciled God ate together in token of amity and peace. But it was the distinctive feature of the sin offering that it was not eaten: it was sin and nothing but sin, and was burnt without the camp. Now the writer glories in the Christian sacrifice, because the Lord Jesus, cast without the camp, was at the same time the Passover and Peace-Offering which was the food of the people sanctified by His blood. On this paradox the apostle specially dwells: the strangest thing that the new covenant imported into the types of the old. Jesus was the common Antitype of all the types at once; and whilst they were to think of Him as a curse, and as made the very embodiment of man's sin, they must regard Him also as the food and nourishment of their souls. Boldly the apostle tells them that their own meats did not profit them: these never really had of themselves profited, and certainly not since the Lord had been offered for them and to them.

Without any controversy it is our privilege to live by our sacrifice. The atonement of Christ combines eternally the two meanings: a sacrifice for removal of condemnation and a sacrifice for the bestowment of life. We eat our offering by faith and have the twofold benefit: the knowledge that God is reconciled, and the nourishment of our new life. And here with regard to these blessings we may drop the figure. We receive Christ into our souls by faith, and that continually, as the inward assurance of our salvation from sin and of our life in Him.

Let me dwell for a moment on the former. When the offerer brought his offering of peace and thanks-

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giving, he confessed his sin and sacrificed for it; but ate of his sacrifice in token that God accepted him. Now the Christian penitent always eats of his altar. He never presents the sacrifice of Christ without the glad assurance that his person has been graciously reconciled to God, and his sins are taken away by it. This is the Spirit's testimony; for we must drop the figure, retaining it only to point this inference, that if the ancient penitent was sent away comforted by the knowledge that God was reconciled to him and ate with him—perfectly assured without any lingering doubt—may we not expect the same? "I will come in to him and sup with him!" What does that mean but that "I will not come knocking at the door as His Judge any longer, but be one with him, feasting with him on our common sacrifice, Myself."

Let me dwell on the latter for a moment too. This is a meaning which the ancient economy hardly knew. All along we have seen the very pith of the passage to be that the Christian reality not only surpasses the ancient Jewish type, but in many respects departs from it. Christian fulfilment is not slavishly bound to Old Testament prophecy. We do not find that the food of the ancient altars is spoken of as giving life to the offerers; that is, a new life. That was a hidden secret: as the meaning of the blood was more fully brought out, so also the meaning of the flesh. But, wonderful to say, our Lord declares that the blood of His sacrifice is to be drunk as well as the flesh eaten. Who does not feel that here we have a new and glorious fact? We have a new life in Christ and

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from Him: not merely through Him, not merely a life of respite or pardon, but the very flesh and blood and self of the Redeemer. "We are members of His body."

Here we cannot but think of the Lord's table. Not indeed that the altar of my text is to be interpreted as having that reference, as many have thought. Such an allusion would have been out of keeping with New Testament phraseology, which never uses this word for the sacramental table. The writer might be supposed to use the word in a very general and loose way: "all the altar we have is the plain table on which we present ever again in emblem and thankful commemoration our Lord's sacrifice." In this sense the word has been retained. But we have already shown that the altar means something else, the cross of Christ: which, however, is commemorated in the Lord's Supper specially and specifically. And more than commemorated. As surely as we approach the table, He, standing there at what is to Him an altar, gives us the bread and wine to be the symbols of our peace and the pledges of the present and constant nourishment of our new life. Outwardly He gives us the food of the body, inwardly and spiritually the food of our souls.

IV.

And now we proceed to another stage in the meaning of our text. We have an altar on which to present our oblations and offerings. It is true that the apostle seems to change the figure, introducing the Priest through Whom we offer

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rather than the altar on which we present. But the fact is that the two are one. Jesus is the sacrifice which He Himself presents on the cross as His altar. But it is not the style of Scripture to speak of our offerings as presented on the cross; and therefore the language is changed. Before we adopt the phrase of the text we may take pleasure in the thought that we present our poor oblations on the same altar that our Lord has sanctified for ever by laying Himself on it. He has left it so to speak vacant for us; and this is the sublime peculiarity of the Christian economy that we are one with Christ in this as is in every other respect: on the altar that He lay on we also lie. How does it endear the thought of the Christian sacrifice; how blessed is it to feel this identity with Him in His oblation! Who would not delight to place himself there! We must however be faithful to our text; and speak indirectly only of the altar and directly of the High Priest through Whom we present what we are and have.

And what is it we present? Here again we feel as if the text only implies what our hearts would desire to hear more fully expressed. Contemplating the sacrifice of Himself for us on the part of Christ, what is it that we all instinctively desire to offer but our very selves! This is the only Easter offering we have for Him when He comes from the sepulchre. Love for love: all that a man hath will he give for his benefactor when he once knows Who that great Benefactor is. We have an altar, brethren, on which to lay ourselves: approaching with humble boldness to present our gift, even as

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we approached with humble boldness to ask for pardon. The one as much needs boldness as the other. What a daring act it is to offer such a heart, to present a soul so defiled with sin, to ask God to accept a creature so vile! But He who received on the altar His Son will for His sake receive whatever is laid on it by Him. Let us pray our Lord to take our individual soul and lay it with His own hand on His own altar!

However, the apostle does not say this, because he still keeps to the typical service: in which a man did not present himself, that being the prerogative of a better temple. He says the same in another way, by alluding to the ancient thank-offerings which were always received by God at the hands of the worshippers. As everything is changed here, the animal and vegetable offerings of gratitude become the fruit of the lips, or, as the prophet Hosea says, the calves of the lips. The voice of a Christian man or a Christian congregation is the grandest oblation. It is the very representative and expression of the internal life: the voice is the man, his glory is his tongue. The utterance of the whole life is to be given to God through Christ: in confession of His name, which is the profession of faith; to His name, which is thanksgiving; and for His name, which is preaching to others. Let me ask you, brethren, who have in this service used our common altar for all its other purposes, to use it also for this. This day use the tongue to pledge its future service, and let your religion be this firm confession, this constant thankfulness and this earnest preaching.

With this the consecration of religion is not ex-

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hausted. This is the sacrifice of word, and there is added the sacrifice of act. "To do good and to distribute good forget not; for with such sacrifices God is well pleased:" charity in act and gift is precisely what is meant. And observe every word here. With these God is "well pleased:" as He was with the sacrifice of His Son, "a sweet-smelling savour." And the man who offers them is like that Beloved Son, one in whom the Lord is well pleased. As they fill up the life, leaving nothing out, the whole being is thus offered in a temple. This is the sublime meaning of the text, that our existence is a perpetual oblation. The ancient Jews visited the temple very occasionally, presenting their gifts. To "dwell" there was object of unavailing desire to David. But it has become a privilege to all Christian people, who live and move and have their being in the Christian temple, where every influence is sanctity and every inspiration is love. Let us this day come afresh to the great altar of consecration, and not let its solemnities cease without having renewed our oblation of all that we have and are to the divine service in Christ.

V.

We have thus approached the altar under four related aspects. But we shall not complete our view of the cross as our altar, nor shall we satisfy the apostle's exposition here, unless we include the affecting reference to the sacrifice of all earthly things that this altar demands. It is customary to say that the meaning is, "Let us give up Judaism,

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bearing His reproach, and gladly suffer the contumely and contempt that all apostates receive." But if we examine the words carefully we shall see or rather we shall feel that there was a far wider meaning in his thoughts.

Surely, they here signify no less than that all who partake of the benefit of the Saviour's cross must share its reproach with Him. Nothing is more constantly inculcated than the necessity of sharing in the Lord's self-sacrifice, that is, our bearing the cross, and with the cross on our shoulders leaving this present evil world. Two words are used to signify the cross besides the cross itself: "My yoke," meaning positive submission to Him; "His reproach," the enmity of the world. But the word "cross" effectually unites these. One who partakes of the benefit of the Lord's passion must enter into its fellowship. This, like much already spoken of, is new: fellowship with the sacrifices there was before; but hardly such as to betoken this. Yet it is a most fundamental principle in the Gospel that we must bear the Lord's cross and die with Him and be crucified with Him: must be crucified, that is, to the world and to the sin of our own nature. Let us ask ourselves if we are remembering the severity of our religion and offering up to Christ all our sins and passions and worldly attachments. "We have an altar:" and on that altar we ought to sacrifice all that is in us of sin and self and the world. Let us transfer to it what the apostle says concerning the cross, which of course is a word and an idea that never enters the temple. We share the sacrifice of Christ by dying to sin with Him, as

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we have seen: He is our sin-offering. He presents our sinful flesh on His altar, that it may perish there, though old ritual made no provision for that: shall we say, let it be burnt without the camp? And on the same altar we lay everything in this world that our soul delights in for time and for eternity. Let us make the sacrifice!

But, remembering the eleventh chapter, we must find yet another meaning. Our religion is not in its essence here: "we have no continuing city." Christianity is an imperfect system. We know that we have no continuing life; let us remember also that we have no continuing church on earth. Christ our Head has gone without the camp, beyond the gates of time, and is waiting for us all in a new Jerusalem not of this world. There are three Jerusalems: one the ancient; one that which is the spiritual Zion where we live and worship; and one yet to be revealed. Let us enter into the spirit of this injunction, or rather of this description of our religious estate and character. We have an altar in the highest and final sense within the veil: in our inmost hearts we want to be worshippers before that. It is good to be here, but better to be there. That is the meaning of the final suggestion in this epistle: we should desire to leave these lower services. It was good for the Hebrews to forsake the Levitical altars for the Christian; it will be good for the Christians to forsake the present Christian altar for the Christian altar that is to be revealed. Alas, what a mistake they are guilty of who think the present economy so desirable and so perfect. The more perfect we can make our temple economy here

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the better; but at the best it will be exceedingly faulty and unworthy, do all we can. The Lord is preparing a city for us; and, because of its perfection, and of the invisible temple in it, He is not ashamed to be called our God. Let us not hang so much on our worldly ordinances: as they are the realities of which the Jewish were pattern, so they themselves are only patterns of things real and future in the heavens. Meanwhile, let us make the best use possible of the services around our present altar. Let us rest in its perfection as a medium of approach; let us constantly realize its virtue as the altar of the Sin-offering; let us eat from it our Paschal Lamb, and live by His flesh who died for the world's life; let us present on it ourselves and our all evermore; and let us serve at it as priests with their eyes waiting till the veil again opens and they enter the true Holiest to leave it no more for ever!

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THE SIGN IMMANUEL.

"And they shall call His name Immanuel."—MATT. i. 23.

TWICE this wonderful word occurs in Holy Scripture: once in the Old Testament prophecy, and once in the New Testament fulfilment; once in Isaiah and once in St. Matthew. On this glad day we have to do only with the fulfilment. But there is one thing connected with the prophecy that will give us our keynote. When it pleased Jehovah to encourage King Ahaz by his servant the prophet—at the time that the King was in sore distress about the invasion of his enemies—He bade him ask any sign "either in the depth or in the height." The hypocritical king would not tempt God by choosing a sign for himself. Then the Lord gave him the sign of the birth of a son of a virgin: a sign that was to him both encouragement and warning. Who that child, the typical Immanuel, was we need not ask. Suffice that the profound meaning of the sign was for the distant future. This day tells us its unfathomable meaning.

We shall best understand our text if we remember that the name Immanuel is still a sign: it is, so to speak, quoted by the evangelist as such. There are two names on the page: Jesus and Immanuel. The

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former was the literal name of our Holy Child. Immanuel was a name He never bore. There it stands: not as a name to denominate Him, but in the sense of a symbol, or sign or token deeply to be studied. The Spirit takes that, as everything else, and reveals it to us. May it be so this day!

I.

The name Immanuel is a sign to us of the unsearchable mystery of the meaning of our Lord's birth, which we this day celebrate. God is with us —that is the meaning of Immanuel—as the Son of God begotten and born in our common human nature: so that He is in one Person true God and perfect man for ever.

Now the entire Old Testament, in all its prophecies and types, from the first prediction of the Seed of the woman down to the last of the Angel coming to His temple in Malachi, was one great sign given to mankind that this event would in the fulness of time take place. We understand now what that great sign given in a thousand forms signified. But our text suggests certain special signs given by the prophet Isaiah, and dear to our Christmas thoughts. The early part of his book has a cluster of references to the beginning of Jesus Christ, the middle of it to His death and resurrection, the end of it to the final triumph of His kingdom. The early history of the Redeemer occupies three conspicuous little batches of prediction. The first is that of our text: which interprets the first recorded gospel, "It, the Seed of

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the woman, shall bruise thy head." A virgin should conceive by the Holy Ghost and bear a son, and call His name Immanuel: the mother of our Lord in her secret heart pondered the amazing secret that that Holy Thing which was born of her was the Son of God, and she in her soul "called Him Immanuel," though in our text the phrase is altered and it is "we" or "they" who call Him "God with us." You remember that she asked for a sign, "How shall these things be?" and the sign was "the Holy Ghost shall come upon thee." That sign she knew and never from that moment doubted. John the Baptist might doubt, but she doubted not. The second is the ninth chapter of Isaiah, where the child Immanuel is announced more clearly: "Unto us a Son is born, unto us a Child is given:" from "the height" the Former, and from the depth the Latter; but both in one. The third is in the eleventh chapter, where the figures change: "the Stem of Jesse" and "the Branch": the Rod of Jesse in His godhead, the Branch in His humanity. And the Spirit of the Lord is shown to rest upon Him in all that His human nature needed for His full and perfect development. The fulness of time has brought the explanation of the Sign. In Christ God is manifest in the flesh. St. Paul changes the word sign into a word of similar meaning: "Confessedly great is the mystery of godliness, who was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached on in the world, received up into glory." We this day celebrate the great accomplishment: the sign is explained, the mystery is revealed.

But it is a mystery unfathomable still. The sign

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is explained, but it is so contrary to human notions that none understand it but by the Holy Ghost. The celebration of this day is not to expound or clear up the mystery, but to adore it and accept it, and, like Mary, ponder it in our heart. We must not speak against our sign because we cannot comprehend it. We cannot comprehend the union of our soul with our body: a sign that God gives to every one of us to denote our origin with His image stamped upon us. Christians receive the sign and bow down before it, that is before God in the mystery of their own nature. Let me remind you once more of the wonderful words of the prophecy. "Seek it," said Jehovah—the sign namely—"in the heights above or in the depths below." God gives it to us from both: from the infinite height of the eternal Godhead He gives us His Son; and from the depths of our nature He gives us a Son of our own. The sign and the thing signified are given by Himself: "The Lord Himself will give you a sign." All we have to do is to accept it from both. We must not seek it, but study it there. Without one single thought of curiosity or attempt to understand it, we must bow down before it. Our Christianity depends upon this. Be thankful, brethren, from the depth of your hearts that you are among those who keep Christmas as the celebration of the one Person of Christ who is God and man.

II.

This sign is a token to us that in all the future history of the incarnate Son of God we must never

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forget that He is always and everywhere—whatever strange scenes He has to pass through and whatever difficult things we may read—no other than Immanuel, God with us.

On this day we must think particularly of the history of His earliest days. The evangelist is about to enter on the narrative of the infancy, in which the Holy Child will be traced through all the stages of His first appearance as a child of the human race. We see Him born of a human mother just like any other child of man, and then being taken to the temple and presented to God as a child of Abraham who needed, after the national rite, to be cleansed and accepted of God. How important, therefore, that this sign "from above" should be introduced by the evangelist who deals most humanly with the Saviour's infancy. Before a word is said of His birth, and in the very midst of the announcement of His coming, St. Matthew singles out the wonderful sign given to Ahab: "He shall be called Immanuel, God with us." It may be well to mark how all the evangelists introduce the Saviour as God at the outset of their narratives. St. Mark does not touch the infancy of our Lord; but begins at once with the "Gospel of the Son of God." Not that he undervalued the infancy and childhood; but, supposing that known, he enters at once on what is of the greater importance, "the Gospel of Immanuel, the Son of God with us." So St. John absolutely omits the human origin of the Christ. While the two evangelists exhibit Him in the bosom of the Virgin, His mother, he ascends to the Son in "the bosom of the Father." And this last evangelist,

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who depicts, if possible, more clearly than any other the human infirmities of the "Word who became flesh," tells us that "we beheld His glory, glory as of an only-begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth." And what do we gather from all this? That we must see the mystical sign of the Divinity stamped upon the Child of humanity. We cannot indeed give up the Child. We want Him to sanctify infancy and childhood. But He could not sanctify infancy unless He were the Son of God revealed in it. He might sanctify His own childhood if He had merely overshadowed it as the Spirit overshadowed His mother. But in order that He might be the life-giving Spirit to all the children of men He must be Himself the sinless and immortal Son of God from the very springs of His being. The same holds good of His later life and entire history upon earth. The sign that sheds its heavenly lustre on the first page of the Gospel must shed its lustre on every corner of the narrative down to the final darkness of the cross. It is the general preface of all that is to follow. Wherever we see the Man of Sorrows, and however acquainted with grief He appears, we must remember that he is still the Son of God, in Whom the Father is well pleased. During the long interval before His showing to Israel, nearly thirty years, He grows up not only "before Him," but in Him with a meaning that cannot apply to any other. "God was with Him" we read again and again, as it might be said of any among us; but if we think so, we remember the Immanuel and we feel the difference. Any other pious youth in Israel might

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have said, "I must be in My Father's business;" but when we see Him and hear Him in the temple we recall, as Mary did, the Immanuel sign, and then we understand the true force of that infinite "Must." Especially when we see the Lord at the banks of the Jordan, we find it necessary for our faith to remember the sign. He who was tempted of the adversary was not tempted in the sense that fallen man is tempted, nor as one that might possibly fall into sin. He was tested and tried to the uttermost "as without sin" or the possibility of sin: this we are reminded of by the Immanuel sign. So in all His sorrows and tribulations, in public and in secret, whether from the hand of man or from the will of God, whether from visible or invisible foes, throughout the whole of His career of grief down to the final "My God, My God," He is always and everywhere the Son of God and the object of infinite love. It may be hard for us to understand this, and indeed impossible for us to sound the depths of a human sorrow endured by a Divine Person. But this is the trial and the glory of our faith. We must read the four Gospels in the light of our sign. All our Lord's teaching we must receive from Immanuel. All our Lord's humiliation is the humiliation of Immanuel, all His wonderful works are the wonderful works of God with us. And therefore His extreme sorrow and expiatory sufferings on the cross are the passion of the Lord who purchased the church with His blood, of that Lord of glory Whom the princes of this world crucified.

Suffer me, brethren, to urge on you the perpetual remembrance of the lesson thus taught. In these

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days when the "Life of Jesus" is so current, and there is such a tendency to make the Lord a man like ourselves, under the plea of doing justice to His human example, it is of great importance that we remember the sign. This Christmas lesson is of supreme significance; in fact, there is nothing that can be conceived more important than that we should carry our sign Immanuel and stamp it upon the entire history of Jesus. Our salvation depends upon it. We are more in need of a Saviour than of an example. The Lord has indeed shown us what is perfection in His own heavenly character. But the glory and the value of His redeeming work does not lie there. "He shall save His people from their sins:" not Himself but His people. And none can save us from our sins but God Himself. There is not a single doctrine connected with our salvation on earth or in heaven, in time or in eternity, which does not demand the Godhead of our Saviour. And of this the sign Immanuel is a continued token and an abiding remembrance for ever.

III.

We must enlarge our view. The glorious sign of the day meant nothing less than this: that in the incarnation of Jesus God and man are reconciled. The word signifies "God with us," as the exact opposite of God against us; and therefore is the sign from heaven to man on earth that the world is a redeemed world. Hence we understand the angel's interpretation of the Immanuel sign: "Glory to God in the highest, on earth peace, goodwill

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among men." Here the central word gives the sense: Christ is the incarnate Peace on earth. The incarnation is the pledge and sign that man is redeemed. "God," sang one of the human singers, continuing the strain of the angelic choir, "hath visited and redeemed His people."

It might be said that this is only a prophecy of what this Child would do when grown to man's estate. The sign given to Ahab was of the future; and of the uncertain future. And so the birth of Jesus might be regarded as a pledge and earnest of what this "child was set for;" and of what when His locks were grown this Samson would accomplish for us: in other words that the sign was a prophecy. Now this indeed it was. "Known unto God are all His works from the beginning of the world." Every saying concerning Christ from Paradise onward was a simple and pure prediction of what would come to pass: and this one was. The Immanuel sign was the calm and clear prophecy of the reconciliation between God and mankind which this innocent Child, having become the Man of Sorrows, would achieve. How dread a perspective of events is wrapped up in this prophecy! This sign, our Immanuel sign, was taken into the arms of Simeon. And what did he say? It shall be "spoken against:" a faint word for an infinite meaning. Both the Virgin and her Immanuel would endure the contradiction of sinners. But He would be smitten with the Almighty's sword unsheathed against His Fellow, His Immanuel! The sword would pierce her also, but only for her own salvation. It would pierce Him for the redemption of all men. In other

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words: "This Man, this Infant become Man, will be for Peace." The right understanding of this word peace, or reconciliation, will give us the right understanding of Immanuel. God is with us, reconciled with us, as a race, through the blood of the cross. The sign Immanuel was a constant token to the Redeemer Himself, which in His human thoughts He well understood, that He must die for the sins of mankind. Thus you see that Christmas Day and Good Friday are closely linked. And Immanuel is the sign that links them. "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself" is the exact interpretation of our symbol; for at the cross the Mediator removed the wall of partition between God and the children of men.

All this is true. But it is not all the truth. We must not understand that the Immanuel name was only a prophecy. When the Son of God took our flesh, He did not take it that he might make a great attempt to save us. His incarnation was the proof that "God had visited and redeemed His people." It is true that He must needs die for us; but He had really been the Lamb slain "from the foundation of the world." And the very fact that the Lord took our nature showed that our nature was saved. Hence the angels sang the accomplishment, not as in the future only, but as already a fact. Now here is the sign of it all. But what is the value of this? Were there no benefit in the consideration, it would be enough to say that it is true; we see however that it is demanded by the dignity of our Saviour. He comes as Immanuel to accomplish a work that God would not undertake without

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certainty of accomplishment. But it may be said again: What matters it providing the end is answered? What is the difference between the Saviour's coming to go on and vanquish our foes, and His coming to effect a salvation already accomplished? It is simply this: that the virtue of the atonement comes with the Lord from heaven, and was not obtained at the cost of His agony and death. We must rejoice in the freeness and fulness and glory of the redemption that was settled in heaven before it was wrought out upon earth. The Christmas sign really marks a peculiar strain of Christian theology. Our Lord was sent by the love of the Father and by His own love to accomplish a salvation that could not be hindered. He brought the great Christmas gift of the Father's love with Him: it had not to be extorted at the cross. It must be sealed to us amidst atoning sorrows; there was a necessity that the oblation should be presented before the universe openly; but the great transaction had already taken place in heaven. The real atonement had been offered and accepted there. God was in Christ from the incarnation reconciling the world to Himself: Himself He had reconciled before the Christ appeared.

IV.

Now let us turn our thoughts to another view of our sign. Immanuel is, indeed, God with the world; and Christmas Day reminds us of a universal benefit. But we must not forget that this name is here placed in the middle between two references to the name of Jesus. Of this name it was said in a sense

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not true of Immanuel: "His name shall be called Jesus." Now Jesus means Saviour, with two meanings: one for the world and one for His people. The angels, however, take the theme of His Saviourship for the whole world: "the glad tidings for all people of great joy." St. Matthew makes emphatic the single angel's announcement of a salvation for His own people. And we must in harmony with this limit the meaning of Immanuel.

It is a most blessed truth that this sign has a direct personal meaning. The name is a token to us that he who is saved by Jesus is one with God through Immanuel. Our Lord is Immanuel as God in man, not as God joined to a personal man. But as the consequence of His not being a personal and individual man united to God, we may individually have the privilege of having the Godhead joined to our own persons. Not that we are one by one united with God directly: it is only as receiving Him into our nature through faith. This is the most glorious privilege of the Christian covenant. It was this which our Lord brought to us by the incarnation. "To them that receive Him He gives power to become sons of God," through union with Himself. He was not a man joined to God: He was and He is the Son of God in the flesh. We being united to Him—bone of His bone, flesh of His flesh—become partakers of the Divine nature; and each one of us may rejoice to believe that in Him "God is with me, joined to me," that "I am a man in Christ, and a man in God." It is true that this is a lesson taught rather in the later New Testament. But it is not forgotten at the outset. St. John, who

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gives us His Christmas lesson of the eternal birth of the Son, goes on to say that the Word was made flesh that "as many as received Him might have power to become the sons or the children of God." There stands the sign in the very beginning of the Gospel that God is with us in order that He may be in us individually. This is what our faith must read in it. The sign is, indeed, like every sign, just what our faith makes it. To a strong and courageous and living faith it means that, in virtue of the new covenant with man, God in Christ unites himself to every believer.

But how can we turn this to Christmas account? We must ask ourselves the question whether we have our "part in Him," as was said of David. Has our Christmas Day come to us? Have we had the Son of God formed in our nature and born in us as the secret of our regeneration? That is our question for the day. Let us turn it into a prayer. Be sure of this, that by this token, our sign Immanuel, He who was born of the Virgin by taking our nature in her, is willing to be born in us by entering our soul and making it new. St. Paul says that he "travailed in birth until Christ was formed again" in the Galatians. Jesus has long been travailing to be born in you. No tongue can tell how gladly He would become the new life of your soul. But in this matter Christmas Day really becomes the Pentecost. It is by His Spirit that He is born in us. The indwelling of Christ is the indwelling of the Holy Ghost. He is even now the life-giving Spirit. Then come for your Christmas gift, and bring your Christmas offering. Offer

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your poor heart, and He will accept it. Ask Him to give Himself to you. And be sure that He was not more glad to come as a Saviour into the world, which had long waited for Him, than He will be to be born in your heart as your Life.

V.

But, after all, Christmas is not so entirely a personal matter. The joy is for all His people, who are made up of many individuals: that is for the church of those who are one with Him. And our sign is to the Church of Christ: a token to them that Jesus, Immanuel, is God in the midst of us.

What was the meaning of the word to the ancient Israel but a remembrancer that, as a privilege peculiarly their own, Jehovah was their God. So when the Lord gave them a sign that He would interpose to save His people, a child was born who bare the name Immanuel: to remind them of a truth they were always in danger of forgetting. That was their glory, their happiness, their strength; their own dignity and their distinction from the nations around. In fact, the whole of the history of the ancient people from the time of their national Christmas, when God gave them His Jehovah-name first, was one perpetual comment on this truth and one perpetual remembrancer of it. While they remembered it they were happy and safe. When they forgot it they were a prey to their enemies. The everlasting exhortation was "Sanctify the Lord of Hosts Himself, and He will be your sanctuary." We are apt to forget the wonderful privileges of this ancient people, to have the Lord their God in their

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midst: Immanuel was their sign in every age, and when it was given to Ahaz it was only the remembrancer of an old and blessed truth. But the sign given to Ahaz takes a new form. "A Virgin shall conceive and bear a son; and she shall call His name Immanuel." There was to be a future revelation of a new name in the midst of a new people; and our Christmas commemoration tells us what that new revelation of "God with us" should mean.

Since the incarnation, God is in the midst of us in the person of the Son through the Holy Spirit. The God who dwells among us, as in a tabernacle, is Jesus our Incarnate Lord. But what difference does this make? Is it not enough, as many say, that God is in His church: can we worship a deified man? We need not ask the question to-day. Suffice that now Immanuel is the name of Him who dwells among men. We do not give up anything that the Deists hold. Deity is with us in their sense: only He is now the Triune God, revealed in the glorious mystery that was hidden from the ages and the generations. We have our God among us in the Person of our Saviour and Friend, the Man Christ Jesus. I cannot pause to describe all the difference which His revelation in human nature makes. It is enough to say that there is now a full revelation of the true God, and that the true God cannot be worshipped without the difference being understood by His true worshippers. Suffice that we adore our God as an incarnate human Lord. All blessings come to us through Him. We do not adore an abstract or distant or

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unthinkable Being; but One whom we invest with human attributes. It might be said that men who reject the Trinity really do this; in a kind of unconscious idolatry. Those who protest against our worship, and insist that we are invading the unity of God, in spite of themselves do what we do but without our justification. But we know Whom we worship; and the Redeemer in our midst by His Spirit only brings the great God nearer to us without diminishing His greatness. The tenderness of Jesus takes away the awful sternness of the absolute God; He brings Him near to us in the only way we are capable of conceiving a being higher than ourselves; and, if we study our high privilege out, we shall not fail to find what a difference it makes that God in the midst of us is Jesus Christ, Man, Immanuel.

Thus I have endeavoured to explain the wonderful sign which the Old Testament gave to the New, which the prophet gave to the evangelist, and which the Holy Spirit gives to us on this festival. What multitudes are this day considering the sign under what variety of aspects! Most of them, however, regard the Infant alone; and it seems almost treason against the majesty of the day to think of any other than the Babe of Bethlehem. Let us too pay our homage to the Child. But let us pay it as those did who came from the East with their gifts. What was it that made them bring to Bethlehem their gold and frankincense and myrrh? Did they bring them to a mere human babe? Assuredly not. They were taught by the Spirit to see in that New-born One the Eternal Son of God. They indeed said that they were come to

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Him "who was born King of the Jews." But we doubt not that they saw in the Child Jesus more than the King of the Jews. At any rate, if they did not, we do; and pay our Christmas homage to the Infant of days who is at the same time Immanuel, God with us: to Whom with the Father and the Holy Ghost be glory for ever!

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STEWARDSHIP: FOR THE LORD.*

"And I say unto you, Make to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness; that, when ye fail, they may receive you into everlasting habitations.

"He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much: and he that is unjust in the least is unjust also in much."—LUKE xvi. 9-10.

THESE two sayings of our Lord place our use of this world's goods under different aspects. One makes us stewards administering what is another's property and responsible for the discharge of a trust. The other makes us masters for a season of what earthly substance we have, to turn it to our own account and reap our own advantage from it. The one recommends to us the wisdom of strict fidelity in stewardship pure and simple; the other recommends to us the wisdom of extracting all the good we can for ourselves from what passes through our hands. In merely human relations it is hard to reconcile these two ideas. A steward, wise for his lord, it wise also for himself so far as he may win his lord's confidence and attain to higher trust; he cannot, however, at one and the same time seek his master's interest and his own. But, in our relations to Him who is Lord of all, the two ideas are perfectly blended and eternally one. Their combination is the true philosophy of Christian

* Preached at Plymouth on behalf of the Thanksgiving Fund.

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life. This is the key to the interpretation of this wonderful chapter. It harmonizes the two parables which begin and end; explains the difficulties of both, especially of the first; and is the secret of the solemn sentences of profound truth which are the link between them. Let us make this combination our subject. And may the great Teacher of earthly and heavenly wisdom help us by His Spirit to discern His meaning; giving us grace to determine at all costs to make His lessons the rule of our life, for His sake as well as for our own.

The principle that we hold all that we have as stewards occupies a large place in our Lord's teaching; but the relation of this principle to our earthly possessions as such is brought out more distinctly in this chapter than anywhere else. Indeed, the bearing of it is so abundantly exhibited that we may regard this portion of the gospel as a complete system of the ethics of property, needing but little illustration from other sources. But the sentences of the Master require pondering, careful pondering, in themselves and in their connection.

I.

The first and broadest application of the principle is one that underlies the whole, but is not formally expressed. It is this, that we hold all that we have —ourselves and whatever we call ours, our bodies and souls, our time and talents and substance, all that makes up the sum of our being and possession —as the redeemed subjects and servants of Christ. It is essential to the idea of stewardship that what

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the steward has he counts not his own: as steward he has literally nothing. It is, in the words of Christ, another's. And that other is our Lord Himself, though He does not here tell us that. We are not our own, for we are bought with a price. He found us ruined, disgraced, and apart from His grace hopeless: in the condition of the steward whom He describes in the parable, who had wasted his lord's goods, hears the fearful summons "Give an account of thy stewardship, for thou mayest be no longer steward," and cries in the consciousness that there is no reparation possible, "What shall I do?" At this point we must leave the parable for a season, and let the Lord give His own answer. There was no possibility of our restoration to our trust: the law broken knows no mercy. Nothing is said of regaining the forfeited stewardship. The holy justice of eternal law cannot give us back our rights. "My lord taketh away from me the stewardship," said the steward in his guilt; and that is the voice of human nature despairing of any hope from law as such. But the blessed Mediator, not found in this parable even as He is not seen in that of the Prodigal Son, takes all the accounts which testify against us, pays them all, and nails them to His cross, and sets us free. Not, however, to be stewards in the same sense as before. He makes us His own property; receives the consecration of our gratitude; gives us back all that we have that we may be His stewards in the economy of grace. Now here, brethren, is the secret of the Christian stewardship. You and all that you have are restored to yourself; you have not a debt of the

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past unpaid; but you hold all for Christ henceforth. Your absolute all is His. You do not understand the gospel, you cannot call Jesus Lord with true devotion, until you enter into this secret. Until you do there can be no peace between you and Him. "Whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that He hath, he cannot be My disciple." But here we have to do with your possessions, and with the power to get possessions: all must come under the same law. You must give all for All. He will have no divided stewardship. Let me beseech you to make this plain to your judgment, and open your heart to receive it, before we proceed. Cast your mind over the whole sum of your earthly endowments, and silently say in your fervent purpose, "Have patience with me and I will pay Thee all!" Nay, tax not His patience: give Him all at once, and open this day a new reckoning with Him. Remember that He says: "Give an account of thy stewardship as a creature, to be a better steward as a creature redeemed."

II.

This last word suggests at once the next application of the principle. What are the tokens of good stewardship? First, that the entrusted property be improved to the utmost; secondly, that it be administered strictly according to the owner's will; and, thirdly, that, where his will is not certainly known, wisdom or prudence does the very best. Now, here we see what the Lord our Master expects from us His consecrated stewards.

The charge, the just charge, against the un-

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faithful trustee in the parable was that he had wasted his lord's goods: that he had recklessly squandered them or negligently allowed them to be dissipated. He wastes the property of his master who does not improve it to the utmost. We cannot help remembering the calm answer of the "austere man:" "Wherefore didst thou not put my money into the bank that, at my coming, I might have received mine own with usury?" Whatever the Scripture says elsewhere against usury, the principle serves the Saviour's purpose here; and it may be said that in these words we have the sanctification of the increase of property. We are stewards, not only of the substance we possess, but of the "power to get wealth;" and the more we acquire as stewards the better for our Master's interests. He also makes to Himself "friends of the Mammon of unrighteousness:" through the loyal thrift of His people He increases His own portion of the wealth of this world, and consecrates it to Himself. In fact, in this way He removes the unrighteousness of Mammon; and is gradually, though alas very slowly, hallowing the commerce of the world. Among the Saviour's most important agents in the preparations of His kingdom upon earth are those merchant-stewards who are carrying this high principle of fidelity into the market-places and exchanges where wealth is honestly gotten. Let this enter into your estimate of your stewardship: as in spiritual things, so also in things temporal, the Lord expects that the ten talents, the five, and the one, be increased for Him. As in a spiritual so also in a temporal sense, the prophecy is to be fulfilled con-

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cerning the bringing gold and silver plenteously to Him. It is your wisdom to grow as rich as you can for His sake; and it is your fidelity. We are bound to maintain our bodies in health, and improve our minds to the utmost, for His use. So also we are bound to remain at our post in the commercial world as long as we can do so to His advantage.

All this implies a high and refined estimate of our steward relation. We may easily deceive ourselves and think that we are accumulating for Him when we are really "heaping up riches" for ourselves. Our safeguard lies in remembering that the idea of stewardship includes—according to the new and evangelical idea of it includes—that of trusteeship for various objects specified in our Saviour's instructions. A steward generally knows his lord's mind as to the administration of his estate: if that lord be absent he has left the record of his wishes, if he be present he can be consulted. Our Lord is both absent and present. He has gone "to a far country for a long season;" but we have the record of His instructions, written as it were with His own hand. And He is present with us, to be consulted by prayer; with the full assurance that His Spirit will teach us His mind. We can never be reckoned among those of whom He said: "That servant that knew not the Lord's will shall be beaten with few stripes." At least that tolerant clause has its application in a limited number of cases, and even to them must be very cautiously applied. There may be some whose inveterate invincible ignorance, the result of early training in a wrong school of commercial ethics, fails to see what is written in clear and distinct letters

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throughout the New Testament. They seem to us to be laying up riches for themselves, and the proportion of what they give their Lord at the end of the year seems to be a satire on the idea of stewardship. But they plead for their principle—be it the tenth or what it may—and honestly plead. They must be left with their Master. Meanwhile, the stricter Christian takes the New Testament as the code of his instructions. He sees there that he is not only a steward generally, but that he is also a trustee, in company with a large number besides, for many special legatees of our Lord's will. He finds that the poor have a large place: that almsgiving to them is placed almost at the head of the practical graces, and fidelity in the execution of this part of the trust is actually made to turn the issues of the judgment. So important is this, that in some special instances of danger, the Saviour said, "Sell all that thou hast and give to the poor," as if that was the only way to retrieve the robbery of the past. But now He says, "Buy and sell and get gain that ye may have to give to the poor." My rich brethren, do you not see in every part of the gospels that you are a trustee for God's poor? You know how they live and how you live: are you faithful? We have in trust certain property for Him and His kingdom: that is to say, for the spiritually poor as well as the poor of this world. Does it require proof that, as in the Old Testament so in the New, the whole economy of the church and its missions manifold is to be kept up by His stewards, furnished with substance to that end? Here our wisdom is wanted to read and interpret the words of the instruction.

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For, after all, much is left to our own discretion; and we should miss an important point in the Lord's teaching if we omit to observe that He is inculcating the practical wisdom of stewardship for another's interests. In earthly relations every steward is more or less dependent on his own sagacity: his value, and his fidelity too, in that capacity being according to the measure of his honest thoughtfulness. There is a sense in which the unjust agent in the parable was a prudent and thrifty steward: his lord commended him because he had done wisely, cunningly, and thoughtfully. But it was not for his lord: he was a faithful steward of his true master, himself. And our Lord silently says: Be wise for ME as he was for himself. This is of the very essence of our trust, that the Master leaves much, very much, to our tact still. We can have no doubt as to the main outlines of His will: the details we must fill up for ourselves. Here, brethren, comes in the very pith of our Lord's teaching. We are trusted with property that belongs to Him; which still is so entirely made over to us that we call it our property, our substance, our possessions. And by our use of it He tests, not only our fidelity, but our worthiness to be trusted with more. In nothing is Christian wisdom more needed than in the right employment of our wealth, be it greater or less. How many there are who would think it a great relief if their Lord would only tell them exactly how much He expects, and precisely when or where the offering is to be made. But He is not now, any more than when upon earth, a judge or a divider. He simply says

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"All that you have is Mine, and use it well." He is not a divider, though He must needs be a judge. One thing He says on this very subject: "The light of the body is the eye; if thine eye be single thy whole body shall be full of light." Let the steward feeling be well educated and keen; and there will be no error: at least, no error against Christ.

III.

Turning to another aspect of the matter, he who habitually remembers his stewardship will be saved from the deadly evil which besets the possession of property, the making it into a god. It may be questioned whether our Lord's words refer to any supposed god of wealth known by the name of Mammon; but it is certain that He here makes it the possible rival of the Supreme. And it is His intention to teach us that our wisdom as stewards must guard us against the danger to which our trust exposes us. There are many arguments against the undue love of this world's good; but here the stress is laid on its being inconsistent with the single-minded fidelity of the steward sentiment. Nor is there any stronger argument than this as it is here employed by our Master.

This virtue, diligently guarded and cherished, will keep the heart from that secret love of money which is idolatry. It is remarkable that when the gospel addresses men who had been turned from external idols, and who no longer needed to be warned against entering the temples of false gods, it still keeps the term to denote that root of all evil,

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covetousness. What may be said of every immoderate desire may be and is said of this preeminently, that it cannot coexist with the worship of God. "Ye cannot serve God and Mammon:" that is a general principle; its particular application is, "He will hate the one and love the other, for no man can serve two masters." Here for a moment the steward idea is lost sight of, and the man is regarded as capable of only one supreme love. If he hates the thought of giving his heart's best affection to this world and its riches he will supremely love God; if he does not love God supremely, he will most assuredly give his heart to this world's good, and hate God. He who knows what is in man declares that this is the alternative, and that there is no middle course. Against this tremendous danger the safeguard here is the habitual remembrance that what we have is not our own, and that our use of it is simply the test of our fidelity. In the sermon on the mount the safeguard is the remembrance that our true treasure is in heaven, and that where our treasure is our heart must be. To this we shall return hereafter. Meanwhile the great preservative here is faithfulness to the one Master whose stewards and servants we are. Our Lord changes the word at the close, with the express purpose of solemnly warning His disciples, His rich disciples especially. The word "serve" is one that covers the two ideas of stewardship and slavery. And we see the full force of the warning when we unite the two meanings in that sentence which here closes all. "Ye cannot serve God as His trusted stewards and be a slave to Mammon at the same time." Or, in other terms,

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the awful danger is thus made emphatic: "The faithful steward-service will alone protect you from becoming idolaters of this world's good." Or, still stronger: "Either use all for God as a Master, or it will take away God from you altogether." It comes to this at last: we must be worshippers in one temple or the other. Man must have a supreme object for his affection: that is the dignity of his nature. If he is not found in the temple where every one speaks of His glory, he will be found in that pantheon where many false gods are worshipped: their names being manifold, the world, or self, or pleasure, or Mammon. Here our idolatry is of Mammon only, for that is the specified subject of warning. And nothing can be more solemn than the thought that he who serves not God with his money makes money itself his only god.

It has been said that the Lord allows no middle course; but He does not intimate that His servant becomes by one act or without intermediate transition a slave of Mammon. We know that there is such a thing as a midway state, in which the possessor of growing wealth is halting between two masters. He has not become a confirmed worshipper in the temple of Mammon: when he is found there, he says, "The Lord pardon thy servant in this thing." He has not renounced the vision and hope of his better days; and such is the warmth of his devotional feeling on some occasions that this world for a time loses its charm. He is a mystery to many around him, and not less so to himself. Things go on long before the secret is found out. But there are testing times which dispel all doubt. I do not mean the

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great detector death, or sorrows that are its forerunners; but such strong appeals as are constantly occurring in life, and when they occur seem to say, "If the Lord be God, serve Him; if Mammon then serve him." To these our Master refers when He says: "He will hold to the one and despise the other." Undoubtedly this points to that secret posture of heart which the unfaithful steward perpetually detects in himself: the preferring of self and alas the disposing or undervaluing of his true Master. When the test is applied, that is found out and seen and known of all men. I may say that the test is applied on the present occasion, throughout our whole community. May we not be found wanting!

Let us all, brethren, receive the Lord's warning with solemn fear: remembering that this is only one of many instances in which He impresses on His people the deadly danger of loving this world's good. His people, I say: the warning is not addressed to the rich alone. We all are stewards of this common Lord; and every one has his measure of trust differing according to a law which seems to govern all the divine dispensations to the creature. The warning applies specially to the rich, no doubt; for in the time of our Saviour the vice of covetousness seems to have deeply infected the heart of society. We have here an incidental confirmation of this; for the evangelist notes what must have been at the time a very marked circumstance, that the Pharisees who were covetous derided the Speaker. They mocked him, because known to be poor he condemned what Providence denied him; or because he exaggerated the principles of stewardship, and in such a way as

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to undermine the foundations of personal property. But I should not refer to them, save for the sake of impressing the strong words used by the Redeemer when He was thus scorned. They are such as all rich men ought to remember. "God knoweth the heart: you may appeal to Him for your justification, happy indeed if you can do so; if you cannot, remember that He sees and condemns and will punish your secret idolatry. The kingdom of heaven suffereth violence: if all men must by mighty effort press into the kingdom, much more must you!" But the warning is to all: though the covetous were offended, all heard it. Every one has some property, and therefore some stewardship: all have not the larger talents, whether of influence, or ability, or intellect, or gold; but all have the one talent, which in another parable becomes the one pound, and each must occupy with that till He come. Take care, you who are comparatively needy, that you do not condemn the rich and forget that you may be in the same condemnation. You too may be in some poor corner of the great temple worshipping Mammon at an altar built of wood and stubble, each of you as perfect an idolater as Dives himself.

IV.

Over all that has been said there has been thrown the shadow of the coming judgment. The shadow, I say: for that seems the instinctive thought when the great day is brought to mind. Although it has no necessary shadow for us, the general strain of the Scripture bids all alike prepare for it with deep

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solicitude. We shall see by-and-by how the great day may be made the day of our supreme enrichment: now we must mark the stern solemnity of the Lord's words as they most affectingly warn us of our coming account.

We cannot doubt that it is the last day which is in our text. Our Saviour does not say so; because much of the meaning as we have seen referred to this life, and also because the very instinct of every heart knows what He points to. Were there any doubt the final parable would solve it. But there can be none: the unanimous consent of mankind has heard in the question, "What do I hear? Give an account of thy stewardship; for thou mayest be no longer steward" a remembrancer of that one last audit to which we are all hasting. We understand it full well. While we are called every day to settle our account with our Lord, there is one great reckoning which will decide finally. To that we are all moving onward, in one steady procession for ever. Our Lord is gone for a long time to a far country; and He does not let us know the exact time of His coming: testifying this only that all His innumerable stewards shall one day be summoned to His presence, bringing their books with them. One of the last sayings of the Risen Lord was: "I come quickly, and My retribution is with Me, to give to every man according as his work shall be." But the same He had said upon earth in every parable speaking of these things.

Here an objection may naturally arise. Is it then to be understood that our Teacher, who is our future Judge, would have us live in the expectation of a judgment that shall proceed strictly according to

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our works? There is a certain difficulty in this that is far better solved in practice than by any argument even the most subtle or careful. The Scripture generally speaks of two ruling principles of the future judgment: according to the one, we shall be accepted or rejected on the evidence of our faith in Christ or our rejection of Him; according to the other, which is much more abundantly dwelt upon, we shall be judged by the evidence of the deeds which that faith or unbelief produced. It may be said that the former judgment will decide the mere salvation of the sinner: he who is found in death the possessor of a penitent and living trust in the Redeemer's satisfaction for his debt shall not be held accountable for it at the final bar. This is a most gracious doctrine; but it is one liable to great abuse; and it is always guarded by another, that the kind of salvation, the measure of it, and the degree of future reward assigned hereafter, will be regulated by the faithfulness of the life in all its boundless variety of works. We have nothing to do with such questions here. It is only necessary for us to receive the Lord's words and take care that we do not trifle with them. He is speaking to His disciples and teaching them to be faithful in the use of what they call their "property," their own peculiar possession; and His argument is that if they are unjust in this life, He will not trust them in the next. To His name, both then and now, be the glory. Amen.

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STEWARDSHIP: FOR SELF.

"If therefore ye have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon who will commit to your trust the true *riches*.

"And if ye have not been faithful in that which is another man's who shall give you that which is your own?"—LUKE xvi. 11-12.

HITHERTO we have been thinking only of our stewardship: not forgetting altogether our own advantage subserved by fidelity, we have dwelt mainly on the fidelity itself. It might seem as if our Lord dwells on this almost exclusively; but a closer examination of the scope of the chapter will show that His lesson wonderfully combines the two ideas, our duty to our Master in the care of what is His, and our prudent investment of it for our own interest as if it were our own. In fact, we can hardly fail to see that this latter point is really uppermost: from the first word, "Make to yourselves friends out of this unrighteous Mammon," down to the last, "How shall I give you that which is your own?"—for that is what it means—there is a quiet undertone of reference to the true wisdom of life, of probationary life, that of extracting as much good as possible from all the elements of its evil, especially from what we call its riches or possessions.

I.

Extracting it for self; and not only for the Master. It might appear from some parts of

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Scripture that the thought of self, and any advantage to self, must be entirely eradicated from a perfect religion. But that is far from being the lesson of our chapter. There is a sense indeed in which self—that is, self as a final end—must be utterly suppressed: he who seeks himself finally in his whole life will most certainly lose himself. Again self must be suppressed as the ruling director of life: we must surrender up the control of our whole being to the Lord and His Spirit with as entire a relinquishment of self-jurisdiction as if the personal I were absorbed into the Holy Ghost. But, on the other hand, it is the will of God that the benefit of self—of this individual one that shall never melt into another, nor be lost in the universe, nor sink into God Himself—shall as subordinate never be lost sight of. It will presently be shown that the whole of Scripture identifies the interest of our Master with our own interest in a manner for which no earthly stewardship furnishes a strict parallel. But, before doing so, we must receive the full impression of what our Lord here teaches: that the whole wisdom of life is in a certain sense a thrifty ever-watchful study of our own interests. There is a Christian care for self, and for self above all things, which is at once the supremest wisdom and the supremest unselfishness. Christianity does not reverse the order of nature which make the care of self a primary instinct. It sanctifies and ennobles it by making it one with devotion to our neighbours and supreme devotion to God. Mark the unjust steward in relation to this. He is sketched by the Divine Master of parables as a

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perfect devotee or slave of self: one, in fact, who sacrificed everything to that idol. Self wasted the goods of his master; and when he is detected, his only thought is to save himself: not "how may I retrieve my lord's loss," but "how may I at his further expense obtain a home when he dismisses me." Mark how prudent the fear of ruin has made him. He ponders, and disdains to despair or even despond. He forms his decision, and studies how to extricate himself and turn the danger even to good account. And he quickly acts on the decision. There the parallel ends. But so far it holds perfectly. We must think, decide and act in the midst of the dangers of time, and the snares of earthly wealth, for the interest of our immortal souls when time and the wealth of time are ended and gone.

II.

For this is the true secret, already hinted at, that we have no self apart from Him. Here, brethren, is the glory of our religion, that the heavenly estate for which we are stewards is Christ's and ours in common. We never reach the height of our Lord's teaching, nor rise to the grandeur of our relation to Him, until we so identify ourselves with Him and His universal cause on earth that we know no difference between His and ours. "He that is joined unto the Lord is one Spirit:" this means that the Spirit of the incarnate Saviour of the world animates the disciple even as He animates the Lord Himself. And I may dare to add: "He that is joined to the

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Lord is one body:" the corporate work of Christ upon earth is common to the Head and the members. What but this did Jesus mean when He said to the disciples whom He was about to leave: "Henceforth I call you not servants or stewards only; for a servant knoweth not His Lord's will with that intimacy and unreserve with which I tell you all My mind; but I have called you friends, for all the purposes committed to Me of the Father I have made known unto you." This was not said to the apostles only: it was spoken to us all. And it is the true evangelical glorification of the steward principle. It is a good thing to have the spirit of strict honesty in giving to every cause of charity or benevolence what we know the true Owner demands, and not rob God because He is absent or unseen; but it is still better to have an intense personal interest in every cause, and, as St. Paul says, "naturally" care for it: not pressed by duty from without, but urged by an instinct natural from within. In this sense also we must make to ourselves friends and not merely clients of all objects of our bounty.

Now let us observe the combination of stewardship and independent possession in another light: the spiritual benefit we ourselves receive from the faithful administration of our Lord's goods. This is literally an inexhaustible subject, and one rather for your meditation than for my discourse. But a few hints may be of use for the guidance of meditation. And first it must be remembered that the Lord is not speaking exclusively of the other world when He says, "If ye be not faithful in that which is

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another man's who shall give you that which is your own?" The stewardship of uncertain and unrighteous Mammon is closely bound up with the possession in the present life of our own and of the true riches. And what, brethren, are the true riches? Surely they are not reserved for eternity: they may be accumulated in time and treasured up in the spirit of man itself. Your own heart is the treasure-house, where you may lay up much goods for many years, for years that never will be counted out. These riches are acquired by the discreet use of everything about us. But here we have to do with the prudent administration of this world's possessions. And, generally speaking, we are truly rich if we are "rich towards God;" if we so live as to secure His constant approbation. Is there any wealth comparable to the light of His countenance, the blessed sense of His favour encircling the soul like a cloud of glory from which issues the voice, "This is My beloved son in whom I am well pleased?" And is not that secured by the man who ever imitates that Supreme Son of God's love Who though He was rich, made Himself poor, and left us His example of habitual self-sacrificing charity? Surely our wealth is a price of inestimable value put into our hands to buy this favour with if we only have a heart to it. It was Jesus Himself who said that word which, floating long unrecorded in the atmosphere of Christendom, was made permanent by St. Paul, "It is more blessed to give than to receive:" whatever else that profound word may mean, it tells us how we may constantly be increasing our store of blessedness; and surely blessedness is the highest term for the true

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riches. Every act of pure charity done in the spirit of Christ—done by a poor man in his poverty as well as by the rich in his wealth—secretly and surely adds to the capital of the soul's true substance. And let me add that if the spirit of self-sacrifice enters into the charity, and in the proportion in which it enters, the true wealth of the giver is increased. The richest soul in the sight of God—whether among the great or among the lowly—is he whose heart is emptied of self and dwelling in charity dwells in God. This priceless grace may be disciplined in many ways besides the everlasting outgoing of benevolence; but the liberal use of wealth is one of the surest aids to its attainment. Time would fail us to tell of the many ways in which Christian bounty helps towards the enrichment of the soul. It disciplines self-denial; cherishes the habit of active piety; and, as opportunities and occasions of practical benevolence crowd the whole of life, it makes religion a constant reality. But, above all, it affords a perpetual opportunity of cultivating that spirituality of mind, deadness to the world, and dependence on the Supreme Good, which is essentially bound up with the true riches of the soul. He is truly and eternally rich who is poor in spirit, delivered from the slightest residue of the earthly mind, and satisfied in God as his portion. Now I do not say that this most happy experience can be bought by the expenditure of the wealth which bears on it the superscription of this world; or that the affluent man has more means for its attainment than the needy man. But it is very certain that the more we have of earthly goods the more are our

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graces tested; and, if we are wise enough to sustain the test, the more confirmed becomes our renunciation of this world and our preference of heaven. Let the "poor of this world, rich in faith" have all honour: their contented resignation to the Hand that denies them wealth is precious in the sight of God, and theirs is the kingdom of heaven. But blessed also is the rich man who trusts not in uncertain riches, satisfies not his soul with the Mammon of unrighteousness, and makes his possession of temporal good only the means of securing eternal riches. Now this, brethren, is our Lord's meaning here. The wisdom of a man who has this dangerous trust is not only to keep himself from the special peril that besets him; but to turn the danger to good account. The unjust steward translated all the elements of peril that stared him in the face into ministers of advantage: like another worldling sketched by a human artist, "out of the nettle danger he plucked the flower safety." You are in danger: you must defy the danger, and press it to advantage. That is the lesson of the chapter, and of our whole life.

III.

But, after all, we must go beyond the present world for the Saviour's most impressive illustration of His meaning. We cannot disconnect the stewardship of time from the issues of eternity. All that we possess is ours for a season, that through our prudent use of it we may advance our own interest for ever. In two ways does our Heavenly Teacher impress this on us: first, we may make to ourselves friends of the

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Mammon of unrighteousness who shall welcome us to everlasting habitations; secondly, by fidelity below in that which is least we may prepare ourselves for larger trust, and for a jurisdiction hereafter for which the stewardship of time furnishes but a slight analogy. Both these require careful consideration.

There can be no doubt that our Lord here exhorts us so to use our earthly substance that we may reap advantage from it eternally. The words are very explicit: more explicit they could not be. The lord of the unjust steward commended his servant's craft though he himself suffered by it. That steward had simply used his opportunity, while the bills were still in his hands, to buy with them a refuge in his disgrace. "I cannot dig; to beg I am ashamed!" he said; but he did dig in the soil of his deep cunning, and he did beg though not as a mendicant. He called the debtors, and, considering the character of each, lowered their debts by various proportions, and so secured their help when his distress should come. We must not criticize the plan; nor consider how shortsighted such nefarious tampering with accounts sometimes proves. The Saviour indicates all that when He says, "The children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light." What they are in respect to the eternity that is coming, let the final parable say. There, lifting up his eyes in torments, is the unjust steward under another character. Our heavenly Teacher hastens to speak for Himself: "and I say unto you!" And what does this emphatic preface introduce but the lesson that we must in our better and holier cunning create for ourselves friends by the charitable

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use of our substance. What that worldling did for the poor self of this generation, you must do for the higher and nobler self of the world to come. We are not told that the unrighteous Mammon, being mixed up with so much iniquity, must be utterly renounced. But we are told that we must make such friends with it as will receive us into everlasting habitations. Let us not distract our minds by curiously inquiring how the figure may become a reality: we understand that our works will follow us, let us believe also that they may precede us; that the objects of our self-sacrificing bounty will, if not in their own person yet in the Person of their lord and ours, welcome us to our reward. You may, brethren, make for yourselves legions of friends by liberality to the poor, by helping the distressed, and by sending the gospel to the heathen at home and abroad. The Lord Himself represents them all, and further represents His own general cause in the world: He is really the Friend whom you may enlist in your behalf by your gifts. You will not want more than one habitation, your own for ever and ever; but its largeness and beauty and adornment and blessedness and nearness to Him will depend upon these many friends you make. Think then of your money as having this possibility in it. "Whilst it is in your own power," see that you use it well; before the time come when you may wish in vain that you had your income again at your command.

But that is not all. The tone of the whole lesson taught by our Lord is this, that our stewardship in this world may be so administered as to prepare us for larger trust hereafter. The unjust steward does

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not, indeed, teach us that, save by contrast. He so failed that he could never be trusted again; and in this, as in other things, he is merely a text on which the Lord preaches His own independent discourse. And that discourse is here of the most profound importance. We are to be trusted hereafter according to the measure of our capacity for trust acquired here. Again, I say, let us not perplex our minds by subtle inquiries: let us take the plain words as they are delivered to us. "He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much:" that is, towards God. "He that is unjust in that which is least is unjust also in much:" that is towards man. When read in the light of the parables concerning the talents and the pounds, this tells us that there will be stewardships in the other world, without probation and without fear of failure, proportioned and accommodated to the character we have acquired here. The highest possible trust, of the largest wealth and most abundant increase, is but little, indeed, in comparison of the great trust hereafter: "that which is least." But fidelity in that prepares for fidelity in administrations which it hath not entered the heart of man to conceive. Two things are here impressively hinted, rather than unfolded, by our Lord: one is that the general principle of fidelity is to be trained in this life; and the other that this prepares for independence. The right use of money is but one element. The turn given by our Lord to the words shows that He speaks not to the holders of property only but to all. "That which is least" has the widest possible application. It invests the very slightest trust with unspeakable

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importance, and carries the high grace of faithfulness into every nook and corner of life. In the sight of God there is no relation of great and small: He sees the character in what we call little things, and accepts the smallest act of honest service with the same complacency that rewards the service of an archangel. But it is the second point with which we must close, as most fully illustrating the combination we have all along had in view. We are not merely serving our absent Master by rightly employing our substance, we are also preparing for a stewardship which is real independence: independence, that is, so far as there will be no probation, no calling to account, no judgment connected with it. We shall be stewards still, inasmuch as all the employments of the kingdom of heaven will be in the service of our Lord, Who is the Son over the whole house in heaven and in earth. But we shall have "our own," the "true riches," in "everlasting habitations." It is our wisdom, brethren, to keep this evermore in view: to make the innumerable little things which count up the sum of daily life a perpetual discipline for the formation of our character; and practice ourselves by fidelity in that which is least for trust in that which is great. Thus shall we be faithful to our Lord and wise for ourselves in everything: the lesson of our text.

Let us, brethren, in conclusion, mark the one final end of our Saviour's teaching. He is evidently drawing a comparison between His own people and the people of the world: that comparison being twofold. His disciples are supposed to have chosen the good part, eternal and true riches, the everlasting habitations of heaven, and the service of

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the one only Master who can reward for ever: they are "children of light." And, as to their choice and ultimate aim, they are wiser than the "children of this world," who limit their aim to the present generation, renounce eternity, and live only to enrich and pamper self. The comparison is here all in our favour: we who serve Christ are the only wise, and the others are utterly foolish: indeed, once only did our Lord use the strong expression "Thou fool!" and it was about one of them. But then the comparison takes another turn. Supposing them wiser in their final choice—infinitely wiser—our Lord mourns over them as being less prudent than the worldling in the methods they adopt to secure their end. And here comes in the exhortation or warning with which we have been occupied. Receive it, fellow children of light! Confirm this day in His name your wise choice for eternity. Purpose this day to be wise also in the prudent ordering of all the devices of life to secure it: that this wisdom may dwell with prudence in your heart and in your conduct. And that prudence is nothing more and nothing less than this, that in the employment of every talent you possess, that of earthly substance included, you keep your Master's interest in view and in so doing secure your own. To Him be glory for ever. Amen.

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THE RECEIVING AND THE TRANSMITTING GENERATION.*

"One generation shall praise Thy name to another, and shall declare Thy mighty acts."—Ps. cxlv. 4.

THE sentiment of this day is a mingled one: in which the memory of the past and the hope of the future strangely combine. These final services of our old place of worship will soon be followed by the commencing services of a new one. Like the Jewish fathers in the days of Nehemiah we remember the former house with sorrow; but like the children of those fathers we rejoice over the new foundation. We pay our tribute to the generations gone, who have spent their lives and their devotions here. But we purpose by the help of God to continue both their devotions and their work, transmitting all with increase to the generations that shall be born. In that hope we are greatly solaced; and shall go on our way, sorrowful indeed that we shall see this place no more, but always rejoicing because we shall find its sanctities renewed in another if not a better place.

You see, brethren, that our thoughts have already begun to flow into the channel of my text, which

* Delivered on the morning of the last day of public worship in Oldham Street Chapel, Manchester.

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exactly expresses the spirit in which divine revelation bids us view an occasion like this. The voice of God in His word always calls off our minds from passing and changing phenomena to things that are unchanging and pass not away: from that which "decayeth and is ready to vanish" to that which is undecaying and "cannot be moved." The melody of this note of the psalmist is the strain to which the whole of Scripture is set: it stamps the impress of eternity on all the things of time. But this general truth is here brought home to us in a manner that is very appropriate to the day. It speaks of every generation as having two characters: one as receiving from its predecessor the tidings of the divine power and grace, and another as transmitting the same tidings to its successor with increase. These will be the two topics of discourse; and may He who is "the Same yesterday, to-day, and for ever" help me to speak and you to hear!

I.

The text places the transmitting generation first: but in our use of it we ought perhaps to invert the order. For the ages can hand down nothing which did not come to them from without; if we mount upward step by step we find at last that the heritage of truth and grace was a free gift of revelation to mankind; and therefore the earliest was a receiving generation. Men can give nothing that they did not first receive.

And this at once suggests our opening reflection: that all the ages of time are in their unceasing flow

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recipients of parcels and fragments of one great manifestation of God in the glory of His name, His works, and His redeeming grace. That is the theme to which this psalm strictly limits our thoughts. From its first verse to its last there is not even a sideglance at anything else. Nothing besides is counted of any moment in human history. This is the one sole developing secret in human affairs: the gradual return of God the Holy Trinity to His place in this fallen world. The ages are indeed freighted with many other burdens. They carry with them the spreading tide of sin, making sad the successive races of men with ten thousand times ten thousand forms of misery. They tell their tale from century to century of the advancement of science and art and civilization: and a marvellous record it is, accumulating its wonders until wonder almost swoons under its burden. They chronicle also the annals of the struggles of nations for supremacy on the face of the earth: where many kingdoms are successive competitors for empire, but one Kingdom alone in silent majesty is surviving and vanquishing them all. Our psalm speaks only of this latter: "Thy kingdom is an everlasting kingdom." It knows nothing of all other secrets that the ages transmit. We must accept and glory in the limitation. The strain of this hymn is that before and behind, above and beneath, everything else there runs through human affairs a manifestation of God becoming from age to age more perfect. What vain philosophy is struggling after is the strict truth, rightly interpreted. The burden of the ages is the evolution of God in history: of God incarnate in

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due time; but, before that, approving His majesty, His providence, His mercy, His love by tokens known and read of all men. The earliest race heard of His first great disclosure of Himself in creation: long ages had gradually prepared the scene for the last creature in the image of his Creator, with the One Eternal Image of God as a Saviour behind him. The manifestations of God in His dealings with a sinning race take up the story; and are the thread that binds all the leaves of history into one record, becoming as it grows more luminous. This was the "dark saying of old," dark in its brightness, of which the psalmist elsewhere speaks as if about to explain it before the time. We, brethren, look back upon the traditions of ages as bearing steadily onwards one diversified disclosure of the divine secrets in one great continuous evolution. We are taught by our psalm to see and to hear nothing else in the past history of our race. This has been its one commanding theme from the beginning until now.

But this revelation has not flowed on equably from age to age. There have been great critical periods in this general evolution of the majesty of God's revelation, accumulating through the centuries; and we in our day inherit the last and best tradition. It may be said in a certain sense that the final secret has been laid bare to the wonder of angels and of men. The tradition given to the first generation disclosed man in the image of God: our new Book of Genesis shows us God in the image of Man. Now we see the Divine Majesty, strange to say, as it was never seen till in the human form.

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Time is rich in its last great secret; and St. Paul, both as a philosopher of history, and as the apostle of the dispensation of that fulness of the time, puts into our psalm a meaning it never had to those who sang it first. Our generation has received from the generations before the final and finished disclosure of the wonderful works of God. When Pentecost was fully come time reached its fulness: it has no other great revelation behind. He then showed us in very deed "the power of His works." They sang that day in many tongues "the wonderful works of God." In many tongues: to represent the many voices that were gathered from the past into one, and the unity from which many voices would spring in the future. Time had received its last birth from eternity; and the generations their last tradition. We throw all this into our psalm, and then how it dilates and throbs and expands, rejoicing in the interpretation it waited for. Its "majesty" is the triune glory of God; its "works" are redemption; its "praises" the Pentecostal hymn; its "proclamation" the Gospel; its "mercy over all His works" redemption for every creature; its "kingdom" the kingdom that cannot be moved. All this is what we have received from our ancient fathers. That dark saying of Ps. lxxviii. is now as bright as it will ever be till another day shall declare it anew.

But on this occasion I must narrow the theme, and remind my hearers that the past generations have bequeathed to us as a people a special heritage in the general unfolding of the ways and works of God. In common with the Christian generations we

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have received the records of finished truth as it is in Jesus; but as our own peculiarity we have received a mass of holy tradition which at such a time as this it is appropriate that we should dwell upon. We have seen that the ages of the gradual manifestation of God are not to be regarded as flowing on in uniform and monotonous succession. Within the economies of time generally, and viewed merely as such, there are interior and subordinate economies. Within the Christian generations there have been generations of constant and permanent fellowships having their separate traditions. We as a people are now in the third or fourth generation of our special tradition. There was the first while the Founder was in the midst of his assistants. There was the second, when they were transmitting a society with all the elements in it of a church. There was the third generation when all was consolidated, much as all now is. And we are in a fourth, which is industriously shaping the old traditions into new forms of adaptation. We have inherited from our fathers the common Christianity of the fulness of time: in a form containing as we think all the elements of truth as in Jesus truth is defined and sanctified. We may take our psalm into our hands, as interpreted by the Gospel, and thank God that our work in the world is what is here described: whether as to the worship offered or the testimony preached. We have an organization that has for its end the manifestation of God to all nations as the God of redemption. We have had a commission to proclaim distinctly the grace "that is over all His works;" to teach men how to receive the personal

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salvation and utter the personal testimony that glows through this ancient hymn; to make emphatic some points of great doctrinal importance on which this testimony is based; and to fight withal the fight of faith against every form of infidelity without and unfaithfulness within, which would exclude God from His universe. I do not say that we have within the dispensation of Christianity an elect dispensation more privileged and better than others. It is enough that we have our own cast of the Christian doctrine, and worship, and life which, whatever others may think of it, we hold to be a tradition of inestimable value. This is, so to speak, the clothing that all the religious traditions of the past wear in their transmission to us. This old place of worship and preaching has for a hundred years and one borne witness to these traditions.

It is necessary, however, now that we look more particularly at what is meant by the receiving generation and at the obligation the reception involves. Why does heaven pour out upon us its stores of truth and grace? Why have the crowning revelations of His name and mercy been given to us? What is the duty that is imposed on us by all this?

The first obligation of every age and of ours is to glorify God for the privileges thus transmitted. One generation is here said to transmit the praise of His name and works to another: not simply to hand on the record of its own praises but to give matter of praise for themselves to those who come after. Our duty is to make divine revelations the theme of our constant rejoicing. The history of the past is the material of the worship of the present. "He is

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faithful that promised." Every generation has a "new song," the burden of each of which is still a response to the word of Jesus: "Said I not, If thou wouldst believe thou shouldst see the salvation of God." The first Christian generation set us the example, occupying all the forenoon of the feast of Pentecost in praising the wonderful works of God. The Lord loves to receive the accumulating tributes of time. They do not introduce a discordant strain into the more ancient worship of heaven. They break into the blessed monotony, and add new tones that enrich the chorus. Much of our worship is supplication for our own mercy. But all our praise must be gathered from the manifestation of Himself in ages past: you know how large a part of the psalms is thus made up. The note is always "Our fathers have declared unto us!" But what had their fathers told them in comparison with what has reached our ears from all the companies of the redeemed in every age! And how much reason have we, at the end of the century which closes with this ancient house, to magnify the God of our fathers and the deliverance He wrought through them!

But all this we cannot do unless we use these privileges aright. The past transmits not only its works, that we may praise God for them; but its testimonies that we may be encouraged also to put our trust in Him who wrought them. The God of the fathers is our God. There was no work wrought in their day which is not wrought now. That is the meaning of the psalm. Not that the contemporaries of David might look back in blank astonishment at

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deeds formerly done. But that they might expect the same to be wrought in their day. "Thou who leddest Joseph like a flock through the wondering waters, shine forth now!" is the universal law. Let that be our joy: that there was nothing done in the annals of our fathers that we may not expect to see repeated in our own. No age has any exclusive prerogative; save one indeed, the Pentecostal age. That had its crowning display of power which we can emulate only in minor Pentecosts. But we may expect even its influence now: if not the sound and glory of its name, if not its visible tongues, yet its invisible grace more mighty than the signs. The last note, "it filled them all," is more than "it sate upon" each of them. While, brethren, we magnify the triumphs of God in the critical eras of Christendom we must expect the same triumphs in other forms. Say not "the former times were better than these." Be sure that no grace was given to them which is denied to us. The signs and many wonders and divers miracles, so to speak, may be wanting; but here again the last is best; the "gifts of the Holy Ghost" are common to every age. And they are ours by many tokens.

But let me most earnestly remind you that all this is an individual matter. Mark how David blends himself, his individual self, with the generations. There is nothing in the psalm more beautiful or impressive than this. It begins and ends with his own tribute. He thought of the marvels in Egypt, and before Egypt to the patriarchs; and the sublime harmonies of singing generations; but ever and anon glides into "I also will magnify His name." That is

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the lesson for you and me. Paying our tribute to the worship of ages past, we must add "I will sing aloud unto the Lord my strength." Let us not lose ourselves in the generation. Let us fight against that common tendency. This age of churches and organizations tends to dwarf the individual, and indeed there is a sense in which he is nothing. But, on the other hand, in another sense, he is all. The units make the company: "say not a confederacy" too emphatically as if forgetting yourself. What is the "Holy, Holy, Holy," in the upper temple if the poor prophet below with unclean lips cannot join it and cries "woe is me!" See to it that you enjoy your personal blessing. Let me urge you to-day. The last hour of this house may be distinguished by you for ever as the hour of your new and better devotion.

II.

Now let us turn our thoughts to the future. The receiving generation is the transmitter also. Each is a link in the golden chain that eternity let down into time and which from time is ascending to eternity again. Each age receives only what it has to pass on to the next.

For here there is a general law of the divine government in the economy of revelation. We have been dwelling entirely on the great gift of truth dispensed from age to age: as if heaven were unrolling before men in slow and successive degrees what men have only to receive in silent wonder and adoration: dividing to each age severally as He will. Nor am I going to revise or retract that funda-

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mental truth. The mystery of it is unfathomable; and we cannot take one sure step in the consideration of our duty unless we consent to receive it with profound submission. But there is another and counterpart aspect of the same truth. It has pleased God to make every generation a trustee for the generations to come. And all sacred history attests that the gradual unfolding of the name and works of God has been bound up with the fidelity of the successive depositaries of the divine counsel. Without involving myself and you in the inextricable difficulties of this subject, let me say that there is no law more patent in the administration of the moral government of the world than that each generation receives its portion in due season from its predecessor, and is responsible only for that; secondly, that each generation impresses its own influence for good or evil on what it receives; and thirdly that it must needs transmit what it received to the generation following with the impress of its own character. It is evident that the responsibility rests mainly on the second of these points: the influence of the present generation on the truth it receives.

Not of course for what it receives as such. The responsibility of the light or darkness, or darkness mingled with the light, which is the heritage of every generation coming into the world, rests with its predecessors. The Judge of all the earth will do right; and that is a thought of unspeakable value to us when we are forced to reflect upon the infinite variety of the relations of people and of men to the one common truth. There is a sense in which I may dare to say that God Himself is responsible for

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multitudes unvisited by external revelation: or, if such still bolder language be allowed, He shares the responsibility with the tardy messengers of His will. A very large proportion of the generations of men neither received nor transmitted more than the dim suggestions of nature. It was not their fault that they were left to the interior light which enlighteneth every man that cometh into the world. They will be judged by no higher standard than that which their nature gave them without an external Law or Rule of Faith.

But all generations have been responsible, and will be held responsible, for the use they made of their advantages and the impress they stamped upon the heritage of truth which they received. Each age has more or less moulded what came into its hands. There is a tone or tendency in every generation which perfectly distinguishes it from every other. We cannot do better than take St. John's illustration of this. The modern word "spirit of the age" might have come from him, only that he multiplies the spirit into spirits. He speaks of the spirits abroad controlling and swaying the minds of his own generation: each spirit having its own sphere. And he speaks of the one Spirit of the truth counterworking all these as manifestations of Antichrist.

The impress each age stamps upon its own Christianity is of various kinds, for good or evil. It would take too long only to sum up the several spirits that have reigned in past ages, and moulded successively the Faith which has been transmitted to us. Suffice that the result of all the influences of all the generations is on our present religion. The

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church, of our day as an organ of preaching, and as a sphere of worship is what the accumulated impresses of all past ages have made it. Every generation transmits the heritage it received either as better or worse. I state only the simple fact. Such is the law of Providence. It is useless to appeal against this, and say that He will provide for His own truth and see that it takes no harm in passing through the hands of men. Useless, I say: not untrue. He certainly will see to it that the gates of hell shall not prevail against His cause; and in spite of all human perverseness the faith shall hold on its way. But still the stern truth remains that every generation forms its own character as a transmitter of the one heritage. Not that any historian of any age can precisely say what impress Christianity received from it. We cannot mark off one generation from another; or define when one begins and another ends. But the general idea is quite enough here; and for a moment we may be content with an abstraction. Whether we can understand it or not, we are taught that there is a responsibility resting on each generation. The most impressive of all teachers of this is our Lord Himself. "The men of this generation" in His lips has a peculiar meaning: chiefly as to their responsibility for what they received, but not without reference to what they handed on.

But let us cease from abstraction and mere generality. What is our duty as transmitters of this heritage? Our duty, I say: for we must now keep in view our own special relations as a people and as individual Christians to this most important law of the divine economy.

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You will anticipate that our first obligation is to transmit undefiled the pure deposit of truth. It is expected of the present generation that it be faithful to Christ in opposition to the special Antichrists of the age. The Head of the Church looks to us that we hand down His religion to our children unadulterated by the errors of the day. God holds us responsible that the Christian faith descends from us untarnished, as good as we received it. That is the great responsibility of any present time, and of this. The spirit of the age we live in is very lax on this head, and must be resisted: the fundamental doctrines, alas, are ceasing to be regarded as fundamental, and the tendency is one of undue tolerance. The supreme Divinity of Christ, His vicarious atonement, and the eternal penalties of its rejection, are challenged, criticized, and almost avowedly thrown aside as the obstructions of an obsolete orthodoxy. Orthodoxy itself is a term that is used only to point an epigram. Religion is no longer one and absolute; it is not allowed to use the Master's words: "I came forth from God;" "I am not of the world." All its forms are regarded as evolutions of the instinct for the infinite in all men: and it is very ominous that the favourite term now is, "The Science of Religion." These times are governed by the spirit of demonstration. Men will in another than the apostolic sense "prove all things, and hold fast that which is good:" that which is good to reason especially. The highest principles of all are in danger: God Himself must be proved; and, that being impossible, men are substituting an evolving law of fate for the living God. Science rules and the Bible stands at its bar. In their

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anxiety to meet the arguments of science, and to elude the force of its attack on the Christian Scriptures which give positive teaching, the defenders of the faith are apt to make undue concessions, and even to renounce the absolute authority of Scripture. Now the sacred oracles are the great trust put into our hands to hold, and to transmit: the trust that enfolds all other trusts. Of the Jews it is said, "To them were entrusted the oracles of God." Strictly speaking, the only thing ever said to be thus committed to the trust of a generation is Holy Scripture. We must hand down the volume of the book as we received it.

But I must not forget the special purpose of the day; and on such an occasion as this may, without being accused of sectarianism, speak of our special responsibility as a religious community. We are bound, by the memory of the hundred years of this place, to hold fast our traditions; and transmit them in their integrity. We value our Christianity first, with its holy books: here is the main test of our fidelity. In comparison with this of course every other tradition is insignificant, however valuable in itself. But we have subordinate deposits of our own, and must transmit our traditions undefiled. They are few, but very important, and they are in danger. Our peculiar rule of fellowship is a trust which this generation is tempted to give up. So is our old system of an itinerant ministry. So is the pastoral government of Christ's flock. So are some other usages of old which God so greatly honoured that we ought to think long before we change them. We are bound to hand down our ancient cherished

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institutions, and with this it is our duty to transmit our old literature, our missionary spirit, our aim to penetrate every hole and corner of the land with our testimonies. Some of these are sacred beyond price.

But is it enough that we simply transmit what we have received? That would be a hard and narrow saying. Every age is expected to improve upon its tradition in some respects, and we must cherish the sacred ambition of doing what we can to improve upon our fathers' models. You will think that perhaps hardly possible. But it is not only possible, it is necessary, if we are to administer our stewardship for the coming generation with clean hands. There are some things, as we have seen, that we cannot mend, which we are not permitted to think of mending. But there are some in which we are improving on the past, and shall transmit a better line of things to our successors. Granted that in what David calls the proclaiming the works and uttering the praises of God we cannot mend—that the essentials of preaching and the essentials of worship cannot be improved: all I ask is, that they go down the same—yet the manner of the proclamation and the style of the worship may be transmitted better to our children than we received it. None can make any reasonable objection to that. Within proper limits the idea of improvement in our methods is one which we may entertain. It is possible, for instance, that the new centre of evangelistic enterprise which will rise out of these ruins may be an improvement on the mission operations of this venerable preaching-house. It is possible that the

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children may be better taught in catechisms; and that our various organizations of charity may improve; that our young men may be better guided; and that both preaching and worship may share in the general advance. It is not easy to say in what specific directions we may hand down our heritage as improved. Our text harps, as we have seen, upon two ideas: the proclamation and the worship. The new house will introduce little that is new in the latter. There will be a place of worship proper for the more habitual assembling of believers. There will be but little change there. But as to the methods of proclamation more may be said. We shall be faithful to our fathers' general plans: above all, like them keeping up the dignity of the cause of God. But in ways that cannot now be mentioned, we shall improve our methods, and realize, by God's grace, a high idea of the evangelization needful for these times. Then we shall care for our young men as they were never before cared for. We shall try to be better than our fathers as to education of those who are the link between one generation and another.

And this once more is a personal matter. I have been, as it were, addressing that abstract and intangible thing, the present generation. But you have all felt that the appeal has been to you individually. Lest, however, you should have failed to do so, let it now be brought home to you with emphasis. You are one by one concerned; nor is there any generation now living which does not look through your individual eyes, think in your minds, purpose in your hearts, and work with your hands.

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Therefore we all, from the venerable few who connect us with a past generation down to the youngest convert who represents the generation which will carry on our labours when we are gone, must take anew the pledge of devotion to our common work: each feeling that he bears in himself, whether old or young, the burden of the responsibility of the present days. Nothing is more habitual than to rebuke the vices of the age, and mourn over the tendencies of the times, as if the age and the times were a personality separate and responsible. We are free enough to condemn the period we live in, and lay our faults upon it. Our Lord did sit in judgment on the generation: He had the right so to do; the only member of a human generation who could bring it before the bar. But every one must ask himself these two questions: Do I protest against tendencies which I know to be wrong? and that in every way possible to me in my sphere of life? Secondly: Is my practice right? To-day let each examine himself. What am I doing as a young man? What as a father of a family? What as a Christian minister and teacher of religion, what as a writer or lecturer, am I doing to help this generation to mould the next? David, who ended the psalm by saying that he would praise God with all the rest, receiving the traditions of the past, says that, as a member of a transmitting generation, he would proclaim the name of God to all. Join him in this. And carry about more than you have done the burden of the responsibilities of the age you live in. Let this be to you the lesson of the day.

And now we may profitably close by returning

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for a moment to the solemn subject of this festival, to the note struck at the commencement. We are reminded by the voice of the Eternal God in His word that we must lift our thoughts from the changes and chances of time to the fixed and unchangeable realities of eternity. Let us raise our minds from this our generation, and from all generations, to the eternal and steadfast future, when the ages shall have run out their course, and the mystery of time shall be wrought out to its final issues. Let us go forward in the strength of faith and of hope to the end of all our generations, and centuries, and millenniums; when the last receiving generation shall have caught up the voice of the last transmitting generation, and have no other coming behind it; but send into eternity the combined result of the whole tradition of all the ages since lost and redeemed Adam began the succession of time. Let us contemplate the prospect: not for duty, as we have done with that; not for reminder of responsibility, as we have done with that; but for the pure pleasure of the vision itself.

Undoubtedly there is much in the anticipation to mingle fear with the delight. The church of Christ may say what St. Paul said of himself: "I know that bonds and imprisonments await me!" She has always in her hand the scroll of the prophet John; and, feeling its twentieth chapter pressing on her heart, must indeed sometimes exceedingly fear and quake for the coming tribulation. Like Daniel, the Old Testament John, the sight of the vision may sometimes make her astonied and sick for many days. And we, as representing that church, may

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have our spasms of apprehension when we look out into the unknown future. But, after all, to the eye of faith and hope the horizon is clear. We see beyond all intervening calamities the day which is at hand. In the immediate future we may forecast darkness; then beyond it a time neither clear nor dark; but in the ultimate future, to which Christian hope springs with a vigour and alacrity that no fear can weigh down, there is only day: broad, cloudless, eternal day. Let us leave this old house, glad with the prospect of the end. We shall see the building laid low, and not one stone left on another, while a better rises out of its dust: the time is coming, though not now is, when every house of prayer shall be closed for ever. We begin a new dispensation of Methodism in Manchester; the time is coming when Methodism itself, and all the virgins her companions around the Queen, shall have ended their ministry for ever. The generations of witnesses and heralds and worshippers shall have exhausted their long tradition transmitted and received. Their generations of preaching shall cease eternally; their generations of praise shall close into one note for the end of time, and begin again with the infinite melody of eternal ages. The old proclamation of our Lord shall be done away; but there shall be a new song. May we, fellow-worshippers of God, and fellow-servants of Jesus in His kingdom and patience, be found in that eternal temple, and each add his strain to the universal harmony which will for ever ascend to the Father, to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost. Amen.

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FAITH AS A GRAIN OF MUSTARD SEED.

"If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place; and it shall remove, and nothing shall be impossible unto you."—MATT. xvii. 20.

"And the apostles said unto the Lord, Increase our faith. And the Lord said, If ye had faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye might say unto this sycamine tree, Be thou plucked up by the roots, and be thou planted in the sea; and it should obey thee."—LUKE xvii. 5, 6.

"Jesus answered and said unto them, Verily I say unto you, if ye have faith, and doubt not, ye shall not only do this which is done to the fig tree, but also if ye shall say unto this mountain, Be thou removed and be thou cast into the sea, it shall be done."—MATT. xxi. 21.

THESE words, as I have read them in our Bible, seem to speak of a faith of which the apostles were destitute; and to describe what they might have done if they had possessed it. Yet there is another reading, and probably the more correct, that makes the Master simply tell them what will be the result of their having true faith, or of their using what they have: "If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say!" There can be no doubt that the teaching of our text is best brought out by combining these meanings. Inverting the order, we must regard our Lord as taking occasion to declare emphatically for His apostles and for all ages the sublime prerogative of living faith generally:

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that is, so to speak, the high ideal of it for every one to aspire to and to attain. But this He does in such a way as to set His servants upon inquiring why it is they have not such faith and to prompt them to seek what they lack.

It is our privilege, brethren, to take the place of the apostles: to put their question and to receive their answer for ourselves. By doing so we shall escape no little embarrassment; for it may be said that the whole scene is more clearly understood in its reference to us than in its reference to them. There are many great difficulties about it in its original connection, to which I need not refer. But when we remember that the Saviour intends this lesson for all posterity, and for every believer to the end of time, these difficulties almost entirely vanish. It is in fact a text too great for interpretation before the Pentecost: only the strong light of that day brings out its hidden meaning. Let us then, asking for the aid of the Spirit, consider these words as responding to a universal need, and that by a twofold answer: first, teaching us what is the perfect strength of faith; and, secondly, suggesting to us why our faith is not perfect.

I.

Our Lord uses figurative language to set before us the ideal or perfect picture of faith: in its principle as the power of a divine life within; in its action as exerted by ourselves; and in its command of all things necessary for our salvation. His figures were familiar enough to His hearers; but they are given to us that we may find in them a deeper significance

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than the first disciples could discern. According to our faith is the meaning of this word concerning faith. We must ponder it much in the light of other passages in which the same figures are used; remembering that we are permitted, both as preachers and hearers, to carry the application a little beyond the immediate text: provided only we do not carry it beyond the Lord's own sanction.

When the apostles ask the Master to "add to their faith," His answer seems first to be adapted to an altogether different request. As His manner is, He rebukes without rebuking them, and speaks of an internal principle of the whole life which is not to be increased from without but grows from within: the divine energy of life working in the regenerate soul as faith. Mark that in the figure the Lord says "if ye have faith," with the emphasis on "have," "like a grain of mustard seed." We may be told that this only means a very small faith: a small particle as opposed in our second text to a great mountain. But here trees are in question; and surely if faith is small, it is only as a secret and imperceptible something put into the soil of the heart to grow with a divine energy. This same seed is in the thirteenth chapter of St. Matthew the similitude of the kingdom in the world; and of that kingdom which in our chapter of St. Luke is "within you:" whether in the earth at large or in the individual soul its similitude is the grain of mustard seed.

But the point in the reality of this figure is the energy of the divine life working steadily and mysteriously its issues, making our whole religion one perpetual expression of the divine will. What those

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who heard did not perceive in the word, we must perceive in it: that faith is not itself the seed, but the energy of life in the seed; that in effect which makes the infinite difference between the mustard seed and the grain of sand. True faith, such as that of which our Saviour speaks, is never small. Moreover, we must in yet another sense enlarge the word that it may receive a sense which before Pentecost it could not bear: that this energy is Christ Himself within us. Apart from Him, we can do nothing; with Him or in Him, or with Him in us, we can do all things. "He that is joined to the Lord is one Spirit." The Holy Ghost who is Christ's is also ours: belongs to each of us and is within us the power of the indwelling Lord. Now Christ "dwelleth in our hearts through faith," as St. Paul's Ephesian prayer tells us. Be sure that this, whether it appear or not on the surface, is what our Lord had in His view when He uttered the sublime word for all futurity. In the power of this faith, which is never weak, Christ repeats all His wonders within us. He does not in our nature abolish physical evils, literally remove mountains, or root up trees; but He does within us, through our faith in His name, all those "greater works" that these things signify. And when He gives this answer to the prayer, "increase our faith," His meaning is that where this living faith exists it must increase itself. It will grow as the tree grows, not by addition from the branches downward to the root, but by development from the root upward into all the beauty and strength of a godly life. If the blessed seed—keeping the figure in view—has fair scope, and absorbs its appropriate

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nutriment, it will become a great tree and suffer no other to grow near it. To drop the figure, the whole of life will be one continual command to sin, "be thou uprooted!" and it will obey.

But all this is not enough. The faith here spoken of is not simply a developing energy; it is expressly connected with our own act and deed. All development, whether in nature or grace, is according to the law of numberless interventions of the divine hand giving new directions and new vigour to existing power of life. In our personal religion the law of development has much to do with our own hand and our own voice hastening and invigorating the work of grace in our souls. We have to speak the word of faith as well as to exhibit the secret operation of faith without the word. The divine power is at our disposal to use it for overcoming of evil and removing of difficulties and obtaining all good. It is obvious that it is only the divine power that could accomplish all this. The Saviour uses these extraordinary similitudes purposely to express that: no other meaning could justify such unlimited hyperboles. But no one can fail to see with what marked emphasis He makes the act our own. We might have expected to hear Him say, "It shall obey Me;" or, "I will see that it be done;" or, "You shall find all things possible with God." But that is not the style: "It shall obey you." Your voice shall command the mountain to be removed; your voice shall bid the tree to be uprooted; and both shall obey you. By no method could the Heavenly Master have more effectually taught that our faith is the link between His power and ourselves. By

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faith we make His voice, His might, His omnipotence our own: so far, that is, as we need them all. Precisely as we receive the benefit of His righteousness, we receive the benefit of His strength. His obedience is not reckoned to us; but its benefit becomes ours as believers. So His effectual power is not vicariously ours, but only as it is made our own. Hence the word is not, "The Lord is my righteousness and strength," but, "In the Lord I have righteousness and strength." But we must not diminish the prerogative. There stands the saying: an everlasting argument that "the disciple is to be perfected as his Lord;" that he shares the supremacy of the Second Adam even as he shares the debasement of the first; that he has in and with his Lord "all things put under him," and that even he also may "speak and it shall be done." "It shall obey YOU."

This leads at once to the high tribute our Lord pays to the completeness of the achievements of faith in every department of the religious life. As the grain of mustard seed was chosen to represent the secret strength of the divine power, so to represent the wonderful effects of that power figures are used which in human language would be called extravagant exaggeration. Our Lord uses them, however, with the most systematic purpose. The first occasion takes us to the mount of transfiguration. The disciples had utterly failed in part of the duty which not long before their Master had laid upon them. While He had all night been receiving honour and glory from the Father above, His representatives had been dishonouring Him below. This they deeply feel, and

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ask "Why could not we cast him out?" The answer convicted them of unbelief; but in the form of a promise for the future: the promise, namely, that every kind of obstacle in the way of duty, though it might seem to block the way like a mountain, should be removed at the command of faith. Before faith in Christ, exerted in resolute personal effort, every difficulty should retire. The second instance finds the same disciples put to confusion by their inability to root out the strong uncharitableness of their nature. When they are told to forgive their offending brother seven times a day, they cry out for more faith, or rather they utter their feeling of despondency in deep consciousness of their impotence. Again the Lord reminds them of His grain of mustard seed, and promises His disciples that His power, put forth through their faith in Him, should avail to cast out every form of interior sin, though it were fixed in the heart by as many roots and radicles as the sycamine tree. Uniting the two, we have the Lord's assurance that no enemy without and no enemy within shall avail against the true faith of a Christian man. But these two are not complete without the exposition of both given at the end of the Saviour's teaching. When these same disciples marvelled at the withering of the fig tree, their Master a third time magnified before them the faith which they had not even yet: "If ye have faith, and doubt not, ye shall not only do this which is done to the fig tree, but also, if ye shall say unto this mountain, Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea, it shall be done. And all things whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive." This completes the charter. In His name,

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and through faith in His name, the believer in Jesus may have all things that he prays for, all things needful for the peace of his soul, the discharge of his duty, and the glory of God.

Such, brethren, is the ideal which our Lord again and again set before His disciples: in strong figurative language, indeed, but with a meaning that extends to and encompasses all the plain realities of life. I say His "disciples," not His "apostles;" for there is not the slightest reason to think that He spoke only to the Twelve, and words intended for them alone. When they complained of their want of perfect meekness of charity, and asked for faith to receive the command of unlimited forgiveness, surely they represented, if ever they did, all Christians. The question here is not of literal miracles: we know not what command over nature the Lord's servants have had and may yet have, in their fellowship with Him; but we think now only of those wonderful spiritual achievements of faith in every poor Christian that shall rival in the sight of God the wonders of the great chapter of faith in the epistle to the Hebrews. The text is a very large charter indeed. It knows nothing of spiritual impossibilities. We must not interpret it by our own too low standard; but according to the Lord's three memorable words concerning things possible and not possible. "With men this is impossible." "With God all things are possible." "All things are possible to him that believeth." Then why is it that we know so little of these triumphs of faith? Why are many of us so much like the apostles in their state before Pentecost, and so little like them in their state after that day? The Lord

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here sets us upon asking that question too, by the very manner of His reply: "If ye had faith as a grain of mustard seed!"

II.

And the same narratives which figuratively set up the high standard suggest the reasons why we sink so much below it. Studying the words carefully we shall see that they present the following tests of faith, the application of which may detect the reasons of its weakness in us. Either it falls short of being the faith which can be exercised only by the regenerate; or it is not nourished and strengthened by its appropriate aliment; or the evils which faith has to contend against are not felt as they ought to be; or the faith itself depends too much on the Lord and forgets its own co-operation; or lastly, and generally, the standard of possible attainment through faith is too low. We shall see that each of these sources of weakness is illustrated in the evangelical narrative.

The first and most obvious reason of our failure is in reality a fundamental one: we have perhaps no such faith as this because it can be exercised only by the regenerate, and we have not the life that is in the Son of God, or that is the Son of God in us. The operation of faith is twofold in the Christian religion. It is, on the one hand, a trust that literally as such does nothing but confess its impotence: asking and receiving mercy and a new heart as free gifts. That faith is indeed vigorous enough in the life of penitence; but it can "perform no mighty works," none of the mighty works at least of which we have been speaking, until it becomes, instead of

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the trust of a penitent seeking renewal, the strength of the same penitent made a new creature in Christ Jesus. Until then, though it may do much in outward amendment, it cannot go to the root of the matter. Now many of us, brethren, are wondering at the poverty of our religious life; and we shall go on wondering still unless we learn the essential lesson that the strength of the faith that overcomes the world within and without is the indwelling Son of God made ours by our regeneration. The strong man will keep his goods in peace—alas, a troubled peace—until the Stronger than he enters. Until we have that life which is "more abundant" than our own we are only saying weak words to a mocking enemy: taking a few grains from the mountain we want to remove, a few branches from the tree we want to uproot. The life we have under the influence of the convincing Spirit is good; and in the strength of it we must do all that its imperfection can do. We must not undervalue it; but we must not marvel at its ineffectual energy. If we carry it to our Lord, and ask Him the reason of our impotence, He will tell us, "Because of your weak faith;" but He will also add that it can never be strong until a new nature puts it forth. And He will still say: "Separate from Me ye can do nothing." Let us then use what faith we have to come to our Saviour and ask Him for that higher life which He came that we might have. Let us pray that our present life may be raised to the life of regeneration. Then, but not till then, shall we have the strength of the sons of God. Raised from the dead, mighty works will be shown forth in us.

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Supposing, however, that the Spirit of power from on high is in us, we may be keeping our faith weak by neglecting the means that strengthen it. "This kind," said our Lord to the dejected disciples, "goeth not out but by prayer and fasting." We must be careful how we explain these words: not to overvalue them as the discipline of faith, but certainly not to undervalue them. It is not that prayer and fasting are "added" to faith, as agents in the work that faith has to do: faith in all things has the pre-eminence. Prayer and fasting are devotion and holy discipline, which are the humble ministers of faith; as abstinence from sin and self and appeal to the divine strength, they are essential; and never was a high religion reached or a great work done without them. If we are not "asking in the prayer of faith" we receive not; if we are not constantly denying our sensual lusts, our faith must be weak, for the old man and the new cannot be strong at once. No law is more absolute than this. But abstinence or fasting does not refer to carnal desires only. On the occasion of our second text the Lord gave another illustration of the same truth. In an indirect but very solemn manner He rebukes in the disciples the self-righteousness which equally with carnal passions saps the strength of piety and paralyzes its voice. Mark the whole context which ends with "So likewise ye, when ye shall have done all, say, We are unprofitable servants." And take the double "say" together, placing the latter first. They who before God say nothing but the language of profound self-abasement may say to every enemy of their souls the words of irresistible authority. But they will continue unforgiving and

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selfish towards their brethren, who are not deeply humble before the common Father: not "submitting under God," to quote St. James, they are impotent to "resist the devil." But we may safely return to generalities here. Strong faith in God, which is the mighty energy of the Christian life, absolutely depends on rigorous holiness. A single permitted sin unnerves the arm and takes the pith out of all prayer. "If I regard iniquity in my heart the Lord will not hear me." What, on the other hand, the neglect of prayer and godly discipline has prevented our acquiring we can never know. But by beginning at once we may know, and soon know, what marvels are within our reach: the test of a word like this is the holy experiment of a season of abstinence and prayer for the good of our souls. That experiment was never yet made in vain.

But this assumes one thing, the absence of which may be reckoned among the most common reasons of our weakness. We may not be anxious enough to get rid of the evils that faith has to overcome. Observe carefully that one particular evil which the Lord was condemning; and His manner of rebuking it, which was such as to be a strong incentive to seek the increase of faith. How awful is His description of the malignity of self, in its deadly carelessness of others. "It were better," our Lord says, in the same strong figurative language, "that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and he cast into the sea, than that he should offend one of the Lord's little ones and have his brother's endangered soul hanging about him for ever." This gives us a most solemn and a most startling view of the exceeding

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sinfulness of what commonly passes as a comparatively little sin. It is one of the greatest hindrances to an earnest piety that those who seek it tolerate the evil that hinders it. Our besetments cease to distress and alarm us by reason of our guilty familiarity with them. The faith in us that lies dormant will never be stirred up until we feel the sin remaining in us, and every particular manifestation of it, to be intolerable. The disciples did not know the uncharitableness of their hearts, and their secret pride, and their rooted selfishness, until their Master gave them this special revelation. Then they cried aloud for increase of faith; and then the very sense of danger began to strengthen their faith by strengthening their earnestness in seeking its increase. And this is evermore the method of the "Spirit of faith" in His discipline of our souls. He first makes the regenerate soul impatient of the sin that remains; then excites that impatience to hatred; stimulates that hatred to passionate desire for deliverance; and then cometh the end of the mighty prayer of irresistible faith. Let us not expect to achieve any great work, or win any great blessing, or rejoice over any great deliverance, until we see in the light of our Lord's countenance the sinfulness of our sin and fly from it with abhorrence; until we see also in the light of His countenance the greatness of the blessing He would give and seek it with all our heart.

Once more, we cannot weigh these words attentively without coming to the conclusion that the Lord is here warning us against relying too much upon Him, and forgetting our own responsibility for the use of faith. The Searcher of hearts detected a

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touch of error in His disciples' "add faith unto us." The end of their training was now drawing near, and here they are with the same old tree of self rooted in their hearts: we know what fruit it bore even on the eve of the Passion. If only their Master would show His lordship over their perverse hearts by giving them at once the power and the deliverance! But no, that is not His way. "It shall obey you!" "It shall obey Me" was of course what He meant; just as "thy faith hath saved thee!" means "I have saved thee: My power through thy faith. Not thy faith without Me; not I without thy faith." Let us find further illustration of this in that final lesson of faith, the last before the Resurrection. The Lord seems to have combined in our third text the two illustrations, the Tree and the Mountain, in one. As He passed by He saw a fig tree, and used it for His purpose. He spoke to it one quiet word. The tree heard Him, and obeyed; its glossy leaves grew dim, its beauty faded, death went down its branches, and it perished to the root before His eyes. And why? As a type of Jerusalem? Yes; but also as an illustration of His old subject. "If ye have faith, and doubt not, ye shall not only do this matter of the fig tree," so it runs, "but if ye bid the Mount of Olives remove it shall obey you!" Observe how to the last the Lord keeps before His disciples the thought of their own co-operation with Himself. Is it not as if He had said: "You see what I have done: how the tree obeyed Me in a moment. Whatever you have to do for Me, or for your own salvation, you may command in the same way." Alas, brethren, how strong is our disposition to forget

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this, and to look up to the Lord as if He must do all. He will do nothing for us without our own concurrence. Perhaps we, for I will not say any more about the apostles, are at this moment forgetting what a responsibility we have, and how much depends upon ourselves. We think: "If Jesus would only pass by and speak that word to my deadly sin; if He would say to this tree, to that tree, to the other, 'Wither and die!'" It is well that we really mean this; to mean it will count for much; but such a one-sided prayer He will never answer. He without us will never make us perfect. We shall wait for ever if we wait for that. Let us at once apply this to ourselves. Let us one by one think of the enemy that keeps us dwarfish, poisons our peace, and makes us a sorrow both to God and man. Let us look to the Lord: not asking Him to abolish our sin for us, but asking Him to help us, and then determining to get the victory. Bring before Him and before yourself that ancient, inveterate enemy of your religion: as if it must be out of the way before another step can be taken. Come to hand-to-hand encounter with this sin. "It shall obey you." But you must be in earnest, and act as one who will know no more of the vice that is ruining you. Ask Him to blight your lust, your avarice, your selfishness, your uncharity, to the roots; but remember that He will speak through your lips and your hands, used in discipline and in prayer, the command that they die.

Finally, who does not feel, after all that has been said, as if the secret of the want of this strong faith among sincere people is their low standard of thought as to the privilege and possibility of the

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religious life. Our Lord has said, as the common superscription of all His promises, "according to your faith be it unto you:" a wonderful maxim, which is really a boundless charter. According to our idea of what we may have, will be our faith in asking. Hence we hear in the closing lesson, "If ye believe and doubt not:" this meaning, "If ye do not dispute with yourselves about the possibilities of religion and the measure heaven will mete to you." Here we must all more or less come under the condemnation of estimating too unworthily what our religion might do for us and make us. That is the real explanation of the commonplace piety of the day. Men have not high attainments because their conception of possible attainment is a low one. Alas, it is the tendency of Christianity to lower its eyes and sink towards the world. Every now and then the Spirit comes and quickens the general aspiration; and thus what we call a revival of religion always begins with the raising of the standard of expectation among its professors.

Brethren, we are assembled on the eve of what we hope will be such a general awakening. But we are gathered around our Lord as the disciples were on the several occasions of these texts: deeply conscious of our impotence, mourning over the causes of it which we only too surely know to be in ourselves, and trusting that He will encourage us as He encouraged the desponding men who teach us here by their examples. Be sure that it is His will to breathe into us the spirit of courage and good hope; and to animate our whole company to the encounter with all forms of evil around us. We are in His

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presence, and about to approach His table; where our Lord, entertaining us at His own feast, will rejoice to grant us every petition we make to Him. We cannot do better than adopt the prayer which the apostles urged on this the only occasion of their preferring a common request. But we must remember the last words of their Master and ours on the subject, and doubt not in our hearts but steadfastly believe that He will send us down from His table with our faith increased. Moreover, we must individually believe; and act on that firm persuasion. Then in the spirit of strong faith in our indwelling Lord, we must each one of us bring the Self that hinders our devotion and sacrifice it on the altar. Freed from that internal enemy we shall then be able to command out of our path every mountain that shadows it. And the congregation that is made up of individuals thus "strong in faith, giving glory to God," will surely find the pleasure of their Master prospering in their hands: to Whom, with the Father and the Holy Ghost, be all honour for ever. Amen.

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PERFECTING CONVERSION.

"Yet lackest thou one thing."—LUKE xviii. 22.
"If thou wilt be perfect."—MATT. xix. 21.

THE one thing which stamps our narrative with special importance is this: that it gives, if not the only account, at least the fullest account, of our Lord's method of dealing with a candidate for His service. The proof of this will appear in due course. The reason of it was simply that there was a great difficulty here to be overcome: a very great difficulty indeed, so great that we know not whether this convert was won or lost. Our Lord's treatment of that difficulty is the pith of the record; undoubtedly the reason why it is given to us so fully, so elaborately, and by no less than three witnesses. It is the standing testimony of our Saviour's rigorous enforcement of His terms of discipleship. The whole hangs on the word Perfect, as applied to the commencement of religion; and to the tone and emphasis with which that word was uttered.

I must at the outset point your attention to the fact that this is the only instance in which the Great Master of all discipleship ever used the term Perfect with a personal application. He does not often employ the word; and that gives the few instances in

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which He does employ it a very deep interest. He uses it of Himself, "I must walk to-day and to-morrow; the third day I shall be perfect;" concerning that one and only perfection set before Him, the being perfected by sufferings. And as the echo: "He that is a perfect servant shall be as his Master." He speaks of His people as making their aim to be perfect in love to all men alike, "even as their Father in heaven is perfect." That was for the present life: He speaks of them as in the better state "perfected into one." But we have now before us the solitary, and therefore most impressive, instance of His addressing the individual. And it is an exhortation to begin with perfection.

As to the specific emphasis on the word in its present application, you will mark that it is twofold. First, it is the severe and rigorous answer to the ruler's question, "What lack I yet?" and must be viewed in relation to an imperfect beginning. Secondly, it is the gracious and invigorating response to the young man's deep desire, "What shall I do?" and encourages him and us to a perfect beginning. May the Spirit of the Great Teacher impress His words upon our minds this day!

I.

It seems hard to suppose the gentle Redeemer receiving sternly and coldly the advances, the impetuous advances, of this eminent young man. There was everything to recommend him. Not indeed his being a ruler in the synagogue: there was something in that to please the Lord; but all classes

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were alike to Him. Nor that he was a young man; for all that came to Jesus were, generally speaking, young. Nor that he was so eager, and came breathless, and cast himself down in the humblest attitude: for the value of all that depended on the heart. But it was the very fact that he came. "Him that cometh unto Me I will by no means cast out." Yet there is no denying, no mistaking, no explaining away that he was very severely dealt with; and that, not only for his own sake, but because he was the representative of a very large class in all times. The reason of the Lord's severity was simply and solely that in this young man He would illustrate the importance of His everlasting principle: the renunciation of self in beginning the Christian discipleship. The present candidate seemed to lack that requisite.

This the all-searching eye of the Master detects in the temper, mind, and spirit with which he obviously comes: obviously, that is, to Christ: we should observe nothing wrong. According to our standard all is faultless. He comes humbly, earnestly; and, as a Jewish teacher, asks exactly the right question, "What good thing shall I do to inherit eternal life?" We know of course that the better question is, "What shall I do to be saved?" But the time for that question was not yet. The question he asks was the legitimate expression of religious earnestness in a man of his class; yes, and the right appeal from one who desired to become a disciple of the new Teacher sent from God. Indeed, it is an inquiry that never was nor ever could be superseded: it is the current, everlasting cry of every soul that begins

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to feel the powers of the world to come. But this young member of the confraternity of rabbinical teachers had something in his spirit and temper which the Lord did not approve. This, again, we should not have detected. "Good Master, what good thing shall I do to inherit eternal life!" seems devout and reverent and decorous enough. There is not much harm in "shall I do;" nor in his idea of "inheriting" life. The Lord adopts and confirms his language. There is an obedience to the commandments which shall "enter through the gates into the city." But it was the "Good Master" that our Lord did not approve of. That savoured of the Rabbi-worship and adulation of human teachers which was the bane of spiritual religion at that time. So the Lord checks him suddenly and at once. "Why called thou Me good? Thou knowest Me only as a Rabbi of the rabbies, and thy words are not good. Put all that away at once and for ever!" He did put it away, at once changing his style; and we may regard this evil and danger as perhaps peculiar to him, and without further application. Yet not altogether so. He who comes to Christ, with the thought of undertaking His service, must bring with him, or must obtain, a clear and perfect aim: an aim to give the Lord all His honour, and let Him absolutely dictate His own terms. He must not be approached as one among many "good masters," but as the absolute God manifest in the flesh. Time fails to show how supremely important this is. Let the general lesson suffice that the Lord requires at the very outset a perfect heart: perfect in this sense, that it must be entirely ceasing from

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man and from self in the matter of salvation. Alas, how few there are who thus come!

Again, mark how this austere Receiver of sinners detects the self-righteousness which the ruler brings, and which must be utterly renounced, or there can be no good beginning of discipleship. The whole tenor of the catechising here on the Commandments —the only instance of His using them thus—shows that the Searcher of hearts is proving to this devout moralist that he has not "kept all these from his youth up:" that he has been very far indeed from that. The time had not come for the exposition of the evangelical method of salvation; and the Saviour said, "Keep the commandments!" testing this young Pharisee, and knowing full well what he would say, and how He Himself would answer him. We did not see at once the offence of his "good Master!" But we do mark immediately the meaning of that hasty and confident "All these have I kept from my youth up!" There we detect at once what the Lord detected. And how does He repel this self-righteousness, which was, and is, and always will be, the diametrical opposite of His gospel? Not by probing him with the commandments one by one; not by applying each to him spiritually, as we do in our own minds while we read. He does not say: "What! hast thou from thy very youth honoured thy parents with a perfect reverence; hast thou never harboured angry and murderous thoughts; hast thou never been unchaste even in imagination; hast thou given their due rigorously to all; hast thou never spoken as thou shouldst not of thy absent neighbour?" He leaves all this for us to supply in our

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own case. But mark how He sums it all in one stern, deep, soul-piercing rebuke. "Hast thou 'loved thy neighbour as thyself from thy youth up?' Then it will be easy for thee to give him his part in what is thine. Sell all thou hast; distribute unto the poor; I will make up the loss, put it to My account!" Then came the miserable detection, and the emphatic illustration of the words "One thing thou lackest!" "Thou needest, if thou wouldst be perfect, the profound abandonment of all thy self-righteousness." Let me say, brethren, in one word, that nothing better illustrates the introductory perfection the Lord demands than this. The first step in His discipleship cannot be taken until a man "forsaketh all that he hath" wherein to boast. Coming to the Lord all glorying must he put away, that we may, stript of self in intention, glory in Him alone.

But now we reach the nerve and pith of all. With infinite wisdom and skill the heavenly Prober and Physician of souls uses the same method to detect the self-righteousness and also the self-seeking, the self-service and the self-idolatry, that spoiled this young ruler's coming. That which tested whether he loved his neighbour as himself, and found him lacking, tested also the sincerity of his desire to abandon himself entirely to the will of Christ. That was what he apparently would do; that was what every one who joined the Lord's discipleship was supposed to do. Nothing was better known than the rigorous terms laid down by this Rabbi of the rabbies. "If any man will come after Me let him deny himself, take up his cross daily, and follow Me." This triple rule was becoming perfectly

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known in the land. If the ruler was not willing to do that, he "could not be the disciple" of Jesus of Nazareth. If the Lord had said, "Wilt thou be My disciple?" he would have answered readily enough, "This I will do from my youth upward!" Now mark once more the calm and almost judicial severity of the Lord: "Go and sell that thou hast, and distribute to the poor, and come and follow Me." And hear after that, on the one hand, "One thing thou lackest," and, on the other, "If thou wilt be perfect." It is as if the Saviour had said: "Go and leave thyself behind thee and then came back to Me, unselfed, stript and bare of all self-seeking: at least give that proof of thy willingness to renounce all for Me."

Fellow-sinners, there is no beginning of the service of Christ without this. You will perhaps be thinking that this entire self-renunciation is no less than the crown and perfection of religion: there is a sense in which that is true. But there is a sense also in which it is necessary at the very outset. The Lord does not count any man His, or a perfect convert, until this absolute self-resignation has taken place. Till then, the soul is only coming, it has not truly come. You need not again be reminded that the actual renunciation of this world's goods is a subordinate thing here. That was the test which brought out the deficiency of the young ruler: self-will in him took the form of mammon worship, and the Lord saw that he could not resign himself to the Ruler of the kingdom of heaven without giving up that. Examine your own hearts, you who are passing your judgment on the ruler. What would

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the Saviour send you to give up, that you might then come back again to Him!

And now I have done with the severer aspect of the text, as it is illustrated by "one thing thou lackest." We have seen what mars the integrity of discipleship at the outset. Before we go on, let us fix our mind steadily on the fact that there is much discipleship and profession of Christianity that is thus imperfect. No one of the solemn words of our Lord more needs to be enforced than this: "One thing thou lackest!" Of a large part of our congregation it may be said that they have never perfectly begun their religion. They have never made the full surrender of themselves, nor the great renunciation of sin and the world; they are coming, always coming, to Christ, but they have not yet fully come. Meanwhile, they are not rejected; nor ought it to be said that their religion is empty and valueless. It is simply in the rudiments: imperfect, unworthy, unsatisfactory, and with this only value that it has the promise of better things.

II.

It is pleasant, Christian brethren, to turn now from the austere Lord to the gentle, from Jesus the rigid disciplinarian to Jesus meek and lowly of heart. It is the same Jesus, however. We never understand Him so well as when we combine the two: blending them in all our views of His character as a Master. The very same page that tells us He is meek and lowly in heart reminds us of this. Out of that same mouth from which proceeded the ever-

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lasting blessing of those words came on the same day the awful denunciations of Capernaum. Necessarily we take the two aspects in their order; though strictly speaking they are blended in the countenance which He turns upon the coming candidate, and blended in the tones of the two voices with which He addresses him. We have been trying to do justice to the severity and sternness of the rich young ruler's reception; and to deduce from it the lesson for ourselves and for the present day. But while doing so we have felt the tenderness that could not be hid, and have been obliged to show that the Austere Man was really the Friend of publicans and sinners. But our candidate's example would not be satisfied without a little more specific reference to the strong encouragement which he and all like him receive.

Then observe how mighty was the stimulant of this word to the young ruler in his present state of mind. It might seem as if it was carefully and deliberately chosen to signify that the Lord, this supreme and only good Rabbi, recognized the good in him which only needed to be made perfect: you know that this word, which we shall dwell on now, always implies in man at least the finish of a process. Undoubtedly the Saviour put an emphasis into the word, and accompanied it with an inspiriting glance, which we must put into the exposition. To the young man the saying was or ought to have been like the sound of a trumpet: like that "Come" to Simon Peter, which fired him to spring into the billows. It meant to say: "Though I have rebuked thy 'Good Master,' and find much self clinging to thee, yet I see thy ardour, and—If thou wilt be

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perfect!" I do not know where but here to insert the comment of the evangelist, unique again, "Jesus beholding him loved him." There was an inexpressible tenderness in the look of longing compassion that went with the calm and strong suggestion: "If thou wilt be perfect!" We must not too readily say that it was the ingenuousness of youth that the Lord loved. Those young people here who would gladly think so may hold their opinion: there is no disproving it, and certain it is that if ever the desire to be perfectly His rejoices the heart of the Redeemer, it is when He sees that desire in a youthful soul. But what always seems to me to have thrown this glance of untold love into the blessed countenance of Jesus was His perfect knowledge of the immense difficulty the ruler had to encounter and His sympathy with the secret conflict through which he had passed and was passing still.

At any rate, I take the preacher's license and base my exhortation upon that. Most of those who are coming to Jesus in deep earnest, to give Him all their heart, are coming through many obstacles. There is a superficial, facile, easily accomplished and easily forgotten, presentation of self to the Lord which meets with but little opposition. But the crisis of which we now speak is one that never fails to stir up mighty enemies within and without. The soul, young or old, that has a generous enthusiasm to be entirely the Lord's, to undertake perfectly the conditions of His discipleship, and to give Him a perfect heart, will have a hard contest. If old, there is a whole life's habits against him; if young, there are all the hot passions and instability of youth. And when the

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Lord witnesses the struggle, He delights in it, and He encourages it. Take this to yourself. He knows all the workings of your mind these many years. He has watched your efforts and your failures; and looking upon you He so loves and so shows His love as almost to make you think you are pardoned, accepted and saved. But that is His method of stimulating you. He smiles and says: "With men this is impossible! But not with God: With God all things are possible!" Hear Him now say with more than angel's voice: "Wilt thou be perfect?" or again, "Wilt thou be perfect!"

And all this is confirmed when we observe how specifically the Redeemer encourages this young applicant to an instant and entire decision, with all its present fruits of perfect self-abandonment and consecration. Do you not feel that the Saviour here teaches the young ruler that he may if he will take this tremendous step at once, that very day, and carefully avoids putting him on an elaborate discipline for the commencement of discipleship? Suppose how differently the words might have run. And to help you in doing so, call to mind the three candidates who are not very far from this history: "Go and ponder; foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of man hath not where to lay His head!" The Austere Man might have said: "Go and put thyself under strict rules; meditate much on the vanity of riches; uncoil the ancient habits; and gradually come to such an entire resolution to take lot with Me as I require." No! such words would have been weighed down by "With men this is impossible." What the ruler heard and we hear is:

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"Go, if thou wilt be perfect, at once, and come back to Me a perfect disciple: as thy Lord, bare of all things, giving thyself to Me as I gave Myself to thee! Let not the sun go down upon another imperfect unconsecrated day, and find thee forgetting God and serving self." What the result in the case of the young ruler was, it is useless to inquire. There is nothing to help our decision about him. He might have found that "it was impossible;" and forgetting that "with God all things are possible," have lost the issues of that wonderful day. But what is to hinder our supposing it possible that he went his way sorrowful and came back rejoicing. If so, the Lord would have told us, you think; but it may have been His will to leave it in its uncertainty to be an everlasting lesson of caution to us.

In any case, the candidate might have been perfect that day. We must hold to this. Whatever may be the case with that ulterior perfection which we all have to aspire to, this initial and introductory perfection we may have at once. As to that other, the Saviour never says much: the time had perhaps not come. But His disciples do; and taught by them we must expect Christian perfection. We must aim at it on the one hand as the formation of a complete Christian character; and on the other as the removal of all sin. This latter may be and will be like that we now speak of, accomplished at once. But we have to do with the perfection that begins. That to you is the more important. The other will come in due time. But never will that come unless this is first secured. Let me pray you to receive the encouragement of this history and these

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words. Who among us feels the appropriateness of the lesson? Who will become perfect this day; before this evening; while I yet speak! Who will now suffer the Lord to seal and perfect his discipleship, and admit him into the elect number of those who have left self and the world behind them, and, like those in Paradise, already follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth! The Lord is willing and able. Of whom did He speak but of Himself when He said "With God all things are possible." Ask Him to help you. Remember the principle underlying the renunciation required. You may not be called to give up, perhaps you could not give up consistently, your substance this day. He seeks not yours, but you. By His grace you may surrender yourself, and thus virtually all, becoming at once in this sense perfect!

But there is here, as everywhere in our Saviour's dealings with candidates for His service, an endless encouragement in the prospect opened of following the Saviour even into another perfection, and of reaching the treasures and joys of another state hereafter. You will perhaps spare me the trouble of adjusting this promise of an ulterior perfection to the case of our halting and baffled and discomfited young ruler. He certainly goes away sorrowful; and as he goes we sigh over him, as the disciples did, though perhaps with a different feeling: they thought, "How hard a lesson has our Master taught here!" We think: "How glorious an opportunity has this young man lost!" But let us hope—there is no harm in hoping it—that our Lord's thoughts were unlike both; and that He foresaw that the ruler would be among the number of the

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"not many rich" who were effectually called. Be that as it may, it is time for us to let our illustration drop out of the history, or at any rate out of our thoughts. For us, brethren in Christ, the lesson is that a perfect conversion leads to a perfect following of Christ in this life and everlasting recompense in the world to come!

Though it is certainly true that our Lord enjoins here a perfect beginning, it is true also that He sets another and a higher perfection before us as the end. The sentence is so ordered that it fulfils its design to the candidate and beginner, and then enlarges its horizon to infinity. The first perfection was the supply of the one thing that the young man lacked: that must never be forgotten. But that one thing supplied, and the conversion made perfect, the way is then open for the pursuit of another perfection, which is no other than the following of Christ. That command sums up all. To follow Christ is the way to perfection; and it is perfection itself. It is the way to the treasure in heaven; and it is already the treasure on earth, which heaven has nothing to surpass. We are, however, dwelling on the encouragement which our Lord gives to those who come to Him. And surely there is no stimulant more stimulating than the promise which is command or the command which is promise, "Come and follow Me." But to what is this an encouragement? Simply and solely to the perfect conversion. And to this let us return in conclusion: it has been our one subject hitherto and must be to the end. We may not pursue the topics suggested by the following of Jesus and the rewards of heaven: they

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would lead us away from the one point that, in order to following Christ and reaching everlasting happiness, there must be a perfect conversion. It is as if the Lord were urging us by that argument to a perfect and complete compliance with the hard terms which He sets before beginners. He fixes His eyes upon us individually and says, "Wilt thou be perfect? Then renounce all for Me: your reward shall be that a perfect religion shall follow." But His will is that we should close with that other word: "With men this is impossible; but with God all things are possible." From beginning to end the requirements of the Christian religion are absolutely beyond the power of mortal man. This is no less true of the first step than it is of the last. Therefore whosoever would enter on the Christian course must forsake and renounce himself, and put himself into the hands of his heavenly Master. Then will He find that with God all things are possible; and reach at once, with no effort of his own save that of abandoning himself to Divine power, the perfection which ends the coming to Christ and begins the following of Him: to Whom be glory for ever. Amen.

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PERFECTING HOLINESS.

"Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God."—2 COR. vii. 1.

WE have lately been dwelling on our Lord's enforcement of a perfect conversion at the outset of the Christian course: marking that the only time He impressed on any individual the requirement of perfectness had chiefly reference to the beginning of religion, though not excluding the ulterior perfectness to which the earlier would lead. Now here we have a solitary exhortation of the apostle Paul, urging us all to the pursuit and attainment of perfect holiness. As the Saviour required of the young ruler that he should go away and renounce all and come back, thus "perfecting his conversion," so St. Paul requires of all who are converted that they keep before them a very high standard of excellence, and so aim at it that they may be always "perfecting their holiness." The expression is a peculiar one: nothing precisely similar occurs elsewhere. We shall therefore do well to fix our thoughts upon it, as it illustrates and is illustrated by the whole context, making it the keynote. In the light of that context it will appear that this "perfecting," or "accomplishing," refers to a lofty standard of holiness which is

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imposed on us by our relation to God and His temple, which His promises encourage us to attain, and which must be the object of our own pursuit. May the Divine Spirit open us to His own will!

I.

That Christians are a temple of God gives their religion here its highest character. There can be no more impressive view of the estate of believers than that which regards them as the spiritual and mystical dwelling-place of God, the Triune God. It will be observed that the apostle lays this down as the glorious distinction of the Christian dispensation. He quotes an ancient prophecy which he represents as now fulfilled: "I will dwell in them and walk in them; and they shall be My people and I will be their God." This is too often regarded as merely a figurative allusion to the ancient sanctuary which, though abolished, still transmitted its special lessons and illustrations to latter times. But the New Testament adopts a higher tone than that. St. Paul says elsewhere, in a passage which theologically defines the relations of Christianity to the earlier system, that "we are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit." Again and again in these Corinthian epistles he had given the same teaching. St. Peter, to whose eyes the Lord opened the first vision of the spiritual edifice, says that we, "as living stones, are built up a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices:" with a beautiful confusion of figures making Christian believers themselves the stones of the temple,

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themselves the spiritual worshippers on its pavement, and themselves the sacrifice they offer. In the face of these and other similar testimonies we must be careful not to deal too lightly with such solemn representations. There is a company of people upon earth who are to the living God a temple for the manifestation of His presence. Among that people He dwells. Whereas their ancient forefathers went up occasionally to the sanctuary, they are the sanctuary itself; or, if worshippers in it, they are dwellers also, and never go out from it day nor night. It is not the place on which they occasionally stand that is holy ground: they live and move and have their being in the holy place.

We feel at once what a character of unspeakable dignity and solemnity this impresses on the Christian life: in fact, carrying the thought of duty and responsibility and obligation at once to the highest pitch. No view of the relation we bear to God and religion can go beyond it, as respects either this world or the world to come. But its supreme importance here is that it concerns not the world to come but the world that now is. However wonderful it may seem, the standard of the religious life is placed as high as the dignity of the Divine presence in His temple. We think of God in His holy habitation, into which nothing enters that defiles; and of the sublime hyperbole of the prophet that He chargeth His angels with folly and that the heavens are not clean in His sight. We think of the dreadful sanctity of the ancient temple, thrice dreadful in the inmost place where God dwelt amidst thick darkness. We think of all those lofty descrip-

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tions of the state in which the Supreme is revealed to His creatures who never sinned or who are washed from all traces of their sin. And we cannot help asking ourselves with wonder and awe what must be the condition of those who are so near to the Holy Presence. But while we are musing, the apostle tells us here that we must not think of them but of ourselves. The tone and spirit of this whole exhortation is: How holy should we be in all manner of conversation and godliness amongst whom God already dwells, as in a temple! Let us before we proceed catch that tone and spirit. It is sometimes of great importance to receive a general impression of the grandeur of our calling, and to have an undefinable feeling of it conveyed to the mind. Here is an instance. Without entering into any detail, or asking precisely what the character must be that should be worthy of the temple of God, we feel how glorious is the height of holiness which such a vocation demands.

Still without entering into detail, we must dwell on the simple fact that whatsoever belongs to the temple of God is consecrated to Him. "Holiness to the Lord" is written largely on the whole, and minutely on every individual thing, within the walls, from the threshold to the holiest. The word holiness means in this connection absolute separation and devotion to God. In that sublime idea there is no greater or less, no complete and incomplete, no distinction of partial and perfect. "The earth is the Lord's and the fulness thereof:" this is true in a sense we all understand. But we all understand in what a different and higher sense it is true that

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the temple is the Lord's and the fulness thereof. The altar rules everything there; and it sanctifies to God whatsoever toucheth it. Here, brethren, is the final standard of what we call Christian perfection: a standard which we must fix our minds upon and receive into our inmost being. We must for a time forget everything that we have learnt, or which we may hear St. Paul elsewhere enforcing, about progressive sanctification; and contemplate steadily the great truth, the indubitable truth, that if we are part of the temple of God we must be entirely His. That is the peremptory law of all religion. That is the holiness which we are bidden to perfect: a holiness which gives to God literally and perfectly all that is ours because it is already His and acknowledged to be His in the temple.

But perfect consecration to God of course implies perfect separation from the world and its evil. The temple is the sphere of all that is right and pure; and all that is not right and pure is "without." There is no more remarkable exhibition of sanctity in the sense of separation from all that is unholy than we have in this context. It must not be thought that the relation of the Corinthians to heathenism and heathen family fellowships is referred to: this may have given occasion to the remarkable accumulation of appeals which we find here; but the appeals or apostrophes soon become general and absolutely universal. Five terms are selected, each of which gives a distinct expression to one aspect of severance from evil, and all of them together give a perfect expression of the total severance of Christians from the world. It is not simply that

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they are exhorted to abandon it: that will come; but at first the apostle orders his words in such a way as to express only the wonderful ideal or standard of perfect abandonment which living in God's temple imports. We can only glance at his "five words." They are so arranged as to lead up by several great contrasts to the perfect one between the temple and the world. This last is, as we have seen, the consummation of all contrasts: within the temple and without are terms which divide all things between them. "What agreement hath a temple of God with idols?" Following the five terms backward, the next is, "What part hath he that believeth with an infidel?" Here the apostle is not so much referring to the distinction between the present and final doom as to the all-important truth that faith in the gospel of Christ places its possessor in a new world of moral obligations. Between him and the unbeliever there is a great gulf which divides him at all points from fellowship of spirit with those who know not Christ. And it is not only that there is no actual or visible harmony; there is the very opposite; for "what concord hath Christ with Belial?" It was impossible for the apostle to express his thoughts more vigorously: it is as if he would make the Christian one with Christ, and Christ one with him, in the everlasting opposition to the god of this world, who is here marked out by his vilest name. The series of contrasts was commenced by two of a more abstract character: "What communion hath light with darkness?" and "What fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness?" lay down

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the standard of Christian excellence with reference rather to its final results. According to the one it is perfect right, as measured by the law of God; according to the other it is perfect purity as measured by the Divine nature, which is light.

But this last suggests the word which St. Paul selects and uses here to express both consecration to God in His temple and separation from the world without. That word is holiness, which always in man combines the two. St. Paul speaks first of "perfecting holiness in the fear of God;" and this we must first interpret in the light of the high standard which has been here set up. The word signifies the exterior state of the soul as conformed to the nature of that God who is in the light: it is not consecration, which is external and effected by the Spirit of sanctification, setting apart the soul for God, but interior purity as the habitual state of the regenerate spirit one with Him. It is the perfect moral restoration of the nature expressed in language appropriate to the temple. Had not the apostle been speaking of that particular relation of believers to their God he might have used other language, such as "perfecting righteousness," or "perfecting the imitation of the Son:" the former representing perfection as in the presence of the law, the other representing perfection as in the estate of sonship. The term "holiness" is the only one suitable to the temple; and expresses the entire inward conformity of the spirit with the holy nature of God Himself.

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II.

This wonderful passage, which sets perfection so impressively before us as a divine requirement, has another striking peculiarity: it glides insensibly from the will of God to the promise of God, and in such a way as to make it plain that nothing is demanded of us for which the covenant of grace does not make provision. Looking carefully at the text we see that the promise has two aspects. It might appear at first as if it were limited to one distinct promise that God will be a Father to us, and make us His sons and daughters, if we separate ourselves from the world and consecrate ourselves to Him. But a second glance will show that the apostle thinks of the very relation in which we stand to the God of the temple as itself involving a gracious promise. He might have said: "Seeing then that we occupy so high and holy a place in the divine temple and family, what manner of persons ought we to be in all holy conversation and godliness! Let us be in earnest to cleanse ourselves from all defilement and perfect holiness in the fear of God." Instead of that he says, "Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved:" meaning that our high relation is an incentive to perfect holiness. That is to say: the temple makes provision for the holiness; and the filial relation makes that holiness attractive and affectionate.

As to the former, it is most important to remember that every privilege, prerogative or dignity to which we are called in the Gospel, not only brings with it but is itself an express promise of provision for our

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meeting its requirements. The ancient temple demanded holiness; whatever entered it must by that fact lose its commonness and be the Lord's in a sense in which it was not His outside. But we know that the whole system of worship provided for the rendering all things sacred that were found there. The sacrificial blood negatively removed the stain as imputed, and the altar positively consecrated to God whatsoever was laid upon it. If we apply this to the Christian temple we see that the promise is literally co-extensive with the requirement. If we are bidden to cleanse ourselves from all defilement of the flesh and spirit, that reminds us at once of the blood of Jesus, the Son of God, which cleanseth and is always cleansing the consciences of the worshippers, so that the Omniscient Eye discerns no spot on those whose faith is in the atoning High Priest. We are bidden to be as separate from the world and as entirely the Lord's as if anything outside not His did not exist. And that reminds us of the Spirit of holiness who entirely separates from the world what He brings into the temple and sanctifies all that He brings into the temple wholly to God.

It has been said that the sudden change in the language, from the phraseology of the temple to that of the household, tends to make the promise more affectionate and attractive. The appeal certainly makes a sudden descent from the awful obligation to the God of the temple to the tender obligation of children to a Father. But we must remember that we are now dealing only with the promise. It is not that the obligation itself is softened. It is hard to say which is its more impressive form: indeed we ought not

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to distinguish, any more than St. Peter does when he says, "If ye call on the Father, who without respect of persons judgeth according to every man's work, pass the time of your sojourning here in fear;" and, speaking to us as to "obedient children," says again, "As He which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation; because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy." This apostle makes the temple obligation and the family obligation the same; and refers to the same "precious blood" as cleansing from violations of both. But, all this being true, the promise on which St. Paul lays so much stress seems in some undefinable but most real manner to bring home to our hearts the claims of holiness. It certainly does so, if we connect it with our Lord Jesus and His relations to us, both in the temple and in the family. In the temple He is the High Priest, makes intercession for us as our Righteous Advocate; and sends down to the skirts of His garments, that is, to the very humblest Christian, the unction of a perfect consecration. That is unutterably solemn; and has in it the promise of finished holiness. But we all must feel that the faultless holiness of the First-born of God and man, to Whom the promise of the text first referred, and in Whom we become the children of the Lord God Almighty, and Who is the supreme pattern of all human excellence, has in itself an attraction and a power and an argument beyond all others. It is into His image that we are to be changed from glory to glory; and there is no higher standard of excellence than to walk "as He walked in the world." When we regard ourselves as in the temple, the awful

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sanctity of the place overwhelms us, until we think that the "unction from the Holy One," our High Priest, fills the courts and that we may receive it. When we think of this temple as our Father's house, and see at His table the Elder Brother, the Father's "One beloved son," who shows us in our own nature in which we were born what consummate holiness is without the sin with which we were born, our hearts are moved within us, and we put our hands into His that "virtue may come forth from Him" and heal us and make us holy.

But, whether the claims of God in the temple or the claims of the Father in the house are considered, it is most certain that the promises are co-extensive with the claims, and assure us on the part of the Spirit of Grace that we may "perfect holiness." That is evidently the motive and the meaning of the whole passage. "Having these promises," the apostle seems to say, "we may be bold to present ourselves before God in His holy temple without stain of defilement, unspotted from the world, and altogether as it becomes the worshippers of such a God in such a temple to appear." We cannot read the passage carefully without finding in it ample encouragement for the highest hopes of a finished holiness in the present life. The temple spoken of is not the eternal temple of the glorified church, but the temple of the church that now is. The word chosen to express the removal of all defilement is put into a tense that binds it to the present time: whatever the cleansing may be—whether the Spirit's application of the sacrificial blood or our own use of the means to put away sin itself—it is some-

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thing that is to be done and effectually done in this world. It is literally, "let us have thoroughly cleansed ourselves." Once more, the defilement from which we are to be effectually cleansed is of "the flesh and spirit:" a description and division appropriate only to the present life. We all understand what the apostle means by the classification: the filthiness of the flesh, or the sin which makes the body its instrument; and the filthiness of the spirit, or the sin which is independent of the body. Both are alike vile before God, as seen in His temple; and from both a perfect deliverance is promised through Him who "was manifested to take away sin." Lastly, the phrase that closes all, "perfecting holiness," demands not only to interpret but also to be interpreted by the "promises." If all the pollution of sin is to be taken away negatively, then positively the design of the indwelling of God in His temple, which is to hallow it absolutely, may be said to be something that His people are always in process of accomplishing or "perfecting."

III.

Were the subject left thus, we should miss much of the emphasis of this large word of the apostle, for which he demands so large an acceptance. The strength of the exhortation is the encouragement it affords to our own personal endeavours in the perfecting of holiness.

It might appear indeed as if the words were carefully chosen to impress upon our minds the absolute necessity of our co-operation with Divine

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grace. There is something strange in the idea of our "cleansing" ourselves, and from "all" defilement, and "perfecting holiness." These are precisely the terms which belong to the Holy Ghost; and of which He in fact might be supposed to be jealous. It might have seemed more appropriate that the apostle should say: "Having these promises, let us abandon our sensual and spiritual lusts, and seek more and more of the grace of the sanctifying Spirit." That indeed is the real meaning of his words. The "promises" explain the apparent contradiction. What we do in the power of God is no other than the work of God within us, Who fulfils His own promises through our instrumentality; and what the power of God accomplishes through our energies exerted in faith is counted by Him our own act. If we cleanse ourselves, that is, if we make it our study to put away from our practice all carnal offence and strive against anything in the spirit that is contrary to the mind of Christ, God by the Holy Ghost will cleanse us. But not without our constant and most earnest co-operation. The "perfecting of holiness" regarded as our own act is still more striking: indeed it can hardly be understood at all save on the principle that St. Paul is assigning the Divine function to human agency in order to impress more deeply the importance of our own endeavours.

We have all along assumed without saying it that this perfection of holiness is an individual attainment. But it is necessary to be explicit on this matter, lest the thought should arise in some minds that the apostle is after all intent only on enforcing

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the obligation of purity in the church as such and as separated from the society of this world. Undoubtedly that was in his mind, as the tenor of both the Corinthian epistles shows. But it will be obvious to every one that there can be no corporate holiness which is not the result of the communion of many individual saints. If it is said—and sometimes it has been said—that the figure of a temple in which God dwells is appropriate only to the body of believers, and that "perfecting holiness" describes the growing conformity of the church to the will of Christ, our reply must be that the figure is in these very epistles expressly assigned to the individual. Indeed, the injunction to cleanse ourselves "from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit" seems at once and of necessity to point to St. Paul's question, "Know ye not that your body is a temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you?" If the spirit is the innermost shrine of the living God, the body is the outer court of the sanctuary in which God dwells. As no sensual lust must pollute the divine temple of the body, so no more refined passion must pollute the divine temple of the spirit. What a noble view of life does this give us!

And let us not fail to mark the tone of resolute and fervent confidence with which the apostle proposes to us the highest ambition. It is the language of a calm and resolute spirit who would infuse his own tranquil energy into all who hear him: the great confidence of one who feels no doubt that those who "have" the promises—there is much emphasis on the "have"—may attain to a spotless spirit in an undefiled body. Mark how his address

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here changes. Before it was "O ye Corinthians!" Now it is "dearly beloved." The thought of perfect holiness—the common object of hope to him and to them — has warmed and melted his heart. Brethren, we must strive to catch that enthusiasm. We must determine to be what we are called to be, "perfectly holy." Whatever we have to do or to renounce, whatever the cost may be, however often we have failed, even though most of life seems to have gone in fruitless striving, still we must make perfection our motto. We need not vex our minds by inquiring too solicitously what is the precise point of the perfection to be reached. Suffice for us that we are bidden to set our minds upon the attainment of a state in which the Omniscient God in His holy temple shall mark no remaining flaw in our spirit, no remaining stain of sensuality in our flesh. Now there is no nobler sentiment that can be encouraged in our hearts than the vehement, ardent, and passionate desire to be perfectly holy; saving indeed that calm, peaceful, confident reliance on the sufficiency of the Divine grace which expects it without vehemence or passion. In either case, however, the whole soul must be set upon perfect deliverance from stain and perfect likeness to God.

There can be no doubt that the words of the apostle allow a certain distinction in this matter. The removal of defilement he certainly presents as a state to be attained and persisted in. There ought to be no question about that. Words could not have been used which more perfectly express the thought of a complete removal of all that might offend the eyes of Him who cannot behold sin with allowance.

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Once more it must be repeated that this does not refer to the merciful blotting out of the guilt of our pollution : that of course is perfect, by the very theory of our presentation on the altar. The personal cleansing from all defilement of flesh and spirit which is accomplished by the Spirit, blessing our own endeavours, is what is here taught; and that is represented to our hope as a cleansing from all filthiness. But with the perfecting of holiness it is otherwise. That is spoken of as always going on, a perfecting that knows no limit. It is a constant, continuous, fulfilment of all the claims of holiness. That necessarily knows no perfection so long as the offerer has his own soul, his own time, his own faculties, his own substance, to offer. He is always maintaining his separation from a sinful world, always confirming his consecration and enlarging the circle of its range : in both these senses, perfecting his holiness. Moreover, we are perfecting or accomplishing the design of our consecration to God so long as we are securing it against the touch of possible defilement. Hence the addition "in the fear of God," which denotes the spirit of profound and ever deepening awe. Assuredly it is not meant that the believer is to be oppressed with terror of the divine holiness: St. John would rise against this, whose "perfect love casteth out fear." But it must never be forgotten that the obligation of sanctity goes on until the end : it can never be said to be "perfected" until the consecration of spirit and soul and body is consummated on the final altar of death. Hence the precise force of the text is this : "Having been delivered from all defilement of flesh and spirit, you shall be made

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every whit whole in the sight of God; and, in that blessed consciousness, every day perfect your holiness as in His holy presence, until the end come and your holiness shall be no longer in the course of perfecting but perfected for ever." But that will be in the eternal temple.

We must not forget, in conclusion, that these last words "in the fear of God" were intended by the apostle to encourage many who, like most of us, were conscious of being far from a perfected holiness. In the very act of setting up this very high standard, St. Paul sends out a strong exhortation to those who were still too much infected, as we are, by the spirit of the world. There is something very impressive in the style of his quotation from the ancient scripture, applying it to his present readers as a promise to them, as if they were yet to begin the pursuit of perfect holiness. "Come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing, and I will receive you; and will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and my daughters, saith the Lord Almighty." Surely that exhortation is adapted to an imperfect state; and is full of encouragement to every one of us. Let us come out from the world this day and separate ourselves more fully than ever we have been separated from its defilements: let us enter the house of God where we shall find Him ready to receive us as a Father, and into the temple which is still the same house, where we shall find Him a sanctifying Spirit. And from this time let us fix our thought and hope on "perfecting holiness in the fear of God": to Whom be glory for ever. Amen.

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THE PERFECT EXEMPLAR.

"And ye know that He was manifested to take away our sins; and in Him is no sin."

HERE at the close of the New Testament the Spirit of revelation who is the Spirit of Jesus gives us the secret of Christian perfection: not so much in His description of perfected love, and of the new birth that cannot sin, as in the perfect Image of the sinless Saviour, who shows us what sinlessness is in that very nature of ours which He made His own, and says to us: "Be as I am, for I am as ye are." At the very end of the volume of the book, now unrolled to its last line, there rises before us the Form of One like a son of man who is the Son of God, with His two attributes of purity and righteousness. This is the last vision on which our eye is suffered to rest, more glorious and precious to us than the apocalyptic visions which had gone before. While we are beholding it and gazing up into the heaven where that image of human perfection now is, we hear the voice not of two angels but of the apostle John, one of ourselves, saying: "in Him is no sin!" "He was manifested to take away our sins!" And what his silent meaning is we soon hear: "As He is so are we in this world." It is the most ennobling, the most inspiriting thought that can enter

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the mind of man: may the Holy Spirit give us eyes to see this great sight and ears to hear these wonderful words!

I.

"In Him is no sin;" in the Son of God, that is, who was manifested in the flesh. Here we must pause at the very outset, and, forgetting for a moment all else, lay the unlimited emphasis on this "Him." Of whom does the evangelist speak but of that "Word of life," that "only begotten Son," who was manifested not so much out of the depths of eternity as "out of the bosom of the Father?" And concerning Him he may well say, using the indefinite, absolute, timeless, present tense, "In Him IS no sin." We have said, "manifested in the flesh;" but in this passage there is no "in the flesh." The apostle cannot forget that, of course; but here it might almost seem as if he were simply falling down before the Image he had set up and paying the homage of his deepest reverence, awe, devotion, delight, desire, and love to the Son of God revealed. "He can never sin! Neither God, nor the Son of God, can be tempted of evil! On whatever errand He has come, for whatever purpose He has become incarnate and visible on earth, He can never cease to be the Eternal Son of God and 'separate from sinners' even before He was 'separated' again from them." "In Him," said this worshipper of the ascended Lord, "is no sin!" with a fervour of loyalty that wanted no other words: as if of all inconceivable impossibilities this were the most inconceivable. Indeed, the very thought is not by him

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even in argument conceived. If we could only enter into the feeling of this lover and worshipper of Jesus, and possess our souls with that most blessed sentiment which filled his heart when he penned this little saying, the greatest in the New Testament on this subject, we should be saved from much that is the offence and the weakness of our poor theology!

Still, it remains true that the Son of God "came in flesh," and His only manifestation was under human conditions. Did He not so share our nature, and become so entirely one with us, that we must attribute to Him a perfect humanity, a humanity therefore which was tempted at all points as ours is, and saved from sinning through the victory that the Divinity gave it? To these questions there is but one answer: an answer which must be accepted at whatever cost, and whatever may be the consequences that follow. He who became incarnate for our salvation never ceased to be the Son of God; and therefore through all His mingled history, whether in the wilderness of temptation, or on the mountain of transfiguration, or in the Gethsemane of mortal agony, this superscription must be written over the record concerning Him, "In Him is no sin." He had no human fellow whom His Divinity must save. There were not two persons in the Saviour of men: the Son of God and the Son of man are always one and the same Son; the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever. This truth is the very foundation of the Gospel; and it is so absolutely and necessarily true, that never once through the New Testament is there any attempt to prove it or any

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indication that it might be supposed to need proof. "He came IN flesh," not INTO it; and, if any one should say that none can appear in flesh and be sinless, the answer is that His flesh was a new humanity, the "body prepared for Him," of the Holy Ghost. He showed among men that man's nature might be sinless, and made it the vehicle of all Divine perfections in human form and in the human sphere. By taking our nature He "condemned sin in the flesh:" the sin which had defiled every mortal since the fall was "cast out" from this new man, this last Adam, whose human nature was as pure as when it first came from the Creator; and, more than that, it was condemned by the Son of God to "come no more into it." Whatever vehicle the Son of God assumes in which to appear must needs be impeccable, or for ever by an eternal necessity shielded from the possibility of sin. St. Paul indeed means that the Father condemned sin in the flesh when He sent His Son; and to that other meaning we shall come presently. Meanwhile that apostle takes care when he utters so bold a word to keep his doctrine safe. He is, like St. John, profoundly anxious to make the Saviour entirely human, "bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh," that we may be "bone of His bone and flesh of His flesh" by an equality. But he is also keenly sensitive for the dignity of the Son; and devises an expression which, knowing full well that heretics would abuse it, he used nevertheless, "He sent His Son in the likeness of sinful flesh." This was St. Paul's way of saying what St. John says in the sublime simplicity of our text: "The Son of God was manifested to take away our sins. And in Him is no sin."

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But the thought of that temptation recurs and haunts us: as if the conjunction of "flesh" and "temptation" must needs imply in Him also that secret of a bias to be excited or suppressed with which we are so familiar. This leads us, however, directly to the second point made emphatic in our text: "The Son of God was manifested to TAKE AWAY OUR SINS. In Him is no sin."

II.

Let those two sentences be viewed in the connection just suggested; and they tell us plainly that the Saviour who came to deliver us from our sins did not come to deliver Himself. Our redemption demanded the ransom-price not of a humanity retrieved from sin, but of a Divine-human life the infinite value of which no sin had impaired: not that of a life or a nature, or of a life in a nature, first sanctified from its own sin and then offered on the altar. God forbid! "The precious blood of Christ" was as "that of a lamb without blemish and without spot, who was foreordained indeed before the foundation of the world, but was manifested in these last times." St. Peter's word "manifested" is the link with our text. The "Lamb of God," whom God provided before the world was, that He might in due time "take away the sin of the world," was no other than His only-begotten Son: that was the secret of His being "without spot and blemish." "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased," was the Father's testimony to Him who went down into the waters of baptism as the Representative of sinners. "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am

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well pleased," was the second testimony when the Sufferer was examined on the mount, searched through and through by the glory of heaven, and approved as a spotless victim, and sent on His way to the cross. And between these Satan was permitted, yea required, to tempt Him; that is, to test to the uttermost this "Second Man" in whom "dwelt the fulness of the Godhead bodily." The tempter was not cast out, but found no entrance; "at all points" he was baffled; and we know the full meaning of the Saviour's word when, in the sanctuary of the paschal chamber, He was preparing to "bear the sin of the world," and felt the presence of the returning tempter near: "the prince of this world cometh and hath nothing in Me." Could the accuser have found any sin in Jesus, that is, any of that principle from which human sins spring, he could have challenged the virtue of the atonement for men; and he could not then have been cast out of the court when he pleaded that this sufferer, like all the rest, suffered indeed "justly," "being in the same condemnation," and was "bound for Himself to offer for sins." But our adorable Redeemer "knew no sin." The typical high priests, appointed by the law, were men "having infirmity." "But the word of the oath, which was after the law, appointed a Son, perfected for evermore." That son who "at the end of the ages was manifested to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself," of whom St. John also says, that "to this end was the Son of God manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil" and "to bear away our sins."

But does not that word in the epistle to the

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Hebrews, "a Son, perfected for evermore," explain our text, "in Him is no sin?" Does not the inspired writer there say that He, "though He was a Son, yet learned obedience by the things which He suffered; and having been made perfect, He became unto all them that obey Him the author of eternal salvation?" To this question and to all similar questions, there is as before but one answer: the perfecting of the Son was His perfect consecration through suffering to the high-priestly service of redemption, He learned what the obedience of His voluntary humiliation under the curse of the law meant for Him; but He did not learn how to obey. The process of His preparation to enter the Holiest as One who had found eternal redemption did not include His own victory over sin. We cannot too firmly hold fast the fundamental truth that the Saviour of men must not be His own Saviour: if He has to take away His own sin first, then He cannot take away ours afterward. "Save Thyself and us!" was the mockery of the robber on the left hand of the cross: alas, that it should be repeated by our theology! The firm foundation of the atonement is the Eternal Sonship of Him who offered it. "The blood of Jesus, His Son, cleanseth from all sin:" the human nature of Jesus provided the blood; but the Divine nature of the Son gave it its atoning value; and the One Person of the Godman calls that blood His own. All its value is for us, "to take away our sins." None of it was needed for Himself: "in Him is no sin."

The force of this is not fairly met by those who insist that, though our Lord never actually sinned, He nevertheless conquered the power of sin, thus

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becoming an example to us. To them "in Him is no sin" means either that He kept the sin that came not into the world with Him from entering at all, or that finding it in the humanity He assumed, He vanquished it under temptation and thus could say "I sanctify Myself." As to the former, no one can say that it is not true: it is indeed so true that it is a truism. Whatever were the awful sufferings that the Incarnate Son of God endured on our behalf, they were altogether the pressure of "our sins," or "the sin of the world," and by no means the agony of resisting the entrance of sin into His person through the avenue of His flesh. The most distant thought of this makes the vicariousness of the atonement tremble. As to the latter, it not only makes the vicariousness of the atonement dissolve but dissolves the very atonement itself. The Redeemer would be "divided against Himself," would in fact "destroy his own works;" for a being that needed expiation for the least sin in himself, could offer no valid atonement for others. When He said above, "I sanctify Myself," He only said that He consecrated Himself to the solemn task of offering Himself, that Self which was in glory with the Father before the world was, which came forth from Him, and went back to Him, and which was consecrated to sacrificial death, "for their sakes" only and not for His own.

But, reverting to the thought of temptation, it will be said that we thus lose all the preciousness of our Lord's example. If He was not "tempted at all points as we are," why is His victory proposed to us for our encouragement in the conflict? Those

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who are so anxious to retain the example of Christ in the conquering of sin hardly bethink themselves at what a tremendous cost they purchase it. If they will have the example at all points, they cannot have at all points the Saviour. What the apostle says is, that "He, the Son of God, was manifested to take away our sins:" not by any means to show us how to put them away ourselves. Every one will admit that He is no example to us in the conflict with the manifestations of sin. Our own apostle's word is, it is true, "he that saith he abideth in Him ought himself also to walk even as He walked." But here we must add what the epistle to the Hebrews inserts, "apart from sin." We cannot find the print of His footsteps in the way of the prodigal son's return to his father. But He sets the faultless pattern of all excellence even where He cannot set the example of the process of attaining it. He was indeed "tempted at all points like as we are, without sin:" not "yet" without sin; that "yet" creeps unworthily into the text, and has no right there. The difference is explained by St. James in his final doctrine of temptation. He shows that there are two kinds of temptation: one applied by God Himself for the best of all purposes and the endurance of which is blessed; the other addressed to a man's "own lust" which conceives and beareth the progeny of sin and death. "In Him is no sin," no mother-lust to which temptation addresses itself; therefore He was not "at all points tempted like as we are" save under the condition that it was "without sin." Those innumerable temptations which beset us through the fact that "in us there is sin" He

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knew not; nor could He know them and be the Eternal Son manifested in the flesh. We abhor the thought, or we ought to abhor the thought, of seeing in Him the example of the suppression of pride, vainglory, sensuality. For this kind of example we must go to Peter, and Paul, and Magdalene, and the saints "of like passions with ourselves." Temptation in that sense our Lord never knew, nor could know. But the other kind of temptation, that which by pressure of suffering tests the quality of the virtue of man, and proves the quality of the virtue of the Man who is the Son of God, none ever knew among all the children of sorrow as the Son of man knew it. "He suffered being tempted." Again we say that those who insist on the reality of the struggle through which the Incarnate Son emerged as conqueror, and will have it that He "saved Himself" there, are trying to unite things absolutely incompatible: a Saviour manifested as the Son of God to bear away sins, destroying the works of the devil, and a Saviour who comes into a flesh tainted with sin and disciplines Himself to victory as an example to His followers for ever. There is much dignity, and grandeur, and beauty in such a captain of salvation as this latter would be. But he is a human Saviour, teaching by precept and example. He is not the Divine-human Redeemer who was "manifested to take away sins, and in whom there is no sin."

Do we then make void the example of Christ? God forbid: yea, we establish that example. That indeed is the pith and substance of the whole passage. St. John was not simply paying his loyal homage to

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the majesty of the Son of God, whose sinlessness is essential to His eternal sonship, and could never be surrendered by any humiliation; not only establishing the sufficiency of the atonement as a provision for taking away sin by showing that He who offered it had no sin of His own to bar the substitutionary character of His sacrifice; he was also and mainly writing over the whole economy of redemption as individually applied, and enjoyed the signature of Christian perfection as exhibited in Him the Son of God, and rendered possible through Him to all who are His. To that then let us now turn.

III.

Nowhere in the New Testament is the example of our sinless Lord so comprehensively, impressively, and specifically exhibited as in this closing epistle of the New Testament. Though it is nowhere said that St. John has this object in view, we plainly perceive that it is always before him: and in a great variety of methods he shows it. The Son of God whom He worships has in Him no sin; but He is ever present in the epistle as the pattern and standard to those in whom there is sin, but from whom their sins are to be removed. Here in the middle is the great text which perhaps surpasses anything in the New Testament. "In Him is no sin; He was manifested to take away utterly from us the sins that we have, so that each of us may be pure as He is pure, and righteous as He is righteous." This text is enclosed within two wonderful words which help to explain them: on the

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one hand we have the chrisma or unction descending upon us "from the Holy One" for our sanctification; and on the other we have His sperma or seed abiding within us, the secret of an ever-deepening and ever-strengthening new life; both these being one and the same Holy Spirit, the supply of the Spirit of Jesus. Then, going back to the beginning of the epistle, we find among its first keynotes, "He that saith he abideth in Him ought himself to walk even as He walked." And then going onward to the end of the epistle, we find among its last keynotes, "As He is even so are we in the world." The gracious and inspiriting "as He" runs through the whole like a continuous call to the highest perfection of the Christian life. The holy ambition of the lover of Jesus is nowhere more vehemently excited and at the same time more amply justified than here. The Lord of all perfection seems to be uttering from the height of His human perfection that mystic "Come" which Simon Peter heard when his daring heart prompted him to be near his Master in spite of natural laws and human fears. Let him whose soul hungers and thirsts after righteousness and the purity of heart which shall see God read the whole epistle in this light, that is, as the New Testament treatise on the "Imitation of Christ," and he will most certainly find that in it the Master is calling him to be like Himself in a more direct and searching and stimulating manner than in any other part of the New Testament.

The eye of the believer's hope is fixed generally on the sinlessness of Christ as a standard, or pattern,

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or copy. It is not set before him as an example of the process by which sinlessness is reached: it is rather as an exemplar than a literal example. We are bidden to keep ever in view the consummate perfection which was not so much reached as brought down from heaven; or, if reached, not as coming up out of imperfection, but as exhibited through stage to stage of a discipline unknown to any other human being, and of atoning sorrows that showed of what more than heroic patience and self-sacrifice and devotion human nature is capable when incapable of sin. Surely patience may have its perfect work in One who could not "fail nor be discouraged"; and submission may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing, in One who says "Nevertheless, not My will, but Thine, be done;" and a perfect model of self-sacrificing devotion may be given by One who is Master and Lord, and without any pride to cause reluctance while washing His disciples' feet. Never once in the New Testament is the Saviour set before us as a pattern in the pursuit of perfection. Not when He said "Be of good cheer, I have overcome the world," the distant echo of which here in our epistle tells us otherwise, "Who is he that overcometh the world but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God:" not he that imitates the conduct of Jesus in gradually bringing the world and the flesh and the devil under his feet, but he that believes in Jesus, the Son of God, Who was "manifested to take away our sins," and "destroy the works of the devil," and in Whom "is no sin."

In harmony with this the strain is general. The law of the Christian life is "No sin," for "in

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Him there is no sin;" they are supposed to have renounced sin in every form for ever. The very theory of their relation to Jesus is that they have ceased to live in sin. It might seem as if the purpose were to lay down the simple argument: "There is no sin in Christ; all who are His are in Christ; therefore those who are in Christ do not sin." We may perplex ourselves needlessly by questions as to the meaning of "sinneth not" and "cannot sin:" words which are plain enough so long as we remember that they are the watchwords of fellowship with Christ, which is the watchword of the whole epistle. "Those who practice sin are of the devil: to this end was the Son of God manifested, that He might annul the works of the devil." To be in Christ and to have Christ in us are one and the same thing: we are in Him and His seed is in us, and we cannot sin. Of course the commission of sin is not impossible; else, what would mean the solemn concession of chap. ii. 1: "These things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin!" any even of you who are in fellowship with the Father and the Son and walk in light! But the whole strain of the exhortation, if it is not rather a statement of privilege than an exhortation, is that the sinlessness of our Lord is the law of His people and the standard of their aspiration. The apostle does not precisely define what degree of conformity to His image we may reach; but contents himself by saying that our Lord came to take all our sins away, explaining what that means by the words "in Him is no sin."

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IV.

But the exhortation is not left thus indefinite, nor is the Saviour's example left thus general. The words "in Him is no sin" stand in the middle between two other more definite statements; on the one hand, "as He is pure," and on the other, "as He is righteous." Here we are bidden as it were to contemplate Christian perfection in Christ our Head as being perfect freedom from defilement and perfect conformity to the Divine will. On these two hang all the law and the gospel of our restoration; and that to which we are to be restored is exhibited as being already "in Him." His purity is not set before us as that Divine holiness which is elsewhere made our standard, "Ye shall be holy for I am holy;" but a term is used that shows holiness to us as the specific opposite of human defilement. "As He is pure" signifies that His humanity, whether as it was seen among men or as it exists in heaven, is free from the stain of human passion and sin, as pure as it first came from God. We are supposed to be able to conceive of such a purity as that in man; and there is no nobler mark of the dignity of our regeneration than that we are capable of such a conception and inspired by it with desire. That is human nature unclothed of evil; but our Pattern shows us that human nature clothed upon with righteousness. And His righteousness too is not declared to be the Divine righteousness as such; but it is said that "He is righteous" as one who "doeth all human righteousness." His humanity

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whether on earth or in heaven is perfectly conformed to every requirement of the Divine law, which is in Him supremely "the perfect law of liberty." The word in the middle, "in Him is no sin," unites these two in one; into it those two melt; and it is their finished consummation. Christian perfection, which is the perfection of the human estate retrieved in Christ, shown to be possible in Him, and to be possible to us through His indwelling in us, is the union of purity and righteousness. That perfection in Christ as man was the result of His Divine Sonship animating His humanity. And if we ever reach it, it will be through the same Divine Son becoming our life in our regeneration. We were "predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son." "He that hath the Son hath the life;" that new regenerate life, the moral perfection of which is, may be, must be, and shall be our being pure "as He is pure" and righteous "as He is righteous."

And now let us fix our attention very steadily on the method the apostle adopts to teach us that we are to aspire to the reflection of the Saviour's image in these two aspects of a human perfection. No thoughtful reader will fail to see two things: first, that he is exhibiting each standard of perfection as something up to which the believer is to be always steadily working; and, secondly, that he is anxious to teach that the two are to be always united. A third thing will be added by the reader who is profoundly in earnest; that St. John impresses on us the individuality of the pursuit, as if he were stirring every member of the Christian household to attain himself that perfection which is always shining before the whole family in the person of the Elder

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Brother of the house. Without following these points in detail, let us receive the lesson here taught. Christian perfection is conformity to the image of the Son: filled with His life alone, and therefore without sin; pure from stain as He is pure; and righteous as He is righteous. He who has a hope in Jesus must aim at this perfection: it must be his one business to do all that in him lies to reach the character of his Master. Whatever other meaning the words had when Jesus spake them, he must take literally the promise, "Every servant shall be as his Lord." Of course we understand in all such sayings that what we are commanded to do is to be done in the use of the means which God sanctifies. We are said to do what He really does in us and through us. But still the emphatic testimony remains: to imitate Christ is to make it a law of life to be holy as He is holy, to be in all things righteous as He is righteous. And it is the character that is to be formed: it is said with strong emphasis that he is to purify "himself," and not simply abstain from impurity; and that he is by doing the deeds of righteousness to "be righteous." The combination of these is Christian perfection: to be cleansed from all inward sin, and in the strength of the love so to do righteousness as to be counted and to be righteous, or all that the law of God requires in the children of faith.

V.

The question of course finally arises: what is the meaning of St. John's "as?" Does it signify that, Christ's holiness and righteousness being the standard, we are to walk in the way that leads towards it; or

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that it is the privilege of the son of God to aspire to become "what He is," the Supreme Son, "in the world." The former is the current interpretation: it seems better to harmonize with the common religion of the church; and the profound humility of the true Christian instinctively takes that side. But this may be said of it, that it fails to give any good account of the "as" and in fact reduces it to "because." It must not be forgotten that a stronger little word could not have been chosen; and that it is used four times during the course of the epistle with precisely the same reference, being as it were reserved for that: "as He walked," "as He is pure," "as He is righteous," "as He is, in the world." For the latter interpretation there is much to be said. It satisfies, and it alone satisfies, the deep desire of the regenerate heart to be delivered from all unholiness, and from all unrighteousness: to realize that ideal which is said in the epistle to the Ephesians to have been in the Divine mind concerning us when He "predestinated us to the adoption of sons to Himself," "that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love." The Lamb of God was "without blemish"; the same word is used concerning the saints walking in love before God, that is, in the present world. Nor is there any reason found in the economy of grace or in the promises founded upon it why the sons who are one with the Son should not "in Him" be cleansed from all stain of sin. The same may be said of the aspiration to be righteous: that is, to be all that God's law demands according to the new provisions of the "righteousness of God" which is revealed "from faith to faith." The apostle's language is here stronger even than with regard to

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purity: his words are that "he that doeth righteousness is righteous, even as He is righteous." The character of the Christian may at all points be conformed to the will of Christ as the Lawgiver of His people. "Love is the fulfilment of the law," or "The whole law is fulfilled in one word, even in this." This is a saying of St. Paul: St. John's comment on it is found at the close of his epistle, and of the whole New Testament: "Herein is love made perfect with us that we may have boldness in the day of judgment; because as He is even so are we in this world. There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear, because fear hath punishment; and he that feareth is not made perfect in love." Surely they ought not to be charged with fanaticism who gather from the apostle's teaching that the Spirit of Christ the Son may make us the sons holy and righteous in this present world: so that the inquisition of the Divine holiness and righteousness shall find no fault in us.

As to the possibility of being stainless and righteous like our Lord in this life, we are left to the interpretation of our faith. But one thing is certain, that we must be "like Him" before we go hence, "for we shall see Him as He is;" and without holiness no man shall see the Lord. At the beginning of the chapter, the apostle, paying his tribute to the glory of Christian sonship, declares that what we shall be must be revealed with the revelation of the Saviour Himself. One thing, however, he says is known to all, that the sons of God will be like the Son incarnate: like Him in their whole being, both in body and in soul. The conformity of their bodies of humiliation to His glorious body will be the result

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of a direct exertion of omnipotence. But not so the conformity of their spirits to His glorious spirit: that must be accomplished in the world that now is, the world of probation. It is the glory of our inheritance as sons that we shall see God in His incarnate Son: God, otherwise than in the face of His incarnate Son, "no man hath seen, nor can see." Then if we are to "see Him as He is," not as reflected from the mirror of His word but in Himself and face to face, we must be first made "like Him": like Him in purity, like Him in righteousness, like Him in the utter, perfect, and eternal destruction and absence of sin. The apostle leaves the filling up of the argument to us, to our faith under the influence of the "unction from the Holy One," by which we "know all things." The death of all life that is not "the life" which he hath who "hath the Son" must take place before we can be said to be "like Him;" for purity like His and righteousness like His both imply the spiritual life of which these are only attributes. But there is no provision for this beyond the range of the present life. There is no sanctifying process in the interval between death and the day when we shall "see Him as He is." There is no "doing of righteousness" beyond the grave. Nor is there in death physical any virtue to annihilate the sinful life of nature which has come to us through the fall. All this argumentation the holy apostle leaves, I say, to be supplied by us. He sums the whole in the text: "He was manifested to take away our sins. And in Him is no sin." To Whom, with the Father and the Holy Ghost, be glory for ever. Amen.

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THE INTERIOR FEAST.

"Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear My voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with Me.

"To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with Me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in His throne.

"He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches."—REV. iii. 20, 21, 22.

THESE are the last words of our Saviour's new communications from heaven: wherein He speaks, not as formerly in His visible person, but by the Holy Ghost. It is His voice that we hear, and not another's: "I stand and knock." And yet it is said, "He that hath an ear let him hear what the Spirit saith to the churches." In fact these epistles are really a continuation of the four Gospels, adapted to the change that took place with Pentecost. It is the same Jesus; the tone and accent are the same; the style and address unchanged throughout. And, if we did not know what has taken place in the interval, we might suppose that the Lord was visiting His churches in person; and that He was addressing to them warnings and promises just as He used to administer to the old church in the temple or His new church as represented by the apostles and disciples. That almost perfect identity we must keep in mind throughout.

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Hence it will not be regarded as fanciful to say that these last words of the new Gospel are in precisely the same key as the last words of the old Gospel. The final promise was that He would be the Indwelling Saviour and Lord of each of His true disciples: "Abide in Me and I in you." "I will come unto him and manifest Myself unto him." Do we not hear in our text the very echo of these words? They are precisely the same with a slight change of expression, and the circumstances and context surrounding them are the same. Let us ask the Holy Spirit to give us that ear to hear which He seeks, and then to speak these words to our hearts: words which offer to us the blessedness of the hidden life in secret fellowship with our Lord.

I.

We hear the same Jesus as of old; the same by this token, that He is still looking for individual devotion in the midst of the crowd: the crowd being the Laodicean church, whereas it used to be the multitudes in Galilee and Jerusalem and the temple. You recall the old familiar appeal to the individual made by our Lord when "there went great multitudes with Him; and He turned and said unto them, If any man come to Me!" Always in the enthusiastic, demonstrative, unthinking masses He sought this man and that, the one among the many. Now observe how precisely this is reproduced here. The Lord is in His church, with its multitudes. He walks in the midst of the candlesticks. He is marking all that passes. He is the central Presence,

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around which, around Whom, all gather. But He does not know the crowd, even though a baptized crowd, as such. It might almost seem as if He was indifferent to the congregation as a whole, so anxious is He to impress it upon all that He seeks a home in the individual heart. He walks in every church as in a temple, fulfilling the prophetic word, "I will dwell in them, and walk in them;" but He desires to make a temple of each of its members. "I stand at the door and knock": if these words refer to the outer door of the church, or the temple, or the house of the Lord, they certainly also refer to the door of the heart of each person within it. Thus the last saying of our Lord, still and for ever reverberating through the assembly of His people, is, "If any man hear My voice!" Let every ear be attuned to hear it now!

Here we must pause to make one thing plain: this implies no disparagement or undervaluation of the church as such. You may be sure that these words give no encouragement to those who think that interior fellowship with Christ is everything, and that external fellowship with Him among His people is nothing or comparatively nothing. Remember that constantly throughout the New Testament the indwelling of Christ by the Spirit has a twofold significance. "Where two or three are gathered together in My name, there am I in the midst of them." "He, the Holy Spirit, shall abide with you for ever." This for the indwelling among us: in the church as a corporate body, inhabited by Christ precisely as the spirit of a man inhabits his bodily organization. But again, "Abide in Me and I in you,"

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"He that is joined to the Lord is one Spirit," "I will come unto him and make My abode with him." This for the indwelling in us: in the personal soul, heart or spirit of the man who loves his Lord and keeps His commandments.

The truth of our lesson is that the Lord seeks the individual in the visible church. Not a word is said about His going up and down the earth, seeking His rest in isolated souls. As He did not go beyond the Jewish congregation in the days of His flesh, but sought His sheep one by one among the lost sheep of Israel, so He seeks them now within the fold of the baptized. Our text is spoken within the church of Laodicea. I do not say that He never meets by the wayside—in some Gaza, or desert—a stray Ethiopian. But these exceptional and scattered cases we have not here to do with. The lesson is that in the midst of His visible assembly, joined to Him externally by a confession of faith and sacred ordinances of worship, the Lord seeks His own one by one: that they may be His both inwardly and outwardly for ever.

II.

But it is not simply that the Lord seeks the individual in the midst of the crowd. There is more than that here. His offer of His interior presence follows a stern and sharp rebuke of the external formality, hypocrisy, coldness, apathy, self-complacency, self-deception, and spiritual blindness of His people: that is, their general lack of all interior religion.

However we cling to the blessed thought of the

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Lord's ever-anxious, affectionate knocking at the door of the individual heart, we cannot but feel that this knocking suggests the Judge who gives warning of His judgment. He knocks at the door of the house where His church meets, as a Witness and Judge in one. You remember how Jehovah appealed as a Witness and Judge to His Old Testament people in Malachi. It is lamentable to think that, while an apostle is still alive, and before the glory of the ascension of Jesus has died away from around it, the Christian community should be so nearly like that old apostate congregation. There is something, however, monitory as well as sad in the picture. It is drawn as if it would serve for many churches besides Laodicea; and the features of decline are such as we can too well trace among ourselves. They need not be expounded; they are not our text, only the background or setting of it. And we have to do with the description only as it depicts by opposites what that interior religion is to which the Saviour invites. Then what does the Lord condemn? A condition of things in His church which is defined as neither hot nor cold: the apathy, torpor, indifference which will know nothing of enthusiasm for Christ and His cause. This seems to refer to the lack of fervour in devotion, as appears from the threatening: "I will spue thee out of My mouth." "You shall not have a place in My fervent intercessions, if you know not how to pray ardently for yourselves." Or to the lack of ardour in the confession of His name: which in the sight of the Lord is of great price. "If you do not earnestly and with glowing zeal proclaim My name

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before men, I will not confess you heartily as Mine." Thus it is like a rehearsal beforehand of that fearful compensation, requital, and return of denial which the Lord will deem consistent with His dignity. "Him will I also deny before My Father and His holy angels." He condemns, secondly, a state of things in which the church is self-deceived; and that in two senses. The people think themselves furnished with the graces of religion when they have only the outward semblance of those graces. They think they worship aright when they have only the forms of worship. They think they are Christians, when they only have the outward name. They discharge many duties, and give much substance, and make many sacrifices, in external matters; but the inward work of religion, and its inward poverty, and its inward discipline, they know nothing about. They are profoundly self-deceived as to themselves. And they are equally deceived as to their Lord. To Him their eyes are holden; rather they are blinded; they do not see, having never had or having lost that sacred eyesalve or unguent that would make them see their Lord and everything clearly. Now all this is exhibited as the opposite of the interior religion which the Lord offers to every one in the church who is zealous and repents.

Accordingly, the incoming and indwelling of the Lord is the cure of that which He rebukes and condemns. Observe the strict connection of the two. The Redeemer speaks of His interior revelation to the heart as the one and only cure of the externality, formalism, and spiritual deadness of His people. We generally think of this text as describing the first

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approach of Jesus to an unconverted soul, and His persistent long suffering when His call is refused. But it is better to expound it as what it plainly is here: the Lord's solicitude to come into the backsliding or half-converted members of His church to give them life and that they may have it more abundantly. It is hard to distinguish between the unconvertedwho aredead in sins and the nominal Christians who have a measure of life, but not the secret of regeneration. The Lord is for ever in the church knocking at the hearts of those who have not given Him full admission: that He may complete in them what He has begun to do and teach. This, dear brethren, is the constant ministry of our gentle long-suffering Lord. He is amongst us, but that is not enough. He is not content with our external service. He desires to possess and animate and sanctify our inmost souls. In every variety of appeal and endeavour—by preaching, by affliction, by secret solicitations of the most tender kind—He is drawing us nearer to Himself, and seeking to open our hearts and bring us to yield up ourselves entirely to Him. That is His appeal to you this day. He comes to seek you, and ask your more entire devotion. "Open and give Me thine heart, and let Me no longer remain on the threshold."

III.

Hence, further, you perceive the emphasis laid upon the "open:" "If any man open the door." The high privilege of a more intimate fellowship and more perfect union between Christ and the soul is one that is not forced upon any man. We must be led to feel how great, how inestimably great, the

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honour is; and pay down the price for it. It has been said that the voice of Christ is the same now as before. It was always His law that an entire and perfect consecration should be entered on by absolute renunciation of all. "Whosoever he be that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be My disciple." You remember the two parables of the treasure hid and the pearl sought and found; and you remember also that in each case the application is that all is sold to win the treasure. And when the Lord explained to St. Jude how it was that He would manifest himself to His elect, He said that it was because of the full obedience of the disciple who loved Him that He would come and make His abode in his soul. As it was in the beginning, it is now and it ever will be, in the distribution of this high and precious privilege. Let us note three things.

First, there must be the most absolute surrender of the mind to the voice as heard: "If any man hear My voice!" Let this be impressed upon us if possible in all its emphasis. Why are there so many thousands of Christians cold and dead and self-righteous and contented with their little attainments? Why is the church crowded with half-converted members, who have only the life of conviction and uneasiness and fear? The reason of both is that the calm, tranquil voice of Christ is not listened to. He says, "I am come that you may have life, and that you may have it more abundantly;" and this He is for ever saying, day by day, sabbath after sabbath, sacrament after sacrament; but few there be who hear Him, that hear Him effectually and to good purpose: they hear Him plainly enough; but they do not listen and

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give heed. And he who will not think and ponder how great a blessing is offered him shall never have that slighted blessing.

Let us, however, ask more particularly what the voice is. The preceding verse tells us that it is the voice of Him who counsels us to study our own blindness, ignorance, poverty, wretchedness apart from our Lord, and the blessedness offered through His indwelling presence by the Spirit. Hence the preparation for this high blessing is the deep study of our emptiness without it. To know this is to listen effectually to His voice. We shall never hear Him outside so long as we are contented with ourselves and our secret fellowships and enjoyments. But if we consider Who our counsellor is, and deeply reflect on His advice, we shall soon let Him enter. And it is a very solemn matter that He gives only counsel. He is deeply solicitous to enter: that is meant by the knocking; as in His own parable, where there is the asking and then the seeking and then the knocking. One might say that if it were possible He would Himself open the door and set right all that is wrong within. It is of importance to remember that it is only counsel. He does not in majesty cry, "Open thy heart to its Lord!" but He gives His earnest advice. Therefore, if you would come to the knowledge and enjoyment of this unspeakable blessing of an inward Christ and inward religion you must meditate deeply upon what He says. You must think that without Him you have nothing but sin and disappointment and misery, here and hereafter, and that He is counselling you to let Him come in and make all things new.

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Secondly, there must be an opening of the door. And, after all that has been said, it will be plain that this does not signify so much our co-operation as the warm and hearty welcome we give Him who offers Himself. He does not require any more of us than that we throw open the door of our hearts and give Him access. The emphasis does not seem to lie upon anything we arise and do in opening the door, but upon our welcoming the Lord on His own terms. Of course, "on His own terms" implies that we do what in us lies to prepare the place for Him. But, after all, the preparing the place is little more than the willingness to have it prepared. It must be emptied of the great usurper, swept of all traces that sin has been there, and garnished with graces of repentance. But these His coming in really brings with it. What he wants and must have in us is such a use of the preparatory grace He has bestowed as opens the door of the will and says: "Lord, enter this unworthy, disorderly, tumultuous, distracted, divided heart, and make it what Thou wouldst have it be." If He remained without until the soul were worthy of His entrance, there would be no hope. But He brings the preparation, when He is welcomed; cleanses the temple and cries, "Take these things hence;" and all becomes orderly and what it should be, if not immediately yet as the certain result of His entering. To give this welcome, however, to One who comes with such unsparing rigour is not a small matter. There are some of us who keep Him on the threshold for years because of some slight thing that proves we are not wholly willing to give Him the control on His own terms. Suffer me to urge on

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you the word of exhortation. Ask yourself what that one thing is which you know He would command you to give up; or what more than one there may be concerning which He would cry "Take these things hence!" Still remember the counsel. It is better for you! You will never know peace until the great surrender is made. That made, life and peace and victory and heaven would at once enter with Him!

Much has been said about this interior religion; but we have not yet listened to our Lord's own description of it. Judging by the significant allusion to the eyesalve, we might have expected Him to say over again, "I will come in to him, if he will open the door, and will manifest Myself unto him." Of course, that is precisely what is meant here. True religion is the inward experience of Christ which is or results from His manifestation to the soul. "I will manifest Myself unto him." Unto him: not to his eyes, his hands, his mind, his thought, or anything that is his: but "unto him," unto the hidden man behind all these. And, as he that seeth the Son seeth the Father also, our Lord adds, "My Father will come unto him, and We will make our abode with him." It is this then at last, that your whole nature is to become a temple of the most Holy Trinity: the Father, the Son, and the Spirit in their unity sanctified within the heart. But you observe that all this is not said: it is only implied. Our text is not literally an echo of the former in the Gospel, but a variation upon it.

First, then, it is communion. The ascended Saviour uses a figure which He had not used before

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the sacred supper was instituted. It almost seems as if He beheld His disciples partaking of the common table; and at once took His illustration from that and protected the outward ordinance from abuse. All that the supper is to the Christian assembly, joyfully commemorating accomplished redemption, and pledging vows of eternal fidelity to the Lord while the Lord pledges His goodwill to them, this internal supper is to the individual Christian. He and his Lord sit at the same table, and alone. It is a feast which is a token and pledge of perfect amity and concord; in which there is mutual entertainment, the Saviour being refreshed with His servant's society and His servant made supremely happy in the society of his Lord; and in which there is discourse on both sides, though the Lord rules the conversation, and so speaks that the ministering angels delight to hear. Yet they do not hear: for this fellowship is a secret and precious mystery. The tenour of the New Testament represents the intercourse between the Lord and the individual soul as the most tender, intimate, and precious that can be conceived. As man and wife are one flesh so he that is joined to the Lord is one spirit. We cannot help thinking of the Song of songs: "I sleep, but my heart waketh: it is the voice of my Beloved that knocketh." "I am my Beloved's and my Beloved is mine." There is no figure that can express what the Scriptures promise, and the saints have experienced, of the blessedness of personal fellowship with Jesus. And His very last word from heaven was the promise of this interior communion of souls between Him and us.

Secondly, this is more than communion: it is union.

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The peculiarity of this interior supper is that the sacred food is the Lord Himself. In fact, we must drop the figure of the common repast, and fix upon the other, that of the entering in. Here, brethren, is the profound mystery of the interior life, the life hid with Christ in God, the life of God in the soul of man. We are very familiar with the figures, and we delight in them: those which represent us as having a house or temple or home within to give our Lord. We almost instinctively speak of His coming in to us somewhere: where, we never step to ask. What does that mean? One thing cannot enter another. One being cannot enter another. One creature cannot enter, literally, another. But God's life can fill and replenish and absolutely rule our life. And Christ, as the Incarnate Son of God, can be the very life, the new life, of our souls. You see that the upper room furnished is not referred to, where the Saviour and His people may find a common meeting-place. The upper room furnished has become the inner chamber furnished; and, our own spirit being the place of this fellowship, Christ must become our new life. "I in you!" "As I live by the Father, so he that eateth Me shall live by Me." What then follows but that we eat and drink the nourishment of a new life which is Christ within us. This, dear brethren, is the real meaning of the interior repast. If we more earnestly considered all the wonders of the promise, we should put away every other inferior satisfaction and dedicate our souls to this! Meanwhile, He ever says: "Eat, O friends: drink yea, drink abundantly, O beloved!"

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IV.

We must not close without the final lesson that is so solemnly and so gloriously added by our Lord. How sudden and as it were abrupt is the transition: "To him that overcometh will I grant to sit down with Me on My throne, even as I also overcame and am set down with My Father on His throne." It is not necessary to expound this at large. There are two points, obvious enough, that belong to our subject.

The interior life of fellowship with Christ is perfectly consistent with, and indeed bound up with, an external fellowship with Christ in conflict. One might almost think that conflict out of the question. Is the feast to break up, the noise of the enemy to be heard without, and the guest or companion of the Lord's supper to go out and fight for the home and the table which his Lord has accepted? It is not precisely so. These are all figures. The reality of the religious life is that, concurrently with the peaceful enjoyment of internal religion, there is the trial of faith in an unfriendly world. The Bride of the Song has to cry, "I will rise now and go about the city; in the streets, and in the broadways I will seek Him whom my soul loveth: I sought Him but I found Him not." A false mysticism says "It is all interior;" and would shut the world out if it could, but it cannot. The mysticism of Scripture unites the peace within and the war without. He who says "I will come in and sup with him" says immediately after, "To him that overcometh will I give." The fact is that there are two senses in which the external conflict is of great importance. First, it is, as we have seen, the guarding that secret treasure. We cannot move

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about in the world without, or in the world within, the church, without endangering at every step our inward peace. And of this does the Guardian of our souls warn us beforehand. Secondly, and chiefly, we are one with Christ in the external struggle of His kingdom and cause; and must contend for it while we live, and sometimes even unto death. Happy are they who unite the two. They are the perfect Christians. They can say, like their Lord, "I have meat to eat that the world knoweth not:" but they are also found saying, with Him, "My meat is to do the will of Him that sent Me and to finish His work."

In His boundless condescension our Lord leaves us with His further promise: that if we are faithful in the interior and exterior work of religion we shall share His throne and His triumph. The most gracious and special part of our internal fellowship shall cease with our probation. Our union with Him shall be confirmed eternally; but our communion with Him shall be not so much in hidden intercourse when the mystical church is complete. We shall so rejoice in our Lord's great triumph throughout eternity, and be so swallowed up in the blessedness of His finished work—never a "finished work" till then—that we shall forget ourselves, forget that we have a "hidden man of the heart." Religion will be all external, "on the throne." Each of us will find his place, higher or lower, on the steps of the throne, according to the measure in which his human faithfulness has approached the measure of the faithfulness of Him who overcame as a Divine conqueror for us. To Whom with the Father and the Holy Spirit be glory for ever.

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THE GLORY OF THE CHRISTIAN SONSHIP.

"Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God: therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not.

"Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is."—1 JOHN iii. 1–2.

WE cannot understand this passage unless we regard it as dedicated to one theme: the dignity, blessedness and glory of our filial relation to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. If that is regarded as its one subject, it immediately claims to be the last and the highest and the most comprehensive exhibition of Christian sonship in the New Testament. On all topics connected with the manifestation of the Son of God this epistle gives the last word; finishing what had been left incomplete, and setting the touch of perfection on doctrines that had been waiting for that touch. It is needless to illustrate this by many examples. Our own illustration is quite enough for us, and it is, as at all points, full and satisfactory. Other teachers in the New Testament had dwelt on our new relation to God in Christ as His children: the supreme and peculiar

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privilege of the new covenant. From the hour at the commencement when our Saviour declared generally "Ye must be born from above," and then more specifically, "That which is born of the Spirit is spirit," and that other later hour when He said, with a still more special meaning, "Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, ye have no life in you," the new life of our regeneration had been more or less fully exhibited. But, supposing all said on the subject that had been said by the Lord and His apostles, there remains in this paragraph the consummation and crown of all. Let us, in dependence on the Divine Spirit, mark how it is so.

I.

The first token of the glory of our sonship is found in the very terms with which the subject is here introduced. St. John had throughout the epistle implied this high prerogative, but had not expressly referred to it. At the beginning of this chapter he evidently pauses in order to bring it in with deep solemnity. Having closed the preceding paragraph with the words "He that doeth righteousness is born of Him," this gives him the fit opportunity; and nothing in his writings is more emphatic than the tribute he pays. "Behold!" is a new kind of address. "What manner of love the Father hath bestowed on us!" is also a new style of phrase. We are carried back to the beginning of the gospel, where John the Baptist twice greets the Lamb of God with the solemn word, "Behold!" and where the great demonstration of God's love to mankind is

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made to be the gift of His Son: "So God loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son." It is not necessary to suppose that there was in the evangelist's mind any purposed reference to those earlier words. But certainly we may take occasion from the parallel to shew what was undoubtedly his meaning; that our sonship places us in a special relation to the Son, and therefore is the impressive token of Divine favour to us.

Whosoever reads carefully the New Testament will be fully aware how closely our dignity as sons is bound up with the dignity of the Eternal Son. His manifestation in the flesh is the glory of the new covenant; and our union with His Sonship is our reflection of that glory. By becoming man He stamped a certain honour upon our very nature; and the most degraded of mankind is born to the prerogative of sharing the nature which the Son of God has shared. But we cannot fail to see that there is something over and above this. To be partakers of His Sonship, as He is the Incarnate Son, is the particular privilege of those who are His, who are in Him, who have received Him, and who are thereby taken out of the world. How this is we must see hereafter. Meanwhile, it is of great importance to remember here at the beginning that the glory of sonship is not the common glory of the race. It is the prerogative of those "to whom it is given of the Father," and those are they who "are given by the Father to the Son." Many have read the text with different eyes, and found in it a very different meaning. "Behold, what manner of love the Father hath given to the race in giving His Son, that the

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lost family of Adam should be called again His children." That has a cheerful sound for mankind; but it is not the genuine and natural music of the gospel. "To as many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God, to as many as believed on His name"; and let that be compared with our own passage: "Therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew Him not."

We must, therefore, be careful to lay the right stress on the words, "What manner of love!" and "The Father hath bestowed on us." The love of the universal Father is very great; but it has not in it this "manner of love." There need be no controversy on the Fatherhood of God. The prodigal sons are sons still, and their compassionate God is still a Father; but when they are reinstated in their forfeited relation they are sons in a much higher sense. That relation is the highest to which God can raise them; the highest to which man's nature can be raised. As the gift of the Son in the incarnation and on the cross is the glory of our redemption as a race, so our being made sons is the essence of the benefit. As the ages waited for the manifestation of the Son, so they waited for the manifestation of our adoption in Him. Our being justified freely and set at liberty from the sentence of the law is a great blessing; our being placed on the altar and consecrated to God is also a great blessing; our being regenerated and joined in a new life to the Son is also a great blessing. But the greatest of these blessings is the sonship; in fact, those others belong to this. We are "called sons," and as such are made pure and righteous as our Lord is.

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II.

What has been already said will be made more plain if we consider our theme in the light of the two terms here used to indicate our sonship; "that we should be called," and that "we are" the children of God. In our modern theological language these would be distinguished as our adoption and our regeneration; in fact, that is the distinction which St. Paul gives us. He speaks of our being adopted into a new relation of sons, and invested with the privileges of that relation; but he always means that those who are adopted as sons are also really children. However, we are not dwelling on St. Paul's phrases. St. John gives us our text; and it has been already indicated that his doctrine has brought the whole subject into its perfect state. It will be enough for us to show how, by the terms our apostle uses, he exhibits the glory of our sonship.

When St. John says, "How great love has been conferred on us that we should be called children of God," it may at a first glance seem as if he employs a very ordinary expression. Some would tell us that he uses the word "called" simply in the Hebrew style, meaning only "that we should be" children of God. But then you see that he presently obviates that misconception by significantly adding, "Now are we the sons of God;" and, indeed, according to another reading here, the antithesis is still more marked; "that we should be called children of God, and such we are." There can be no

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doubt that the word signifies very much what was signified by that sentence in the Gospel, "To them gave He power or authority or prerogative to become children of God." We need not ask curiously who it is that calls us children; suffice that it expresses generally the grandeur of our relation. We are not only creatures of God, and, therefore, in a certain sense His offspring, not only sons of God as angels are, not only His children as the redeemed descendants of Adam, but children in union with the Supreme, Only-begotten, and Eternal Son. There lies the sublime dignity of our elevation; that we are called up to the side of the one everblessed Son, and permitted to hear ourselves called what He was called, "The Beloved Son." Though we are not using St. Paul's term "adoption," it may furnish an illustration of St. John's meaning. That term indicates "the being placed in the relation of a son," not in the relation of a child, which is a different word. Our Lord's supreme name of dignity is always that of "the Son." Though he was in early years "the Holy Child," that name passed away, and He remained "the Son." We are "called children," it is true; but our dignity is that we are the many sons of whom Jesus is the Elder Brother, and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ the common Father. That is, and will be for ever, our honour that we are invested with all the prerogatives of sonship in the unity of the Eternal Son. Those prerogatives are manifold, and we have them all in fellowship with Him. He calls God His Father; so do we. He is the Heir; we are joint-heirs with Him. He is free as the Son over His own house; we are also

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made free in Him from every kind of bondage, and the honour and dignity of the Father's house are ours.

But there is much more than this. Whether the abrupt and vigorous addition, "as we are," is to be received or not, the idea of it is in the whole passage. Those who are adopted, and have authority to call themselves sons, are really regenerate children. There is the advantage of St. John over St. Paul, if such words may be used: St. John's "called children" almost means "are children," while St. Paul's "adoption of sons" would mean, according to human analogy, placed among the sons without being actually such. In that sense, strictly speaking, there is no adoption. The Father reckons no children who are not born of Him through the Spirit forming the Son in them. Now this phrase, "forming the Son in them," is St. Paul's; and we may use it to illustrate St. John's teaching concerning the dignity of the regenerate life. He always presents it to us as being the inward possession of the Son. "He that hath the Son hath the life; and he that hath not the Son hath not the life." Our subject is the glory of our sonship; and there it is. By faith we understand that the new life is a new begetting, a new quickening, a new birth; our true life being not only hid with Christ in God, but being Christ Himself hid in us. We need to be reminded of this. Many current definitions of regeneration entirely forget it. There are some which swallow it up entirely in adoption: their abettors boldly declaring that Christ has given the whole race a new life of adoption into the divine family, and that no indi-

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vidual new birth is necessary. Others lay much stress on the moral change wrought in the nature, whereby evil becomes hateful and goodness desirable: a view that is undeniably sound so far as it goes; but is in great danger of vitally falling short. Our new life is not, cannot be, the mere improvement of our old life. There must be an altogether new beginning. And it is the glory of St. John's final teaching that it has brought out the glory of the sonship itself: making it the birth of the Son of God within us. This is the third, which is the greatest of three, each being true. The three are contained in a sentence of St. Paul: "The law of the Spirit of Life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death." Regeneration is a new moral law governing the life: "the law of the Spirit." It is the Holy Ghost as "the Spirit of life in Jesus." But the emphasis is on the third, "in Christ Jesus," which is always to be inverted if you would find the meaning, "Christ in us." Be sure that you remember this. Fix your mind attentively on this great thought. Ponder it until you feel all its grandeur; but do not rest there. Bring more than your views to be changed. Bring your life itself to be filled up and replenished and made perfect. Ask the Son of God to enter and bring with Him the perfection and glory of life, that you may have what the Scripture itself calls "life indeed."

III.

The next mark of the glory of our sonship follows directly from the former. If our new life is really

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the life of the Son within us, then its development and perfection must be really His; at any rate, He must be in all things the standard of it. The bearing of the two is obvious. The life of the Son of God within us must grow up into the fulness of the stature of the life of the Son of God without us. But it is plain that St. John is not thinking of a blessed necessity of natural or supernatural development: his idea is that we have a hope in us of being like our Lord, and in that hope strive to be like Him here that we may be found like Him hereafter. "We know," he says, "that we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is." Only the pure in heart can see God; that is Christ, or God in Christ; if, therefore, we are to see Him as He is in that other world, we must become pure in heart as He is pure in this world; we must be righteous as He is righteous, if we would not be ashamed before Him at His coming. Leaving the future for the future, let us consider now the glory of sonship that it aims at the Son's likeness.

First, see this in the negative freedom from the stain and impurity of all sin. In the early part of the epistle it is said that if we "WALK in the light as He IS in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanseth us from all sin." Now we are said, strange to say, in our present passage, to have this as our business to "Purify ourselves even as He is pure." These two we must reconcile by remembering that if we use the divine provision for cleansing we cleanse ourselves, and also that it is a personal matter, as all sonship is: "He that hath this hope in him"—that is, the

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hope of being like Him—"purifieth himself," with this standard before him, the Son of God "in Whom is no sin," and Who "was manifested to take away our sins," Whose blood can take away the stain and guilt, and Whose Spirit can take away the very sin itself. "As He is pure" is the standard: it does not say whether or not it is or may be perfectly reached; and, leaving that alone for the present, we may be content with the grandeur of the filial life which aims to reproduce that faultless image. Our pattern, the Son of God Incarnate, is pure, holy, sanctified: we, as the sons of God, must become the same. Observe that He is not set before us as the pattern of the method of becoming pure and undefiled. He does not say "Follow Me in the pursuit of purity;" nor do the apostles tell us to reach after what the Great Exemplar reached. He came into a pure nature, and kept it pure: no stain could ever dim its lustre of holiness. The meaning, therefore, is that the Christian, whose hope is to be like Him, for ever makes it his ceaseless study to use all the means ordained for the removal from his soul of every stain of sin. It is the glory of our sonship that it must be, and shall be, as free from impurity as the Holy One Himself is. Whether here or hereafter, that is the standard, and no other than that.

But, secondly, it must be noted that purity is only a negative thing: freedom from all stain. Now, deliverance from sin is also deliverance from disobedience to law; and the apostle goes on to show that a son of God has the high prerogative of copying the Incarnate Son in His actual, positive, practical righteousness, and thus becoming "righteous,

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even as He is righteous." Here again, however, we are not exhorted to acquire righteousness as He acquired it; but to become righteous, "even as He is righteous." The Eternal Son Incarnate did accomplish all righteousness, and kept His Father's commandment; but His obedience was for us, and not for Himself, and He never acquired righteousness as one who had been unrighteous. The meaning therefore is that the regenerate child of God must not only be sanctified from sin, but also made righteous and obedient up to the standard of that perfect conformity with divine law which is seen in the righteous Servant of God. And it is carefully to be observed that St. John is deeply solicitous to impress this: "Let no man deceive you," he says, as if there would be attempts to teach the children of God that they had nothing more to do with law; or that in some sense holiness was the conclusion of the whole matter of religion: "He that doeth righteousness is righteous, even as He is righteous." He who fixes his eye on the purity of the Son must fix his eye also on His righteousness; and be righteous, "even as He is righteous."

If you put the two together and look at the picture they present, and then regard that picture as in its framework and setting, you will perceive that this most triumphant testimony to the glory of sonship aims at a very high mark indeed. Here we see the Form of the Son of God become the Son of man, with His two attributes of holiness and righteousness: the perfect image of excellence as it is freedom from sin and discharge of all duty. And it is said to be the dignity and honour

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of our sonship that every child of God makes Him the standard: "As He is pure," "As He is righteous." There is no need to occupy our thoughts with the question whether or not there may be a perfect attainment of this image in the present life. Let me simply point out the setting and frame of the text. "The Son of God was manifested to take away our sins;" not simply to atone for them, but to remove them; as is plain from what follows: "In Him is no sin." Now pass suddenly from that to the next chapter: "Herein is our love made perfect, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment; because as He is we are in the world." The glory of our sonship shines through all this most gloriously. We cannot but be reminded of St. Paul's word that we were "predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son": a solitary sentence, which shows that our heavenly Father, when He gave His Son for us, determined that every one of the multitudes saved through His mediation should be exactly a counterpart and similitude of Him. Now there is no limitation. It is one great process going on always: "We are changed into the same image from glory to glory." But the image of sinlessness must be stamped upon us here, in order that the image of glorious perfection may be stamped upon our triple nature, body and soul and spirit, hereafter. Let us not diminish the glory of our Christian sonship in the Son.

IV.

After all this you will not wonder at another most impressive view of the sublimity of our filial charac-

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ter which glides in as it were by the way, and is in danger of being lost sight of: the utter inability of the world to understand the character of the children of God. This sentence, however, is far from doing full justice to the wonderful words, especially when they are taken as a whole, "even as it knew Him not" being included. The more you ponder it the more clearly will you see that there is nothing which can surpass this note of dignity. Alas! there is no note of our dignity that becomes at the same time a more condemning test than this.

When the Saviour was departing He told His disciples that they would be persecuted by those who should think that in killing them they were offering acceptable sacrifice to God; so little would the world understand God or His Son or His people. St. John afterwards refers to the persecution: "Marvel not if the world hate you." But here he seems to throw out the passing suggestion, as if it were a meditative parenthesis. "Ye are sons of God: a glory and dignity quite beyond the world's apprehension, which never understood the Son Himself when He was here." Thus the glory of which we have been speaking is of a kind altogether different from anything to which the world assigns that term, or which the world counts glorious. But then that very fact constitutes the true value of the Christian dignity. The glory of our sonship is not worldly glory; but it is all the more glorious on that account. Think, brethren, what it means to be thus set on a par with the Incarnate Son of God. Think of Him as living and moving and having His being on earth and among men: in the supreme dignity of His

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Divine holiness, and yet by all men as such, and, until illuminated by the Spirit, either despised or condemned or unknown. Can you imagine any dignity beyond His? And would you not count it of all honour the most honourable to share His lot, His credit, and His repute? Now St. John says that the sons of God are those who are like Christ, beyond the world's capacity of understanding or estimating aright. Their spirit and temper and life and action and hope are all above and out of the world's reach. St. John does not say that this is one element of the glory of Christian sonship. But we may so interpret his thought; and none can reverently read the whole paragraph, with all that has been said in it about the image of the Son, without feeling that St. John meant no less, and that, whatever he said, all this was in his mind.

Here, however, we must pause to make the sad application already hinted at. Of how very few may it be said that they are incomprehensible to the world: objects of the same kind of wondering awe that the Lord Jesus excited among the people who watched His unworldly life. Incomprehensible too many Christians are, inasmuch as their conduct and their professions are so glaringly discordant. The wonder among men is not that these Christians fail to reach the high standard; but that they do not, living as they do, give it up altogether. The fact is that they who excite that kind of wonder among men of the world are not verily and effectually sons of God: the mark of the children here given is inalienable. The ways of the Lord's true brethren are not so like the world's that no difference is ever seen.

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On the other hand, the men of the world must not triumph over the children of God too readily. There is often something behind and below the seeming inconsistency of religious professors which ought to be taken into account; but the critic knows nothing of it. The hidden life of many a child of God would, if known, save him from too severe comment. But, after all, this note of sonship dignity is one that should set us all on most solemn self-examination and earnest revision of our life.

V.

The last element in the grandeur of our sonship, it hardly need be said, carries us not beyond the world's estimate but beyond the world itself. It might indeed appear that the apostle has nothing to say on the future estate, and also that he desires us to know nothing and to make no inquiry. "What we shall be doth not appear." That, however, says very much, especially as following the declaration that we shall be like our Lord, the Only-begotten and Eternal Son.

Our likeness to Him in the present life has been spoken of. We were "predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son:" St. Paul says, having used the same word "predestined" to express our sonship generally. The only predestination known to the New Testament is this: that we should be perfectly like the Son of God. Now there is no doubt that this conformity is general, and applicable to both worlds: the present conformity being the condition of the future. "We shall be like Him,

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because we shall see Him as He is:" that does not give us the reason why we shall be like Him, but the proof that we must have become like Him already. "Blessed are the pure in heart; for they shall see God:" not because they see God are they pure in heart, but being pure in heart they see God. So they who are pure as He is pure will see Christ as He is: they are already like Him, and therefore can behold His glory. But their likeness to Him will embrace body and soul and spirit: they will be conformed to His glorious Person at all points. But observe how it is introduced. We know not what we shall be! One thing, however, we do know: "We shall be like Him!" That will be compensation hereafter, and is compensation now for all other ignorance. We know not a thousand things we should like to know: what our manifestation will be, what our relation to each other, what our employments, what the other "sons of God" who first bore the name will be to us, and endless other matters we literally know nothing about. But one thing we know! We shall be each one of us a perfect counterpart of the Incarnate Son: having long borne the image of the earthly Adam, we shall bear for ever the image of the Heavenly. And surely the dignity of sonship cannot go beyond this.

Mark, in conclusion, how beautifully consistent all is here. "We know not" is really "we know;" and "we know" is really "we know not." Both belong to the glory of our estate of sonship. What we know—that "we shall be like Him"—is beyond all language glorious. Nothing can surpass it save the ignorance that knows not all that is contained in that

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amazing hope. And let it not be said that this has nothing to do with our sonship in particular: being generally true of our hope of heaven. The simple truth is that our sonship is here altogether and only concerned. It gives a specific character to our future state. Heaven does not exhaust the idea of our destiny: that will be the common abode of all but the lost. Nor does life: for that will be shared by endless multitudes of beings of whom we as yet have little revelation. Nor, indeed, does the vision of God: that will be shared by all the pure intelligences whose companions we shall be. But to be one with the Eternal Son Incarnate in His glory, and to be one with Him as He is one with the Father, and to be sharers of all that the Father will give Him as the reward of His humiliation and sorrow and death: all this is the special characteristic and prerogative and dignity of the sons of God. To borrow St. Paul once more: We were "predestinated unto the adoption of sons!" And we wait for our eternal destiny, as "waiting for the adoption!" To Him, the Eternal Son, incarnate for us, with the Holy Ghost, be glory for ever. Amen.

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THE NIGHT COMETH: THE DAY IS AT HAND.*

"The night cometh, when no man can work."—JOHN ix. 4.
"The night is far spent, and the day is at hand."—ROM. xiii. 12.

WE may take it for granted that there is no contradiction here; though the two texts seem to affirm the exact opposite of each other. The Lord on one side of the day of Pentecost, and the apostles on the other side of it, always agree, though very often their language differs. To harmonize them, and in doing so to mark the reasons of the apparent discrepancy, is one of the most profitable exercises of our devout meditation: let the subject be what it may. The instance we have now before us is one of the most striking in itself and of the most profoundly interesting in its application. Our Saviour tells us that our day is passing and our night is coming; St. Paul tells us that our night is passing and our day is coming. We must now aim to reconcile these two; to show how they are one in our personal religion; and to derive salutary lessons from their unity. This would be of the deepest importance at any time; but it is specially commended to

* Preached on occasion of the death of Mr. Richard Haworth of Manchester, in Albert Park Chapel, on December 23, 1883.

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us at the present season, and by the solemn memorial of this evening's service. May the Holy Spirit, the interpreter alike of our Lord and His apostle, direct our thoughts aright and seal them to our hearts.

I.

The season reminds us of the Advent of our Lord: both His first and His second Advent for human salvation. And this suggests the first and highest illustration of the oneness of our texts, as found in the meaning of day and night to our Lord Himself. This will be seen to underlie all the others.

"As long as I am in the world," He said, "I am the light of the world." He is that Sun which arose upon mankind when the sun of Paradise set: the light of human history, "enlightening every man that cometh into the world." But He is also the Sun of His own one day, the day of man's redemption. That was its dawn, when he cried as the youth, "I must be in My Father's business." Here is its meridian, when He still says, "I must work the works of Him that sent Me while it is day; the night cometh:" the transfiguration noon being passed, soon after which we hear Him declare, "between the evenings," "I have finished the work Thou gavest Me to do." His night came, and His sun set, "while it was yet day." But in that "great and notable day" the world was saved. His departure was the night season of His rest from His labours and sufferings and infinite sorrows. His works follow Him; and eternity will be filled with the results of that one day for which all other days were made.

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But our Lord's night was only the dawn of another day, which is still more emphatically called "the day of Christ." There is a sense in which He knew no night. As soon as His sun set in the west, its return in the east began at once to be proclaimed. A higher watchman than he of Dumah cries from heaven to earth with a change in the cry, "The night cometh, and also the morning." And all the New Testament scriptures respond; they also cry aloud, "The day of the Lord is at hand." The church of Christ from the time of its foundation in Jerusalem took up the note; and has continued to expect His coming from age to age, reckoning a thousand years, and a second thousand if need be, as one day. And though the Lord "delayeth His coming" as one who is gone "into a far country for a long time," His people see in all history the signs of His coming; and wait for Him "as they that wait for the morning." It will be the world's "midnight when the cry will be heard;" but His saints midday, for "their night is far spent" already.

Now, you see at once the great and fundamental reconciliation of the Lord and the apostle. The Master's text was spoken on the shadowy side of the cross and the sepulchre, with the night season of His sacrificial death before Him; the deep gloom of which was but faintly betokened by the three hours' darkness which hid the sufferer from all but God. St. Paul's text was spoken with the cross and the sepulchre behind him, with his eye fixed on the second coming, which was to him as certain a reality as the day that shone around him while he wrote. And we must remember that the Lord Himself re-

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conciled the two in His own words; for He adopts almost the language of His apostle: "Behold, I come quickly, and My reward is with me." We may regard Him as writing the two texts thus: "It is appointed to men to die once; and much more is it appointed to Me once to die. My night of betrayal and abandonment is at hand. But My day is also at hand, when I shall come a second time, without sin to weigh Me down to death, unto salvation to all them that look for My appearing."

II.

Now, you observe that the same prophecy which tells us that "He will come a second time to those who look for Him" tells us that "it is appointed to men once to die." And we must therefore combine our texts into unity by regarding ourselves as sustaining two distinct relations: one which is personal and anticipates the evening of life and the night of death; the other which is not personal, but corporate, and belongs to the church which can never die.

As individuals we may say with Elijah, "I shall die; I am no better than my fathers." "So teach me to number my days that I may apply my heart unto wisdom;" or rather, in the light of our text, "to number my hours, my moments, and to mark how surely my little sun is passing over my little sky." "I must work while it is day, the night cometh when no man can work;" the grave is waiting for me, where there is no device to retrieve time or use it. "The living know that they shall

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die;" and, as a living man, I accept my lot and must prepare to meet my Judge. But as members of the mystical church of Christ the matter stands to us very differently. Each of us belongs to the company of pilgrims which has been redeemed from death, and is going onward from generation to generation to meet the Lord. As a man he belongs to a dying race; but as a Christian he belongs to the church against which "the gates of Hades shall not prevail." That church, like Rachel, buries her dead and mourns "because they are not;" but lives on nevertheless. He may be buried by the wayside; but his name is nevertheless "written among the living." "Refrain thy voice from weeping," said the prophet to Rachel; "thy children shall come again." So he shall die himself as an individual; but as a member of Christ he shall never die.

Here we have a true and adequate reconciliation of our texts. There is nothing of unreality in this: it is not a forced interpretation. We are all familiar enough with the idea that we are very different persons in different aspects of our relations. A thousand evidences might be adduced; but I will illustrate it by a notion prevalent in this age which is a frightful perversion and caricature of our truth. We are told that as men individually we are on our way not only to death but to extinction also; while our consolation is that in the race, in humanity, going on to perfection we live on for ever. Hear how the Positive Philosophers parody our texts. "We must work the works that fate has assigned; and do them well, for our deep eternal night cometh when no man can work. But the night of human evolution is far

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spent; the day is at hand for our struggling race; and all the good we do will help forward the ideal Mankind. And that thought must be instead of personal immortality." Their parody, brethren, is our truth. We have two relations. In the one, we lay our account with death; and shall only live on below in our works. But, in the other, we know that we are citizens of heaven; and that we belong to the new race of saved humanity which is immortal in the heavens.

III.

It was said that this is a true and adequate reconciliation. True it undoubtedly is; but perhaps it is scarcely adequate, for the separate relations are not quite so distinct as they have been made. It is not that, on the one hand, I must die, while on the other the church I belong to lives: the resurrection being supposed to supply the link. However true that may be, it does not join the texts as closely as it is our privilege to join them in our daily life of experience and hope. This will appear if we attend to two prominent truths of the New Testament which shed light on our subject.

First, death is regarded as really joining the departed soul to the number of those who are expecting the Lord's second advent. It is death, as the separation of the soul and body. But it does not for an instant interrupt the waiting for Christ which has begun in life. The only difference is that the separated spirit waits for Him without the body. Mark how much prominence St. Paul gives to this when writing to the Thessalonians on the very

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subject. There were some whose hearts mourned over their departed because they were cut off from the great expectation of welcoming the Lord's return. They in their present ignorance thought that such as ended their day on earth ceased to have any interest in the great expectation : at least, they had no notion of the connection between the two which St. Paul establishes. He corrects their fears, and tells them that those who wait for Christ on earth would have no advantage over the sleepers even if He came ; for that He would bring with Him those who "sleep in Jesus" to share in the glorious revelation. He does not say that they are now waiting in Paradise to join the procession : for that we must go to the Apocalypse. But he says enough to establish our point : that the expecting of night here and of day there, and both as parts of one undivided expectation, does unite our two texts. Whether on earth or in Paradise those who are in Christ and love His appearing are "looking for that blessed hope and the glorious manifestation of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ."

Now take another view. Looking carefully at the strain of New Testament references to the last things, we cannot help marking that the prospect of dying and the prospect of receiving the Lord from heaven, are blended in one common perspective ; or rather as an alternative which every one must contemplate as undecided. In other words, the Christian revelation has left it for every age matter of uncertainty whether believers shall go to the Lord through death or the Lord will come to them without death. The second advent is the horizon as

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certainly for individuals as for the church. "We that are alive and remain," says the apostle; and, not in one passage only but everywhere, the prospect of the believer is in a strait betwixt two: not exactly the apostle's strait betwixt living and dying, but betwixt Christ coming to him or his going to Christ. It might almost appear as if it were the intention of the Divine Head of the church, that every Christian to the end of time should have both prospects before him, the night and the day: the Lord Himself deciding between them. One set of passages are so framed that they seem to sustain the theory of the Millenarians, that it may be said of any generation, "There be some standing here that shall not taste of death till these things are fulfilled." In the light of these passages St. Paul's is the text: "The night is far spent, the day is at hand." But then there is another class which change the tone: "Whether we wake or sleep, we live together with Him." "Let no man perplex you as if the day of the Lord were come, or very near at hand. There must be a falling away first, a large development of evil, a universal ingathering of the Gentiles, a resurrection of the dead Jewish nation, the coming of Antichrist." In the light of these passages our Lord's is the text: "The night cometh, when no man can work." But only, you must remember, as an alternative. Putting them together we cannot but see that they harmonize our two texts so far as this goes, that none can set out on the Christian career without having the two prospects before him, and being uncertain which will be his lot. It is true that this applies chiefly to the young. To the aged it

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will not apply: they know full well that events must take place on the scene of human action which they cannot live to see, though their children may. So St. Paul when he became "such an one as Paul the aged" dismisses the thought of witnessing Christ's return: "I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand." His expectation of his crown is postponed to "that day."

You see, then, that there is a certain sense in which we may all combine the Lord's words and the apostle's in our own prospect. The young have the alternative that they may die or that they may witness the coming of the Lord: that is the reconciliation for them. The elders can fall back upon the other thought that they are going into the company of those who join the coming Redeemer some other way, even by the side portals of death. Thus we all have our portion in both the texts. Some who sit here may be caught up in the great Transfiguration, having their bodies "fashioned like unto His glorious body" without the resurrection. But most of us, probably all, must enter into the shades of evening and through the gates of night join the great Procession that will meet the Lord.

IV.

You cannot but have felt, brethren, that thus far we have assumed death to be a reality; and have expounded our Saviour's night which is coming as meaning our individual decease. But, strictly speaking, our first text says not a word about our dying. It regards every Christian as joined with the Lord in

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having a day's work set before him, which he must do with his might, since the time to cease and go to rest is at hand. Pause for a moment to observe the application to Jesus Himself. I need not ask whether His words were "We must work the works of Him that sent Me": if He said that, then it might appear that He sets us an example. There was the blind man: blind from his birth. The disciples would inveigle Him into controversy or draw from Him some profound secret of the Divine government. We sympathize with their question; but the Lord answered it in His own way. "The man is there, and is what he is, that the works of God may be manifest in him: that I also may do My appointed work as the Healer of body and soul: here is an opportunity for My skill." It was His divine opportunity for showing His power, teaching many truths to the people, and giving His disciples a permanent lesson. It was not possible that He would neglect anything that could be crowded into His short day. Yet He says: "I must work!" His thought, brethren, was on us all. We need to be told, and we are told, that we are sent into the world to do a work, which if done at all must be done before the evening comes: a work, however, which if we do it well will have the night of rest to follow it; and to follow that again another day, or a to-morrow of heavenly service.

But we are too much forgetting that there is no death in the text. It is as if that word were carefully avoided; for the time is fast coming when the Saviour will say, "He that liveth and believeth in Me shall never die." He has "abolished death" to His

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people by bringing "life and immortality to light." There are many ways of linking time and eternity together; it would take time to enumerate them. Suffice that here our Saviour impresses on us that we have a commission to discharge, a day's work to do, and then give account of it and be rewarded. For the apostle joins on where the Lord leaves off. The day is at hand, when all the labourers shall have their hire: their own salvation individually, and their relative place according to the measure of their toil for others. "I come quickly, to give to every man as his work shall be." The rewards of the day's work, however, do not appear in either of the texts, or in their combination; we must therefore not dwell upon them. It is enough to recall to our thoughts how constantly the Master connects His coming back with His examination of the conduct of those whom He trusted with talents that they might "occupy till He come."

Let us, however, keep close to our one topic: the harmonising of these texts. Uniting them we gather the truth which is the most solemn at once and the most joyful we can learn, that our existence is one continuous whole: running on through all the variations of time, undergoing a certain remarkable change at what we call death, and still going on for ever. Take the two passages, and, with this thought in your mind, make one flow into the other. But let the Lord himself blend them: rather, let us ask how He would blend them, and find the answer in His own words. "I am the light and sun of this world to every man. Each has a day, longer or shorter, in which he must work the works of God. His night

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when it comes bids him retire from work, and wait upon his Lord's further will. After ploughing or feeding cattle, for instance, all the hard day, he does not at once receive his final rest and reward; he still stands and waits." But we must not include that parable, which rather alters the view; nor must we think of that other where the labourers are called to receive their hire. These teach their own lessons. But this one—our own text—has its peculiar teaching, which almost requires St. Paul's addition. So let us hear the Lord again. "He cannot work; but must wait till day reappears. The day is at hand; the night is far spent; My servants who slumber and sleep in the intermediate state awhile must be up and doing when the cry is heard, 'It is time to wake out of sleep!'" The day's work must begin again: but in a day which does not measure off twelve hours, and is followed by no afternoon, evening, or night, where the sun stands still upon the new Jerusalem for ever. Here, fellow Christians, is the reconciliation. Death is only the introduction to a state where "no man can work": probation has ended, self-discipline has ended, charity to others has ended. The man himself still lives, between the past and the future. But the opportunity of changing the past or providing for the future is for ever gone.

V.

Here, then, we are at last landed where all discourses should land us: in the practical application. The final and most important harmonizing of our texts is this: that in our life of daily preparation for

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the future we must let the two thoughts strictly unite, however difficult it may seem. In other words, the true theory of living shows its perfection in being at once a fitness to die and a fitness to receive the coming Lord; at once, I say; for there is only one preparation for both.

It is a preparation to die. After all, dying is a tremendous reality. It might seem as if our two texts taken together would abolish death before the time; but that is a mistake. Religion is the prudent life which regards this state as a probation for another, death being the term and seal of that probation. Notwithstanding all that the Conqueror has done to rob it of its terrors, death has in it what needs no special pleading to emphasize. It speaks for itself. Our Lord Himself has paid His tribute to its awe. I do not mean in His "strong crying and tears" when He approached it: that had a reason which no physical dying will explain. But I mean the tribute of His tears over our death, and the havoc it produces among us. It is a dread and solemn thing to die: it is so even in old age, when nature seems simply to fall asleep; but to be arrested in the mid-career of life and probation, to be suddenly grappled with and to be hurried from time and opportunity for ever!

And not less solemn is the alternative of ending life by the sudden coming of the Lord: though this we too seldom take into our calculation. Death we know, and all the agonies that precede it we know; but what is this swift rapture into eternity which shall befal the last generation! This will be the most sudden of all sudden deaths. And in itself it must

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needs be the most awful experience possible to man. If religion is a preparation to die well, it must also be a constant readiness to meet the Judge when He suddenly comes.

Now, terrible as death is, and terrible as is the thought of being suddenly called to meet the Judge, both are divested of all their terror by the preparation that keeps both equally in view. There is but one preparation: viewed as to the coming night of our first text it is simply a right use of the day; viewed as to the coming day, it is simply a full delight in the expectation of its approach; viewed in their union it is simply the mingling of solemnity and joy in the prospect.

The apostle's admonitions and exhortations in the second text, which have not yet been referred to, show how entirely the preparation for the night is also the preparation for the day. In fact, the words are so chosen that they are equally adapted for both prospects. Here is the perfect preparation to die well; and it is also the perfect preparation for the coming day. We are supposed to be thoroughly awakened from the sleep of sin; to have been aroused, and effectually converted, and to have received the earnest of salvation. We have thrown aside for ever the garments of night, abandoned the revelries and abominations of the service of sin, and, having put off the old man with his deeds, put on the new man; so that, clothed with the Lord Jesus, we may meet Him in His own vesture and stand before Him accepted. This total abandonment of sin and of all earthly vanities, and this reflection of the image of Christ, is all that we need to die well;

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and it is all that He will seek at His coming. But you must mark how wonderfully St. Paul joins what we are supposed to BE with what we must take care to BECOME. And our own consciences will tell us better than the expositors and critics why he makes this change. This is the perfect double preparation; but how few there be that find it! Much reason have we to ask ourselves still whether it is not high time that we should be thoroughly aroused, whether even now we do not need, as it were, a fresh conversion, and to be plunged again into the waters of regeneration and new life. Let us look well at our lives, and ask if we are really walking with unsullied dignity as if in the clear day of eternity already begun to dawn. Let us begin afresh this day, and resolve to combine the two texts in our experience as we never have combined them before. Ceasing to make provision for the flesh we must regard it as crucified and let it die. When that is dead within us we shall be fit to live with Christ for ever. If we have our conversation in heaven before the time we shall be ready for the day of the Lord that comes after death. Let the powers of this world more entirely cease for us; and the powers of the world to come more effectually begin.

Brethren, how lovely is the experience of the man in whose daily life these two texts exercise their perfect influence. He does not dwell in his thoughts on death and judgment and the day of the Lord with their terrors; these to him are transfigured, and suffused with a glory that casts out all fear. He thinks only or mostly of his progressive, continuous, ever-brightening future. All his anticipation is one:

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it is treasured up in Christ, to be revealed from stage to stage as its successive hours shall come. That is enough for him. His present day is inexpressibly precious; every moment of it is stamped with the value of eternity; and no man desires life as he desires it. Therefore the thought of its end is solemn. But the other world has its own infinite secret of bliss; and the solemnity of his departure is tempered with an awful joy. He mingles the daily preparation to die with the daily longing for heaven in a manner that defies description. It must be known to be understood. Every evening he tells off the diminishing fragments of his earthly existence: "now am I a day nearer to the appointed doom of sin." But every evening he tells off the diminishing fragments of the period that keeps him from true life: "now is my salvation one day nearer than when I believed." Sorrowful, he is always rejoicing; dying, behold he lives. Such a man will never really die: death hath no more dominion over him. He leaves night finally and for ever behind; and as he lived so he dies, "in the day;" through the grace of union with his Lord, "Who died for us that, whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with Him." To Whom, with the Father and the Holy Ghost, be glory for ever. Amen.

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