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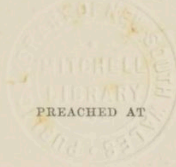
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SERMONS.

SERMONS



AUCKLAND, NEW ZEALAND.

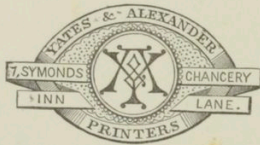
BY

SAMUEL EDGER, B.A.

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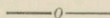
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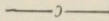
CONTENTS.



	PAGE
SERMON I.	
MAN IN THE GARDEN OF EDEN	1
SERMON II.	
CAIN AND ABEL: THE FIRST WORSHIP AND THE FIRST MURDER	19
SERMON III.	
THE PURPOSE OF LIFE	34
SERMON IV.	
WHO IS CHRIST?	47
SERMON V.	
THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD IN CHRIST	64
SERMON VI.	
THE GENIUS OF CHRISTIANITY	81
SERMON VII.	
ON REGENERATION	96

	Page.
SERMON VIII.	
SINFUL AND SINLESS LIFE	110
SERMON IX.	
GOOD AND EVIL IN THE SAME HEART	122
SERMON X.	
THE CHRISTIAN'S CONQUEST OVER SIN	136
SERMON XI.	
THE HOLY GHOST OUR HELPER	149
SERMON XII.	
ON DOING GOOD	162
SERMON XIII.	
THE MORAL EARNESTNESS OF LIFE	176
SERMON XIV.	
HEAVEN	190
SERMON XV.	
HELL: ITS NATURE AND MEANING	205

PREFACE.



THE following sermons have all been written and preached during the last two years, and are the result of from twenty to thirty years of reflection and study. The fire which consumed our residence near Port Albert, during the morning service of Sunday, August 8th, 1866, deprived me of nearly every book that I valued, and of every word I had ever written, excepting a few sermons that had been copied by friends in England before I left. So that the same cause which led to my returning to more public life, as a preacher in Auckland, also threw me entirely on the resources of my own mind in the execution of my work; for the books one may require are not readily to be had in the colony. For ten months I pursued my usual habit of extempore preaching, which I believed to be the

most effective (the correctness of which belief I now much doubt), and never finding any difficulty in it. An attack of paralysis on June 2, 1867, deprived me of that entire command of the nervous system (always extremely sensitive), which is of such imperative necessity for easy and successful extempore speaking. From that time I have been compelled carefully to write nearly every sermon I have preached.

To me, writing was always burdensome, probably from the ease and freedom I found in impromptu speech; to induce the labour of writing, some stronger motive was needed than the mere fact of *having to preach a sermon*. Had I been left to that, I should have abandoned preaching—most certainly when reduced to the necessity of writing—probably many years sooner. The result is, that these are not so much sermons—sermons that had to be preached, and being preached might as well be printed—as studies of subjects deep in interest and very dear to my own heart; embodying thoughts and feelings that through the whole of my life have been taking shape and definiteness. Whatever merits or demerits there

may be in these sermons, amongst my ever-remembered and dear friends in England the above facts will have some interest and weight.

A number of written sermons, when done with in New Zealand, were sent to England for the perusal of friends; this led to a desire on the part of some to give them a wider circulation through the press: this volume is the result. The selection of the sermons and the care of publishing are entrusted to those generous friends whose kindness, if it meets no other response, will at least cement a friendship neither superficial in its nature, nor now of short duration.

As I know neither what sermons will be included nor what omitted, I can say nothing specifically about any; but I may add a little respecting the circumstances under which they have been delivered. Having preached at Albert-street, Auckland, for eight months, during the interval between the resignation of the Rev. Thomas Hamer and the arrival of the Rev. J. T. W. Davies, I had become to some extent known in Auckland, and found many who seemed to think that my method of presenting divine truth more met the spiritual wants of the people than any to which they

were accustomed. I was urged by many to relinquish bush life, and commence preaching in Auckland. I do not know that I should ever have done so, but for the fire which completely destroyed our bush home and everything that it contained. Thereupon, by the invitation of many friends, we came to Auckland, and I commenced preaching in the Parnell Hall, and later in the Odd Fellows' Hall also (now the Duke of Edinburgh Theatre), in accordance with the principles I had for many years cherished.

Eighteen or twenty years ago I had come to the conclusion that all sectarianism, or denomination-ism, as some prefer calling it, is a sin against the New Testament, and ought to be renounced by those who desire simply to follow our Lord and Saviour. For these eighteen or twenty years, I have argued, pleaded, and laboured for this principle,—invariably finding sympathy among those who are called the 'laity,' and being almost as invariably met, among the clergy of all classes and ecclesiastical officials, by ridicule and opposition. The congregations meeting in our two halls have been composed of individuals representing nearly every shade of opinion in the

various sects, besides many who had never allied themselves with any body of worshippers ; and, with the exception of some difficulties that arose during the time I was laid by from illness, we have worshipped together in unbroken harmony and good feeling for now nearly three years ; thus proving the practicability of carrying out the great ends of Christianity without the unhallowed aid of sectarian influences. To accomplish this, has been one of the great aims of the later years of my life ; the impossibility, as it seemed to me, of doing it in England, where all prejudices are so deep-rooted, was one amongst other causes that led me to seek the more free atmosphere of the Colonies. With my present experience, I can see that the difficulties are not insuperable in England.

In practically carrying out the unsectarian principle, I soon found a difficulty arising from the general prejudice in favour of ecclesiastical organisation ; and I now see that the two things—sectarianism and organisation—are so interwoven, that they must stand or fall together. Consequently, our aim has been to dispense with both,—to recognise

the Church of Christ as spiritual, the drawing together and fellowship of hearts, mutually attracted by the all-powerful feeling of love to the Great Redeemer,—the Church, as such, possessing no property, and represented by no officialism,—to treat the congregation as an indefinite portion of the great public, providing for its convenience through the very simple medium of a congregational committee,—to regard a minister as nothing more than an evangelist of mercy to the world. This is the course we have pursued, and with such results as are entirely satisfactory to those whom they most concern. The entire project or work has repeatedly been pronounced quixotic and a failure; and has been met by an opposition and persistent misrepresentation, whose moral and religious character I leave to the judgment of the Most High God.

It is my settled conviction, that it is in some such direction as this that we must look for that new reformation that is so obviously needed, and after which so many thousand hearts are profoundly sighing. I have seen in Auckland the utter inutility of all sectarian systems in maintaining a religious

tone in the community. The moral character of the professing Church here is not one shade above the moral level of the people generally ; sometimes I fear it is below it. What I have seen here, many things led me to suspect in England ; and I now think that the only reason of its being more apparent here, is that the restraint of society and of public opinion being removed, men here appear as they are ; in an old country the conventionalities of life act as a disguise. Moreover, it has been a belief, growing in my mind for thirty years, from the intercourse I have had with ministers and churches, that, in the midst of sectarian trammels, it is next to impossible for any minister either to study the word of God freely or to express candidly his deepest convictions of divine truth. What men really think on matters of profound interest, is rarely preached from any sectarian platform.

To me, then, it is clear, that if we are to reach a more healthy Christian state, it will have to be away from all sectarian systems, and all the present church organisations. The course which we have adopted here is that which seemed to me most plainly in-

dicated by apostolic teaching and practice; and whatever may be the opinion of men who have few ideas that extend beyond the narrow horizon of their own sects, I feel but little doubt that the sincerity and Christian spirit of our undertaking will be some day recognised.

The readers of this Preface may find in it much to throw light on the design and spirit of the Sermons; while many of my friends in England may be glad of this explanation of the precise course we have been pursuing.

If anything in this volume should produce the conviction that it is possible to live a "Higher Christian Life" than that usually attained by professing Christians—if anything in it should stimulate one heart to deeper affection, more genuine prayer, and nobler efforts to reach such an end—the author will feel anew the truth of that very old and sacred saying, "They that sow in tears shall reap in joy."

SAMUEL EDGER.

PARNELL, AUCKLAND, NEW ZEALAND,
May, 1869.

As stated in the foregoing preface, it was in compliance with the wish of some of Mr. Edger's former hearers at Kimbolton and Abingdon, that the manuscripts of these and other sermons were sent to England for circulation in that form amongst a circle of friends. Those who perused them agreed in the opinion that the subjects treated of and mode of treatment were of sufficient importance to justify them in selecting a volume for the press. This, with Mr. Edger's consent, they have done.

It is just possible that regard for their author, and the desire to possess some of the results of his study of religious subjects, may have led them to over-estimate the excellence of these discourses, and their value as an aid to truth-seekers; but, besides all personal feelings of this kind, they have a strong conviction that their publication will be useful in placing before mankind the fundamental principles of our holy religion in all their divine beauty and adaptation to human needs, freed from the encumbrances with which "orthodoxy" has too often weighted them.

We see many indications of an undercurrent of thought, even amongst our so-called orthodox preachers, which is widely inconsistent with the ordinary pulpit teaching of the present day. One qualified to speak on such a subject lately said: "The clergy are at present divisible into three sections—an immense body who are ignorant and speak out, a small proportion who know and are

silent, and a minute minority who know and speak according to their knowledge." To the last division Mr. Edger belongs, and perhaps these sermons may convince some readers that a man may retain his faith in God and Christianity, and yet deal honestly with the facts of nature and the deductions of reason, strong in the consciousness that religion does not need to be bolstered up either by the propagation of falsehood or the suppression of truth.

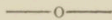
In the selection unity and continuity have been aimed at, but this may not have been attained so perfectly as if the number to choose from had been greater.

To Mr. Edger's friends in England the volume will be welcome, reminding them of a voice which often made them stronger to do or suffer; in this form "the sunlight in his soul" may shed its rays across the ocean, to cheer some whose path still lies through the dark valleys or up the rugged hills of life.

The book is offered to the world in the interest of a liberal and rational Christianity, and leaving it to the testing of time—the fire which tries every man's work; we do so in the belief that when the wood and stubble have been destroyed much will remain that is imperishable.

*Dean, Kimbolton,
Dec. 8th, 1869.*

SERMON I.



MAN IN THE GARDEN OF EDEN.

“And the Lord God took the man, and put him into the garden of Eden to dress it and to keep it. And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.”—GEN. ii. 15—17.

FIFTEEN years ago I preached on this subject, and gave substantially the interpretation that I am now about to offer. During these fifteen years I have read and heard various expositions on the subject, but have seen no reason to modify the opinions I then held. The only effect of mature reflection and experience among men has been to give me a deeper and perhaps broader conception of the great spiritual principles set forth in this narrative, and to enable me to see more clearly their universal bearing.

Most thoroughly am I impressed with the truth asserted by the great Apostle:—“All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in

righteousness." There are some who wonder what we can learn from these ancient records, and some would say they are no part of the inspired book. I enter into no question of the canon of scripture, further than to express my conviction that the earlier chapters of Genesis form a very sublime and important part of it.

But in studying this and many portions of the Bible, it is most essential to know what we expect to find in the Bible. Do we expect to find science, or philosophy, or history? I do not. The facts of science will not be contradicted when we properly understand the Bible, but it nowhere professes to teach us science. The principles of philosophy will be found in perfect harmony with the Scriptures, when both are seen aright; but the inspired writers never undertake to advance, defend, or explain one single philosophic principle. Even history is but secondary, and used only as the earthly basis on which to raise the heavenly superstructure.

The Bible has one aim, pursued consistently throughout,—to unfold the great spiritual principles of our nature, our history, and our destiny. It is the manifestation of the invisible world in all respects that is of importance to us.

Hence two principles of vast magnitude:—First, That every part of the Word is intended to teach us something spiritual. Its spiritual teaching is its first and primary meaning. This meaning should not be

called secondary, or figurative, or allegorical. It is its original and one chief meaning. History is used only for the sake of illustration. Thus the men, Saul, Solomon, and David, are of little consequence to us, or what they did and said. But the exhibition of the spiritual world of thought, feeling, and religion through these men is of immense value. So, again, it is not of the least importance whether or not such a man as Job ever really lived. But the unveiling of the human heart in its converse with the infinite, in this wonderful book, the earnest wrestling of a strong and manly faith crushed beneath gigantic woes, against the sanctimonious cant of hypocritical piety, self-righteous conceit, and superstitious favouritism, terminating at last in its splendid vindication by God, makes the book of Job not only an inimitable product of inspired genius, but one of the most precious portions of the older Word of God.

The second principle is,—That inspiration secures infallibility in this spiritual teaching. That is the element of the Bible which makes it the Word of God, and into which not the smallest error or imperfection can creep. We can afford to allow that mistakes have crept into the history, that facts of science are not precisely stated, that philosophic principles seem to be set at nought. Supposing it is so—I do not say that it is, I do not even care to know whether it is,—what then? Is the Word of God less infallible? Not in the least. Suppose the

printer had spelt many words wrongly, and the binder had bound the book badly, would it be less inspired? No more is it less inspired or infallible through any imperfections of history, which are but the outward material cover, containing within it the Word of God, which is God's revelation of the unseen world.

Now, thus regarding the Word of God, how clear and simple does our path become in approaching a passage like this. We have to inquire what is its bearing upon our spiritual nature; and in that high and holy inquiry, how many needless and vexatious questions may be set aside! We avoid them by taking ground altogether above them, and where they become unimportant. Thus, as I said about Job, so of this,—Of what consequence is it to us, whether this is literal history or only allegory? I do not feel the least interest in the question, for, in either case, the divine teaching, which is the Word of God, and which is precious to us, remains precisely the same. Or, again, of what importance is it whether Adam and Eve are individual names of one man and one woman, or generic names indicating an entire family, a tribe, or a race? To me it is wholly immaterial; nor shall I attempt to discuss whether every word here used may or may not have some spiritual meaning. That, too, is unimportant. I offer you nothing fanciful or beyond the reach of any common reader. I believe the Bible was meant for simple, but devout, earnest, and thoughtful minds, and needs no interpreter

beyond the aid every man may have from God. If, therefore, a really earnest and simple student should feel that this interpretation is such as he could never get from a study of this narrative, then that would be a valid objection against it. But I do not anticipate such a conclusion.

We are to find in these records, then, not merely the history of our first parents, but, through that history, an unfolding of the deep and hidden things of our own nature—yours and mine—an exposition of the influences and principles that are at work in our own lives. We shall see ourselves in the narrative. When Paul says that “in Adam all die,” one truth taught us (I do not say the only one) is, that in Adam’s sin we can see the method of every man’s sin, and in Adam’s death the process of death through the race. This is the universal and perpetual value of the record.

To the thoughtless reader it may seem like a record of merely external events, and it may well perplex him. The thoughtful reader will discern more deeply. What man that has ever reflected on life does not know that the outward is only an image of the inward? Of what consequence are the actions of a man, except as they contain and flow from the internal fountain of life? And so, too, the very world around us is but the reflection of ourselves. What is the sunlight without a glad heart? or clouds and night without gloom of soul? The deepest thinkers

and the most devout men of all ages have ever felt that even the material world is what our hearts make it. Thus every man's own experience of life furnishes him with the key to unlock the spiritual treasures of these early records.

Here we have, symbolised in outward objects, great spiritual truths; and we become impressed with one of the most divine facts of our human existence,—that God will always have man's external world to correspond with and reflect his inmost thought and nature, so that man ever finds himself in a world suited to his real character. Were it not so, our life would be full of falsehoods. This we shall see more plainly.

We have, then, in the record two things:—

- I. Man and life as God designed them.
- II. Man and life as transgression has transformed them from the original design.

I.—In Adam in the garden of Eden, we behold man and life according to the beneficent design of God.

We have here three things indicated.

(1.) That man is made in the image of God, though formed from the dust of the earth.

By the latter fact he is bound up with material things, in the midst of which his life lies—for a time, at least. But by the divinity of their origin, material things are neither impure nor obstructive to spiritual life, until sin, involving weakness, misery, and death, has made them so. Material things are of

course transient, and not intended for a permanent home ; man being meant, as we shall see, for an immortal existence, into which he may enter when material things have fulfilled their purpose in his training.

By the former fact—his being in the image of God—man possesses, in a finite degree, those spiritual elements which, in God, are infinite. What is true to God is true to man. Good and evil, right and wrong, are the same in heaven and on earth ; and the blessedness of the infinite descends into the bosom of the finite creature. Man can neither be said to be holy nor perfect ; for holiness, which is essential to perfection in a responsible and dependent creature, depends on his own actions, and cannot be the original quality of his nature. Through an obedience springing from love, he may become holy and perfect ; through transgression he forfeits both and brings disorder into his entire nature. This alternative—these two facts—are placed before him in the two symbolic trees of the garden. The tree of life, to which he has free access, as long as he stands in obedient love, but which, in itself, cannot give life, is the symbol of his immortality and union with God. The tree of the knowledge of good and evil—which, in itself, could not poison his nature—is the striking symbol of the result of transgression in his own soul. It is so called because man can know evil only in its bitter experience, and thereby only can he know the

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awful and immeasurable distance of good from evil. I say that these are two symbols, precisely as in the Christian Church baptism is the sign of the new regenerate life, and excommunication the sign of apostacy.

(2.) With one single prohibitory warning, man is at home everywhere in the garden of Eden, and free to use and enjoy it all. Those who can see nothing but the external representation may amuse themselves in endless speculations over this garden; but they are quite valueless to the devout reader, who, looking for a deeper truth, sees exceeding beauty in the representation. How often has a rich and well-ordered garden been to us the emblem of a pure and holy life on earth! How often has this same figure been applied both to the community of the Church and to the kingdom of God in a man's own soul! So it is meant here. Everything around a man is beautiful when heavenly beauty dwells in his own soul. And with what assiduous and daily care must that internal beauty be both guarded and nourished! How poor and wretched seems all, both within and without, when once sin has marred the heart's deep peace!

While obedient, man has free access to all, the whole garden of life is hallowed. Till sin invades the heart, there is nothing impure or unclean in life; there are no forbidden pleasures, no dangerous paths. We wrongly call things corrupt, evil, dangerous. They

are not so : the corruption, the evil, the danger is in us alone. It is true that life seems full of peril ; but the peril is not in life, it is in us. No path can lead astray the man whose heart has not already gone wrong. Nothing can corrupt the man whose soul is pure, nor anything betray him who has innocence without guile. Of all he may eat, at all he may labour, and in the midst of all is the tree of life. Without sin of heart, every possible path would lead only to God and immortality. Oh brethren, if we did but see this—one of the grandest truths of this book—how differently we should think of God and of ourselves ! Towards God, how simple, child-like and confiding would be our love ! Towards sin in us—the root of every imaginable evil—how implacable would be our hatred !

(3.) It is indicated that in the garden man has the holiest fellowship with God. His voice is heard amidst the trees of the garden in the cool of the evening. What a beautiful image of a good man's eventide, and of his simple religion ! Not far away, in the inaccessible heights of heaven, has he to look for God. No putting away of the common objects of life, as though God did disdain to come amongst them ; no consecrated spot for sanctimonious worship. These are the superstitions of a degenerate age. Here all is pure and simple. The quiet evening of an honest day's labour for a Sabbath. The common objects of life and the world for a temple. The

serenity of the sky overhead, the gentle breezes of earth, the murmurs of the four rivers, trees, herbs and flowers in calm repose,—in all these he finds his Father, and they all help to fill up the harmony of his evening hymn. O, my brethren, when will the day of that sweet and innocent religion come back, to give us again a hallowed life instead of a consecrated sanctuary, a home with God everywhere instead of ‘a waste howling wilderness’? Shall it never return? Yes, it shall, when we have allowed the second Adam, Christ Jesus the sacrifice, to put quite away the deadly work of the first Adam.

II.—In the second part of the picture we see the entrance of transgression and its work. And here, I repeat, we are studying the history of sin in each one of us. We all sin after the similitude of Adam’s transgression. He is to us, in this sense, the representative of our race. Search your own hearts, and here see the image of your life.

(1.) We have man tempted into transgression. Sin enters not by action, but by thought and feeling, and that through temptation. It is quite immaterial to us what we understand by the ‘serpent’ here spoken of. Whether it is merely a figure of the Devil, or of the principle of evil; or whether we understand that a literal serpent could make suggestions to the woman: these are profitless speculations, for and against which much may doubtless be said.

What is of importance for us to see is, that sin

begins in thought,—and that its first conception was not in man's own soul. Not for the love of wrong itself, not by the deliberate conception of wickedness, did man become an alien from his God. Had it been so, there might have been little or no hope of his redemption. He appears here as the betrayed—the tempted, and as such is treated mercifully, and the way is kept open for his escape from the evils which have invaded his life and nature. He is never suffered to be a lost man until he has made evil his last deliberate choice. He lends his heart to the seductions of evil thought, and only as he does that is transgression possible,—but then it is irresistible.

And here one objection raised against this narrative falls completely away. It is said,—How could God place in man's way a temptation, knowing the fearful consequences that would ensue? God did no such thing, for he tempts no man. Sin lay in the thought, and to that there was at least no temptation from God. With a false thought admitted into the heart—even had there been no forbidden tree—can we suppose that the hidden evil would have found no other vent? Your own life teaches you differently. You see corruption cherished in the soul of that child; what avails it that you take temptation out of the way? Does that remove the inward evil? Nay, are you not sure that, sooner or later, it will and must find its opportunity,—and even that the longer it is doing that, the more deeply

it poisons the inward nature? For of all things most dreadful to a man is the long cherishing, in the inmost sanctuary of his nature, an evil purpose—long waiting for its execution. The man who, in the hour of passion, stains his hands with human blood, is a very different man, with much lighter guilt, from the man who has harboured the thought of murder for years, letting its infernal fire smoulder and burn down into every part of his spiritual nature, while he long and relentlessly pursues the victim of his hatred. These are the sins that most truly damn a man. It is even better that the hidden thought of evil should come out early, and find its correction through the transgression. Ah! how many miseries would the man be spared, if the boy put all his evil thoughts into deeds and found their proper chastisement. You that are young, of all things beware of a cherished thought of evil. Every day it abides in your heart it strikes its root more deeply, and infuses its poison more effectually. Now what God did was to place before the sinning heart the outward image of its sin, that man might know what was going on in his soul, and not perish unconsciously. And this, my brethren, was pure mercy. "Count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations,"—for it is better that the evil become visible than that it invisibly destroy the very structure of your being.

It is, of course, through the bodily inclination that

the inward sin finds vent. I have often said that those inclinations are not wrong in themselves, kept in due subjection. They become wrong and base when they gain the mastery. Now, so long as the soul is the temple of God—the dwelling of light and love in purity—the man is invincible. Not a thousand temptations, a thousand times more flattering than this of Eden, can have the smallest power over him. To the pure and guileless heart, sin can put on no forms that will either cheat or charm. The man stands like the great Master, confronting the mightiest influences and the most accomplished flatteries of wickedness, to baffle all with one simple utterance of its pure love and trust.

You have some of you realised such moments in life, when, with the pure light and love of God in your soul, you could unravel all the complications of deception, could see the dark spirit through all the false garments of angelic light, could answer all the threats and flatteries of evil with a simple smile, and you have seen the foul spirit shrink abashed from your calm and holy gaze. This is the sublime moment of a Christian's life. But what can you do when the heart is already vanquished, and at every appeal from without, an answer from within proposes, first a parley, then a compromise? Defeat and disaster are inevitable: so was it in Eden; so is it all through human life. Some men tell you we are the creatures of circumstance. I do not deny

the fact—men are so; but it is their shame. The philosophy of necessity is the philosophy of human baseness. What are the circumstances to the man whose soul abides in the strength of God? They are his obedient servants. But when man has banished that divine energy and trampled down, with unbelief and inward thought of evil, the power of truth, shattering the very bulwarks of his soul, what can he do? The impetuous torrents that rage around can easily pour in and desolate his whole nature, making him indeed the very slave of every demon that chooses to trample him in the dust. And what can he do? Nothing, but fall into the hands of the great restorer of our ruined nature.

(2.) We have the effect of sin upon ourselves. The first effect is a kind of consternation—a consciousness of disorder in all things. Doubtless, what the first transgressors said to God, they had been revolving in their own minds:—"The woman thou gavest me" tempted me, "the serpent" tempted me. Thus the blessings have begun to look like curses, and things right in themselves seem wrong. As it is with the man who has rashly ventured upon the edge of the precipice, as it gives way and the ground slips from beneath his feet, in the first consternation of his fall, all things around him seem disordered. Because he is falling, things most stable seem to be thrown into confusion.

To the unstable heart nothing seems trustworthy.

This is the first effect of sin. To the sinner all things seem to be thrown into confusion. And we most willingly throw the blame of our impending ruin upon this general disorder. Hence all our distrust, our scepticism, and our infidelity. Nothing looks true to the false heart. We can no longer trust our best friends, our most intimate relatives, because we can no longer trust ourselves. We have lost our way, and, in our confusion, the paradise has become a wilderness; the fairest objects cease to charm, and every thing of beauty summons up some image of dread. A ruined man sees all things in ruin. This is the beginning, in each one of our hearts, of that dreary confusion in which we see all human life.

Then comes the feeling of shame and disgrace. We can no longer bear the open light, for all sin loves darkness. It is said that they covered their bodily nakedness, and began that course of gaudy show which rears the most ridiculous pride upon our most disgraceful humiliation. For never let it be forgotten, that all that love of dress which annually wastes millions of pounds and fritters away millions of intellects, is nothing but an ostentatious veil thrown over the shameful deformity into which we have changed divinest beauty. Yet do not think that it was chiefly the bodily nakedness that could not be endured. Far more deeply does shame go into the soul of the sinner. Man could no longer bear an unveiled heart; and while throwing a rude

garment round his limbs, it was really the spirit he sought to hide. So has it been ever since. Only as man becomes truly regenerate can he bear to stand with spirit unveiled before either the creature or the Creator. What are all our conventionalities, our social customs, and half our forms of speech—what all our religious ceremonies, our formalities in worship, and our external professions—but so many rude garments with which we seek to conceal and adorn the soul that trembles at its own naked deformity? Worship can never become simpler till men are purer; then we shall as much despise the gorgeous ceremony as the gaudy dress.

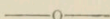
An inevitable consequence of all this is, that God himself now seems at a distance, because his presence is no longer welcome. From the common walks of the garden the heart would banish him, and seek in the cool shade a shelter from God, instead of a temple for God. Henceforth, God is confined to the distant heaven, the bush on fire, the mountain that may not be touched, or the inaccessible sanctuary. And man, finding the earth a solitude, sinks into the gloom of his own unbelief, or gives himself up to the passions that soon complete his ruin,—“In the day thou eatest thereof, thou shalt surely die.” What was not dead to man now? Truth has lost its stability—the best blessing of God has been turned into a curse. God himself, the very fountain of life, is distrusted and too terrible to approach,

while the soul dreads its own naked simplicity, and can only bear the consciousness of self, when self is wrapt up in coarse hypocrisy and falsehood. Yes, that was indeed a death to die, and we have felt its iron coldness and its bitter misery in our own souls. The fruit, my brethren, not of plucking an apple, but of severing the soul from truth and God.

One other feature of the narrative absolutely requires a brief notice,—the expulsion from access to the tree of life, and from the garden itself. I have said that the tree is the symbol of immortality to the obedient child, and the garden the symbol of peace to a heart dwelling in truth and confiding love. What now can these be to man thus fallen? A symbol of immortality to a man who carries death in his soul?—it would be a perpetual delusion. A symbol of peace and bliss to a man who carries the bitterest grief in his heart?—it could but mock the wretchedness that goes deep down into that soul of death. He must take his way into a world in harmony with his nature—a world of thorns and briars, of hard and barren rocks, of tempest and of earthquake,—because all these have become the elements of his fallen and sorrowful spirit. And this, too, is the decree of tender love. Yes, brethren, for the sinner, the tree of life is changed into the Cross. For everything I have said leads us to one conclusion: that our only hope now is in the hands of Him who can thoroughly regenerate our inward spiritual nature. Only when.

in deep repentant sorrow, we have learned the lesson of the Cross, can we return to the tree of life, to dwell for ever under its peaceful shadow, and eat for ever of its celestial fruit. Our way now lies through death into newness of life—through Him who lived and died that the dead may live.

SERMON II.



CAIN AND ABEL: THE FIRST WORSHIP AND THE FIRST MURDER.

“And in process of time it came to pass, that Cain brought of the fruit of the ground an offering unto the Lord. And Abel, he also brought of the firstlings of his flock and of the fat thereof. And the Lord had respect unto Abel and to his offering: but unto Cain and to his offering he had not respect. And Cain was very wroth, and his countenance fell.

“And the Lord said unto Cain, Why art thou wroth? and why is thy countenance fallen? If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted? and if thou doest not well, sin lieth at the door. * * *

“And Cain talked with Abel his brother; and it came to pass, when they were in the field, that Cain rose up against Abel his brother, and slew him.”—GEN. iv. 3—8.

EDEN is barred against man because the inward principles of his erring heart no longer find its hallowed peace congenial. It may truly be said that he has excluded himself; and the flaming sword of the cherubim is—like all else in this narrative—an outward symbol of the insuperable barriers that lie

between a sin-disordered heart and any real peace. If this be literal narrative, the outward object has perished thousands of years back ; but the lesson remains indelible—a most precious truth—that the only way into paradise is by a renewed nature. All the laws of the universe forbid any other. Man finds himself in a world where everything responds to the principles of his own heart. The world is not without its loveliness, its hopefulness, and its fruitfulness. The sun will rise in splendour and set in calm beauty, day will succeed the darkest night, the storm subside into lovely peace, and returning spring recal warmth and fruitfulness, because hope is not dead in man's heart ; everything around will remind him that there may possibly be a return of his lost blessedness.

But, on the other hand, every night will bring its portentous gloom, the cold and barrenness of winter will return, all the loveliest flowers will fade, desolating tempests will come like the avenging messengers of wronged love, the desert, in its sterility, will mock at his labours, and thorns, briars, and weeds promise but a poor requital of them,—all things pointing to the inward gloom, passion, and barrenness of his soul. Do not understand me to say that any one of these things is evil in itself ; far from it. In the infinite wisdom of God, every pricking thorn, every sharp pain, every poisonous weed, and every destructive storm is fulfilling its mission ; and it is a mission of love to man. But man, in his now wrong state,

cannot feel these things to be good. They are good, but wrapt up in the appearance of evil, which strikes man's senses, and compels him to discover the good by a deeper reflection, both upon nature itself and his own soul, of which nature is but the reflection. He can discover them all to be good; but only when he has learned the deeper truths of spiritual renovation. We are not concerned with this passage as a mere piece of ancient history, but only as unfolding universal facts and principles of human life and nature, which may be seen operative in all ages. We have here two great elements of human life—the Religious and the Social, unfolded to us in their origin, and the influences that are at work in them displayed.

We shall now consider:—

I.—The institution or first observance of outward formal religion.

II.—The murderous passions developed beside it.

I. This is the beginning, not, of course, of religion, but of outward formal worship.

(1). In innocence all life was worship, and everything religious. God was in everything, and always present. There was no temple in Eden, because, God never being felt to be distant, man needed nothing mediate for worship. It will yet be so again. But when, on transgression, man seemed severed from God, he then needed some kind of external mediation, and began to concentrate his

religion in special acts of worship, and to look upon special things, places, and times, as alone consecrated. Thus, the worship of both Cain and Abel, in its special form, arose out of their distance from God, and essentially indicated an evil principle in the heart. And it is a great admission that we have yet to learn candidly to make—that, however important it may be for us to have a sabbath, a temple, and a form of worship, it is indisputable that the more we feel their importance, the more manifestly are we distant from God, and our hearts in error. Who would need a sabbath if he felt every moment to be holy? Who would need a temple if he saw God filling everything? Who would need a form of worship if he loved and worshipped in every thought and action? This is the ground taken by the New Testament. None of these are prohibited, but to the true Christian is acceded the holy privilege of rising superior to them all.

Now, it is when we understand this principle, that the whole question of Ritualism, so much agitated, is seen in all its bearings. At present, with ninety-nine out of a hundred persons, it is so entirely a party question, that its real significance is lost sight of. The hot anti-Ritualist little thinks that he is himself involved in the very thing he denounces. Yet so it is; for, my brethren, Ritualism has nothing whatever to do with candles upon the altar, vestments upon the priest, or music in the choir.

What harm can these particular things do any one? The question goes much deeper. It rather touches the altar itself, the priest, and the cathedral or chapel. The man who cries out that an organ is an ungodly thing in a chapel, or that the Scotch psalms are essential to worship, or that we cannot worship in silence on the unconsecrated hill side, is as truly a Ritualist as the man who clamours for wax tapers and lawn sleeves.

There are two false principles in Ritualism, and they are the false principles of all idolatry. The first is the regarding any external form as essentially connected with religion. I say that it is not a question between Romanism and Anglicanism, any more than it was between Mount Zion and Mount Gerizim. It lies between any external form, and spiritual feeling. It is just the same principle that makes one man in Rome bow to the image of the Virgin, another in London or Auckland to baptismal immersion, and a third in India to Juggernaut,—namely, the principle that we need any particular form to approach God. The true worshipper worships God in spirit and in truth, his inmost soul is a divine temple; and of forms he can appropriate all that help him to a deeper and more religious life: I do not mean to the awakening of sensuous emotions—I mean to an intenser realisation of the divine character and presence, and a more complete subjugation of all mere feeling to the great

principles of religious and eternal truth. The second error in Ritualism is the confining religion to any special part of life. The truly religious man is no more religious in his worship than he is in everything else. Every man who banishes religion from his common life is in heart a Ritualist, or, what is the same thing, an idolater. Nor can there be any end to Ritualism but by making all things holy. Let there be nothing common or unclean, make everything sacred, and then, by converting all life into worship and the whole universe into a temple, you will have rendered it for ever impossible that man should shape to himself anything peculiarly sacred out of matter.

(2.) Now on this principle—the principle of all true religion—that all outward form is quite immaterial, except as it is found conducive to inward truth, we can see that, so far as the outward worship of Cain and Abel was concerned, they were equally good. Each was just that which was most natural to the occupation of the offerer. Each brought the first-fruits of his own labour, which was the most simple and proper thing to do. Not a word is said in the Bible indicating that God was displeased with the kind of offering that Cain brought. Indeed, it is quite incredible that God should have disapproved of so natural an offering, had it been properly made.

It is the very principle we desire to see carried out, and which Christianity affirms, that you should

find the means of worship in your own proper calling. Moreover, if we needed any farther evidence of this position, we could find it abundantly in the Jewish law, which as much sanctioned the offering of the first-fruits of the earth as the offering of animals. To find the difference between the two men in the mere outward offering, is to fall back on the very worst errors of Ritualism and Romanism, and to sanction the greatest evils that have afflicted the Church. It is the most melancholy exhibition of human folly when men dispute and contend which and whose form of worship is the right or the best. That is the best to you which brings most help to your inmost thoughts and feelings. Do you think that God will scrutinise your mere garments—their colour or their shape—when your soul truly, earnestly, and lovingly comes before him to seek his mercy and his aid? No, indeed, brethren, no more than he will the colour of your skin. Can you worship best in silence? then in silence listen to the innumerable voices that are ready to speak to you out of the invisible world. Can you worship best with many objects to impress the senses? then worship with such objects around you, and feel how the spiritual can hallow the material. It is supposed by some that Abel in his sacrifice had regard to Christ's suffering on the Cross. The supposition is most unfounded and unreasonable; four thousand years before Christ came, men had no conception what his

coming would truly be; and even when he had come, the most devout, and those who had entered most into the spirit and meaning of his mission, found it hard to understand that his work was to be consummated by the sacrifice of the Cross. Or again, if the difference was external, we must suppose either that Cain erred through ignorance or intentionally. Now can you suppose it likely, either that God condemned Cain for his worship in consequence of an unintentional error, or that Cain would intentionally frustrate the very end he had in view? To suppose the latter is to attribute to Cain a measure of stupidity quite incredible; to suppose the former is to rob us all of the very faintest hope that our worship can ever be acceptable to God. For how can we hope ever to escape from every possible error of ignorance in our worship?

(3.) I say that the entire difference lay in the spirit and intention of the two worshippers. The only light Scripture casts on it is,—that Abel offered in faith, which indicates the openness of the heart to receive divine influence, and that Cain had no such faith. Why, then, did he offer at all? We are not told, and we do not know. This only do we know,—that it is possible for a man to be most correct in his formal worship and yet most false in heart. But for this incident it is possible that Cain might have gone on with his worship till his dying day, and prided himself upon the excellence of his first-fruits.

This the event was intended to arrest; and its record was designed to teach us, at the very outset, how full of positive evil is formal worship when dissevered from a true heart. But men are slow to learn; and though this narrative has stood here for so many ages, men have gone on in the way of Cain, thinking it possible to do a good thing in their worship while the heart is devoid of true principle. How few worshippers would be left if we retained only those who worship from a true and pure heart, and whose worship draws them nearer to God! And what a change would come over all our religion if men admitted the principle I am urging,—that the importance we attach to forms is an indication of our distance from God. He most values the form whose heart is most without God.

II.—We have to study the murderous passions developed in connection with formal worship.

(1.) It might appear strange to the thoughtless that a man could pass so readily from worship to murder. It is, however, a melancholy fact with which the reader of history is more familiar than with any other. It is explained by what I have said. The distance from true religion to murder is immense, and there are no easy steps by which any man could pass from one to the other. But if, as I have said, the formality of our worship is the evidence of our distance from God, then may the most elaborate and precisely punctilious, the most gorgeous and

solemnly imposing worship, lie very near to the worst passions of the human heart. And that it is so, the history of all religions is the most painful witness. The cruelties of the heathen devotee are only surpassed by the cruelties of the professedly Christian persecutor. The horrors concealed under the most imposing solemnities that have borne the name of Christian, are, when we first read them, incredible, and make us feel the truth of the saying that devils can walk as angels of light. Yet there is no difficulty in understanding this; for the religious feeling—which does not necessarily contain one spark of Christianity—is allied to the very strongest passions of the human heart. It appeals most mightily to our selfishness, both through hope and through fear; all the irresistible force of a heated imagination fires it with infernal inspiration—it is set on fire of hell, the greatness of the infinite unknown raises it to a pitch never attained by anything else in human nature.

We are not to suppose that Cain had any other reason for hating Abel, nor for wishing him out of the way; nor, on the other hand, was it the first prompting of an envious heart. It grew day by day, for the simple reason that formal worship, without a true heart, is associated with and stimulates the deepest passions of the soul, which, on the first provocation, are ready to perpetrate the most atrocious deeds. The occasion soon arose, and gave the world

a lesson, which, had we been disposed to learn, would have taught us ages back that there is nothing can bring so much woe upon our race as the most splendid religious ceremonies without a well principled heart.

(2.) Cain may most properly be regarded as the first of religious persecutors. Outwardly the resemblance may not strike the reader, but in reality the very principles that made Cain a murderer are the principles cherished by every persecutor, although it may be under many disguises. The essential features are, that formal worship was associated with bad passions, and that religious differences fomented these passions till they became hatred, revenge, and murder. It may, I know, be pretended that persecutors have often desired to promote the truth, whereas Cain only gratified personal animosity. But this position is not true. Men never persecute on behalf of the truth. Did any one ever really seek to make a man more truthful or more Christ-like by persecuting him? Or was it ever known that any man, feeling himself more truthful or more Christ-like than another, did on that account persecute this other? Never! Men are not so mad as to think persecution will open a man's heart to the truth, and they are not quite so inconsistent as to persecute because they know that they themselves love the truth. No; it is not often that truth has anything at all to do with persecution; and when it has, the fact is that

the persecutor has just so much doubt about his own convictions that he is afraid to trust them to the defence of their own evidence. With very rare exceptions, all persecution arises out of creeds and forms, because they do not imply any real religion at all: they may be but the shelter for the worst passions of the heart. No man ever yet persecuted in the name of pure spiritual religion, nor will such a thing ever occur. The entire difference between the fierce Saul of Tarsus and the gentle Paul of Antioch was simply the difference between a believer in the gorgeous Jewish temple, and a believer in the spiritual teaching of Christ.

(3.) Many, however, who will not defend persecution, will so far excuse it as to hesitate at calling Cain the father of persecutors. I have no such hesitation, I can find no such excuse. It is said that the past ages were more cruel in every respect than the present. Perhaps so; but it was this very religious persecution that made them so. The present age could be as cruel, of which we have proof enough in the late Jamaica atrocities. Moreover, it is said by an eyewitness of the Spanish *auto da fé*, that the very persons who went to see the burning of heretics as a great holiday, were often deeply moved in sympathy with a political victim of cruelty. Man is not essentially or naturally more cruel in one age than in another, till he is made so. And never is he so cruel as when the fanaticism of formal religion perverts

his judgment, steels his heart, and inflames his hatred.

Again, it is urged that all, or almost all Christians have persecuted, and that we must allow some excuse for persecution on this ground, and attribute it to ignorance, rather than badness. But I deny that any Christian ever persecuted, or that it has anything to do with ignorance. I can understand the ignorance of Saul of Tarsus, but not that of the persecutor who has the New Testament in his hands. You might as well plead ignorance for the liar, the thief, the adulterer, and the drunkard. For these are not more plainly rebuked in the New Testament than the foul deeds of the persecutor. You might as well ask me to call that highwayman a Christian who plunders and murders the rich because he thinks them too proud, and gives to the poor because they are poor; as that fiend-like priest who revels in the dying agonies of his victim, because he brings a different offering from his own. Whether the habitual persecutor may find his way to heaven is not for me to decide; but should he do so, then I see no reason for excluding the worshipper of Juggernaut who casts his children under the wheels of the idol's car. But that they are not Christians is as indisputable as any of the teachings of Christ. It is true that a Christian man may do an unchristian thing, but not habitually, nor is he Christian in doing it.

My brethren, we forget what injury we are doing

to the truth when we call those men Christians who have more of the spirit of Satan than of Christ. If we are willing to call those men Christians who have perpetrated the most horrible cruelties, have fomented the most bloody wars, and forged the most oppressive chains of bondage, then we can hardly be surprised if the world should retort upon us as it has done: "If this be Christianity, we are better without it!" For it is not too much to affirm that religious persecution has, for the last thousand years, caused more misery in the world than all other causes combined. Our answer is clear and simple. This is not religion; none of it has any connection whatever with Christianity. It is all the work of men like Cain, who are angry and cruel because a purer and nobler worship than their own has found place amongst men.

Of the milder forms of persecution, it is enough to say that they are precisely the same in principle, and therefore as essentially unchristian.

Christianity is beautifully defined as the power of love supreme. It begins in a consciousness of the love of God; it terminates in love to every one of God's creatures. He who departs from this principle, so far ceases to be a Christian. Its sister principle is supreme regard to another's conscience—the most precious thing to him and to me, and therefore inviolable where love rules.

We may sum up the whole teaching of this narrative in the following principles:—

1. That all real religion consists in true and holy principles of the heart, and has no necessary connection with any form of worship.

2. That the mere form of worship may be connected with the worst passions of the heart, and then becomes a great evil instead of a good.

3. That all religious differences arise out of the mere form, and are overcome by a loving devotion to truth.

SERMON III.

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THE PURPOSE OF LIFE.

“Your life is hid with Christ in God.”—COL. iii. 3.

THAT we should have a purpose in life is essential to our living properly. Everything in existence has its purpose, and may be said to live or exist truly only so far as it fulfils that purpose. Man not only exists for a purpose, as all things else, but is expected himself to know and appreciate that purpose; for man is an intelligent being, and a free agent, and must therefore attain the object of life intelligently and with freedom, or else he would not be a man, but a thing. Man can never become anything that a man should be but in freedom. To man alone, of all the creatures we are acquainted with, it is given to know the reason of his life, and to enter into it, if he is a wise man, with unspeakable blessedness.

When a man feels that he has found an object in life, his life will be well lived or indifferently lived, according as that object is elevated and good, or low

and mean. Every man feels this, everywhere and always, in life. When I am pursuing a mean object, it makes me feel meanly; when a high and holy object, it elevates all my thoughts and sentiments; when a worldly object, I become worldly; and when a spiritual object, I become spiritual. Nothing can interfere with this sacred law of our nature. Thus, while all other things grow and are perfected by powers of which they are not conscious, man alone, being free and intelligent, may be said to be, in a very large sense, the artificer of his own being and destiny. Not indeed alone and without God, but under and in co-operation with God. This is at once the responsibility and the grandeur of life; for what is so grand as with freedom and intelligence, and with the aid of God, to work out a glorious destiny; or what is so shameful as voluntarily to sink into ignoble baseness?

I have said we can enter into and appreciate the purpose of life, which means, as implied above, that we can, to an extent, choose the object for which we will live. If it were not so, it would be useless to speak about it; neither could we have freedom. Yet of course our choice has its limits, though we are scarcely sensible of them; for anything we can think we can at least try to pursue, and therefore make our end in life. But practically we are limited by the powers of our nature, although we may be unable to say precisely where that limit is. Innumerable are

the objects we may choose that are low and mean ; as we rise higher our choice becomes more limited. They become fewer and nobler, more grand and comprehensive, as we approach nearer to God. For God is the fountain of all that is really great ; and as he is the centre of unity, so his purpose in man and human life is but one. To know that and to choose that as *our* purpose in life is, of course, the highest wisdom and the purest bliss.

It is this that we want to see, that we may know that we are working to that same end which God has purposed for us. Then our intelligence, our freedom, and our energy will be most complete ; and then we shall know that we cannot fail, because no man can fail who is working in harmony with the infinite Will.

I.—I must urge a thought I have on other occasions put before you, for it lies at the foundation of this matter. *Man himself* is obviously the greatest end and purpose of human life, for man is the noblest creature we are acquainted with. If God *could* be the object of human life, of course he would, as being infinitely greater than man. But he cannot, since he is complete and perfect in himself, and all that man is and can do can neither enrich nor impoverish God. God can do without man, though man cannot do without God. Next to God, man is the noblest being. He is in the image of God ; he is placed above all created things ; his intellect and character

constitute the power that moulds and shapes all the objects in life. All things exist for him and contribute to his life; he can therefore find no object equal to himself, none that can supply a purpose in life that would not be degrading to him.

Moreover, although man can operate upon material things, it is only to a very limited extent; they are controlled by laws over which he has little or no power—laws that are designed to keep material things mainly in the hands of God. So that if man would find the object of life in material things, he can go a very little way, and is soon made to feel that in that direction he has but very little freedom; and whatever purpose he forms of such a character is extremely likely to be frustrated by influences and laws beyond his control. Only in his own nature is he perfectly free to choose and to execute; and even in material things the liberty he does enjoy is a liberty to use them for purposes that centre in himself. He has no liberty to use them otherwise, so as to make them anything different from what they are. When man has done using them as tributary to his own development, whatever he has seemed to make of them, they again return to their former and natural condition. Thus flowers and fruits, though modified by man's cultivation, return to their wild state when his care is withdrawn.

Does not all this show beyond the power of doubting it, that the great purpose of life must be found in

man himself, and not in anything in creation outside the man ?

And yet sometimes *appearances* are against this view, too often leading man to disregard it. Nature around us seems more permanent. The individual man, and even the generation of men passes away ; we almost lose sight of them ; while the things on which they have acted, the signs and products of their labour, remain with us. Hence men are apt to feel, —must not these things that remain age after age be greater than the men who have used them and have passed away and now are not ?—must it not be better to find the purpose of life in these things that will endure long after we are gone, rather than in the human beings who at most will continue here but seventy or eighty years ?

The delusion is perhaps plausible, and lends its sanction to the sensual tendencies of men, who seem to think it a much better thing to heap up wealth and leave behind them monuments in stone, brass, or iron, than to cultivate their inward and divine nature, leaving nothing to speak for them but sacredly cultivated characters, and their impress on the spirits of men.

But plausible as is the delusion, it vanishes on calmer reflection. Supposing, for instance, I go into a schoolroom where many scores or hundreds have been carefully taught, and I look upon the various works accomplished in the discipline and develop-

ment of these many human beings, all of whom have gone out into the world, and are now lost sight of—many of whom are dead. At first sight, the things they have done may attract much more notice than the men and women into which the scholars have grown by doing these things. Yet who that considers it well would not say at once,—What is all this you are looking at compared with the power of thought and the energy of character that were nurtured in those exercises? The hands, the brains that did these things, have they not done ten times, a hundred times more than these, and greater than these, in their way through the world?—and who knows what they may do in the immortal world, as the result of this teaching? Then how utterly mean and trivial become all those objects of the schoolroom, compared with the human beings who have gone forth from it on their unknown ways, rising to their several spheres of greatness and of goodness?

So is it with the common pursuits of life. The things we work upon are but the means of our education; the works we have produced are nothing but the memorials of the discipline we have gone through; and we, the scholars, must be infinitely greater than the things that have only served to make us what we are.

Nor would it ever occur to us that the works are more enduring than the men, but for that fatal error in our religion which makes the future world some-

thing quite distinct and separate from the present. If we would see, as the New Testament represents, that our existence or life is all one, in the present and in the future, then, feeling our immortality always present with us, we could scarcely fall into the absurd mistake of thinking that the actions or products of a man can last longer than the man himself.

We come then to the simple but beautiful truth that all things exist for the man, that the whole purpose of life centres in the man, just as the God who dwells, or is supposed to dwell, in the temple is infinitely greater than the temple itself; so the man who dwells in the world and in life is infinitely greater than either. Then only is life understood when it is seen to be the building up of such a temple; not to be admired or prized in itself, but as the shrine or vesture of the indwelling divinity of a redeemed and hallowed child of God.

II.—What, then, is it *in* the man, for the sake of which all life is given us?

There could be no need for this question if men had not learnt to identify so much with their nature that is not really man. Many things may belong to the man—perhaps for a time—that are not essentially *of* him, and in which the purpose of life cannot centre. When, for instance, men live for the increase of wealth, to surround themselves with honours, or to fill life with enjoyments or pleasures, this is not living for the man, but only for something that casually

belongs to him. The true man is his character ; those moral and spiritual elements that are immortal as his very self, that are secure amidst all the devastations of time, with all the destructive tempests that arise out of its hidden depths, that remain unchanged, even should the very temple of life, as we know it, be swept into utter ruin.

When we look closely into man we are obliged to distinguish the different elements of his nature. For it is not the intellect chiefly that makes the man ; it is character, and character is moral and spiritual. Great as is the intellect, it may be without character, —a wild, disorderly force, driving him into reckless and monstrous paths, and plunging him at last into crimes and miseries of which the ignorant know nothing. Character is true beauty, in itself and its effects. It is a power of order and harmony, making a man to be loved in himself, guiding his steps with admirable wisdom, and enriching him more and more with the imperishable qualities that make him divine.

Further, the intellect has chiefly to do with the things that are transient ; the moral and spiritual have to do with other beings, with men, and angels, and God, who are enduring in their nature. The most accomplished intellect, alone or with an evil heart, might leave us lonely and desolate, except as we converse with mere things. Character, a pure heart, a holy spiritual nature, open to us the society of all the true and good. With such a nature we can

never be alone. Out of it arises, with inevitable necessity, the heaven of blessed love and fellowship. How, then, can we doubt for a moment that in this latter part of our nature must be found that which constitutes the true man ?

Not to gain something, nor to do something, but to become something, is the purpose of our life ; and that something is ever bringing us into communion with all that is good and blissful, and therefore ever raising us nearer to God.

We can conceive no higher purpose in life, none that lies so within our reach, none that is so certain not to disappoint us, and none the end of which so richly rewards the pursuit of it. And yet how seldom does it enter into the heart of man ? What does not a man think to improve rather than himself ? Or even when a man does aim at self-improvement, what part of his nature receives so little care as his moral and spiritual character ? As though nothing were of less importance than his being in the image of God.

III.—Let us look now at some of the conclusions to which this leads.

First, to understand the purpose of life is to understand life itself. The word ' life ' is used in a variety of senses, according to the thing to which it is applied. But there is always one idea prevalent, and that is, that whatever is said to live is answering the purpose of its existence. - So that when the term

'life' is used as it is in the New Testament, in a very high Christian sense in reference to man, it is with the meaning that man is attaining the high purpose of his being.

Christian life, whether here or hereafter, does not mean existence, nor even blissful existence which we suppose to be immortal. Existence without a purpose, to a good man, would be nothing, therefore not life. Neither could the fact of happiness merely, supposing it possible under such circumstances, constitute life; for though the purpose of life centres in man himself, it by no means terminates there, but through the man reaches to all the beings with whom he is morally and spiritually brought into fellowship, even to God himself. And this is, indeed, the only real ground of blessedness; for to a moral being bliss consists in the fellowship of a pure and holy love. This is attained only in the perpetual growth of our spiritual nature. The whole universe of God's children eternally grow in goodness, or likeness to God; could we any of us cease to do so, we should be left behind in solitude, and therefore in misery.

Life, then, means the eternal perfecting of our nature in truth and goodness, the eternal putting on of the nature of God,—a glorious ascent, which, being infinite, can never terminate, but every step of which deepens within us the sense of becoming infinitely holy and infinitely blessed.

To go to heaven, or to enter into the kingdom of

God, is to become more and more regenerate—less sinful and more holy,—to discipline and strengthen and perfect every moral and spiritual element of our being; for this is the purpose of life and life itself. Men talk of going to heaven when they die, but we must go to heaven before then, if we wish to be children of God and to dwell there. Heaven is not some distant place, far away in the hidden regions of space. It is distance from sin and the devil, and everything unholy and dark—nearness to God and to all goodness. And that is as possible to us now as it ever will be. Nothing could be more foolish than to think that putting this body into the grave can make us blessed and give us heaven. It may take away some pains and evils; but that will be useless unless there is in us some deep foundation of bliss. Wherever the gospel is, the foundation of our faith,—wherever Christ is, the way to God,—wherever the power of the Holy Ghost is, the means of our eternal regeneration,—there is heaven, because there it is possible to attain the great purpose of life, truly to live; and that true life *is* heaven. “Your life is hid with Christ in God.” As he appears we become like him, for we “see him as he is,”—and there is nothing higher or beyond that.

Secondly.—How truly and beautifully is life described as immortal youth, or perpetual spring.

Sometimes men speak about life wearing them out, exhausting their energies. But it is just the opposite.

If the purpose of life were to accomplish certain works, to produce certain effects on material things, man might exhaust or weary himself in doing that. But it would be more proper to call that death than life; for the man is sacrificed to the thing. Life is the building up of the man, the calling out and strengthening all his noblest faculties and elements. So that a man does not become wearied and worn out by living; but the more he lives, the more truly a man does he become. Whatever I have been doing, if I have kept before me the end of life, I am stronger to act than I was before, and have a deeper sense of life, and a larger consciousness of energy than ever. I grow not old, except in body; and as the body, which so often has put a limit to my energy, sinks into decay, the true inward vigour of the man comes into play, and keeps up within me the sense of immortal youth.

Thirdly.—This is the true foundation of our most confident hope of the future. If true life does not bring a sense of weariness, it cannot bring the fear of death. If it only strengthens within us the vigour of youth, it must be radiant with immortality. And hence when a man has learnt truly, and in this highest sense, to live, following ever this great purpose of life, he does not doubt his immortality, because he sees no real death before him. He sees only the ceaseless development of all those energies of his spiritual nature, which in their vigour cannot

possibly suggest death, but only a life of eternal approach to God.

It is only the overpowering sense of death which makes us doubt the immortal. If I go down into the grave, a worn-out creature, weariness creeping over every part of my nature, as though the lamp of life had burnt down into the socket and had no more to do, I may well ask,—Shall I live again?—Who shall rekindle the dying flame? And the answer is difficult.

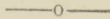
But if the light within has been burning brighter and brighter to perfection, if the consciousness of true life has become ever deeper and stronger to the end, why should the decay of the body cut short this perpetual progress or put out this light, now in its noontide brightness? And if not, how can I but be immortal?

It is not argument or reason that will convince man of his immortality; they can do no more than answer objections; but that *proves nothing*.

A man's faith in immortality grows out of his living a true life; that gives him the consciousness of an eternal purpose, imperishable hopes, and immortal vigour; and how can he who has that consciousness think that he is not immortal?

Make the purpose of life rest in perishable things, and that must overcloud your being. Let the light of eternity shine on your path here, and you need no proof of immortality. It speaks by its own presence.

SERMON IV.



WHO IS CHRIST ?

“ Whom say ye that I am ? ”—MATT. xvi. 15.

TWO questions have agitated the world for ages,—
Who is God ? and what is man ? Two great subjects have perplexed the simplest minds, and baffled the greatest,—the existence of the infinite, and the conflict of good and evil, right and wrong.

To the child, the answer to the first question,—Who is God ? is given, in apparent simplicity,—“ The Creator of heaven and earth.” This *may* perhaps be enough for the child, but the man soon discovers that the answer either conveys no distinct idea, or involves us in still deeper mystery. For what is it to create the heavens and the earth ? Who has seen the process of creation ? I see a man shape a piece of iron or of wood into a useful instrument, and the process seems simple enough. But here I see the hand that works and the material on which it works. But that is not creation—creation out of

nothing. I see no hand shaping the trees and hills ; I never see something rising out of nothing. I can watch the growth of a flower, as I can the building of a house. And I know that in the former case, as in the latter, there is some *force* in activity. But force is not God. Behind that force God is still hidden, and the mysterious question remains,—who is He ? More mysterious still when I have to reflect that millions of flowers all the world over are being formed, and that a similar force is in operation through all the worlds of boundless space. And everywhere behind this force God is. God is *my* Maker too. I eat and drink, I live and grow, and feel the energy of life. And that, too, is God. So near to me—so immeasurably distant ; and yet nowhere visible. How, then, shall I think of Him, and answer to my heart the question, Who is God ?

Or to the second question, the child's answer may suffice for the child,—“A man is a creature who thinks, and feels, and acts.” But still, am I nearer any comprehension of it ? I know that I think, but I also know that my very thoughts are perplexing, and it seems easier to understand the creature that never thinks and never errs in thinking. I am conscious of my feelings ; but in all the pleasure and the pain that come with them, there is yet fresh mystery to perplex me and to make me feel that I know as little of myself—of man—as I know of

God. Human actions I continually see, but I do *not* see the wisdom that animates them, or the good end that they serve. I do not yet know what is Man.

Of God, again, I think as infinite, perfect, all wise, all good, and all powerful. I know what I mean by these terms quite well; I may even see the existence of the things they indicate. But when I want to combine them all in one Being, and to see before my mind the infinite, perfect, all wise, all good, and Almighty God, I am met and overwhelmed with innumerable difficulties, especially when that God is the Author of all things that are.

Or of Man again,—where shall I find a Man that I can understand? Shall I take him from the gentlemen of society who, immersed in the follies of external show and ostentatious pomp, seem to forget that it is one quality of a man to think?—or from the poor, who seem to know no life but one of ill-requited drudgery?—or from the toilers whose ceaseless industry, valuable as it is, so often crushes out the best and noblest feelings?—or from the religious teachers who can so easily drown the noblest instincts and aspirations of the heart in sordid gains?—from the warrior or the slave, from the rude barbarian or the cultivated tyrant? Where shall I find one whose actions and thoughts, whose life, can tell me what man is?

I know there are men amongst us who repudiate these inquiries as needless, and urge us just to

accept unquestioningly the traditions of the Church, and rest in quiet and be saved. And we might be disposed to take their advice if we could believe that they themselves had any intelligent perceptions of either God or man, or if our leaving these questions alone would remove the perplexity they involve from the troubled heart of man. But neither of these things is so. Men are lamentably devoid of any genuine knowledge of either themselves or God, and while it is so, the agitations of the human heart will go on; and whatever may be the consequences, till man either ceases to be an intellectual being, or finds the knowledge he wants, he will go on plucking the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

Now, the answer to these questions is CHRIST; the perplexing thoughts I have referred to find their solution in the Christ of the Gospels. In accordance with what he said of himself,—“I am the way, the truth, and the life.”

This is what I want to show,—that Christ in the Gospel is the resting-place where the heart of man can find repose; not because we there at once learn *all* that we want to know, but the *greatest* questions are there set at rest; and there we may ultimately find the key to interpret all the problems that have so long and so painfully agitated the thoughtful mind. In fact, Christ takes the place of that baneful tree of knowledge, whose fruit, says Milton, “brought

death and all our woes into the world." And if it be so, then is the very current of human life reversed, and the knowledge we are now seeking brings back life and all its bliss.

Two phrases, full of deep significance, Christ applied to himself;—Son of God, and Son of Man; and, different as may be the precise meaning of the term 'Son' in these two applications of it, the two phrases point in the same direction, namely, that Christ is the best and completest revelation of both God and man.

I.—Son of God.

I have already indicated what difficulties beset the knowledge of God. Let us look at them a little more closely. The one God must be supreme over all; he must be infinite, eternal, omnipresent. But how can we conceive of such a Being? how did men conceive of him without Christ? We know quite well how they did, and how we should if we were left once more without a gospel. The human mind wavered, and was cast about in painful perplexity between mere abstractions that could not move the heart, and gross ideas that corrupted the heart. The men of genius, the philosophers, who knew quite well that no idol, no material thing, could represent God, lost themselves in the abstractions of their own minds, or confounded the Deity with the powers of nature, or tried to rest in the Athenian belief in the unknown God. The mass of men, incapable of rising

to such conceptions, found gods in every material object, and then came to shaping gods for themselves,—ending, at last, in a low, sensual, and debasing worship. Men of shrewd intelligence, with too much sense really to believe in any sensual religion, and too little devotion laboriously to think of God philosophically, took refuge in a universal scepticism, until they came to doubt, not only whether God could be known, but whether it was possible to know anything at all, when the highest object of knowledge seemed so inaccessible.

Now, in the midst of all this confusion, superstition, gross folly, and unattainable abstraction, when the mind of man seemed rapidly sinking into the most dreary despair, Christ stood forth, and said to the world,—I can tell you what God is; I am the Son of God; he that hath seen me hath seen the Father.

How, then, shall we understand this phrase,—Son of God? Doubtless Paul has given us the best interpretation of it. “In Him dwelt all the fulness of the Godhead *bodily*.” Suppose we had heard of such a thing as loving generosity, but had never seen a generous action. Our own feeling of love might tell us something, but whatever we may be conscious of in *our hearts*, we do not really know its meaning till it appears in the life. Never, then, having seen an action of self-denying love, never having put forth a hand to help a fallen brother, or to feed a hungry brother,

how little would the word 'love' convey to the mind. It would be only an abstraction

But if, while trying to imagine what love might mean, we should see an act of splendid generosity, how instantly would the meaning of love, in all its depth and tenderness, be revealed to us; and we might then comprehend the power of this principle throughout the universe of intelligent creatures. This is true of everything; it is life alone that we can understand. Only in living does any principle of heart and mind become intelligible.

Just what this explanatory action is to the inexplicable principle,—just that is Christ to God. He is the bodily manifestation of the Deity in a form that we can comprehend. We can understand nothing till it in some way takes form or shape. The only form that God can take for us is that of Man.

The invisible, infinite, incomprehensible, in Jesus Christ assumes the form of visible, comprehensible reality. We are not lost in the vague conceptions of philosophy; we are not drawn down into the sensuality of the vulgar; we are not drawn into the cold regions of scepticism. Standing in the presence of Christ, we are sensible of an intelligence that reaches beyond the farthest limits of thought in all directions; we feel a sinless purity, an intense love outmeasuring our most extravagant expectations; we see action that grasps the whole universe of forces. What is this if it be not the express image of the

person of God ? I can conceive of no higher intelligence than I find in Christ. I can attribute to God no more perfect or more beautiful moral character or nature than shines in Christ. Thus there is no knowledge of God which it is possible for me to possess which I do not find in Christ. When I am with Christ my heart is resting in God. For what do I seek to find in God ? Not a vague spirit,—not a lawless power ; but intelligence, moral nature, action upon the world and man. All this I have in the highest and most perfect form. More I could not have, and I am sensible that when I have adequately studied the divine that is manifested in Christ, nothing remains to be added that would make me know God better. Consequently, I am never so near God as when in converse with Christ. The essential elements of the Being of God, incomprehensible in their spiritual infinitude, are all before me, and in a living person, with whom I can enter into most real and most tender fellowship.

I see in Christ the design of God in ruling all the elements of nature, namely, making them all tend to the higher purposes of *our* spiritual being. Nothing among these wild forces of the universe is truly inimical to us, but all things are meant, through the laws that regulate them, to serve and bless the higher nature that dwells in the child of God. I see also in Christ how God is dealing with the great problems of human sin and human woe. I see that he

does not stand in cool unconcern over our destiny, but is really a Father, with a Father's heart,—that he means to conquer vice in us by the infusion of his own purity into and through our race, with which he stands in such close contact, and to drown our woes in the boundless ocean of his own love and blessedness.

No longer, then, can it be any mystery, nor even a question,—why it is that devotion to Christ should be so intense a passion,—so absorbing an enthusiasm to the heart that truly feels it. Of all deep feelings of the devout human heart, none is so deep and strong as the desire to know God. The longing that draws us to the infinite Father, the fountain of life and blessedness, when once truly awakened, is the strongest force known in the soul of man. In the life of Christ the knowledge of God is presented to us in a form so clear and simple that neither its mystery nor its magnitude any longer overwhelms us,—so closely related to our own nature that we seem to approach God, as it were, in the very consciousness of our own being. The intellect, if not satisfied,—and what can ever satisfy it?—has at least a resting-place ; the heart's strongest affections are kindled by every truth received ; and the light of God in Christ is seen everywhere resting on the objects of life, as the light of heaven bathes in its splendour all material nature. Could we only go back to the time when Christ had not yet appeared

and when therefore the attempt to know God was a painful and wearying groping in the darkness if haply he might be found, I am convinced that our moments of holiest enthusiasm would seem to us far too cold for so wondrous a drawing back of the veil that for ages concealed the infinite and eternal God.

II.—Son of Man.

We come now to consider, briefly, the other aspect of Christ, in answer to the second question,—What is Man?—to us, not less momentous.

By the universal consent of mankind, man's own poor life does not tell him what Man is. Yet till Christ came there was no other source of knowledge accessible to the masses. We may be perfectly sure that when any thoughtful mind looked on human life,—then as now,—it could not possibly appear as if man,—the race,—was answering the end of his creation. Occasionally we find this feeling breaking out from the more earnest and devout. Old Jacob at the close of his stormy career could only lament,—“few and evil have the days of the years of my life been,”—as though life had been all a mistake. Somewhat of the same feeling touched the glorious Elijah's heart as he sat disconsolate under the juniper-tree, musing over the utter mockery that life seemed: Moses was not without this experience; it breaks out in the sad hours of Job's sorrow, and it finds repeated utterance in the Book of Psalms. Ecclesiastes is a long utterance of the same feeling by one who

had had the most ample opportunity of judging. You find it again and again in the prophets, and not least in that misquoted saying,—“The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked.” Even amongst this most religious people, where, if anywhere, life could rise into some sublimity, the very best men seemed but ill at ease in the world, as though the meaning of life were a perplexing riddle, and man himself the most incomprehensible of all the Creator’s works ;—the only one, shall we say, of which it seemed impossible to verify the old declaration—that “it was good.”

If we were to turn to any other nation we should find a far more melancholy picture : the masses trodden down in the dust as more contemptible than the dust itself, which at least could bear fruit ;—the tyrants respecting humanity far less than the nature of the dog ;—the affluent finding no single really lofty object to which to consecrate their leisure and their powers ;—the learned scorning the very notion of seeking to elevate the race ;—human life mean and despicable, and going out into the dreariest vacancy. That there were occasional exceptions we all know ; they do but prove the rule. For their loftiest conceptions of what man might be can nowhere find any realisation. The profoundest longings of their nobler hearts waste themselves in vain imaginings, and their hopes are postponed for an indefinite future. O, how little can *we* tell the passionate earnestness

with which the best men longed, for ages, that some one would arise and tell them what life meant and why man was created!

That One came at last. I am the *Son of Man*,—Christ said,—here let your questionings, your agonising doubts, your dreary scepticism, end. Human life is meant for what I make it; man in his real nature is what I show you. I am the light of the world. By me if any man walk, it shall not be in darkness.

Never had such an idea startled the thoughtless world before. To see a Man, as God meant man to be, living out a human life, as God intended life to be lived; and that in an age when the ablest men had begun to doubt whether anything truly great and good was possible to our miserable humanity,—miserable, I mean, as they thought it,—why, my brethren, it would have been impossible for this fact not to send through the whole race such an electric shock as had never before—nor has ever since—been felt.

That beautiful life, as human as it was divine, as proper to Man—to every man, as it seemed full of the deity, entranced, chained, inspired the few that came within its light, while it was being lived; it sank silently, lovingly, but irresistibly into the hearts of millions, perpetuated in the records of it; and it has gone on mastering the mightiest intellect, overcoming and winning the most malignant hatred,

breathing its warm breath upon and melting ice-cold scepticism, putting to rout the mean and selfish principles and utilitarian philosophies that have cheated and debased mankind for ages, until the whole civilised world is disposed to agree in one thing,—that, if nothing else were true in the gospel, at least Christ has taught us that man can live a great, good, and noble life, and that in man himself may be found, after all, the very highest thought and most beneficent purpose of God.

Yet, calculated as all this is to delight both our intellectual and moral nature, it would be wanting in practical power unless we could believe that the life we so admire in Christ was in some way possible to us. It would be but a picture of loveliness to gaze upon with unavailing desire. Christ has not so left it. Through his whole teaching and action runs the thought that his life is man's true life, the only life that is true for man;—and therefore possible, for nothing true to us lies beyond our reach. His universal precept to men,—“Follow me,”—rightly understood, can mean nothing less than that every thing in his human life is possible to his followers. In language that nothing but perversity could misunderstand, does Christ himself affirm this; and the thought is both accepted and practically carried out by his Apostles, who, whatever may have been their imperfections, may be said fairly and faithfully to have reproduced or prolonged among men the

image of their Master. This constitutes the charm and power of Apostolic Unity ;—that it is eminently Christ-like, and while it lasts, suffers not the memory of Christ as a living reality to fade. Could this have lasted through eighteen centuries, what a world might this now have been !

When we study the entire work of Christ, commented on by his Apostles, the whole seems designed to meet the difficulties of our case, and to render possible to us this living the life he lived.

Throughout the gospel its author aims to effect the most complete reconciliation of the heart of man to God. So that, no longer cut off by our fear and conscious guilt from the only fountain of moral and spiritual strength, we may, in undisturbed friendship with God, be raised to the attainment of thoughts and deeds beyond the reach of a disordered humanity left to its own resources.

Throughout the life of Christ, he appears as struggling with the very same temptations and dangers that beset our path, which are vanquished for him by no miraculous interposition of heaven, but by the exercise of that purity of heart, that high purpose and that calm reliance upon God which cannot be said to be beyond the reach of a truly Christian man. When he leaves the earth visibly, it is with the solemn assurance that *He* remains perpetually with us in heart, that he gives us the same authority he has received from heaven, and that his

followers shall be the temple of the Holy Ghost, by which assurance the true believer is saved from weariness, despondency or defeat, till he rises like his Master into the perfect life. That a sceptical and material age should pronounce this extravagance or fanaticism, need not surprise us; to me it is enough that an impartial study of the New Testament leads me to the conclusion that this is its meaning. The true believer in Christ cannot but find, in the hope of growing into the full likeness of his Master, an intense inspiration that exalts Christ in his heart immeasurably above everything else, and raises his life to a holy warfare against all wrong, vice, falsehood, and hypocrisy, and on behalf of all that is virtuous, noble, and lovely, in which warfare he himself feels that he must ultimately "come off more than conqueror."

To those who thus regard Christ and his work it must be clear that to love him at all is to love him with a quite measureless love. He who can tell us as he does who God is, setting at rest the terrible doubts and perplexities of the human heart, bringing us so near to the throne of the Eternal, where the light is neither too dazzling for us to behold, nor darkened by any obscure object through which it has to penetrate;—He who can tell us, as he has done,—What man is—What life is,—holding up to us, in spite of the deep degradation into which our poor humanity had fallen, a pure, beautiful, and heavenly

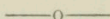
life with God, and beckoning us on to reach it, nerved by his loving presence and example, and strengthened from heaven as he was;—He who can do this may well be loved with a mighty passion that shall burn up the coarseness and selfishness of the soul, and exalt it to a life divinely glorious as His own.

Finally, let me suggest that herein we may find the solution of all our difficulties. Questions of great difficulty surround many points of our faith; I have never believed that either criticism or scientific study could altogether remove them. *Their solution lies in the heart.* Conscience scatters to the winds the sophistries of necessity; love makes present a God whom the intellect can never grasp. Faith makes real to us sublime hopes at which a contemptuous world only laughs; and practical charity sets at nought the impudent pretensions of the market and the exchange.

It may be that critical shrewdness will never end the disputes that grow hot round the canon of Scripture, the miraculous birth of Christ, and the difficulties of Paul's teaching. But a devotion to Christ like this will keep the heart unshaken in the centre of all truth; its simplicity will end all cavils; its purity will help to uncloud the intellect; and its fellowship with God may by degrees help us to see all things in a new light and from a diviner point of view. The clouds may still hover over the earth and perplex the

earthly,—the nights of darkness may still descend upon and shroud in obscurity the clearest and most beautiful objects; but he who dwells in the heavens with God sees neither cloud nor darkness, for there it is always light. The pure in heart shall see God and know him. And if it be true that he who hath seen Christ hath seen the Father, a life with Christ will end for ever the long age of gloomy doubt through which our hearts have been bowed down with sadness and our eyes have wept bitter tears.

SERMON V.



THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD IN CHRIST.

“God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself.”
—2 Cor. v. 19.

IT is now our purpose to enquire what we really know of God as he stands revealed to us in the Christ of the Gospels. You will hardly need to be reminded that it is not so much theoretic and speculative notions about God that we are in search of; but rather such a knowledge of God as can endear him to our hearts, and make him, if I may so speak, the companion of our lives.

There was a time when I took considerable interest in the theoretic disputes of theology, but I have now lost much of that interest,—partly by seeing the interminable and ungenerous conflicts waged around them by all sections of the Church, and partly because, as I grow older, I feel that what we really need is some substantial truth that can strengthen our characters and enable us to live holier lives, and cherish better hopes both for ourselves and for mankind at large. With the fuller experience of Christian life I have

also learned to leave many questions unanswered as beyond the reach of the faculties we now possess, and to be content with such knowledge as God has seen fit to give us, in order to make our human way more plain, and clear away the darkness that obstructs our more distant view.

What, then, do we know of God as manifested to us in Christ Jesus? First we must ask, what could we do towards knowing God without Christ?

Take away Christ, and we are left for our knowledge of God to the teachings of nature and the very little that can be gathered from the providence of human history. The older revelation of God to the Hebrews is truly understood only by the light of the New Testament; and it is too certain that, with the exception of a very few men,—and such exceptions might be found even amongst the heathen,—the Hebrews did constantly fall back on the teachings of nature, aided by the very partial representations afforded by their national history.

That the invisible things of God, his eternal power and Godhead, can be seen from the things that are made, and that the human conscience, even that of the heathen, is some revelation of the law of God, Paul himself assures us. And this is ample for the purpose for which he urges the fact; which is, not to show that the Gospel of Christ is needless, but on the contrary to show its necessity, since the teachings of nature and conscience awaken just enough sense of

God to make it impossible for man to rest without clearer light.

“Eternal power and Godhead,”—yes, that indeed is known in nature, and a terrible knowledge it is; not such a knowledge as Man, with his feeling of sin and weakness, and his insatiable longing for rest in a Father’s love, could either be satisfied with, or could find to be a clear light to walk by. It is just *that* knowledge that so troubles a heart with a refined conscience, looking on evil as the bane of life, and feeling that no home can be found till evil is vanquished.

Not even after eighteen centuries of the study of Christianity have we come to be so familiar with that eternal power and Godhead as to find at all times a Father there. What, then, should we be without Christ? Doubtless, force or power is in all the works of nature, and in or behind that force is God. But are we drawn in our hearts lovingly and tenderly towards God as manifested in that force, or rather do we not stand trembling and sometimes crouching down before the Omnipotent, whose thought and intentions are concealed from us, whose tremendous power can instantly crush us, and whose anger we have done so much to provoke? Even if God was better known to the Jews than to others, how often to them even was nature a fearful robe wrapt round the infinite.

I consider attentively the phenomena of nature to

learn what they have to tell me about God. There is power, there is wisdom, there is goodness. But is that all, and do I even understand these? I build my house with such care as I can exercise, and hope to find much peace and joy in it: then comes nature's wild hurricane, tearing it to pieces and scattering its ruins round my disconsolate heart. I plant my field and look with satisfaction on the waving crop of corn, till the pitiless hail and tempest destroy every hope of the harvest, while I gaze helplessly upon the destruction. We build our city beautiful and fair, in the midst of nature's charms, and thousands of happy homes resound with tones of gladness throughout it, till, in one short hour, the rending earthquake buries these tens of thousands with all their hopes and joys, heedless of their miseries and death agonies, and deaf to their unavailing cries of despair. What is the God that dwells enthroned in this? Men have told us repeatedly that we may bend the knee and bow our hearts in sad petitions before these forces, but they heed us not. Many a time have we felt that we may pour out our cries of distress here, and not even a gentle voice comes back to soothe our griefs and give our hearts a little comfort. Of late, philosophers have assured us, almost with satisfaction, that nature moves on in her own stern and implacable way, as though there were no such being as man, overwhelming the good with the evil or blessing the evil

with the good, in defiance of all moral distinctions. Nor can we well find any reply, if left to nature alone. They say too, that it is no otherwise with human history. If it be so, verily this is a poor school wherein to learn to know God and the great Father's love!

The two most essential things in God here fail us; the *moral character of all His operations*; and *His personal friendship*.

Now let us come with Christ a little while and see what we can learn there. We go out with that four or five thousand into the wilderness, faint, weary and hungry, yet chained to his presence by the charm of his words and smiles. Here, too, we witness nature's sterner moods, barrenness and solitude, frowning upon us. But He is there; and that simple fact turns the desert into a fruitful field, and the wilderness into a garden of plenty. In his presence the cry of the hungry is heard, and nature, as it were, pauses and bends to listen to the cry of the human heart.

Or in the eventide we go down to the Lake, and take ship to the other side. Again we confront the frowns of nature, and from the hill sides come down the howling winds to mingle with the thickening gloom of night, making one of those dismal scenes wherein men are very apt to "stand breathless in their dread and baffled in their skill." But again He is there. His voice pierces the darkness and the

noise of raging wind and waves, and in his presence the tempest seems to halt on its way and to grow silent before the sad pleadings of a few poor fishermen. Of all nature's powers death is the sternest and perhaps the most unbending. Now it has torn from the bosom of a devout and happy family a brother's heart and helping hand. Men and women stand round that sepulchre, giving their tears, not to help, which is impossible, but to comfort. But He who was always where sorrow was keenest, is there too; his well-known voice has tones that can reach the ears of death. Nature unlocks her most secure recesses, loosens her iron grasp, and Lazarus starts at the voice he has often heard before, and returns to gladden a sister's heart, and to bear witness to Him who is the Resurrection and the Life. Wherever Christ is, there seems to be a higher thought and a deeper meaning than nature's own. Our cool and sceptical critics will find fault with all this, and tell us these tales could impose only on a credulous age, not on a philosophic age like this. They are welcome to the cold comfort of their wisdom. I am not careful to enquire into the physical method of these acts; it is their moral and spiritual meaning that I am in search of.

It was at times like these that our Saviour would say to the people,—“ My Father worketh hitherto and I work;” for “ I and my Father are one.” He means to tell us that we are not looking herein on some

strange marvels, but getting a deeper insight into the God of nature, and the Father who rules everywhere. These things are 'signs,' but they are signs of a universal not an exceptional truth. And their value is, that *every* desert has become hallowed ground, and *every* tempest has its whisper of love, as well as its thunder of sublime terror.

For suppose now that this Christ be with us everywhere, and everywhere teaches the same truth,—that when He works, the Father works. Is nature any longer deaf to the cries of the heart? Is it any longer true that she moves on relentlessly, almost scornfully, as though man was not,—as though right and wrong were nothing? To the men who had seen and entered into these things it never could be and never was so again. You will see, in the after lives of these Apostles, how the God they met everywhere on sea and land, in heaven and earth, had become the gentle Father of their hearts and the protector of their steps. And so it is, and so it ever will be with all who can believe these facts and read their moral and spiritual teaching. For they say precisely what, before, nature did not say;—That God, seen in Christ, is the personal friend of every man who is willing so to find him; and that not one of nature's strictest laws is indifferent to the loveliness and preciousness of all that is morally true and good. The eternal power and Godhead which nature teaches, Christ has exalted into eternal love and Fatherhood.

And if I must still feel that the powers of nature will go on frustrating many a scheme and crushing many a precious hope of mine, I also know that not a terrible Omnipotence, but a loving Father sits enthroned in them, and that the saddest sorrow of my life contains within it the healing of my griefs. And I am quite sure that, in the long run, even nature will be found on the side of truth and goodness, and the victory will be all to the godly.

Christ alone has taught us,—he alone could teach us these two precious thoughts of God,—*The possibility of personal friendship with him*;—and *the presence of love and a moral purpose through all the powers of nature*. How this teaching has changed the very world, how it has moulded human life, how it has softened the heart of man, how it has made God's temple to be as wide as the universe, has helped us to look on all things, even death itself, with a calm and placid faith, in which we can, if we will, carry our religion into every act,—all this can be known only to those who are thoughtful enough to look earnestly into these things. Yet none the less do multitudes of men *feel* what they might not be able to explain. Without knowing the *process* of learning, the lesson is learnt; and to thousands of Christian minds the God of nature is "Our Father," and the rude wild violence of nature can no longer conceal the purpose of love that lies wrapt up in it.

Let us now see if Christ will enable us to know

God in *His relation to human sin and error*. If Christ did not first introduce the truth, at least he first made it clear and intelligible, *that God loves even the godless*, that his moral character *is love*. Of course this could only follow on a clear perception of his personality in Christ and the moral character of *all* his operations. An abstract god, a pantheistic god, or the unknown god of idolatry, need not concern himself about human actions. It is in Christ that God is known as profoundly interested in all human affairs. Christ displaces for ever, both the unimpassioned omnipotence of philosophy, and the passionate deities of vulgar sensuality. Christ is the embodiment of God, to whom humanity is precious; He is the Father of a prodigal race. The sorrows of the Son of God, which have so perplexed all theorists, speak a simple truth to the anxious heart of the worshipper; that God does assuredly care for us and watch our course with a Father's heart; that it is no matter of indifference to him whether we are holy or vile, noble or base, blessed or cursed. In truth, the one aspect he bears towards this race, in its strangely confused history of prodigal crime and repentant aspiration, is contained in the one word, 'love.' "God so loved the world,"—that is the key-stone, the fundamental truth in this revelation of God in Christ, or, as Paul puts it,— "God was in Christ, reconciling the world to Himself;"—restoring all *to love, by love*. Perhaps this is

the most peculiar teaching of Christianity,—that God loves all alike,—loves all to save all. Christ alone could have taught it.

Emanuel Swedenborg says, *God loves even the devils in hell*. When I first read that sentence I closed the book, not in offence at so startling an assertion, but calmly to ponder it; and I could not say that it was untrue. Yet Swedenborg believes in a perpetual hell and everlasting misery, not created by God, but growing out of the debased nature of an immortal being. And therefore he repeats it often, in his cool relentless way, that “God loves even the devils in hell.” Truly this is not said in Scripture, but we may find the vision of the divine love in Christ coming very near to it. And the truth it means to indicate is very clear in Christ, and is at once the most wonderful and the most precious thing Christ has taught us to believe,—*that no amount of badness in man can quench the divine love to the creature*. If it could, I do not know where any man could rest his hopes. Nor, since Christian light rose on our darkness, do I think that it would ever have seemed incredible, or even strange, but for the terribly false and shocking teachings of Calvinistic systems.

Even in man’s poor efforts at loving we find some traces of this divine fact. There are forms of human love,—strange if the divine should fall below it,—which the worst vice can hardly blot out. That is a beautiful outburst of pathetic love in which David

laments over the fall of his foolish son,—“O, my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom: would God I had died for thee, O, Absalom, my son, my son!”

See that broken-hearted father bowed down with unutterable grief, and dropping hot tears of pitying sorrow over that emaciated young man, whose wasted frame and haggard features and wildly wandering eye tell the sad tale of a misspent, bad, base life, ending at last not in repentance, but in mad despair. One of the saddest pictures human life presents, but not without some sublimity. For see how the strong love of a strong human heart survives even there. Filial disobedience, recklessness, crime, cruelty, have not sufficed to crush it out. It will weep over the grave of the abandoned criminal, without one ray of hope to glisten in those burning tears. It is a fact of human nature, sometimes found in fathers,—often in mothers. Is it a lesson Christ has taught us, or have we found a tenderer, more enduring compassion than his?

Let us see. That Christ loved all the poor and sorrowful, the weak and weary, the neglected and broken-hearted, though still sunk in moral shame, we know well enough, from almost every page of the evangelic history. That his love would by no means stop here, but reach to a class of criminals less likely to call forth compassion, we should expect from His own precepts,—“Love your enemies,” * * * “that ye

may be the children of your Father in heaven, who maketh His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust." But it is when we look through the history carefully that the marvellous depth, tenderness, and breadth of that love appears. How often was he repulsed, mocked with vulgar scorn, taunted with refined irony and contempt, subjected to every possible indignity,—without slackening in his efforts to draw the hearts that hated him, gently if possible, forcibly if possible, into a happier region of trust and love. It almost seems as if his love, in its exuberance, violated his own precept, and cast pearls before swine. Not only was there no resentment in Jesus, but no cooling down of his immense compassion. Do you point me to his terrible denunciation of Pharisees and hypocrites? I ask no better proof of what I am saying. Terrible denunciations they were, wrung from a heart of compassion by the cruel wrongs of the million that cried out against these destroyers of an unhappy nation. But read on, and see how the deep love of that heart breaks through the divine indignation, and turns the thunder of his holy rebuke into the most pitiful lament that was ever uttered,—“O, Jerusalem, Jerusalem! how often would I have gathered thy children together.” Jerusalem!—the very hotbed of all the cruelties and villanies that priestly hypocrisy and pale-faced pharisaism had been perpetrating for centuries;—Jerusalem! that had stoned all the pro-

phets, and tried to stone the Son of Man and meant to crucify him,—how often would I have gathered *thy* children.

The poetic beauty of this passage will perhaps never be fully appreciated, and its moral teaching is perhaps equally inexhaustible. But it tells more than whole volumes can tell of that love which dwelt in Christ,—the love of God.

We need but one more scene,—or short series of scenes,—from Gethsemane to Calvary. It was not sullen silence in which Christ gave no answer to his accusers or his judges; it was not merely the calm dignity of innocence. It *was* that, but it was more than that. Had Christ spoken it must have been words of love; and how could the gentle accents of love be heard in that storm of vituperation, and in those hearts of raging passion? There are times when love can only weep in silence; and the deeper the love the deeper the silence. Such was that hour; Christ waited patiently to tell his love, knowing that the hour would come. And it came. When hatred had expended itself in cruelty, when the clamour of lies and insults had worn itself into silence, and the malignity of the heart had satiated itself in the deeds of blood that seemed to rid the world of the object of hatred, room was left once more for the gentler, truer feelings of our nature: then was Christ's time to speak loving words to the sorrowing few, "daughters of Jerusalem, weep not for me, but weep for your-

selves and for your children," and even an intercession for those malignant hearts who hated him,—“Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.” Such was His love: one deep, broad, measureless stream, rolling silently but mightily through the most lovely, loving life the world has ever seen, into the eternal from whence it rose.

No man can ponder this life, and doubt the fact that the love it expresses is one that no crime, vice or hatred can diminish. And if we are to see God in Christ, and therefore God's love in Christ's, then is this God's love. And if it does not justify Swedenborg's strange saying, it comes as near to it as we can possibly imagine. At least, if there are devils on earth in the form of men, there are none whom God does not love.

If it could be shown, as some have meanly endeavoured to do,—that in the character of Christ are to be found moral blemishes, all this would come to nothing. It might be weakness, pusillanimity, connivance at wrong, or any other of the numerous weaknesses of humanity; it could *not* be the perfect image of God's love. But by the keenest eye of suspicion and hatred no fault was found in him. The only charge having a semblance of truth was in effect that his love was so great. That he loved those whom no one else loved; he consorted with those whose society brought him no credit, and in his broad sympathy with all forms of humanity, he who

“had not where to lay his head” was rebuked by sentimental asceticism as a glutton and a winebibber. How verily can innocence smile at the shafts of malignity,—smile or weep. Yes,—it was a love always beautified by spotless purity, it was vigorous and manly in its association with a ceaseless indignation against every wrong,—a love of surpassing tenderness in its womanly sympathy with every frail and modest feeling that hides itself from the world’s rude gaze,—a love divine, since it could stoop to the worst forms of pollution without catching any taint from the polluted hearts it sought to raise into purity. It was a love giving rise to a life, a work, and a teaching, the whole of which culminates in the reconciliation of our hearts to God and the regeneration of our whole nature. A love so strong, so vast, so deep, so tender, so enduring ;—what was it but the very love of God ?

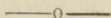
Thus in broad outline do we see God in Christ,—God in a personality, the very Father of our hearts, the friend and protector of our lives,—existing everywhere in nature, through all the forces of the universe, working out his great moral designs, the basis of whose character and the secret spring of all whose operations is *love*,—a love that rests not until there remains not a ruined creation to save nor a miserable creature to bless. And if this God be truly known in Christ, and only in Christ, then may we rest calmly assured that, so long as there shall be a

homeless wanderer needing sympathy, a weary man needing rest, a depraved creature capable of regeneration, or a mind oppressed with gloom and darkness to which light is possible,—so long shall the gospel of Christ stand immovably rooted in the deepest elements of our nature, the powers of earth and hell raging most impotently and vainly against it.

And now let us for a moment reflect on *the immense value of this knowledge of God to us*. It is now a universally recognised principle, that what we believe respecting God, the thoughts we cherish of him, are the mightiest power secretly moulding our characters. Every man seeks to be like the God he worships, and can by no possibility rise higher. When corrupt actions and unholy passions were ascribed to God, Man became rapidly steeped in pollution. And when harsh principles, a circumscribed love, an arbitrary sovereignty, and an implacable vengeance were thought to belong to our Father, religion, though called Christian, became the cruellest thing on earth, and priests tortured men here in sanctimonious piety, because they believed that God would burn them for ever in hell. They were dark days,—with a darkness lurid with the awful and cruel passions that dwell in hearts literally “set on fire of hell.” Let us hope they are for ever ended. But if they are, it is because at last we have suffered Christ to draw back the veil, and in his own person—now better understood—show us God who makes all physical forces bend to the

sublimar purposes of his moral nature, and in whom every purpose is based upon a love that excludes not a single creature, and can neither grow weary in blessing, nor impatient at the repulses of wickedness. The heart grows warm because God is a real Being whom we can comprehend. Our religion becomes a universal spirit of heavenliness, because this God fills all things, through every moment of our being ; and our Christianity is at once the most humanising, purifying, and elevating influence, filled with the grandest hopes for our race, and breathing into us an undying energy, because its only force is *Love*.

SERMON VI.



THE GENIUS OF CHRISTIANITY.

“Follow me.”—MATT. iv. 19.

TO turn from the traditions of men and their theological Babel to the New Testament is always delightful, but never more so than when we desire to learn what it is to be a Christian. For while no knowledge can be more essential to us all, none is so difficult to obtain from the teachings of men. With one class, it is the due performance of certain conventional observances, from counting beads, to immersion in water; with another class, it is being able to talk a certain amount of pious cant; with a third, the essential of a Christian is a little doctrinal hair-splitting; and with a fourth, the repudiation of a few popular enjoyments. In vain do we search the New Testament for the slightest trace of anything of this kind.

More earnest men will be apt to place the distinguishing character of the Christian in more moral habits, better affections, and purer thoughts and

purposes. And as far as this goes it is correct. But it leaves unanswered the question of *becoming* a Christian; it is, too, rather the evidence of the Christian character than its foundation. Even with regard to this aspect of the Christian the New Testament is singularly silent. We do not find Christ propounding any system of virtues to his followers,—much less to those whom he invites to become such. There is one invariable requisite, so simple that it cannot be misunderstood, so practicable that no one can plead the impossibility of fulfilling it; and yet, perhaps, more than the most elaborate system of moral precepts does it lay hold of the individual and become the inspiration of his life. It is this simple saying,—“Follow me.” They may be fishermen by the lake, or publicans at the receipt of custom, or the inheritors of a rich patrimony, or the cultivators of a few acres of soil;—to all alike comes the same precept—“For-sake all and follow me.”

At first it may seem a hard requirement; but if we really think it so, it is from not attending sufficiently to the entire narrative. It was quite essential that they should evince a readiness to give up all for Christ, to the most literal and the fullest extent, since only by such abandonment of all other objects of interest could they be prepared for the new life Christ would breathe into them; but though the disciples were thus ready to sacrifice all the secular interests of life, such a sacrifice was not really made, for we find

them again, through the whole history, at their old occupations. Not because they had grown less zealous in their devotion to the Master, but because the actual abandonment of their common pursuits was no part of their discipleship. Thus much we can see,—that they were never too busy with their fishing or other secular pursuits to obey instantly the bidding of Christ. They had forsaken all in the highest sense, so as to be no longer enslaved by any pursuit; yet they might adhere to it, making it subservient to the claims of their higher calling.

It has been supposed by some that this great precept is no longer applicable, from the changed circumstances of life, and from the fact that Christ is no more amongst us in the flesh. But that would be to understand the precept in a very low and coarse sense; and would rob the New Testament of its value. For if this is not the genius of Christianity for all ages, what is? Christ, later in his teaching, substituted nothing else for this; but I think rather, by implication at least, enforced it to the very last. And if now it is not possible for us to follow Him, in the same literal sense as those first disciples did, this is only because everything in Christianity since the Crucifixion remains so eminently and entirely spiritual. But the force of the precept will not thereby be diminished, but rather increased.

We have, then, to inquire,—What is the force of this precept *as applicable to all times and to all dis-*

ciples? For, if we once allow that any great teaching of Christianity can lose its force by the lapse of time, then all its teachings may in like manner become obsolete, and Christianity itself be laid aside as a thing of the past. That Christianity is thus obsolete has indeed been maintained by not a few; and this opinion is perhaps gaining ground. I hold that the responsibility of this rests with those teachers of religion who have substituted formalities for its great principles, and sectarian societies for the one spiritual Church. In the very nature of things, forms and sects must change with ages and the progress of intelligence, while the Church of the living God and its principles are eternal and immutable. If, then, we wish to refute the objections of those who would represent Christianity as a worn-out system, we shall have to penetrate to those principles which men of all ages must feel to be of changeless power. More and more does it become clear that either we must do this or we must be content to see our Christian faith losing its hold on mankind.

If now we have thought of Christ as the living head of our race, capable, in his divine humanity, of leading us through every contest with sin and folly, to the highest forms of life possible to men on the earth, and if we have thought of Christianity as the divine method of accomplishing this victory, we shall see at once how great a significance has this precept, —“ Follow me.”

What, then, is its meaning for us?

I. The principle that lies at the foundation of it is,
—*That Christianity must be felt by its disciple as surpassing in worth all other things of life combined.* Not until a man sees that he can love it with a stronger love than any other that holds possession of his heart, is he prepared to be a faithful disciple. For a man's strongest, deepest love, under all circumstances, rules his life. Nor is it possible that it should ever be otherwise, unless his intellectual and moral nature should perish, when he would cease to be a man. Even if Christianity involved no struggle or conflict, no man would consistently adhere to it any longer than he felt that it could command the most powerful love and enthusiasm of his nature. It is quite true that men may *pretend* to be Christians from very different motives,—from fear of consequences, or for the sake of reputation; but in this case they will not really adhere to it, they will lay it aside when they dare, and their adhesion will be formal and hypocritical. Indeed, this is the invariable root of hypocrisy. A man may be a religious hypocrite from all sorts of reasons;—to get a good business connection amongst the members of his sect, to pass well amongst respectable people, or to escape hell fire; but he can be a Christian only when his love for Christianity surmounts every other love. This becomes still more clear and certain when we reflect that Christianity is a constant struggle⁵—that

nearly every principle held amongst men and every feeling of a selfish heart has to be subdued by it,—that it has to engraft upon human life new habits, a fresh mode of transacting all our business, and of dealing with our fellow men, in effecting which it must break through innumerable prejudices and trample down many low and sensual inclinations.

It was on this principle, and not that Christ was ever unwilling to receive any disciple, that he sometimes put such severe tests to men. With the poor, the broken-hearted, the outcast, and the miserable, he never applied *any* test, asking only a loving faith in himself. Having nothing else to love, already severed from outward delusions, the love that rested in him was sure to triumph. But when men came to him who had riches to care for, reputation to regard, and opposing inclinations to surmount, our Saviour applied very severe tests, such as would marvellously thin the ranks of the professing Church in the present day. Indeed, I fear whether his severe process would leave any at all, except a few amongst the poor. Thus, he sometimes required well-to-do men to abandon a profitable calling, and sometimes to overcome a good deal of natural affection,—not because he would suppress such callings and violate affection, but because he would prove to them whether or no their religious devotion was really supreme in their souls. In the same way he would tell a rich young man to go and sell all that he had and give to the poor,

and them come and follow him; not because riches were incompatible with Christianity, for there were rich Christians then,—not because Christianity preached any kind of communism, for none of the disciples had as yet adopted any such practice,—but because it was not possible for that young man to prove a faithful Christian unless he loved Christianity above everything else; and if he did so love it, the selling all things would have been to him no hardship. I have not the least doubt that any one of his faithful apostles would instantly have obeyed such a precept, and because they would have done so it was needless to lay upon them such a command. Nor have I any more doubt that, were Christ here now to give us advice, coming into any of our fashionable places of worship, he would use just the same language,—“Take off those diamonds, jewels, and gold rings, sell them and feed the poor, strip these luxuries from your temple, and carry bread to the hungry and knowledge to the ignorant,”—not that these things are wholly and essentially wrong, but that men are loving them with too strong a love, and that there can be no faithful Christianity until devotion to it is the ruling passion of the soul.

II. The precept plainly implies—*the principle of progress*. No one can suppose that following Christ meant just walking about the country with him. It meant *discipleship*, and that means a progressive introduction into Christ's thoughts and purposes,—into

the spirit and intention of his life and work. He took them just as they were, with a most limited knowledge of himself and his designs. They knew little of his nature, they misunderstood his character, they staggered at some of his intentions and would have dissuaded him from them, they were perplexed at and almost alienated by some of his teachings when they soared into the sublimest regions of spiritual truth, and occasionally even their faith seemed baffled; but he was content with the intensity of their *devotion*, which never once wavered:—"To whom shall we go but unto thee?" "Let us also go, that we may die with him." This devotion to him secured the most perfect discipleship. Ultimate fellowship with him would gradually reveal to them his true nature and character, the constant teaching of his words and deeds and love would unfold the grand purpose he was working out, and communion with God and heaven through him would lead them at last into the most profound and the most lofty spheres of divine truth.

You who know the New Testament know that he asked their acceptance of no system of ideas, their allegiance to no system of morals, their pledged devotion to no system of action. Instead of all these, which constitute the policy of short-sighted men, he required only simple and pure devotion to himself. *This alone was their Christianity*, to live and die with him. But how much did it involve? As much as is

wrapped up in the grain of mustard-seed or the acorn. That devotion to him, alone and simple, was a living germ in their souls, expanding all through life, long after *he* had fulfilled *his* work,—to the amazement of the apostles themselves, and the still greater amazement of a revolutionised world. And why? Because their devotion to him was devotion to the divine. And who can measure the purposes and grasp the thoughts of the divine? They come upon us like the first rays of morning, beautiful enough, but harbingers of the advancing day, whose glories no one could anticipate, had not repeated experience taught us to do so. *This was the very genius of Christianity.* It is so still, and must be to the end of time. When you ask me why Apostolic Christianity was so magnificent in itself, and so triumphant in the world, I have but one answer to give,—because the apostles knew nothing but devotion to Christ. When you ask me why modern Christianity is so mean in itself and so powerless in the world, I only know one answer,—because, instead of devotion to Christ, we have now devotion to creeds and ceremonies, to immersion in water, to congregational principles, to John Wesley and John Calvin, to Bishops and to Beads! How can these things fire the soul, ennoble the heart and purify the life, like devotion to Christ? Perhaps the greatest religious want of this age is the absence of that *progress* which so marked the apostolic life. But how can there be progress while we are

shut in by these narrow human inventions? It is as impossible as that there should *not* be progress when we are simply followers of Christ. The true Christian is the most expansive and progressive of all men; not so much because it is his deliberate intention so to be, but rather because he is possessed with that divine afflatus, that inspiration, in his devotion to the divine Jesus, which descending from heaven bears us thither, and is continually revealing to us things that we could neither anticipate nor learn from any teachers, and raising us to fresh experiences that could never grow naturally out of any previous condition. It is no more possible that a man should live in fellowship with Christ and his teachings and remain the same man day after day, nor more unworldly, no nearer heaven, no more intellectual, no more upright,—than it is possible that a healthy plant should be constantly nourished with showers and invigorated with the sunshine and yet remain meagre and stunted. Neither is possible; in both cases, not to grow is to perish.

Does the question here recur,—Who is the Christian? I answer,—not the man of correct creed, not the disciple even of any moral system, or of any system at all, not the conventionally correct. Still less the canting sentimental pietist, who talks most graciously and lives most ungraciously. Not necessarily the Baptist, Wesleyan or Presbyterian, the Episcopalian or the Romanist. The Christian is that man, of any creed or no creed, of any

sect or no sect, in whom devotion to Christ is a divine power, daily enlarging his conceptions of truth beyond the measure of any system,—exalting and purifying his feelings far above the maxims of any moral code, ennobling and strengthening his actions in defiance of all adverse influences. Aye,—a man, under the divine inspiration, expanding into the likeness of a god!

And if it be true that such Christians are hard to find, this is no sound argument against the truthfulness of my description. If we will forsake God's own method of becoming Christians, and choose out methods of our own, the consequence is inevitable, that Christians so made will be after all mere common men, impressed with a certain stamp of religious formalism; they never can be men born of a heavenly birth, in whom the human is swallowed up by the Christ-like and the earthly transformed into the heavenly.

I will proceed to specify more minutely the particulars of this discipleship or following of Christ.

1. A Christian at the outset may have few convictions and still fewer settled points of Faith; all centres in devotion to Christ. He may not know well even what he thinks of Christ in the highest aspects of his nature and work. But his heart is with Christ, devotedly and completely. That is the only point on which Christ is exacting of the young disciple. It is the one point that can give such disciple the resting-place he needs. It secures his becoming a learner.

He feels that his life, with all his powers of mind, is now consecrated to a daily growth in the attainment of divine truth. You notice how insensibly truth grew on the apostolic mind. So it is with the true young disciple, and for the same reason. Living with Christ, the heart, with increasing purity, finds its vision expanding and its penetration deepening. The divine light always comes to the pure and loving in soul; and thus he finds day by day thoughts that were dim and obscure at first growing in clearness and brightness,—truths that once perplexed the understanding now not only commanding its assent but shedding an unexpected light all around. His soul grows in strength, and he finds himself rising to grasp the higher and grander conceptions of the divine and the human, the transient and the eternal. He has yielded himself up to the influence of Christ, and thereby his whole nature is moulded to see and understand things as Christ himself. In fact all things are being transformed by the light of heaven.

What would you think of the scholar who at fifty years of age should know no more than at twenty? Very meanly. So you may think of the Christian who, after years of Christian life, has no larger conceptions of God and of his purposes, of humanity and its destiny, and of the meaning of life. That we should have such a stationary Christianity, we may thank our creeds, our sects, and our priests. Most deeply to be lamented is it among the young, whom

the power of our Christianity might raise to an intelligent greatness and strength so unlike the cramped and mean narrowness into which our sects discipline many minds of great gifts and noble aspirations.

2. The disciple comes to Christ without any system of duties or virtues, save that one principle of love to God and man which is involved in loving Christ. Life is to be interpreted by Christ; and how Christian principle will guide a man's steps is to be learnt only from the manner in which Christ acted. In this, every day supplies its lessons, for there is that spirit in the life of Christ, so catholic in its purity and so universal in its benevolence, that, if we are willing, it will put a new meaning into every action and give a heavenly direction to every step. And so the Christian, taking Christ with him everywhere, soon finds a more god-like love with which to build up his household and to cherish all the friendships of life,—calming a ruffled temper, subduing an innate selfishness, and revealing the bliss of the great law of self-sacrifice. Not willing to part with Christ or lose his fellowship anywhere, he discovers a nobler principle on which to deal with men and by which to fill every sphere of his calling. And so Christianity comes to have something to say and teach respecting all things in life,—whether it be making shoes or coats, or building houses, measuring out silks and linen, or selling tea and coffee, ploughing a field, or legislating in the provincial council. Believe me, my brethren, there

are Christian articles of commerce, Christian houses, Christian farms, and Christian laws,—or else there is no Christianity at all for men on earth.

Thus the morality of the true Christian grows larger, stronger, deeper, more scrutinising, as he comprehends more fully how Christ dealt with human life. His virtue grows with his life, and ever is he discovering, not fresh formal rules, but fresh methods and respects in which the principles of his loving faith may more completely pervade his earthly existence. He is, in fact, learning how to transform earth into heaven.

Will any one say that it was not thus with the apostles? No one who has ever read his Bible thoughtfully will say this. And why is Christ not so with us? Because, my friends, while the apostles began by knowing little or nothing, content to grow up daily into the stature of Christ, we have taught that the man who becomes a Christian already knows everything, being able to say over all the articles of his creed, and having no more to do than to sit down and wait, in complacent security, till time and death carry him to heaven. For where are the Christians now who expect each year to be more pure, more virtuous, more humane and more godlike,—as they do certainly expect to be more rich and more at ease?

3. Finally; it could not be expected of a young disciple that he would enter much into the grand designs of Christianity. But he grows up into the

apprehension of these by discipleship. At first our desires may reach no further than aiding some poor lost and erring brother to find his way back to God. But we shall not rest in this, as our knowledge of truth becomes larger and the emotions of the heart kindle with a purer holiness of purpose. The design of Christ in his gospel grows upon us as we are thus growing, till we begin to feel that not only here and there may a stray wanderer be led home, but the whole race lifted nearer to God and the entire character of human life changed into something more divine. This hallowing influence is felt through all the ramifications of human life; a new spirit is breathed into society at large, gradually to bring within its reach all classes of men, in all countries and through all ages. And as such a thought fills the soul, it raises it to a far holier elevation, and converts its zeal into a sacred enthusiasm, until to the matured Christian it becomes a truly divine thing to live. Thus life loses all its selfishness; and it becomes the aim of life, from its grandest efforts down to its most trivial actions, to see a world made happy in its holiness through the redemption of the great sacrifice.

SERMON VII.

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ON REGENERATION.

“Ye must be born again.”—JOHN iii. 3.

THE popular notions on this subject seem to me to be drawn mainly from the traditions of men, with scarcely any regard to the Word of God. That regeneration is an exercise of omnipotence which leaves to man no choice in the matter, that it is a sudden change, without any cause that we can appreciate, after which a man becomes infallibly secure for heaven, that it is moreover a privilege granted exclusively to a select few,—this may be the teaching of Calvin, or before him of Augustine, but certainly is not the teaching of Christ or his apostles.

The absolute necessity of regeneration for every man *is* a clear and distinct teaching of Christianity, but how it is effected and for whom available is *not* so directly stated ; it is rather left to be inferred from numerous statements of divine truth, which, properly considered, must lead to right conclusions. But from the fact that regeneration is affirmed as a universal

necessity, while Man is condemned for not being renewed,—from the many assertions of God's unbounded love to all,—from the universal aspect of the gospel of Christ and the condemnation of Man for rejecting it, a rejection that is unavoidable unless Man be regenerate,—from all this we might conclude most confidently that regeneration is at least possible to every man, and that the reason of its absence must be found in man, not in God.

I. We are plainly taught, through the whole of the New Testament, and indeed through the entire Bible, *that any change in man for the better must be through the truth.* And since regeneration brings us into a different state of heart and mind *towards God*, it is the truth of God that must bring about this change. A right knowledge of God is the foundation of all spiritual life. The clearest knowledge of God that we can have is found in the gospel of Jesus Christ, and therefore pre-eminently an intelligent acquaintance with that gospel is the surest step towards a new life. Yet perhaps we are not justified in limiting the sources of the knowledge of Divine truth. Truth is everywhere; and all truth points to God, as all light radiates from the sun. Any object in nature, any event in life, any thought from science, philosophy, or history, in all of which God is found, may to the thoughtful and devout heart become a regenerating influence. Ignorance can only degrade and depress.

The more truth enters the mind, the greater is the possibility of regeneration.

It may be asked here—Has the divine spirit nothing to do with it? I answer, *everything*; and for the simple reason that it is accomplished through the truth. As truth is the only thing that can have any influence over the mind of man, so truth is the only power that the Holy Ghost can make use of. And there is no truth in which may not be found the divine influence. If men think of the divine spirit as effecting a miraculous result on the heart of man, independently of all the influences that commonly move us, I cannot wonder if religion becomes to them a useless superstition. I might as well imagine that a man could give me inward pleasure without conveying any information by word or deed,—or that a book could instruct me without my reading it, or knowing anything that is in it. The divine influence, without any truth that can stir my heart and mind, is about as likely to change my heart as the divine power is likely to make that field fruitful without any rain or sunshine, or indeed without any seed to grow. But as, in the one case, it is not the rain, the sunshine, or the seed *without God*, but the *power of God in them all*, that brings the abundant harvest, so in the other case, it is not the truth *without divine influence*, but divine influence in the truth, that can renew the heart. That one man should be renewed and not another, when both have the truth, appears to me no more

mysterious than that one field should be fruitful and another unfruitful, when both have the same seed, the same showers, and the same sunlight.

II. This brings us to a second fact,—*that this regeneration by the truth depends on the man himself.* The essential principle involved in this statement being so universally admitted in the sphere of secular life, it is marvellous that it should be so commonly denied in the sphere of religion. We never attempt to teach either childhood or manhood without feeling it. From a number of pupils instructed, some learn rapidly and grow in intelligence and character, because they gladly receive instruction, reflect on it, and turn it to use; others, with the same teaching, learn little or nothing, and make little or no improvement in character. What rational man would ascribe this difference to the decrees of God? We know quite well that it depends on the pupil; that he has it in his own power to grow wise by instruction or to remain in ignorance. We are certain of two things,—that knowledge or truth alone can make him an intelligent and wise man, and that this can only be through his diligent thoughtfulness. Surely the same principle holds good in religion. If you come here as thoughtlessly as most persons go to places of worship, without any intention of making the truth your own, though I should preach as an angel, it would avail you little though a stray thought might happen to reach some heart, yet the ninety-nine out of the hundred of you

would doubtless be wholly unmoved. To ascribe the profitlessness of preaching, in such a case, to God, would be most irrational and most unjust. As to those of you who come here thoughtful and earnest, God has a spiritual blessing for every one, without partiality. But how monstrous to suppose that the truths of the gospel should have any power over us when we pay no heed to them! As well might you expect a man to be a good accountant without paying any heed to the principles of book-keeping, or a good artist without studying the laws of his art.

Take the case of a man who has been living in reckless sin and folly for many years. Will any one say that this man is not conscious that he ought to consider seriously the path he is pursuing? Suppose that, instead of drowning the memory of his crimes in fresh licentiousness, he should sit down in the midst of his unhappy household and reflect, as God has repeatedly told him through conscience that he ought to reflect, on the wretchedness he is bringing on himself and others. "Here I have been living thus for years, in defiance of the laws of God and of man, and what have I done but make myself a miserable being and the source of misery to others? My life is a hard and cheerless life, my home is desolate and dreary, and my heart is cold and sad." He turns to his Bible and reads—"The way of transgressors is hard:"—hard indeed; God says the very thing that is going down bitterly into his soul. Again he turns and reads,—

“God hath no pleasure in the death of him that dieth.” —“Then it is not God who is bringing all this sadness on my heart and into my home; it must be myself.” The very thought that has often almost maddened him with remorse. Yet again he may read—“God so loved the world” :—“the world,—then myself. God has loved,—does love me. I know what it is to be loved. How often the love of my little child has melted my heart for a moment or two and almost made me a better man; how often has the love of a wife made me look with loathing upon my reckless way, and wish that I were not what I am; that I were even out of the world that I have been doing so much to make wretched. Now God loves me, loves to make me a better man, to turn my feet into a better path.”—And can he think of that love and all the sorrow that expresses it, and the infinite pains of Jesus to bring that love as a healing balm to his soul, without tears rising to those eyes that have almost forgotten how to weep, and deep emotion laying hold of that heart that has almost forgotten how to feel? And yet, even when he has gone so far as this in his thoughts, he may, as many do, rise up and shake it all off, and go back to his evil way; or he may cherish these better thoughts, until they make his habits of vice really hateful to him, and the memory of God’s love a happy refuge from them. Then it is that the truth and the Holy Ghost are regenerating that man’s heart and leading him to God

and heaven. And yet is it not at the same time the man himself who is making use of the truth to regenerate his own heart? And who is there to whom this is not perfectly possible? Yet, if such a one really seeks to become a new man and live a new life, he must not allow these moments of thoughtfulness to go by and be drowned in fresh sins; he must cherish them with earnest thought and prayer. And he must not refuse practically to obey the truth that moves his soul. Many men remain unregenerate because the few and brief moments of serious thought that come upon them are not followed up by mature reflection, and many more remain unregenerate because they have no mind practically to obey the truth they feel. Nothing is more dangerous than to trifle with truth. It will not remain in the heart when we insult it by violating it. And, as I shall show presently, it is not by one half-hour of feeling that we become godly.

Thus we see that there is nothing miraculous in regeneration. I know of no more fatal fallacy than that conversion is something mysterious and incomprehensible. So esteeming it, men sit and wait until, by some heavenly magic, they shall find themselves quite different men from what they have been. And so they may sit till doomsday and the magic never come. God no more makes human hearts rich and fruitful by magic than he does barren soil. As no sane man expects the latter, let him not delude him-

self about the former. The regeneration of a human heart by the truth is just as obvious and simple a thing as the cultivation of barren soil with a plough. Of all things, Christianity is the most rational, and appeals most to our intelligent good sense.

I may be met here with this objection,—That the man whom I have supposed thus to reflect has been aroused to reflection by something special which makes his case peculiar, and in that *special something* we see the divine sovereignty. To which I reply,—that life is full of these *special somethings*, as you may call them, inviting us to reflection, if only we would heed them; that this special something would have been useless to this man unless he had resolutely cherished the thoughts suggested to him; that the great guilt and folly of men is that they will not listen to the counsels God is giving them all through life. Do you think that with men generally, life, in a religious point of view, is a mere blank?—that they have no thoughts of the great immensity around them? that they are never startled into something like fear or anxiety? that with so many appalling occurrences taking place around them—the sudden ruin of men's earthly prospects—calamity and death in every form overtaking men in their moments of greatest security,—that with all this and more than this to arouse reflection, men have no thought of what they are doing or not doing, no question in their hearts whether religion is a reality or a solemn farce? No, every man has had

his moments of solemn and agitating thought, which are God's special appeal to him to pause and reflect; and his error lies in banishing those thoughts and *preventing* his regeneration.

Is there any one here whose experience will not confirm what I have said? Had you no feeling in your childhood that you had a father in heaven and might find a home there? Did you never think that there was something beyond that dismal grave where men have covered up what was once a living man? Did you never wonder whether there might come a time of reckoning for the ill deeds by which you were profiting?—all these were the opportunities offered you to become regenerate, and when, doubtless, you would have undergone that change had you not deliberately preferred remaining unregenerate.

III. This brings me to another fact, *that God is really seeking to regenerate every man by the truth*; that is to say, every man to whom the gospel of regeneration is known. I am not speaking to untutored barbarians, but to men who know that there is a Bible, a Christ, and a gospel. And to such I say that by these things God is seeking to regenerate every one of us. If I have seven sons who are gone away into profligate courses, and if, in the anxious love of my heart, I send to each of them the most powerful parental appeal I can frame, in the hope of moving their hearts and changing their course of life, am I not seeking to reform them *all*? And if

three listen and four do not, will any sane man say that the four are unsaved because I desire to save only the three ?

Yet in this absurd way do men reason about God and his sovereignty in regenerating a few for heaven. Brethren, God will regenerate us all if we will let him, and he has no particular choice of one rather than another. There lives no man who knows anything about the truth to whom the Holy Ghost does not appeal. The reason why we are not Christians is not that God leaves us to our doom or to chance, for God leaves no man until the man himself has deliberately and resolutely rejected all God's appeals. We are unsaved, unconverted, unregenerate men, only because we refuse to accept the truth God offers us, as a man would be a dead man if he should refuse to eat bread. Were it not that we resist the Holy Ghost, God would regenerate every one of us.

IV. Lastly, *regeneration is a lifelong process.* Here again we have to discard a common error. For many persons regard regeneration as a *sudden transition*, mysteriously effected, which changes a child of the devil instantaneously into a child of God, who is henceforth safe for heaven and immortality. And from this error springs a fatal and most unchristian spirit. Especially is it injurious amongst the young. Young people with a very slight knowledge of divine truth, and still less knowledge of life and the world, come to look upon themselves as enrolled amongst

the saints, as divinely distinguished from and exalted above the world at large, and as being comparatively freed from the dangers against which the mass of men have to struggle,—and all because of some hour or so of sensation that they could not explain. It is not difficult to see how prejudicial to the character all such notions must be. When a man comes to look upon himself as an especial favourite of God, nothing can save his heart from a spiritual pride which may perhaps prove more ruinous than actual crime; when he feels himself sealed for heaven in the decrees of God, he infallibly falls into a spiritual indolence from which it is most difficult to arouse him; when he looks upon himself as separated from the rest of the world by his religion, he is far more likely to be possessed by a haughty contempt for his erring fellow-men than by an earnest desire to lead them back to God. And all these melancholy fruits of a mistaken religion we are now reaping most extensively, and with a perplexed regret, in all our professing churches. How seldom is it the supreme aim amongst the young of our churches to grow daily and hourly into a more manly and intelligent perception of divine truth, and to fortify their character against the seductions of false principles in the world, and flattery and fear in the church! How many assume to be teachers when they should be content to be learners! How seldom is it the constant effort of the elders amongst us to cultivate a more manly

and honourable spirit in everything, and to evidence to themselves and others the reality of their regeneration in incorruptible rectitude ! Instead of this feeling themselves secure of heaven, both the practice and the enjoyment of their religion consists more in psalm-singing and formal prayers than in the holy exercise of virtue and benevolence ; and they are distinguished from the world more by forms of speech and decorous Sabbath observance than by a more godly spirit and life through the six days of the week. If the religion of the present day is a light at all, it is certainly under a bushel ; for you must go into the temple to find it, and even there you will see it hidden under a whole mass of formalities. Such a religion will never win the world.

A true knowledge of regeneration will speedily correct these evils, for none of them could possibly exist with men who believed that the whole of life was a gradual regenerating of their nature ; that such regeneration can be effected only by a diligent study of the truth, and a constant application of it to all the practical details of life. Such men will find their only safety in progress, and the only evidence of their Christianity in becoming each day in action and in feeling more like Christ and less like the world. Such men will seek to teach rather by their virtues than by their professions. It is true that a very great change *may* take place in a man's mind very suddenly. But we know that this does not often happen,

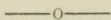
and that it is never safe to trust to such a change,—that all such changes need fortifying, or the change back again may be as sudden—that, in fact, they are at best but a beginning. Reference is often made to Paul suddenly changed on the road, but it is forgotten that Paul retired for three years into Arabia before he entered on his great work, and that no man could more emphatically teach us that Christianity means ‘growing in grace,’ and implies a constant perfecting of our characters,—that he it is who tells us, “let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall.” I know no man who is not in danger of falling, and exceedingly likely to fall, unless he gets regenerated day by day. For what is life meant, if not for this? We call it a journey to the better world; but surely this journey is not accomplished merely by our days and hours slipping away, but rather by our becoming daily and hourly more fit for the better land by a continual regeneration. For what else is God continually with us, and what else means all the discipline of life?

We do not find regeneration in the Scriptures likened to the tempest, the earthquake, or the whirlwind, but rather to the quiet and imperceptible action of the dew, the rain, and the sunshine, or the hidden and ceaseless growth of the seed in the soil. It is certainly a delightful thought that the soul, of boundless capacities and infinitely varied experience, is, through all its mortal career, under the discipline of

heaven, nurtured through all this childhood of our being by every event in life, by constant supplies of divine truth, and by the watchful and unfailing guidance of that divine spirit that can turn everything into nourishment for our souls, and make every occurrence of our lives a stepping-stone to the eternal:—

“While day by day we are changed from glory to glory, into the image of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

SERMON VIII.



SINFUL AND SINLESS LIFE.

“Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin.”—
JOHN iii. 9.

IN a former discourse I endeavoured to show that the purpose of life consisted in the attainment of personal perfection. The question will arise in many minds,—Is this practicable, or are we not thus setting before ourselves an object which is quite out of our reach, and in pursuit of which our energies will be wasted? Unquestionably there is no task in which men seem to succeed so little as that of personal improvement. In the pursuit of those objects, amongst external things, to which men devote themselves with energy and perseverance, they do generally attain some success; but in the amendment and development of their own characters even the well-disposed and earnest-minded rarely attain any gratifying result.

So hard, indeed, is the work of self-improvement

that many are led to abandon the effort in despair; while others, still believing in the greatness and goodness of the aim, are inclined to leave it to be accomplished, without any effort of their own, by the discipline of life and the grace of God. Some indeed defer altogether to the future life what seems to promise so little success in this. It will be admitted by all that there is something radically wrong in this. Some will attribute the difficulty of self-improvement to the inherent evil of our nature, and even seem to find some consolation in this explanation of the matter. But this appears to me a singularly unsatisfactory solution of the difficulty (even if it were any solution at all,) for the greater the evil in our nature, the greater need have we to make every effort for the abatement or removal of the evil.

Perhaps we are apt to underrate the improvement that is actually effected in our own character and in the character of others. The growth of personal Christian character lies so much out of the observation of all our senses that it is quite natural that we should not be able readily to observe it in our own case. How much less should it be observed by others, since there is nothing in which men are so constantly mistaken as in their attempts to appreciate character, especially when it rises above their own level. Then, again, the elements of character that are most valuable are just those that tend least to display themselves, while most virtues wither under

the notice and praise of men. Even in our own hearts we imperil our holiest virtues almost by recognising them, certainly by congratulating ourselves upon them. The absolute necessity of modesty and lowliness to the existence of any high excellence condemns us, in a measure, to unconsciousness in its cultivation. At the same time, the need of searching into our weaknesses in order to overcome them ever reveals to us fresh failures, that, with a sensitive and conscientious mind, throw into the shade all the attainments we have made, and make us feel as though the whole work had still to be done.

It seems to me that the small measure of our progress towards Christian perfection is mainly owing to these two causes:—first, that we are not really in earnest in our wish and endeavour to become holier: and secondly, that we are too apt to regard as impossible that which is difficult.

It is really impossible to be in earnest where a strong faith does not guide us. "According to your faith be it unto you." It is certain that without faith nothing greatly holy will be reached, and it is scarcely less certain that that can be reached which faith has once laid hold of as intended for us by God.

In Paul and John we have remarkably different types of character, yet they both with equal emphasis put before us the attainment of Christian perfection as the great end of life. Each looks at it from his own point of view. In Paul we have the man of

boundless energy, always pressing on, never happy but when doing so, content only when he felt that he was progressing towards a higher degree of holiness. Could we imagine him far nearer perfection than he was (a thing difficult to imagine), his language would still have been the same,—“forgetting the things that are behind, I press on,” because it was in his nature ever to be striving after something yet unattained. Only an infinite course could satisfy such a heart; and, with the ardour that fired his soul, it would have been impossible for him to have admitted that anything was out of his reach which commended itself to him as right, and which could come within the compass of his faith. Paul is the type of perpetual progress; his epistles abound everywhere with expressions which either assert or imply that nothing short of perfection is to satisfy the Christian.

John presents a striking contrast; not that one of “the sons of thunder” could be wanting in energy, but he is emphatically the man of repose. We think of John as “leaning on the bosom of Jesus,” which gives you the idea, not so much of “pressing on” to perfection, as of resting in it. To what higher position could the man aspire whose favourite position was reclining on the bosom of his Holy Master? And how could he have a doubt of the possibility of a perfect, sinless life?—What rude, unholy thought, what evil purpose, what base pas-

sion could assail the man who had found such a retreat? If our hours of worship were truly a calm and loving repose in the heart of the holy Jesus, should we any longer say that perfection was impossible?

Now the same feeling pervades John's epistles. They are the utterance of profound repose in the bosom of infinite love. While they say little directly to rouse us up to energy, they are continually saying,—here is perfect bliss, here is rest from all the annoyance of vice and imperfection, here sin and temptation can no longer approach. He that loveth is born of God: he that is born of God sinneth not, neither can he sin, because his seed remaineth in him: perfect love casteth out fear.

I. We will consider what ground there is in general for affirming that the Christian may, as John says he must, live and sin not.

(1.) The question in its simplest form would be this:—Can we, dare we say of any individual evil of heart or life that it is unavoidable or ineradicable? I do not speak now of sinfulness in general, but I ask of any special sin—is it incapable of cure? I am sure that there is no Christian who will venture to affirm this. For if we admit that any one evil is incurable, we must admit the same of every other evil; and that is simply to affirm that we are hopelessly wicked, and that the power of the gospel of Christ and the influences of the Holy Ghost

are nothing. For what are these if they are incapable of eradicating any evil from our hearts? But on the other hand, if we admit, as we certainly must, that there is no particular evil which is incurable, then we must admit that all evil, that evil in general, can be overcome, and that it is possible for a Christian to live without sin. I am not saying that it is easy. Far from it. I know otherwise. I know how any evil may become such a habit as to be a second nature to us, so that the removal of it may be like tearing away a part of our very being, and may cause us tears and bitter sorrow from which a man may well shrink. Indeed, we can hardly wonder that sometimes the remedy seems worse than the disease; and doubtless an evil propensity is often yielded to because the pain of resisting it is too great to be borne. Our Saviour has plainly told us this, when warning us that it might be necessary to cut off a right hand, or to pluck out a right eye, in order to enter into the kingdom of heaven.

If, then, one sin be so hard to banish, surely the attempt to purify our hearts from all sin may well appear so appalling in its difficulty, and in the sorrow and anguish it may involve, that nothing but a most mighty faith, and the divine inspiration of a holy desire can give us the courage to enter upon the fiery trial, and the strength to come out of it purified, not consumed. Yet, hard as is the task of

self-purification, we must still regard it as possible ; and I think our Saviour tells us that it is essential thus to 'agonize' if we would enter into the straight gate.

(2.) We must remember that a thing is sin or evil only when it can be avoided. There is no such thing as 'necessary evil;' a phrase that is insulting to the God who rules over this world. What is necessary is not evil, and what is evil is not necessary. A man's conscience is often more true than his reason. However a man may argue about it, the deep instinct of his soul tells him that a thing is wrong because he could have avoided it. The moment he is sure that he could not avoid it, he ceases to blame himself, being as innocent as any dead matter that may be acted upon but does not act.

I think that those who declare a sinless life impossible have hardly considered that in so doing they justify sin. That measure of sin which cannot be conquered is no longer sin at all,—at most it is but inevitable misfortune. A man only needs to convince himself that his sins have become too strong for him to master, and he may go through the world, filling it with woe and misery, yet undisturbed by the reproaches of conscience. A picture of humanity too often, alas, realised. I am very sure that there is no middle path between affirming the possibility of a sinless life and absolving every man from all guilt in his deeds.

(3.) In whatever way we doubt the possibility of a sinless life, we throw doubt upon everything, not only in this life, but in the future. I have no reason to say that that will ever be possible which now I proclaim impossible even to God; and the question is not what I can do myself, but what God can do in me. A pure heart is the foundation of all clear faith.

II. We will now consider the especial way in which John puts it:—"Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin."

Here all depends on the phrase 'born of God,' by misunderstanding or misinterpreting which we make the whole teaching obscure. There may doubtless be something in being born of God which is deeply mysterious and beyond our comprehension; for the relation of the finite mind to the infinite, and how the one effects the other, is doubtless a very profound matter. So indeed are all the operations of the infinite. But there is much in this phrase that we can understand, and which serves to explain this teaching of our text. That in us which is born of God is the inward spiritual life and energy which proceed from the fellowship between our hearts and God, and the supreme power over our hearts and lives which this fellowship exercises. Hence it comes to pass that our very thoughts are inspired by God, our purposes and feelings are breathed into us by his Spirit, and our life is necessarily in harmony with

his will. Surely it is needless to ask whether the result of this can be sin. To regard such a life as sinful would be to confound the highest and holiest distinctions, and to make the influence of God in our souls no better than the promptings and inclinations of our own nature.

If indeed we never can be thus born of God,—if there never is anything in us thus divine in its origin, then all I am now saying may be unmeaning or untrue; but then Christianity itself is unreal and delusive. Nothing can be more plainly taught in the Scriptures than that this power of God over us is an essential part of Christian life,—that indeed it is only by virtue of this power that we can become Christians. To doubt the possibility of a life without sin in this world is, as it seems to me, simply to doubt whether God ever has this power, and whether there is any such thing as being born of God. I fear that there is such scepticism as this in the Church,—a scepticism which is doing far more to destroy religion than the infidelity of the world of which we hear so much.

Is it not certain that, if the whole of a man's life proceeded from his intimate fellowship with God, so that everything in the man and his life were the creation of the Spirit of God within him, it would then be true that, as John says, he cannot sin because he is born of God? Like John himself, reclining on his Master's bosom in serene and holy peace, such a

man would be dwelling in the bosom of God, secure against every evil. And who will venture to say that this is impossible? Who makes it so? Impossible it may be to men who have no strong faith in God at all, or who believe that he is utterly severed from the human race. But most possible will it ever appear to men who, like Paul, feel that the life they are living is Christ living in them,—to men who, like John, find the whole inspiration of their life in converse with God.

It is important that we should understand that being born of God, or living under the inspiration of our heavenly Father, is not merely a passive condition, it implies the earnest and thorough co-operation of all our powers in actively doing the will of God. You may be sure that John's leaning on the bosom of Christ was only on the condition that John would actively and practically follow and obey Christ. Our Saviour sanctioned no mere sentimental religion. There may be a great deal of vapid sentimentality even in thinking that we have fellowship with God and are born of him. Mere sentiment is not religion; nor is it any safeguard against sin; activity is necessary for the health of the mind as well as of the body. Being born of God means having divine life within us; and that divine life within must govern us in active life.

Now it is just this vigorous, practical living out what God teaches us within that men are so averse

to. There are many men who would be glad enough to keep heaven in the soul if they could let the world have the life ; a thing wholly impossible, the attempt at which so destroys our faith.

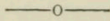
Another point to be observed is, that we are often disposed to allow and welcome the power of God over some parts of our hearts, our natures and our lives, while we wish to reserve other parts uncontrolled by God. Every one conversant with his own heart and with other men, knows that religion often has great power over one part of life and little or none over other parts. You will sometimes find the same man very excellent in the religious aspect of his life, and most reckless and unprincipled in parts of his life where he does not admit religion.

The influence of this is most disastrous, not only upon the world that observes this inconsistency, but no less on the man's own heart and faith. Trying to keep God in one part of the heart and life, and the devil in another, is most likely to end in having God nowhere and the devil everywhere. It is not likely that sin can thus be driven out. It holds its ground where the power of God is not admitted ; and if sin be welcomed anywhere in life it casts its shadow everywhere. It is no wonder that men who have disregarded their principles in the market and the counting house feel that " sin is mixed with all they do," even when they come to worship, for the uncleanness still clings to them, and pollutes their

thoughts that otherwise might be holy. And for such men to say that a sinless life is impossible, is only to say that it requires a greater sacrifice than they are willing to make.

But when the divine regeneration proceeds through the whole man, and gives birth to the whole of his life, when God and the teaching of his Spirit are at the foundation of all we think and all we do,—then surely no evil can creep in. Absolute perfection may not even yet be reached, for perfection is more than all this. But, according to John's teaching, sin is banished; conscious wrong, deliberate evil, can find no place in the God-inspired soul. The temple swept clean is the dwelling of the Pure and Holy, and Christ, who has been offered up for us, keeps watch over it, that the unclean may enter therein no more.

SERMON IX.



GOOD AND EVIL IN THE SAME HEART.

“Ye cannot serve God and mammon.”—MATT. vi. 24.

IN the preceding discourse I referred to the fact which is so observable, of the partial influence of religion over men's characters, striking excellences often being displayed in certain aspects of a man's life, while in other aspects of the same life evils and vices are allowed to go unchecked, or even to grow stronger. The questions that arise out of this fact are among the most difficult that can present themselves for our consideration.

The teaching of the New Testament on this point is as clear and decisive as it could be. A Christian is represented as born of God, inwardly regenerate; and this inward new life is described as controlling all his actions and making him holy. According to this view, sin should be entirely banished, as John says it must be, and as we have shown to be at least possible. All the descriptions given of the Christian

and of Christianity by Christ and his Apostles are thus ideally perfect. We have not, that I am aware of, in the New Testament, any description of a Christian in whom the existence of sin is assumed as a fact and in any way justified. Every sin named is said to exclude from the kingdom of heaven, into which we might often imagine none but the perfect can enter.

Many of the parables of our Lord clearly teach that evil and good cannot grow together in the same heart; and it is almost a proverbial saying of his that we cannot serve God and Mammon, that we cannot love God and the world at the same time, that we must be either for or against Christ, and that if for Him, we must forsake all, even to father and mother, and take up the Cross and follow him; which certainly can imply nothing less than the entire abandonment of every evil.

This sharp and well-defined method of the New Testament is one of the most striking, and is certainly the most important of its peculiarities. It imparts to Christianity an intense moral earnestness that can be found nowhere else; it forbids that men should ever confound right and wrong, truth and falsehood; it makes the true Christian feel that he is engaged in a conflict in which compromise is out of the question,—a conflict that must be waged to the death, and in which victory must be secured at all costs, because failure is worse than death. Thus, where it

is heartily received, it secures followers who will never flinch in its advocacy, followers animated with that exalted courage and that steadiness and holiness of purpose that are found to be so essential to the accomplishment of anything really great and good in this world.

If Christianity had been more moderate in its demands,—if it had left the good and evil to grow side by side, if it had suffered us to become followers of Christ and yet indulge our evil propensities, if it had encouraged us to hope that we might have sufficient faith in Christ and love to God for our eternal safety without renouncing every unholy affection,—doubtless such a Christianity might have found many more followers;—those who shrink from its present severe demands might have been glad enough to secure divine favour and heaven on such easy terms. Doubtless many would have welcomed the “possibility of making the best of both worlds,” getting all they could from the god of Mammon, and all they could from the God of Holiness.

But how much should we have lost; how denuded of power would our religion inevitably have become! We know the tendency of human nature well enough to be sure that the one question would have been,—How much sin and selfishness can I safely retain, with how little of holiness can I manage to save my soul? Where that is the thought there is an end to all godly energy, the door is open to every species of

moral sophistry, and Christianity itself would have justified what is now the greatest reproach to so many of its professors,—the attempt everywhere to compromise the principles of purity with the principles of unholiness. It is quite clear to my mind that if the religion of Christ was to be a real power for good among men it could only be by the method pursued by Christ and his apostles,—placing before us the perfect ideal of Christian life, bidding us reach that with the alternative of forfeiting our claim to be Christians, and making every sin a barrier to entering into the kingdom of God. Such a religion could never sanction the *growth* of good and evil in the same heart.

But now when we come to real life, we cannot find in ourselves or others this ideally perfect Christianity. In our own selves we are quite sure that evil does exist, and we cannot think that it is not so with other men. Therefore we must conclude either that there is no good at all in us, or that good and evil do exist together; either there is no Christianity, or it does admit an admixture—and even a very large admixture—of what is alien. And when we consider certain facts in the New Testament history, the class of men and women whom Christ received among his disciples, and the conduct of nearly all his own chosen apostles, we see this admixture tolerated by the very Author of Christianity. So that those higher and more perfect representations appear to

be inconsistent, not only with the facts of life, but with the conduct of our Lord himself. Not a little has this apparent contradiction perplexed many thoughtful readers of the Scriptures who have most earnestly striven to be true Christians. Several methods have been suggested of explaining away this difficulty.

The commonest, with thoughtless men, is to suggest that Christ and his apostles did not really mean what they said in demanding such a perfect Christian life; putting an unnatural and forced meaning upon their words, and so avoiding their strict severity. But this is too unfair or dishonest towards the Bible to satisfy the truly earnest and devout. They did mean what they said, and in the obvious sense of their language, however difficult it may be for us to comprehend their meaning and to carry it out into our actions. Others take these high and holy precepts and descriptions as 'counsels of perfection,' and not as actual precepts to guide life; as though Christ had said—This is the glorious picture of a Christian, if only you could reach it, and it is well to strive after it; but without at all meaning that these precepts were really intended to guide a man.

Another view, somewhat prevalent of late, is that the Scripture contemplates two separate classes of Christians;—the ordinary Christian, who is only just good enough to be recognised as a follower of Christ, and to whom those perfect precepts were

never intended to apply,—and a higher class or inner circle of advanced Christians, comparatively few in number, who are capable of reaching that more perfect state, and to whom alone those precepts are addressed.

I need scarcely say that, on all grounds, I must reject entirely these explanations. I would rather leave the difficulty unexplained and inexplicable than seek to surmount it by methods that impart an air of insincerity to the Scriptures. In fact, the explanation creates a difficulty greater than that which it seeks to remove ; throwing needless obscurity around the character and conduct of Christ and his apostles, and robbing the Scriptures of that clearness of meaning and aim which is their greatest beauty as well as value. They mean what they say in the most obvious sense of their language, and that meaning is applicable to every reader, while, throughout, their design is to be a practical guide to human life. There is, I think, a much simpler and more natural explanation of this seeming contradiction, which will help us to comprehend what Christian life really is.

(1.) We must give full weight to the principle that life is estimated, morally and religiously, rather by its *honest intentions*, than by its *performances*. We admit this amongst ourselves, unhesitatingly. When we are quite sure that any human being, young or old, is perfectly pure and good in his *purpose*, we pardon or overlook his failure in action, the

failure calling forth regret rather than censure, for we know how often insuperable difficulties will prevent a man exactly carrying out what he most honestly and earnestly desires. And moreover, the principle is absolute, that the right and wrong of every action does really lie in the motive. A man's character is formed more by the deliberate and determined purposes he cherishes than by the actual results he accomplishes. We often speak of "taking the will for the deed." God does the same, provided only that the will be sincere and earnest.

Whatever may be said of the difficulty of carrying out into actual deeds amongst men all the precepts of our Saviour, no one will doubt the practicability of making obedience to them the one great purpose of life, and so completely receiving them into the heart that they become as much a part of our very inward life as they would be if everywhere fulfilled in deed. And it may be that practical failure may even the more endear to us the principles that we truly love and for which our very sympathy is thus aroused, as for a friend whom we have unconsciously and unintentionally wronged. The heart may be very right towards God as well as man, though we very imperfectly fulfil its intentions.

This obedience of heart may be said to be a great part of our faith in Christ, as our Leader and Representative. Without Christ we should know very little what we are aiming at, or what is that perfec-

tion we seek to realise. In Christ all is plain; we aim to be like him. He is the ideal of perfection we strive to reach. The purpose of life becomes clear and definite; Christ realised in us is the great end and aim of all.

Now faith, which is not the mere acceptance of truth, but which always involves something personal, recognises in Christ the true man—the true life. It accepts with a deep intensity of love the entire image of Christ, as that alone which it is good for a man to be, and the whole inward life is consecrated to the one purpose of growing into the likeness of this image. At the same time faith clings tenaciously to the solemn assurances of the gospel, that love will sooner or later raise us up to be like Christ, who already fills the soul with his surpassing loveliness.

But it may be said,—Is there not a danger of men easily satisfying themselves with good intentions, which are cheap and abundant in the world, and making them an excuse for practical sins? And is not hell paved with good intentions?

Certainly there is danger; danger is everywhere, when men are resolved to distort truth. But that good intentions so abound in this world that there are enough of them to pave hell is certainly not my experience. Professions of good nature that mean very little, passing expressions of good feeling that contain little or no heart, may be common enough. But of holy intentions and good purposes I fear there

are few enough in this world, and none at all in the world of the lost; and I am sure that a really holy desire never carried any man to hell.

An intention or purpose is that to which the whole soul is devoted; it awakens all our energies, calls forth all our activities, and is the all-absorbing pursuit of our life. Such is Christ to the true Christian heart, when faith recognises in him the true idea of life and the power by which it may be realised. And I say that that heart is so occupied by Christ that evil can no longer grow in it; although, for many reasons, the life may still present but an imperfect image of Christ. Every thought or principle must sink deeply into the heart before it becomes a guiding power in life; and perhaps it may be long in becoming thus an essential part of a man's nature; but when the soul is once the temple of divine truth, the ultimate victory over the whole man is sure. God sees it and knows and accepts the heart's obedience.

(2.) We must also make due allowance for the progressive character of Christian life. For good and evil to *exist* in the same heart is not the same thing as for them to *grow* together there. It is this latter that is impossible. Evil is not banished in a moment, nor is good implanted and perfected in a moment; and the evil is only vanquished by the presence of the good. Thus, in the true Christian heart, there are two processes going on

together—the evil is being eradicated, and the good is being cherished; the one cannot go on without the other. As a besieged city may be occupied by two opposing forces for a time, while the one is gradually driving out the other—though it is impossible for its walls permanently to contain them both,—so in the human heart, regeneration, which is the subduing of evil by good—in some cases a life-long process—may be progressing for a season while the evil is still there,—the evil being gradually driven from the field, a vanquished foe. And for many a long day the presence of the half-vanquished foe may still disquiet us, until the victory is completed in his destruction. But this is something very different from good and evil *growing* together, or *being cherished* together in the same heart, which the New Testament pronounces, and we have ever preached, to be wholly impossible.

Yet here again is danger; a man may say that evil is being conquered and driven out of his heart, when all the time it is really cherished by him and sinking deeper and deeper therein. I cannot provide or even suggest any universal remedy for hypocrisy. Much in such a matter depends on a man's own conscience. I can in no way persuade myself that any conscientious Christian will ever find much difficulty in knowing whether the power of sin or the power of holiness is gaining the mastery in his heart. Nor can I hesitate to say that as in the latter case the Christianity is genuine, and sin will not be imputed,

so in the former case, there neither is, nor can be, any Christianity at all.

(3). One other consideration must not be lost sight of. Innumerable things lie hidden in our hearts, unknown to ourselves, coming to light from time to time, and often most unexpectedly. An unconscious evil is an imperfection, but not a sin. One great end of life is to bring the hidden things of the heart to light. And as these hidden things come to light and reveal to us how deeply evil has penetrated into our being, we are overwhelmed with shame and sorrow, and abase ourselves before God in the most profound contrition. Yet this secret evil unexpectedly brought to light is not *deliberate sin*; it does not stand against us as guilt; it is rather the result of the warfare we wage against evil, and may often be the best evidence of the sincerity of our conflict. But to allow a known evil to remain in our hearts and to submit to its influence, is quite another thing, and this I say again is wholly and for ever impossible to a Christian. Light and darkness make no compromise, though the shades linger long in the presence of the rising dawn.

Now if any are determined to find an excuse for sin in what I have been saying, doubtless they will do so, nor is it in any way possible for me to prevent or guard against it. The clearest truth is not proof against the efforts of those who are determined to pervert its meaning, or to avoid its force. Even

the personal presence and teaching of Christ did not shut out this worst malady of a diseased heart. All I can do is to take care that in my mode of presenting the truth there is no just and reasonable ground for excusing evil. Of that I have been careful. Hypocrites, I fear, will enjoy their day of partial triumph until the solemn disclosure of all hidden things, when so many of the judgments of men will be reversed.

I assume that I am now speaking to those who sincerely desire to attain to a true Christian life, and who are anxious to see difficulties removed. To such I think I may say that the more thoughtfully you consider what I have been saying, the clearer will become the two conclusions I am aiming to establish,—that a sinless Christian life is attainable, and that it is the object we should constantly pursue,—and that the apparent mixture of good and evil in our own and other men's lives is no sufficient reason for despairing of attaining a sinless condition. To you it will be no reason for indifference, no excuse for sin, and therefore no source of weakness, that the sincere desires and purposes of your heart are acknowledged by a heavenly Father, notwithstanding the many failings of life. This will not lead you to hide transgressions under a hollow-hearted pretence that you could not avoid them; it will rather nerve you with courage and resolution in the practical carrying out of those desires upon which God looks

with so much tender compassion,—even with more tender compassion than we feel for the obedient child who struggles nobly, but not always successfully, to master the reprovèd habits and passions of his life. It will certainly never lead you to cherish deliberate unfaithfulness and violation of holy principles, while you throw over it the easy cloak of valueless religious sentimentality. You will never rest, as men never do rest, until the purpose of your heart is realised in life; but you will not despair in the midst of many failures whilst a Father's love smiles approvingly on every unsuccessful effort.

To you it will be no reason for indolence, nor for resting content with imperfection, that the conflict is protracted, and that the presence of evil, though brought into subjection, still grieves the spirit. This will not lead you to make a compromise with the evil that you hate, nor to ask for as much worldliness as you can safely cherish without ruin to your soul. In the glad consciousness that God has enabled you to free the citadel of your nature from the spiritual enemy, you will the more resolutely wage the conflict until you have driven him from the very outskirts of life, confident that even that shall be accomplished through the love that has given you the inward victory.

The more you come to know how deeply and entirely sin has assailed your spiritual nature, the more restless will you be, until the light has shone

into the deepest darkness, and the eye of the infinite has searched out the last remaining weakness.

There are two dangers that beset us, and into one of which so many fall,—the one when Christianity appears to us impracticable, the other when its claims are lowered to suit our weakness and imperfection. I have striven to avoid both. Religion unmistakably asks for the banishment of all evil, for a sinless, holy life; it knows no middle path, and yet it proclaims no impossibilities.

Things that seem utterly incredible and out of reach come nearer and become more real, as the heart's desires grow stronger and more earnest; while the very heat of the conflict reveals the power and nearness of Him who never suffers one of us to wrestle alone, or without a sure guarantee of the victory.

SERMON X.

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THE CHRISTIAN'S CONQUEST OVER SIN.

“Greater is he that is in you than he that is in the world.”

1 JOHN iv. 4.

I HAVE endeavoured to show that the great purpose of life is the attainment of Christian perfection or a sinless life. I have urged its possibility, and I have referred to the conflict of good with evil which it involves. I have now to speak of the power by which the Christian wages this warfare and achieves this victory. I would on no account be understood to affirm that man possesses any such power apart from Christianity and the peculiar influence it yields. All who have tried the experiment know better. Let any man bring all his natural powers of reason, judgment, conscience and will to the task of putting evil out of his heart and life, unaided by the higher influence of Christianity, and he will find that the language of the prophet is not too strong when he says—“Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? Then shall they that have done evil learn to do well.”

But man is no more left to accomplish this task

unaided than he is left to turn the desert into a fruitful field without rain and sunshine. The Scripture plainly recognises the fact that we are surrounded by two opposite influences. God is ever ready to aid the man who struggles honestly against any of the evils of life; but the consciousness of strength to resist evil is impossible without the recognition of God by man. On the other hand, there are influences and powers in the world that tend to keep us in the midst of sin, and to deepen sin in our nature,—influences that are commonly supposed to be centred in a person—whether literally or figuratively is immaterial, denominated the Tempter, Satan, or Devil. Between these, man holds his freedom, without which he could no longer be man. A very crippled freedom it may often be,—man appearing, in his sins, more like an abject miserable slave than a free and reasonable being. But still he is free,—not indeed to shake off the chains of sin by his own strength, but free to accept the higher aid of heaven, and to be set at liberty by the Son of God. For it is the very bondage and misery of man which has brought Christ into this world to break off our chains of slavery by awakening in our hearts the determination to be free.

Now what John assures us is that this power of God, the aid of which is offered to all who will avail themselves of it, is greater than all the powers that influence us to wrong; and it is on this very ground that he has already told us that he that is born of

God sinneth not. For being born of God is the same thing as being under this greater power of holiness, the result of which must certainly be that holiness will banish evil.

But now what does John here mean to affirm? Surely not merely that God is greater than the devil; for it would need no inspiration to tell us that. God is greater than all the powers of evil, we know; but what then? It does not follow from this alone that man's position in relation to evil powers and influences is any the more favourable. It may be asked,—If God is the greater, why does he not put an end to the devil?—That God could annihilate every power of evil we do not deny; but it is a question whether in doing so he would not annihilate man, whether it would be possible to man to do right if it were not possible for him to do wrong, I speak of man only, for of other creatures and their moral nature we know nothing.

If, for instance, I say to my child, here is a certain thing which for many good reasons must not be touched; while it is within the child's reach, he can either obey or not. But when I have placed it out of the child's reach, so that disobedience is impossible, I have rendered obedience equally impossible; and, so far as that action is concerned, the moral nature of the child becomes nothing. And so of the whole human race,—we can obey because we can disobey. To annihilate the powers of evil, which would

be to render sin impossible, would be to render willing holiness equally impossible, and to destroy our moral nature. That this would be compensated for by the absence of sin and misery in a world of slaves is more than we can affirm. Therefore, evil continues, and merely to say that God is greater, is not to give us any vast consolation. John's meaning is something much more than that, and much more to the point.

It is that the power of God—not in the abstract, but as we can realise it in our own hearts and lives—is greater than the influence of evil that can be brought to bear upon us,—that we, by the power of God, have more to lead us to do right than to do wrong, and are, therefore, better able to do right than wrong. Surely this is the very knowledge which is most valuable and most consoling to us. It concerns us far less to know what God may be *in himself* than what he is to you and to me. The universe may be full of wondrous powers; but I want to know which of these powers can be made serviceable to me in my own life. And now we begin to understand what John says about the Christian overcoming the world. To the Christian who realises God in his own soul, the power of good is so far greater than the power of evil, that the victory cannot fail to be on the right side.

Truly, if we were to listen to the complaints of men and the confessions of Christians, we should

believe something quite different from this; but it is best to close our ears to the Babel of human tongues, when, as in this case, we have such plain and decisive teachings of the word of God. It may, indeed, serve the purpose of those who seek an excuse for their sin to say that the power of evil is strong and the influence of good is weak, and to pity themselves as the victims of a very hard fate. But the honest man will find more satisfaction in preserving the character of God than in sheltering the sinner. And to the Christian, who cares more to secure his own victory than to hide well-merited shame, it will be a most welcome doctrine that his failures are simply the result of his own unfaithfulness to the aid God gives him.

Let us enquire, then, wherein consists the superiority of the power of good over the power of evil *in us*. It is not in the mere fact that God in himself is mightier than the devil, but in our *own consciousness* of these opposite influences, that the answer to this question must be found.

(1.) The power of God is much *nearer* to us, and, by its relation to our true nature, so much more capable of becoming *ours* than the power of evil or the devil.

We are the children of God, conscious that he is our Father, and that that holy relationship has not quite perished in the overwhelming tide of sin and misery. We feel that our true position is as children

of God, in loving obedience to his will. And, on the other hand, no less certainly do we know that, whatever may be the power of evil or devil over us, it is a usurping power,—a tyranny which does violence to every one of our thoughts and feelings. This is true even of men in general ; who, when they speak out honestly, admit that the evil they commit is revolting to their deepest soul, and that they would be more truly and peacefully at home in loving and serving God.

Doubtless this is not always felt while the storm of passion is sweeping over the heart, and for a moment seems to uproot and carry before it the very memory of everything holier ; it may not be felt in the hour of deep agonising despair or recklessness, when the soul seems torn away completely from its anchorage in the truth. But these are passing hours in man's life. When the storm has swept by and left the calm of returning reason, when the madness has passed away and the man has become himself again, then he feels how alien to his true self was the passion or despair of these dark and hopeless moments, and his whole nature tells him that he can be truly at home only with his heavenly Father. This is beautifully brought out in the parable of the prodigal son. He was a son still, though carried away in his reckless madness. There were hours when he came to himself ; when the madness seemed to him like madness ; and thus we see that, even in

the depth of his shame and misery, the feeling of being a son and of having a Father was, after all, the strongest feeling in his heart.

And is it not thus even with men generally? I doubt not that we should find that it is so if we could listen to the voice of their inmost souls, in those moments when they do not stifle the truest and deepest thoughts within. But how much more certainly may it be said of the Christian, to whom the filial relationship has become the one supreme bliss of his existence. Can the renewed child of God say that any evil power lies nearer to his heart and more appropriately belongs to him, than that influence of a Father's love which he acknowledges to be the holiest and most blessed thing in the universe. He has become a loving child, if he is a Christian at all. When you will show me that a stranger, an avowed enemy, has influence enough to annihilate the power of a parent's love in a true filial heart,—then, but not till then, can I admit that the power of evil may be greater than the power of God in a Christian's soul.

(2.) The greater power of good over us may be seen by comparing those parts or elements of our nature to which good and evil influences respectively appeal. It is true they both appeal to us, but it is in a very different way; and though in our freedom we may choose to yield to the weaker and inferior elements of our nature, that will not alter the fact

that the superior elements are the stronger, and able to gain the victory, if we so determine; for we must not forget that this conflict can only be waged in accordance with our own free determination. The question is not what is actually strongest in us, but what might and would be the strongest if we were true to our calling as Christians.

On the one hand, then, we have the appeal of God of good and of truth, to our reason, judgment and conscience, to the deepest instincts and most fixed principles of the soul, and to love, in itself the strongest element in our nature. On the other hand, the appeal of evil is only to prejudice, fancy, and appearance, to passion and to selfishness.

When reason, judgment and conscience all approve, shall prejudice and the mere show of things set them all at nought? When the clearest principles of our spiritual nature command, shall passion render them powerless? When the strongest love is awakened, shall selfishness prevail against it? That it may be so we know, because we may refuse to listen to the nobler promptings of the heart, and give heed only to the baser. But who will say that it can be thus with the Christian? He has made it his aim to cherish the better parts of his nature, he cannot be a Christian without the possession of fixed principles within, he reposes in love as his very life and bliss, and therefore all the mightiest influences that can actuate man are on the side of holiness.

Take one of these contrasts,—that one in which men generally suppose that the advantage lies on the side of evil ; I mean selfishness and love. I do not deny that selfishness prevails more in the world than love, because men choose that it shall. But would it do so if we as studiously cultivated pure and generous love as we now habitually yield to selfishness ? We have no right to expect a principle that we constantly neglect and suppress to assert its own superiority ; still less have we any right to reproach it with weakness, when we have done our best to destroy its strength. In hearts that have cultivated sacred and holy love, it does become an all-conquering power, as thousands can testify in whom love to the truth, love to man, love to God, has annihilated every other consideration. So would it be with us all, if we only determined that it should.

And in truth selfishness is not by any means the strong power men commonly suppose. There are few men who are not in their hearts ashamed of being selfish, especially when their selfishness has overridden their more generous impulses,—a clear proof that the mastery over it is not so difficult.

The same is true of the other contrasts to which I have referred. When once we have come to look upon Christian character, not as something that must grow of its own accord, or which we are justified in leaving entirely to the care of God ; but as something to be diligently cultivated in co-operation

with God, then shall we find what an immeasurable influence good can secure in every part of our nature when brought under the divine power of Christianity.

We have also to consider how *enduring* are those elements or principles of our nature to which God appeals, and how *transient* those which evil can secure on its side. Reason, conscience, principle, love,—these in nowise change in the true heart but to become stronger. They deepen and grow, but they never become old and feeble. Hence the power of God, when it has once been welcomed in the heart, is ever with us, a force that can more and more overrule, but not desert us.

Evil, on the other hand, appeals to the fair appearances of things, but those appearances are ever changing and deceitful; it commands our passions, but if these are violent as the tempest, they are as short-lived, and leave us weary and worn out; it kindles our selfishness, but selfishness is as fickle as it is mean, and of all our feelings yields the least permanent enjoyment. If to grow old, change and decay, is a sign of weakness, if to endure with immortal and ever-growing vigour is a sign of strength, then is good strong in a Christian heart, and evil comparatively weak.

Again, the appeal of God is to all the superior elements of our nature at once, harmonising and uniting them; for what the conscience approves,

what principle enjoins, and what a holy love desires, is always one and the same, and the undivided house of the soul stands strong in its unity of purpose and of action. With evil it is altogether the opposite. It never commands the united counsel of the heart; it brings divisions and discord, the sure sign of its weakness and the presage of its defeat, if such be our resolve.

(3.) We will observe that the *objects* through which good principle influences us are vastly greater than those with which evil is associated. Even in reference to the present visible world, we may see this contrast. Evil, which is necessarily selfish, limits the objects of our thought and life to our own mean, narrow selves. It knows no large and noble objects or ends. Good embraces all things, all beings, all great and lofty ends. Good objects and aims kindle the heart to an enthusiasm before which difficulties vanish; evil purposes sink the heart into meanness and weakness. But when we turn to the invisible and eternal world, how much more striking is the contrast. God himself is the centre and fountain of all sublime thoughts, of all mighty emotions, and of all boundless hopes. The summit of greatness is before us in Christian perfection; the infinite of the beautiful and the blessed forms the anticipated heaven of the Christian; immortality is the boundless ocean, the vast extent of which our conception vainly strives to grasp. All this greatness we as

Christians can claim as our possession; and can all this dwell in and fill the soul, and yet awaken no sense of greatness and power?

But what has evil to compare with this? Where are its sublime heights, where its grand conceptions, where its boundless prospect?—what immortality invests it with unfading splendour, what solid reason guarantees its infinity of bliss? Can we, then, say that the ignoble and mean has the same power over us as the sublime and glorious? Are we as conscious of strength in handling a child's toy as in scaling the Alpine mountains or rearing the loftiest structures of man's genius? Surely no one can say that evil has the same power as good of awakening man's heart to a consciousness of strength and greatness,—no Christian can say that to him the power of evil is as great as the power of good. He must admit with John—"Greater is he that is in us than he that is in the world."

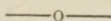
I am convinced that the considerations I have urged are sufficient to demonstrate the great truth which I have been seeking to establish;—that the power which Christianity will exercise over us, when we are faithful to it, is immensely stronger than all the influences that tend to lead us astray, or to bind us to evil,—that, though we are in a world of temptation and danger, where conflict is ever necessary, it is a most unequal conflict that we wage,—the advantage being all on the side of God and the truth. In this

contest no one can fail except through his own unfaithfulness ; not even one single defeat can we suffer except through our forgetting him in whom we live and move and have our being.

But I must again remind you that our progress towards Christian perfection, like every other kind of progress, will be in proportion to our faithful devotion to the object of pursuit. We must not suppose, because the power which aids us in this progress is divine, that it is exerted upon us without any effort on our part. We are co-workers with God ; and without our own efforts God will effect nothing for us. Every element of Christian life needs careful and deliberate culture. Without that earnest application which is essential to the attainment of everything good or great, we can no more reach the true glories of the Christian life, than we could the heights of philosophy, or the productions of true genius in science and art.

When we have made the Scriptures our earnest study, when we have learned to look upon Christ as our teacher as well as our Saviour, when we have disciplined our hearts into obedience to Christian principle, as earnestly as we discipline ourselves for many things infinitely inferior, then shall we experience the full force of John's saying ;—"Greater is he that is in you than he that is in the world."

SERMON XI.



THE HOLY GHOST OUR HELPER.

“My grace is sufficient for thee.”—2 COR. xii. 9.

THERE is no need that I should say anything further to show that it is well to be a Christian; that until we are such, we do not know what life means, and to what it leads.

That Christianity is not merely singing and praying, and what men call worshipping God, that it is not professing certain articles of belief or practising certain ceremonies, is sufficiently well known by all who have taken the trouble to read their Bibles carefully. Equally certain is it that it does consist in practical holiness and in the virtues that adorn a man's character and life,—justice and love towards each other, lowliness and love towards God, with faith in Christ and in the powers and influences of his gospel. That this is practicable by man, even to the extent of a sinless life, I have sufficiently shown, while allowing for the conflict, more or less pro-

tracted, between good and evil, inevitable to men who have grown up in a world of sin.

But admitting this, we have yet to inquire further how this end is to be reached. The answer to that is given in the words of inspiration,—“Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord of Hosts,” and it is further said that Christians are born “not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.”

We will now inquire into the nature of this divine influence or Holy Ghost, the fountain of all regeneration or new life in man. Nothing can be of greater importance to any of us than the becoming better and holier men; no question can have more interest for us than how this may be brought about. No subject can be so worthy of our most earnest attention as the inquiry into the nature of that divine influence upon which our religious growth depends. We are the better able to avail ourselves of any influence the more fully we understand its operations.

I. The operation or influence of the Holy Ghost is in accordance with divine laws which we are capable of comprehending.

That there is much that is mysterious in it I do not deny. So there is in every divine operation. Who can explain the growth of a single herb or plant so as to leave no mystery in it? Yet this does not prevent us seeing that the growth of every plant depends on light, heat, moisture, and suitable soil.

In like manner, although the influence of God's Spirit on the human spirit may contain a great mystery, yet we may have some knowledge of the conditions under which it is exercised.

Now, if there be anything that is absolutely clear and certain to us, it is that the human spirit is never influenced in any way without some objects of contemplation or thought. Men do not even do evil without some object before the mind, either some object in itself false, or else some true object falsely looked at. So, on the other hand, it must be through truth itself, or through true and holy objects that the mind is influenced to good. Every change, everywhere, takes place by the influence of one thing over another, dependent upon their mutual relation. Truth is the divine food and nourishment of the soul, which can no more grow and improve without it than can plants without sunshine and rain.

Two very important results follow from this ;—

(1.) We see the importance of making Christian truth generally known, since, if the truth is not known by men, they lose in great measure this divine influence. Not entirely; because, as Paul says, something is known of God, through nature and life, even where the gospel has not reached; and any truth that comes from God—as all truth does—may become a hallowing power in the hands of God.

But since the gospel is not only the best, but the only complete revelation of God, it follows that the

mightiest influences of the Holy Ghost can only be where that gospel is known. This is clearly taught us by John in his gospel, where he says,—“the Holy Ghost was not, because Jesus was not yet glorified,”—that is to say, the full influence of the Holy Spirit could not operate until the truth was fully known. The same is taught us in the same gospel, where Christ says that he would send the Holy Ghost, and “he shall take of the things of Christ and show them unto you.” Many more passages can be found to the same effect. Hence, we see the imperative necessity of making known the divine truths of the gospel, as the only channel through which the most effective operations of the divine Spirit can reach the heart of man. When once that gospel is universally known, we cannot say with what astonishing and glorious rapidity the whole race of man may wake up to a heavenly life on earth. But of course without that diffusion of truth, the world’s millennium can never come. So far it depends on our energies, in getting rid of all false representations and diffusing true ideas of God and life.

(2.) A conclusion of no less practical moment to us individually is this,—that if we desire the divine influence to be exerted more fully upon us, this can only come to pass through our obtaining a larger and more correct knowledge of divine truth. The larger our knowledge, the more fully shall we be under the divine influence. But we must never

forget that knowledge depends on something more than intellectual perception. We cannot properly know a truth when the bad feelings and passions of the heart are strongly opposed to it; they must be subdued or crucified. Neither can we know while we are practically disobedient. "If any man will know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, he must do the will of God." For nothing more conceals the light of truth from us than the dark atmosphere of deliberate evil actions.

Understanding clearly the essential conditions of knowledge in the heart and life, we may say that we can have the influence of the Holy Ghost only just so far as we are willing to take the trouble to know the truth. In this, as in all things, God neither will nor can give us his blessing, when we are neglecting the only channel through which, or the only condition on which that blessing comes. For the same reason I say that we may have as much of the divine influence as we desire, if only we adopt the right means to obtain it.

Can you believe that God is parsimonious in his gifts, or that you and I can have better thoughts and desires about men and the world than God has? Do we wish men to be blessed more than God wishes to bless them? Consult the Scriptures and you will find that God's gifts are unlimited; but they are useless to us till we accept them in the way God intended. We shall never rise to a true religious life till we

understand how much depends on ourselves; not because of any power we possess without God, but because God is already and incessantly doing his part for the everlasting good of man. I fear there are many who think it enough to ask God for his Holy Spirit, if only they ask often enough, or perhaps loud enough, like the priests of Baal crying to their god, asleep or on a journey. As though our God could be afar off, or indifferent to the wellbeing of his children, until we move him to compassion by our loud outcries.

Do not think for one moment that I underrate prayer. True prayer is the holiest exercise and the purest bliss of the human soul. But prayer was never meant to be alone; what has Christ so severely censured as the many long and loud prayers of his age? I can look with profound sympathy and admiration on the few broken cries of any human heart casting itself upon the loving compassion and protection of a heavenly Father. But if you wanted to turn these fern hills into fruitful gardens, and were to spend your time and energy in beseeching God, by some miraculous process, to do it for you, I should certainly be disposed to say to you,—Is not God quite willing that these fern hills should be gardens,—is not that what he intended; is he not giving everything necessary for that purpose? Do you want more rain or more sunshine, or more nutritive powers in Nature, or an angel from heaven to dig and plough for you?

Would it not be better to dig and plough yourselves, and see what heaven will do? Without prayer?—by no means. Pray, when you dig and plough, that it may be well done, and not distrusting the divine blessing; turning all the toil of life by its devotion, into the holiest worship.

So I say here,—We want our hearts, barren as fern hills, turned into luxuriant vineyards of holiness. Well, is not God willing enough that it should be so? it is what he always meant; he has given his Son Jesus Christ and his word; he is constantly giving his Holy Spirit for this very purpose. There is no need to ask God for any of these things; he is giving them. What we need is to take and use them. There is the truth, large, deep, and rich,—understand it, take it into your hearts, it will be dew and rain to those hearts; there is Christ the crucified, the light of the world,—receive him in loving trust, walk with him, till you know him in the depth of his compassion and sorrow; he will become the sunshine of your hearts. Turn up the soil of your hearts in honest self-searching, confession and contrition, eradicate the weeds of selfishness, let no worldliness shut out the light or the moisture. I need not say that when you are striving and toiling thus, it will certainly be with a heart full of true prayer.

There are some, who I think care more for creeds than for Christianity, that would say I am making the truth everything and the Holy Ghost nothing, that I

confound one with the other. Far from it. To the mere farmer, rain and sunshine are everything. The Christian farmer sees neither rain nor sunshine without God. He uses the gifts and remembers the Giver, but he never insults the Giver by neglecting the gift, and then blaming the Giver for his own failures.

The mere speculator may say that the truth is everything, and the Holy Ghost nothing; as many lovers of creeds represent the Holy Ghost as everything and truth as nothing. As Christians, truth should always be felt by us to be full of divine power, and obedience to the truth as the channel through which light and strength come to us from above.

II. All that I have said becomes more plain when we consider the process by which sin gains the mastery over us, and that by which holiness subdues it and expels it from our hearts. Men do not become great sinners at once, nor do they fall into any evil so suddenly as a superficial view of human life might lead us to suppose. Sin has a method of conquest, and if we wish to defeat it we shall do well to study that method. All sin begins in thought, from which it proceeds to the imagination, and displays itself before us in vivid pictures of enjoyment; thus it gains the heart and becomes a strong desire, and then a purpose of the will, and so at last an action. We may not be always conscious of the whole of this process, since we are not sufficiently in the habit of watching closely the processes which take place in our own minds.

Now it is very difficult to conquer sin when it has quite gained the heart and become a fixed purpose, or a part of our actual course in life; and one reason why we are so unsuccessful in our efforts against evil is that we oppose it only in this last stage. But it is comparatively easy to overcome it at first, when it exists only as a thought; and if we would trace sin back to its first beginnings and meet it there we should much oftener gain the victory.

Do you ask how we shall conquer and put out an evil thought? Even as you most effectually get rid of a mischievous weed,—put a useful plant to grow in its place. How easily you can do this with weeds that are young and tender and have not yet struck their roots deeply; get some vigorous good thing to occupy the ground. So you can in the soil of our moral nature. When the thoughts of evil first appear in the heart, young, tender, and without deep roots, thrust them out by putting some great and holy thought in their place; then they will never gain the heart and never become vicious actions.

Is it not, then, plain how we may realise the power of the Holy Ghost, and how its power to regenerate our hearts comes through the truth? When some evil thought has implanted itself in my heart and threatens to grow into a violent passion and an evil deed, how shall I rid myself of this evil thought if I have no sacred, heavenly thought to put in its

place? Shall I merely cast it out, and leave an empty space in my heart, and ask God to keep it clear of evil thoughts? As well might I pull up the weed, leave bare the ground, and ask the heavens to let no more weeds grow. No, there is but one way to keep out sin,—put some divine plant of truth to grow in your heart; heaven's fostering care will nourish that. When your soul is filled with plants of heavenly origin, growing to maturity and bearing ripe fruit,—when your heart is fully occupied with the precious and beautiful thoughts which the power of God and the Holy Ghost have been nourishing in you, surely sin will hardly find an entrance there.

Now the growth of holiness in our hearts is somewhat after the same manner as that of sin. Christian virtues do not come into the heart full grown, suddenly matured without fostering care, like mushrooms springing up in a night and ripe in the morning. They, too, have their method of growth; planted as the holy thoughts of divine truth, striking their roots into the heart, ripening in holy unselfish purposes and bearing fruit in active virtues. How tender and feeble they often seem at first, as if the least cold breath of worldliness would cause them to wither and die! But when you have nourished them in hearts devout with prayer, when you have seen and felt their loveliness till they have become the choicest companions and most precious friends of

your hearts, when you have watched them ripen into beautiful deeds of kindness and humility,—then how strong they have become, how firmly they hold their place,—then how tenaciously and jealously you guard them, desiring rather to part with all else and even die the martyr's death than to lose the fellowship of these heavenly angels, with all the light and love and bliss which they bestow.

In all material and temporal matters we expect God to work by means of instruments; is it not strange that, in the work of our regeneration, we should expect God to operate upon us without reference to any instrumental means or influences? Though God has filled the Universe with truth—the food of the soul—even more abundantly than with meats for the body,—yet, while we disregard these stores of spiritual nourishment, we expect God to raise us suddenly and mysteriously from the lowest depths of sin and shame to the glories of the heavenly life. Impossible! God is a spirit, and we are spirits; God's influence over us is that kind of influence which one spirit can exercise over another. No man can affect my mind, nor I his, except by some object or thought we can contemplate. It may be some written communication, or it may be the expressive features of his countenance, or the sight or memory of his goodness. The soul can no more be nourished without its proper food than the body.

But alas! it seems to me that while men desire in

all other things to be reasonable, in religion alone they claim the privilege—if such it be—of being most unreasonable; as though God, having made us in his own image, would be best honoured by our despising his best gifts, and telling him to his face that we think that all that makes us most like him is utterly contemptible. No wonder, then, if our religion languishes in indifference, or expires in cold infidelity.

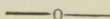
In nature, wonders surround us on every hand, all telling us—if we would but listen to their voice—of the glorious character of God; human life is crowded with its mementos of a Father's love and wisdom, human history is full of sublime, divine lessons; but when we think of the wonderful life and death of the Son of God, what thoughts of grandeur and tenderness, of homely simplicity and of profound depth, come before us! Thoughts that carry us up into the immensity and glory of the infinite, and that penetrate down into the most hidden things of our own hearts; thoughts that touch upon and illumine every object of human life, that go down into the deep abysses of our guilt and shame, and that rise to the sublimest heights of possible virtue and perfection; thoughts that bring out the meaning of everything in our mortality and that make us familiar with our immortality. O what divine power is here, if only we were wise enough to avail ourselves of it!

III. Whatever views you may hold of the doctrine

of the Trinity, whether you say that the Holy Ghost is the third person of the Trinity, or that the Holy Ghost is only one special aspect of the Father, one thing is certain,—that there can be no influence which does not centre in and spring out of a *person*. All truth is but the thought or utterance of a person; and when I feel any personal influence, it is through the love and sympathy I have for that person. To realise the influence of the Holy Ghost in the truth, I must have love to God and sympathy with him. All the utterances of God,—that is say, all truth, will fall coldly on my heart if God himself is not loved, or if the sins and evils of life are allowed to make him an object of terror rather than of deep affection.

Love is the opening of our whole spiritual nature to everything that is great, good, or true. Love to God is the opening of the heart to God. Then all the utterances of his voice are welcome; all the teachings of his spirit sink deeply into ready hearts, truth beams upon us with its clearest light, and the Divine Spirit is mightiest through that truth. We are born again by the will of God, by the incorruptible seed of the word. He that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him.

SERMON XII.



ON DOING GOOD.

“Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.”—
MATT. v. 16.

THE question may have occurred to some, while I have been describing the great purpose of life as consisting in our own personal improvement,—whether this is not too selfish an end to have before us, whether we ought not rather to forget our own personal interests and to care more, or even exclusively, for others and their improvement.

Doubtless this question is worthy of most serious consideration. We must remember, however, that it is possible for us to give ourselves credit for a great deal of generous and noble feeling, when in truth we are only seeking to avoid the most difficult task of life, and to substitute for it one in which professed intentions may pass for earnest endeavours, and in respect to which it is next to impossible to detect our own insincerity. In seeking to make other men better, we are dealing with a matter so far out of our

own power that we cannot test our sincerity by our success. We may persuade ourselves that we have been all our life long trying to make the world better, and have failed only through the obstinacy of men, the deficiency of the divine help, or some other circumstance beyond our control. And so we come off with easy consciences, though we may have really done nothing whatever for the kingdom of God and his righteousness.

For failure in our own self-improvement we cannot so easily find excuse. If we do not become holier, the fault is clearly our own; we can more readily throw upon God the responsibility of an unregenerate world than we can cast upon him the guilt of our own sins and imperfections. Thus it may seem much easier and much more pleasant to be warmly concerned in getting up a revival in the world and saving other men's souls, than to set about zealously to mend our own ways and save our own souls. I am quite persuaded that if we would begin to give more earnest attention to our own spiritual improvement, and to trust God more for the salvation of others, we should find how much insincerity has been lurking in our zeal, and how little it has really been our earnest desire to get sin and wickedness put out of the world. Moreover, there may be a great deal of self-satisfaction, not to say pride, in looking upon ourselves as 'the saved,' and then going about officiously to save other men, who perhaps no more

need saving than ourselves. If it be true that "charity begins at home," I am quite sure it is still more true that any kingdom of God for which we are earnestly caring will begin in our own hearts, in a practical holiness which will cost us more self-denial than the seemingly zealous efforts men put forth, as they say, to save the souls of others.

I should regard it, however, as a valid objection against all that I have said, if it could be shown to inculcate anything like selfishness, or if it could tend to make any man contented with so meagre and narrow a prospect as that of journeying to heaven alone. I have little fear that any one who understands me will fall into so very undesirable a mistake.

I. In seeking our own improvement or growth in holiness, it is not merely our own personal advantage that we pursue. Our Christianity might well be called a selfish religion if it taught us that we should aim merely to secure some heaven for ourselves, or to escape some hell. There can be no genuine improvement in our character which does not make us more anxious to act rightly towards our fellow-men, and to seek their good in the best and highest sense. We reject entirely every notion of holiness which makes it something distinct from our general conduct; some sanctimonious piety towards God, flowing out copiously in the singing of hymns and the saying of prayers, while it suffers us to act unrighteously or ungenerously towards men. True holiness is the

spirit of our conduct in all things, and cannot exist in our hearts without controlling all our actions in the world. That is no genuine holiness which does not lead its possessor above all things to seek the good of all. The selfish man has not yet begun to seek personal Christian character. The very dawn of a nobler or holier character is seen in its outflowings of generous goodness towards all men.

Is not love the foundation of all true character in man, even as it is the basis of the moral nature of God? Every good element of character centres in love; without love every seeming virtue is worthless, as both Paul and John so distinctly teach. If there is, indeed, a pietism which honours selfishness, calling it by the more respectable name of self-love, and which declares the impossibility of unselfish love, this is neither sanctioned by Scripture, nor has it any place in the gospel we preach. When I speak of Christian character, I mean love, the image in us of God's love, and all the pure principles that either proceed from or are animated by it; even as our Saviour teaches that we shall be judged by our conduct towards the little ones of earth, bidding us to be perfect, and to love even as our Father in heaven loves.

Thus, in seeking personal improvement or Christian holiness of character, we are seeking that which will ensure our doing good to others; the unconscious influence of a good man's life, being wider in its

scope and more certain in its results, than studied efforts directly to benefit mankind. In order to do good in the world effectually, it needs that our goodness should be exercised with ease and grace, and not by any forced constraint; so that it may be a ceaseless stream flowing from a willing heart, and not an uncertain ebullition coming forth occasionally and grudgingly.

How much apparent good is done and seeming kindness shown in the world by men who heartily wish they were not compelled by conscience so to act! How much 'saving of souls' is attempted in the world, not because men feel the worth of a soul and understand the solemn grandeur of its life and destiny, but because men feel themselves obliged to put forth efforts of some kind, lest they should imperil their own heaven! To bless and save a human spirit, we need to have felt in our own souls all the sorrows and fears that can agitate a brother's heart, the hopes that sometimes irradiate it and then sink into a deeper gloom, the terrible agonies that men know when they are awakened to a consciousness of guilt and begin to wrestle against it; we need to have realised the full seriousness of life's battle on the verge of two boundless immensities; we need a character disciplined by all this into the true method of being saved. Then shall we labour to save men, not with the cold formality of one performing a duty that he dares not neglect, not with the forced zeal of

exaggerated and transient religious emotions, but with the grand enthusiasm of a heart that has learned from the ever-blessed God that the only true blessedness is in blessing.

II. We affirm as our next principle, that he who attains to the greatest amount of personal holiness or excellence, invariably and inevitably does the most good in the world.

He is the greatest benefactor to the world who lives the most excellent and Christian life. We sometimes think that they are the most useful men who give away most, and who perform most seemingly generous acts; but it is a far nobler gift to the world when we subdue in ourselves some passions or vices that would corrupt mankind, and when we cultivate some Christian virtues that shed light on our human path. What act can we perform so truly benevolent as to shew men how our life should be lived, and that it is practicable so to live it. It is doubtless a good thing to tell men that there is a way to God and to bliss, and to point out the direction of that way; but is it not a far grander thing ourselves to walk in this way, and give men a practical exhibition how its difficulties may be overcome, and all its obstructions removed? Hence he who lives an unselfish life does more to banish selfishness from the world than he who proclaims all his life against it. A holy life preaches more forcibly than a thousand sermons against sin; and he who practically exhibits

the image of Christ does more for Christianity than all the loquacity of the most eloquent orators. It is one fault of our age, that we make the hope of the world's regeneration depend so much on loud talking, and so little on holy living.

(1.) We learn this lesson from the history of the past. Who are the men that have moved the heart of the world? Not the men who have talked much, but rather the Enochs, the Abrahams, the Elijahs of the world, whose holy characters shed a light on every age,—the prophets whose hard life in the desert, whose patient sufferings in dungeons, have shaken the self-satisfied pride and the worldly luxury of princes and monarchs,—the apostles, many of whom have left no words, but whose characters leavened the putrefying mass of corruption which human society presented in that darkest of all dark ages,—the martyrs, whose tears and blood preached eloquently when their tongues were silenced, and all their bodily activities bound in chains.

And what was it in these men that gained such victories? The exercise of a spiritual faith, which shewed that men could be in the world without being of it; the exhibition of a rectitude that no luxuries or flatteries could bribe, and no threats intimidate; the keeping, through numberless miseries and tortures inflicted by men, that serenity of soul and unruffled tenderness of heart which proved that God in a man is vastly mightier than the combined forces

of the world; the raising up of the virtues of Christian holiness out of the dust in which man had trampled them, and setting them on thrones with sceptres, before which the haughtiest insolence was compelled to do homage and the mightiest armies of the world to declare their own impotency. Give us men like these now, and though we should never say another word for the gospel, it would rapidly penetrate to all the darkest corners of our world, and shed its light there.

(2.) If we consult the teachings of Christ, they lead us to the same conclusion.

Although it has not been much noticed, it is a remarkable fact how little Christ did to organise anything like a propagandist society, how little pains he took to secure the promulgation of his teachings by any of the ordinary methods that men adopt. His last commission to his apostles is the only direct instruction on the point; and that is quite a general precept to go and make known those facts and truths without which Christianity is impossible. We have no directions whatever from Christ himself as to the manner in which we should preach, or conduct what men call public worship,—we have no instructions as to the organisation of any church.

How different this is from the conduct of men! Men who have laid the foundation of any society, have been careful to leave their followers most precise directions as to the management of the society, and

the means of securing its growth. Whence this difference? The answer is simple. Men trust in organisation, in prescribed modes of action, and energies put forth according to rule; Christ trusted all to personal Christian character, to the divine power over the heart of the disciple, and to the inspiration it would bring to bear on his life and actions. Men think, if we do certain things great results may be attained; Christ teaches, if we are godly ourselves the kingdom of God will certainly come with power. The Sermon on the Mount, the fullest exposition of the mind of Christ, speaks very decisively, especially in that passage which before all others unfolds the true principle of doing good, "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven." Here is the most explicit promise of effecting the greatest possible good for mankind. And it rests not on our pursuing any evangelistic course, but on our being true to our Christian character, and fearless in its manifestations amongst men; shunning all ostentation and pharisaic exhibition, diffusing a holy light through the whole of our earthly existence, so that men, walking in this light, may feel how near God is to them, and seeing the beauty and feeling the power of Christian life on earth, may be led to glorify our Father who is in heaven.

There is something extremely beautiful in this,

beyond everything else proclaiming the divinity of our religion. Apart from the definite energies of man, it possesses a glorious vitality of its own, and that vitality is its power. It cannot exist without conquering, and that conquest is its life. We thus see that Christianity is not something existing apart from man; it is the energy of God in the soul of man; an incarnation of divine might and majesty, moulding each individual man, until, renewed and hallowed, he becomes an influence of heavenly love, before which the most appalling evils of the world, thus secretly undermined, are destined to pass away.

(3.) Our experience of life shows us how much more influence we may exert by our actions than by our speech. We know the popular proverb, that "example is better than precept;" a fact is always mightier than an assertion. We know the delusiveness of speech; but the logic of facts, properly comprehended, is quite irresistible.

Moreover, the power of a man's speech depends on its sincerity, whereby alone it can move our sympathies; and life, revealing character, is the test of sincerity. We know the immense power which a single man, eminently good and true, may exert over his generation by force of his character. Even though he be not much honoured or much loved, though he be slandered and ill-used, as were the prophets and apostles, though he be despised and rejected, as was the Son of Man,—yet will the power of his character

win its silent way through noisy falsehoods and calumnies, impressing itself upon the most obdurate, outliving all resisting passions of hatred, and remaining like the calm sunshine and genial influence of heaven when all the storms have swept by and sunk to rest.

We see plainly the difference between what is told us and what we have ourselves witnessed or experienced, in the greater permanency of the impression produced by the latter. However eloquent a description of some beautiful landscape may be given us, how soon is the impression gone compared with that which we receive from actually gazing on it. Or in reading of scenes of suffering in works of fiction, how little has your soul been moved beyond the hour of perusal; one half-hour spent amongst the groaning and the dying would leave upon your heart an ineffaceable impression, going down with you probably to the grave. Facts seem to bring us into the very midst of the universe of God, where God himself is speaking to us; words only invite us to look at it from a distance, where we hear only what some man may think about it.

Character in a Christian man is the greatest of all facts, and the most sublime thing existing in our mortal world. Christ is to us the most wonderful fact in the universe, because of the divinity of his character. And I am sure that, if we could conceive of the existence of a man in all respects like Christ,

to see and know such a man, or even to be certain of his existence among us, would produce a deeper impression on us than the mightiest revolution that has ever taken place.

We cannot doubt, for one moment, that true Christian character is the strongest thing in existence, a power transcending all others for the well-being of man. Even of an evil character it is well said that a man perishes not alone in his iniquity, inevitably dragging down others with him into the abyss; as truly may it be said of a good man, that he is a mighty power while he lives, and that his influence dies not with him, but being dead, he yet speaketh.

There is something in character, as displayed in practical life, which touches the deepest springs of the human heart. There is much that we vainly strive to communicate to each other through words. Partly through our ignorance of each other, and partly through the imperfection of language as a means of conveying thought and feeling, it often happens that, when we attempt to persuade men, the very arguments we use produce exactly the opposite effect to what we intend. But character in life wins its way imperceptibly, through innumerable sympathies, and our intention produces its proper result, as though aimed by an unerring divine hand. There is much that is common to all men in the great elements of their nature. Our speech often betrays us into mutual misunderstanding, even when we most aim

at perfect sincerity; but character, as displayed in actual life, is the *very man*, it is the living picture of the soul. When we truly know and see the character of a man in life, his very heart of hearts touches ours, the beatings of that heart are answered by the pulsations of our own; and almost without our knowing it, the very life of the man flows into us through innumerable channels of sympathy and love.

It is easy enough to test this. Listen to some splendid oration about the beauties of human kindness, and see if it reaches your heart much more than to make you say, "how good a discourse;" then look on some real act of generosity, in which you know that the true heart and character of the man is visible, and see if it does not live in your memory, soften all the ruder feelings of your nature, and even win you to the love of goodness. Ah! my friends,—how many an eloquent preacher, in the hour of honest heart-searching, must mourn that the influence of his best discourses is more or less marred through a life that fails to shine with their light.

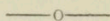
On the other hand, where the lips are speechless, how many an irresistible sermon is uttered even by the simple-minded and feeble, who, in self-forgetful love and the beautiful spirit of our Saviour, show by acts of noble kindness and self-sacrifice how much the love of God has done to mould the character, and to raise it up into the image of his own.

Here, then, is the true method of blessing every

human being and doing most to save the world,—by following most perfectly the Lord Jesus Christ in all our actions, that out of our character may arise the daylight of God's purifying love, never to go down into night, not even when the last curtain of darkness shall fall upon all this bright and sun-gladdened universe.

For then shall the righteous shine as the stars of the firmament, even when firmament and stars shall have passed away.

SERMON XIII.



THE MORAL EARNESTNESS OF LIFE.

“Abstain from every appearance of evil.”—1 THESS. V. 22.

EVER since man became addicted to evil, and its consequent miseries began to mix themselves up so largely with human life, the nature of the distinction between right and wrong, between good and evil, has been discussed with more or less earnestness and thoughtfulness. The discussion will doubtless continue, if not to the end of time, yet at least till right and good shall have gained the complete victory over evil and error. So long as man *does wrong*, he will seek to escape the stings of conscience by blinding himself to the true nature of wrong-doing. So far as we can introduce confusion into our moral notions,—so far as we can conceal from ourselves the distinction between right and wrong, so far will our worst passions and propensities have full indulgence, free from the restraints and reproaches of conscience. Even the law and judgments of God will have but

little influence over us when conscience has ceased to bring us under their power.

It is no doubt possible to find particular cases where right and wrong so run into each other that a decisive judgment seems almost impossible. But this no more shows that right and wrong are not irreconcilably opposed to each other than the fact of the day gradually and insensibly fading away into the night would show that light and darkness are not opposite.

One mode of attempting to throw into the shade the distinction between good and evil is by affirming that evil is necessary to good, that we could not understand or appreciate good except in contrast with evil. What should we know of light, it is asked, but by its contrast with darkness? I meet this argument by a flat contradiction; I affirm that our perception of light is not in the slightest degree dependent on our experience of darkness. Doubtless we should not have so distinct a notion of the difference between the two, but assuredly we should be sensible of all the beauties with which light clothes everything, and we should enter into and avail ourselves of all the innumerable uses of light, though we had never witnessed the gloom of a single night, or seen the fair light of heaven obscured by a single cloud. The artist will tell us that the intermingling of light and shade is one of the great secrets of his art. But these effects could be produced by means

of the infinite variations in light, without the existence of absolute darkness. So of good and evil. We might not so fully appreciate the *difference* between them without knowing both; but the absolute beauties of goodness would be none the less manifest, and we should see none the less of the uses and glories of virtue and holiness.

Again, it is said that virtue needs the discipline involved in vice, and that we are only strong to do right by having learned by bitter experience to avoid wrong. There are reasons why it should seem thus to creatures who have already tasted the bitter fruits of evil; but it is too bold to affirm that there are no creatures who have learnt to stand fast in holiness except by a temporary sinking into wretchedness. If there is a holy and sinless God, dwelling in his eternal purity without the relief of unholiness, what right have we to say that he cannot or will not create beings in the image of his own blissful glory, without the shadow of evil falling across their existence? There are to be met with, at least occasionally, children who have scarcely known, or never known at all, what disobedience to parental love means; and who most certainly have not learnt the loveliness of that obedience in contrast with the gloomy unloveliness of disobedience. Will any one affirm that the obedience of that child would, by any acts of disobedience, become more precious to its own heart, or more lovely to contemplate?

It is the decisive and sharp opposition, even the irreconcilable enmity between good and evil, that gives to human life all its meaning and earnestness. If there can be any compromise between good and evil, if they can be confounded, or if both assert an equal claim on man, then clearly the battle of life is at an end; and I confess that I can see no longer what use or dignity there is in human life. All things are alike; there is nothing to strive for, the devil may as well have his way, nor can it matter whether there be any God at all; for what is God to you and me when the distinguishing element of his character, holiness, has no longer any existence for us?

I propose now to look at certain great doctrines or facts of Scripture that set this opposition of good to evil and evil to good in the strongest and most decisive light.

First.—The doctrine of the *devil*, as the enemy of God, which, as we know, pervades the Bible.

The speculative discussions that are raised about the devil I never could feel to be of any serious importance. Whether evil all centres in one personal devil, or in a kingdom and league of devils, according to Milton, or whether the devils are the spirits of bad departed men who still exert a baneful influence over human life, according to Swedenborg, or whether the devil or devils only represent symbolically the evil principles that rule in men's hearts and lives, according to the more modern notions, appears to me

a question of no great practical importance. Its interest is purely speculative. The great matter is that evil is here amongst us; that it has most fearfully invaded our hearts and become mixed up with all the events and circumstances of our lives; that its influence over everything is terribly destructive; but that, on the other hand, we can, if we will, bring it under subjection to the power with which we are endowed by Christ and his gospel; that if we resist the devil he will flee from us;—this, truly, is of immense moment to us.

And yet what significance or importance could this doctrine have for us if there could be any friendship between God and the devil, or even if the devil were only a servant of God—though a very disorderly one, working under His government, and in the end only accomplishing his will? If only God's will is done, even by the devil, why should we wish to interfere? Nothing can be better than God's will, and so long as it is done, it is of little consequence how it comes to be done. If it really is God's will that I or any man should be in Hell, it is monstrous to wish it otherwise. There is no evil except the violation of God's will.

The devil of the Bible is the sworn and irreconcilable enemy of God. It is the will and aim of the devil to dethrone God, or frustrate the designs of his providence; it is the determination of God to bind the devil in everlasting chains, as the only means

of securing rest and peace to the universe. The opposition is sufficiently marked in the Old Testament, but still more so in the New, where the devil appears in most deadly hatred to Christ and his work. He seeks to tempt Christ from his path of holy love and sacrifice, and when that is impossible, to obstruct it; he seduces Peter from his fidelity; he animates the counsels of the bitterest haters of Christ; he perfects his malice in the condemnation of the Holy Son of God, while the great hope of the world lies in his being cast down like lightning from heaven. Subsequently he is the determined foe of the Holy Ghost, betraying into falsehood Ananias and Sapphira, corrupting the heart of Simon Magus, and seeking to destroy every trace of holiness that appears amongst mankind.

What now is the moral and spiritual significance of this doctrine of the devil? It seems to me that this is just the most forcible way of telling us that good and evil are in everlasting and deadly enmity to each other; that they can no more dwell together or come to any compromise than can two enemies, each of whom is bent on the destruction of the other. Towards the devil of the Bible, or the impersonation of evil, no friend of God can cherish any other sentiment than that of intense and relentless hatred,—his life is solemnly devoted to unremitting warfare against this hateful foe, and to admit a moment's truce is a flagrant and abominable treason against God.

If our hearts are to be roused to the keenest opposition to evil, how could this be better effected than by looking upon evil, not as properly belonging to our nature, but as a personal enemy, everywhere thrusting in poisoned darts upon our tenderest sensibilities, undermining our fondest hopes, and robbing us of our holiest feelings; delighting in the ruin of our spiritual nature, and seeking even to cut off the streams of mercy that reach us from the throne of a heavenly Father. To believe and to feel this is assuredly to have done with every notion of evil being either necessary or tributary to good.

Secondly.—There is the Christian doctrine of heaven and hell; the final severance of the good and bad. I do not mean that coarse superstition which represents hell as a place of material torture constructed by God especially to perpetuate the misery of his disobedient creatures; and heaven a place of material luxury prepared to gratify the mean selfishness of our nature. I refer to that scriptural doctrine which shews us heaven as the divine outgrowth of all those principles of purity and love and fellowship with God which Christ implants in our hearts, and which teaches us that hell is the dreadful consummation of all the bad passions and vices which have been burning down into the very structure and substance of our spiritual nature.

These two results of our actions and principles here,—blessedness and misery,—the New Testament

represents as complete and final, as a bliss without alloy and a woe without mitigation; and moreover between the two is a great gulf fixed, that no man can pass from one to the other. Both, as I have said, are put before us as the result entirely of the good and evil we have done here, and of the true and false principles we have cherished.

The doctrine of Heaven and Hell has been objected to on the ground that it has been used to operate upon our fears and our selfish desires. It is not thus that I read its meaning. The Bible doctrines of the future life inscribe upon our hearts, and brand into our nature, as with flames of living fire, the vast and enormous opposition between good and evil. Could the doctrine of hell, in all its forms, be eradicated from the Bible, the struggle of man against iniquity would probably cease; not because our fears would no longer be excited, but because we should lose that awful and sublime reminder which this conception presents of the utter and eternal antagonism between right and wrong.

Results are so mixed and complicated here that sometimes sin seems to be profitable, and holiness seems only to bring a long train of suffering that may severely try the patience of a faithful Christian. But at the end of a course of sin, cheating us at every step with false appearances of pleasure or profit, looms the deep agony of a lost soul,—lost *only* through the operation of that very sin it has cherished.

From the dark abyss of perdition come up the long groans of wretchedness without hope, telling us, not how harsh, severe, or relentless is our heavenly Father, but how measureless is the curse which evil brings with it, how terrific is its power to obliterate from the soul every bright and hopeful feeling of love, and to plant deeply within it the passions and the hatred that never will let us rest. On the other hand, at the end of the holy path of patient endurance and well-doing is the infinite repose and bliss of the sons of God, assuring us, not of God's partiality for an elect few, but of the power of all true and holy principles to calm the troubled heart, to take away every fear and sorrow, to breathe a heaven of blessedness into the soul, and to lead us into the peace of God by giving us to share his purity. With such a view of the future, we can never think lightly of the distinction between good and evil. Good, with such a sublime consummation, is seen to be good and only good, to be loved with the most passionate love of which we are capable, and sought after with an enthusiastic ardour which rests not but in the most sacred inspiration of the Holy God. Evil, on the other hand, is seen to be evil and only evil,—to be resisted and driven out of life, no truce nor compromise being allowed between the two, nor any disguise blinding us to the distinction that exists between them,—and this not for the sake of the results, but because in their results we comprehend the real

nature of the two, and how inevitable it is that they should be mutually destructive.

Thirdly.—The doctrine of *Regeneration*, most fully and profoundly unfolded in our Saviour's conversations with Nicodemus and the woman of Samaria. Different as are these two characters, and accordingly receiving very different treatment from the great healer of diseased souls, they entirely coincide in the one point that now concerns us. Both were devout in their way and both were looking for and ready to receive the kingdom of God; but both had conceived it in a superficial way, because neither of them had properly understood the deepest principles of good and evil, and their entire antagonism to each other. Nicodemus, with so many others, thought that a respectable and orderly life could entitle a man to inherit the divine kingdom. The Samaritan woman, with the sensibilities of most women, thought that if she only knew where she ought to worship God and the proper manner of that worship, such worship, with the heart in it, would assuredly commend her to God. To both, Christ told the great Christian truth that the kingdom of heaven is essentially holiness,—holiness reaching to the very depths of the heart, searching out and bringing to light all the most hidden sins, until, as by a baptism of fire and water, our souls are completely purified and created anew. In this new creation of a spiritual baptism all the old evil of our nature perishes, and the whole

man comes under the influence of holiness. This same truth is practically taught by our Saviour on many other occasions, where he repels those who have not looked deeply enough into their hearts to feel the necessity of an entire eradication of selfishness and worldliness, and when he so readily received the broken-hearted and the miserable, who had nothing to cling to but his redeeming love.

Why these hard conditions of salvation if good and evil can dwell together, if they are sufficiently alike to be confounded, if they are not eternally inimical to and destructive of each other?—Why this severe and agonising struggle to subdue sin and to lay hold of the transforming power of God's love in Christ in order to enter into the divine kingdom? If, as some men seem to think, evil is not such a very bad thing, but may even help on the good,—if sin itself is but a disguised power of holiness to raise us to God,—what need is there for this stern and bitter conflict, what meaning in remorse and contrition, why this wrestling in death-agonies to tear vice out of the heart and to leave a clear field for God's grace? Surely the path to heaven might be much easier than this!

Fourthly.—We have the great fact of *the Cross*. In all its aspects the Cross shows sin in a most hateful light. The immense sacrifice love there made, could not have any lesser object than to rescue us from the most accursed and hateful enemy to all that is true

and good. To think lightly of sin is to make a solemn mockery of the cross. If there be one thing certain in human experience, it is that a recognition of the cross and a feeling of its influence sends a man away with a most intense hatred and disgust for every sin, and kindles in his heart a quenchless fire of enthusiasm that suffers him not to rest until he has cast out every evil that could have had a share in crucifying the Son of God and Saviour of mankind.

The cross may be said to be the throwing down of the gauntlet between good and evil, the symbol of war to the death between holiness and sin. It is the decisive point in the world's history, where all compromise between right and wrong for ever ends. It might have been supposed that a heart tainted with evil would still be able and willing to recognise the loveliness and excellence of perfect holiness. It might have seemed that sin could not inspire man with cruel malice against innocence clothed in its most beautiful forms of love and compassion. So men might have thought until the horrible tragedy of the cross proved that even the most perfect incarnation of God's wisdom and goodness could not go through human life without encountering the most deadly shafts of malice and cruelty.

Surely, if ever a compromise were possible between heaven and hell, between right and wrong,

between the kingdom of Christ and that of the world, the life of Christ on earth would seem the occasion for such a reconciliation. Would not the very gentleness of Christ to the sinner seem to suggest this? Will not evil in man's heart cease its malice when its deepest wounds are healed by such gentle compassion? Will not the soft answers of infinite love turn away the wrath of even infernal hatred? This question is for ever set at rest when we see the Lamb of God led to his cruel death by the very men he had sought to bless.

It is too common to think that the Jews must have been a singularly wicked people to crucify Christ. But we cannot doubt that any other people would have done the same. Had not the Greeks, the most enlightened and virtue-loving people, poisoned their Socrates? Had not the Chinese banished their Confucius? It was not so much the Jews that crucified Christ as the sinful human heart in its dire hostility to the highest form of goodness. The history of every nation illustrates the truth that evil in its very nature never does or will do otherwise than hate and persecute good, until good shall chain down evil in everlasting darkness.

We need not wonder that men are so anxious to shut religion out of their business and common life. For, put the Christian religion aside, and then it is so easy to make out that a little selfishness is very natural and no great harm, that a little worldliness

will conduce to our prosperity, that a little covetousness will make us energetic, a little moral indifference make us more genial, a little sectarianism quicken our religious zeal; and surely it is easier to go to heaven in this way, comfortably "making the best of both worlds," than to be perpetually agonising and putting ourselves to great inconvenience and misery because a little sin or weakness still cleaves to us.

But take Christianity into your heart and into your life, apply its principles to your secular matters and your every-day business, and then all this sophistry will appear to be high treason against the King of Heaven.

It is from the sublime height of a Calvary of the heart that an Apostle bids us "fight the good fight of faith," and assures of his willingness to be offered a sacrifice on the altar of that faith. It is Christianity alone that reveals the intense antagonism between good and the mildest form of evil, and that imparts to life its full seriousness and moral earnestness.

SERMON XIV.

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HEAVEN.

“Whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap.”—
GAL. vi. 7.

THE thoughtful observer of human affairs and human actions cannot fail to conclude that the future world has little or no influence over men at the present time. It was otherwise in the Apostles' day, when every religious belief was real and earnest, when the memory of Christ's presence was fresh and strong in the minds of men, when the holy enthusiasm with which his personal teachings had inspired the souls of men had not yet faded away, and when tradition had not yet usurped the place of the written word,—then the anticipation of the future life was a real power over men's hearts and lives. Then believers were ready to die for their faith, a thing impossible except where faith has a deep hold of the human heart.

The future world has had great influence even in a later age when material representations of eternal happiness and misery were believed in without ques-

tioning. That age has passed away and cannot return; enlightenment has destroyed the materiality of all religion, and a belief in a material future has become impossible. Perhaps the more ignorant may still be induced to believe in golden streets and green fields, and in material fire; but even these persons, as soon as they come into contact with the more intelligent thoughts of men, will find their confidence in a sensuous religion shaken, and their old notions of heaven and hell, if not actually abandoned, will cease to have any strong practical influence over them. It is only through men's ignorance that a material religion can maintain its power over them.

But when material notions of religion have lost their hold on men's minds, it is not always easy to put spiritual notions in their place; for man's common life lies so much in the midst of the material that it is hard to induce him to rise above it even in his religion. Hence the progress of the religion of Christ is always slow in the world, whilst the progress of Mohammedanism, of Romanism, or of Ritualism, appealing to man's senses, may be rapid. But when once the spirituality of the New Testament lays hold of the heart, it commands it with a sublime power quite unknown to the grosser forms of religious belief. When men understand a spiritual heaven and hell, the future world will exercise dominion over their thoughts and actions unknown since the days of the apostles.

If we inquire into the reasons of the slight power which the future world has over men, we shall find them in two unavoidable results of the more spiritual way of looking at things ;—the very vague and indefinite views of the future which generally prevail ; and the distance that world seems to be from us. When it was possible to put a man's finger into the flame and to tell him to judge from that what hell-fire would be, doubtless there was in that—if he only believed it—a representation that might make him feel hell to be very real and very near. So, too, if we could tell a man who has been dazzled with the splendours of royalty that in heaven he shall look with his bodily eyes on God robed in clouds of magnificent light, and sitting on a throne of gold and diamonds, he might feel the reality of such a picture. What spiritual thoughts can we substitute for such as these, which will give as distinct a sense of reality and nearness ?

There are two principles plainly taught throughout the New Testament, which give the future world an aspect of nearness and reality ;—first, that we must find the elements of our future blessedness here, and secondly, that in the future, as in the present, our enjoyment and suffering grow out of our character.

The evil we complain of is, not that men do not believe in a future state, but that they *do not know what* that future state is to be, and therefore cannot care much about it. There are multitudes of Chris-

tians who die in a calm and trusting faith, believing that a God of love will appoint all things well. But what we do *not* often see is a Christian who looks upon death as a great and glorious event, that will be to him an immense gain,—a Christian who anticipates death as the attainment of what he has been striving for, the realisation of long-cherished hopes; the harvest of long-sustained toils. This was Paul's feeling; but then he had a most definite idea of the heaven he anticipated. It is this which we lack, without which our hearts cannot be much moved by the anticipation of the future. It is useless to tell me that I shall be very happy unless you tell me *what the happiness is* which I shall experience; it is useless to tell me that I shall be surrounded with objects that will yield enjoyment, I want to know *what* objects and *what* enjoyment. I know some objects that give me joy here,—will they be there? If not, but only some other objects that have never given me any joy here, then my heaven is a blank. It is worse than useless to tell me that I shall be free from care; for the desire mainly to get rid of care is cowardly and mean. At the best it still leaves heaven a blank. I must find some real joy in something spiritual and immortal,—some real joy *felt now* which I can take with me beyond the grave, to form the foundation of my future blessedness; then only have I any heaven to anticipate with pleasure. Of course heavenly joy may infinitely surpass any enjoyment here; but it

must be like it, differing not in nature, but in quantity, intensity or extent. I can understand what I have really felt, carried to an unlimited degree; but an infinite joy which I have never yet felt in the lowest degree, and of which therefore I have no conception, can excite no pleasing anticipation in my mind.

Now the New Testament everywhere teaches us that real religion gives us the highest and purest enjoyment *now*; and the experience of this present enjoyment constitutes our expectation of heaven. The future world occupies a very small portion of the New Testament, and that only as the result or consummation of the present. I do not know of a single anticipation of heaven set before us in the New Testament, which is not represented as to be realised by us now. A man who finds no heaven on earth will find none elsewhere.

The second principle,—that *enjoyment and suffering grow out of a man's character*, we see clearly enough in reference to this life. When we understand its application to the future, both heaven and hell will assume a distinct reality, and religion will become the ruling principle of our lives. There is but one way in which men reach heaven or hell,—“Whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap.” This is inevitable, because he sows the seed in his own nature. A man can desert the land he has sown with docks and thistles,—he may be deprived of the

field he has sown with corn ; but what he has sown in his own heart he cannot escape from ; he must reap that harvest whether he desires it or not. I cannot doubt that as the good will find their condition in heaven accord with their regenerate and purified sympathies, so will the evil find in hell all that accords with their cherished sympathies and inclinations. We have a vivid illustration of the darker aspects of the matter in the drunkard. He knows that drunkenness is his misery—the hell of his heart and life ; yet see how instinctively he turns into the tap-room to kindle more fiercely the fires that burn in his soul, and plunge himself lower into wretchedness and perdition. Even so will men whose sympathies fit them for it turn down to the palaces of intoxicating damnation,—no more thrust there by an angry God than is the drunkard into his condition of ruin and degradation. No less truly is heaven the necessary consequence of our actions and our moral condition. Shakspeare has taught us a true and noble lesson, equally applicable to the higher things of religion :—“ It is not in our stars, but in ourselves that we are underlings.” It is not in our doom but in our hearts and lives that we are destined for heaven or hell. Can that besotted drunkard have pure and refined enjoyment? Can the good and holy man carry in him a wretched heart? Never! Not here, and not in the future.

We will now consider how far these principles

will help us in forming a conception of heaven. We want to know where heaven is to be found in our earthly life. We shall have then to strip off from it all that cannot possibly belong to heaven,—all that is necessarily connected with our bodily senses and with the material world. In doing this we readily discover how far heaven is from us, and how near it *might be*.

What is our life? Take away from it, my friends, the eating and drinking, and all our preparation for eating and drinking, including the pursuit of the money we need for that and similar purposes; take away the immense expenditure of time and effort in adorning our persons and our dwellings; take away all our sensual indulgences, and our necessary repose from weariness,—and what is left? In that you have to find your heaven. Is it meagre? Is it nothing? Then you can understand how it is that the future world has little or no power over you.

Now there are three things distinct from all this, rising immeasurably above it, as heaven rises above earth, namely,—*knowledge*, *affection*, and *action*. In these is a true man's life here, in these is his heaven in the future. In these, and in nought else.

(1.) Reflection will show us that all true inward enjoyment is connected with knowledge. When we realise this fact, it throws a new light into life, so that the very commonest things of life cease to be vulgar. Even when I sit down to a meal, know-

ledge may impart to it an enjoyment very different from the mere gratification of appetite. Each single article of diet connects me with innumerable hands and hearts of brother men who have been employed in its production; reflected in it I find some of the wondrous powers of nature that surround life with the highest forms of beauty; and it becomes to me a voice from the eternal, assuring me of a Father's love and a Father's care through every moment of my being. That dusty workshop, that half-lighted and gloomy counting-house, may suggest to me through what innumerable ramifications of life it is possible for me to be either a blessing or a curse to other men; a new spirit comes into every detail of my life; and I can retire to rest every night with the sweet consciousness of having lived to serve my generation, and to be a child of that God "whose every act pure blessing is." We can carry this thought through all men's occupations, and find something fit to constitute heaven in the humblest and most dreary paths of human life.

Every Christian believes that heaven must consist, in part at least, in knowing God. How will our knowledge of God be gained in heaven? Even as we learn to know him here, though much more fully. Can you wander here and find no Father in sun and moon and stars, in mountains, in ocean, and in fertile plains? Then I know not where you will ever find him. Or can you go through life and

discover nothing of his hand, and see nothing of his love? Is solitude never charmed by his presence, is silence never full of harmony from his voice? Then I fear that to you there is neither God nor heaven. Or is such an intelligent sense of God not heaven to you? Alas, my brother, if the highest and most wondrous knowledge in the universe brings no pleasure, what will? Truly there is here an exalted felicity that can mingle with every moment of your earthly being, and unveil to you more and more of the pure world of bliss to which you are travelling.

“ I stand upon the mount of God,
 With sunlight in my soul :
 I see the storms in vales beneath,
 I hear the thunders roll.

“ But I am calm with thee, my God,
 Beneath these glorious skies ;
 And to the height where now I stand
 Nor cloud nor storm can rise.”

If such knowledge yields you the highest interest and enjoyment of your earthly life, then you can already form some idea of heaven, even in its immensity of enjoyment. Having experienced this pleasure in a limited extent, you can anticipate it in its infinity. While it is certain that the besotted sensualist knows nothing of the delights of knowledge, it is no less certain that by tasting of these

delights our desire for them is strengthened, and our capacity for realising them enlarged without limit. Under how many disadvantages do we labour here in both the pursuit of knowledge and the bliss of knowing. There are things shrouded in a mystery so dark that we scarcely dare seek to penetrate it,—as evil, pain, and death; there are things that we intensely desire to know, the knowledge of which eludes our pursuit just where it promises us the highest delight.

We can well conceive these barriers removed in a higher and more spiritual state. The deepest night of perplexity may then turn to day, and no desirable object of knowledge be any longer beyond our reach. The man to whom the few glimmerings of light we get here have been a deep blessedness, would assuredly call it heaven were there nothing else to anticipate than that this whole universe with its Great Creator should become to our minds transparently bright and beautiful, without any dark cloud or solemn mysteries to enshroud it. One of the greatest men of the present century died, feebly uttering with his last breath the words "more light." That man understood heaven better than multitudes who would consider themselves far better Christians.

(2.) If there are many to whom the pleasures of knowledge are wholly unknown, there are few who have no conception of the enjoyments of affection, the second element of heaven, both now and in the

future. No man would care to live without it. Yet how little of its preciousness have we yet discovered? Affection or love is capable of yielding blessedness in exact proportion to its *purity*,—that is to say, as it is divested of selfishness, and rests wholly upon the sympathies of pure and noble hearts. O what a heaven is open to us even now, when we know how to take possession of it!

Innumerable are the channels through which true affection can flow. There is not a human being with whom you come into contact, towards whom, in some form and degree, it may not be called into exercise. And may I not say that the inward and holy pleasure each man finds in life is measured by the number of human beings he finds to love, and the depth and purity of that love? Could we only see in our children something more than the offspring of our flesh, and under all the relationships of the household discover an affection of soul to soul, too spiritual ever to be affected by death; could all our relationships with men discover to us endearing bonds of mutual sympathy and help, to grow stronger and nobler with the advance of life and the multiplication of its cares;—would there be none of heaven's peacefulness spread over this distracted sea of life?

And yet here, again, how many are the barriers to our love as well as our knowledge! Not only that studied selfishness which is the grave of all affection, but the insuperable difficulties of really knowing

each other, the prevalence of distrust and misunderstanding that arise unintentionally. And all these hindrances are a barrier to our loving God as well as man. Let them all disappear, as disappear they must in a spiritual world where we shall both know and be known,—and to what an intensity of enjoyment may our love grow! I envy not the man who sees no heaven in affection, whether it be in the future world, or amidst our present imperfections. But to the man who *has* found in these affections the most solid good of life, how intelligible, how distinct, and how near an object does heaven become! And to him who has lamented the limits and the uncertainties of our love here, how great a gain must death be that raises him to the possibility of a perfect and sinless love!

But here, again, how manifest it is why so few now believe in heaven or anticipate it. If you have allowed the selfishness of life to dry up the fountains of your love; if its miserable gains of gold and silver have drawn off your affection from the invisible world where pure love always centres; if your hard competition in trade and your intense desire to rival each other in the paltry adornings of the material world have led you to see in men only machines to be made use of, instead of brothers to love,—then it is no great wonder if these dry and parched hearts fail to see the blessedness of love in the coming world. Nor can it help you to imagine that the love

of God is left you when the love of man has perished. For this is only delusion. "He that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?" Thus, again, is earth the birthplace of heaven.

(3.) We have now to speak of *action* as the third element of heaven. Assuredly there can be no heaven of idleness; but by action let us not understand the mere material activity of bodily limbs. Indeed, rightly understood, action is more spiritual than material. We *see* the action that is outward and material; but these limbs only obey the activity of the mind. What I mean by action, then, is that *willing and intentional influence* of one mind on another, whereby the well-being and happiness of all are increased.

Oh! it would be a miserable heaven,—pardon the contradiction,—in which we were for ever shut out from the blessedness of blessing others. Such is not the heaven of the Christian. True, there may be there no broken hearts to bind, no bleeding souls to cure, no tears to wipe away, or sorrows to alleviate; yet surely it is not the only good we can do to help each other out of misery. There may be knowledge to enlarge, love to deepen in all; there may be the aid of sympathy to lend to all, in the eternal progress to yet higher joy and purer life. When we have become more like God in character generally, it cannot be that we shall be less like him in the

most glorious attribute of character,—making others happy.

Have you tasted the rich felicity of doing good here? If any man should ask me what single thing could most make this earthly life happy, I should say—the power of doing good to every creature. But alas! how limited is our power, and how seldom can we know whether good is really done. Not so in the future world. Far from the activity of heaven being less than that of earth, it must be infinitely greater, when no weakness and no weariness impedes, and no ignorance robs us of the fruits of our energy.

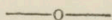
Truly the man who has known the vast delight of doing good to a fellow-creature on earth can understand heaven. It is to him most real, most intelligible, and most near. But as for those poor starved souls that have lived here to feed their selfishness, to grow rich and luxurious, careless of the millions who are poor and wretched,—souls that have thought only to take care of themselves, and leave others to do the same,—preaching up the base maxims of the market for the gospel of their lives,—to such souls it is impossible to tell what heaven is, for the true heaven is just that which they cannot comprehend, or would most assuredly hate if they could comprehend it.

Thus may we have a foretaste of heaven on earth, and it is only through our earthly realisation of heavenly blessedness that we can ever reach a heaven

beyond. When once this is seen and believed I am sure that it will be the most mighty inspiration of our lives, investing with true dignity even our most trivial actions, and rendering the whole of our earthly being divine and godlike.

Against this truly Christian view of heaven it is impossible that reason should raise a single objection; its anticipation can lead no man to neglect his earthly duties. It is impossible that any but the godly should either expect or desire it. But let it be received into the true and faithful heart, it will make our life here a pure pleasure; it will give an elevation and dignity to every act; it will strengthen the whole soul; until, being familiar with the elements of the higher and nobler existence to which we are destined, we shall be fit to enter on it when it pleases God to terminate our mortality in immortality.

SERMON XV.



HELL: ITS NATURE AND MEANING.

“Whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap.”—GAL. vi. 7.

THERE are some questions connected with this subject which I shall not attempt to answer on this occasion; partly because they are not of any practical importance, and still more because I believe it is wholly out of our power to answer them. Chief amongst these is the question of the *eternity* of future punishment, or rather of future suffering. There can, I think, be no question that, in some respects, it would accord best with the intellectual and moral nature given us by God, to suppose that a time will come when all evil, and therefore all suffering, shall cease throughout the Universe, nothing remaining but good and peace and love. There could then be no hell remaining, evil beings either ceasing altogether to exist, sinking into annihilation, or else all being raised at last to the purity and bliss of the divine presence. When we appeal to the Scriptures,

I am bound to confess that the argument in favour of this universal restoration is certainly as strong as any argument that can be brought against it; and I can well believe that an earnest and devout inquirer might find this conviction somewhat strongly impressed upon his mind by a careful study of the Word of God.

At the same time I cannot see the least force in what is often urged,—that if future suffering was not eternal, or if all were to be saved at last, men would become reckless in their conduct. They certainly would not *become* so, for they are so already, in spite of such expectation of eternal misery as they may entertain. In fact, men are not to be frightened out of their sins or terrified into religion. If love does not restrain and draw them, nothing else will; the influence of fear on the human heart is altogether degrading and evil. I have never known any man kept from doing the wrong upon which his heart was bent by any fear of hell; but I have known many Christians whose hearts seemed chilled and their sympathies frozen by the notions they have entertained respecting future punishment. We should certainly gain more than we should lose by getting rid of a teaching which encourages men to look with complacency on the misery of their fellow-creatures, and to worship a God who finds ‘glory’ in inflicting infinite tortures on the works of his own hands.

It seems to me that the evil we have to fear lies

elsewhere ; that the doctrine of universalism implies either that moral evil is only a disguised form of good, or else a *necessary step* towards good ; opinions widely prevailing. But in either case evil ceases to be evil, and so moral distinctions disappear, and with them all vigorous religion. This is the danger that I have always seen involved in universalism, and which has led me to reject it.

Altogether, then, I prefer leaving the subject where I think the Scripture leaves it,—in impenetrable obscurity, in that outer darkness which no mortal sight can pierce. I reject the doctrine of a universal restoration without denouncing the men who hold it. I reject the doctrine of endless punishment as not clearly taught in the Bible. The last estate of the finally impenitent we can well afford to leave to the infinite wisdom and goodness of God.

Assuming, then, that *hell is a reality*, I shall endeavour to show that the line of thought which I followed in reference to heaven is no less applicable to hell, namely,—that the misery which constitutes hell is found here on earth in a less intense form ; and that this misery is nothing more than the natural and unavoidable result of character. Thus we escape the terrible notion that God uses his omnipotence to make his creatures miserable. The idea of God creating and maintaining a world of material horrors expressly for the everlasting torture of the wicked has now, I hope, so far vanished from the minds of

men, that it is unnecessary seriously to combat it. No doubt it was a powerful engine of priestcraft in ages of intellectual darkness; and it may yet linger amongst the grossly ignorant who always prefer sensuous images to spiritual truth; but the world is becoming too enlightened to accept blasphemous traditions at the bidding of designing or mistaken men. But, even with more spiritual ideas, it is yet possible to fall into an error not much less serious, unless we hold fast to the New Testament teaching, that whatever misery we endure either here or hereafter is the necessary fruit of our own characters.

I can well understand that men do not like to be told that all the wretchedness they endure is of their own creating. From childhood upwards we like to throw the blame of our sufferings anywhere rather than on our own folly. To bear the responsibility as well as the pain is doubly burdensome; if we are doomed to sorrow, now or in the future, it is some relief to be able to blame fortune, or destiny, or God for it.

But in relation to future suffering, there is an additional reason why we should welcome the thought that it is not of our own making. If our misery is a divine infliction, if it depends on the divine will whether we shall be happy or miserable, it is natural to believe, rather that God will spare us in his infinite love, than that he will treat us with strict severity; hence men will hope that they may commit the worst

iniquities with impunity, both in this life and the next. This hope vanishes for ever when we once see that it is not God at all but our own actions that sink us into ruin. Not even God can save us from a destruction that we have, so to speak, made part of our very nature, except by turning us from our ruinous course of action. If all his pleadings, his love, and his power have not availed to wean us from the sins we cherish, even Heaven has no resource to save us from the hell to which we doom ourselves.

No thought can be more solemn than this ; and none so incessantly appeals to us. Here, in this life, a thousand events are telling us of the terrible fate we are bringing upon ourselves. God warns the drunkard against his fatal infatuation ; he listens not or he heeds not ; and no divine hand comes in to save him from madness or a horrible death. God warns the youth against licentiousness, but he persists in his vicious indulgencies, and no divine interposition arrests him as he sinks into a dismal grave. The murderer stifles the pleadings of a conscience not yet silenced and a humanity not yet dead to pity and rushes on to his damnable deed ; he may escape human detection, but no pity of heaven shields his soul from the remorse and the avenging furies that leave him no rest out of the grave.

Thus it is all through life ; nowhere does God, avert the natural though fearful consequences of our own folly ; and if hell is nothing but such a conse-

quence, where is the hope of escape from it? Well may you prefer to believe in any hell rather than one that you yourself are creating. Yet this is just the hell we cannot help believing in when prejudice and human devices are swept away, and when we deal faithfully with life and listen to its daily teachings. When once men thus regard the future, and see the fore shadowings of a terrible end in the miserable fruits of wrong-doing here, they will find the evidences of hell's doom so numerous all along life's sinful path, and the illustrations of its misery so palpable and real, that they will no longer hope to escape it without becoming holy.

We have, then, to consider whether, in the suffering caused by sin in this life, we can find such elements as can constitute hell. For this I fear we need not search far; to find heaven on earth may need devout care and earnest thought, but to discover hell we have only to open our eyes, and see what exists around us. If I could show you the ghastly realities of war; if you could see men employing the fine intelligence God has given them in inventing weapons that shall most cruelly mangle the human frame; if you could witness the horrors of the battle-field,—the wounded lingering on in horrible misery as life slowly ebbs away in helpless agony,—the malignant passions unrelieved by humanity, the unblushing vileness that glories most when it can most trample out all that is innocent and pure; could you visit the besieged city

and behold thousands of human creatures sunk into a desperate wretchedness that has destroyed every bond of our nature, men feasting on filth and carrion, and mothers tearing their newly-buried children from the grave or murdering their living children to still the ravings of hunger,—scenes repeated thousands of times in our bloody history ;—you could not deny that earth can bring forth horrors dark enough for hell. If I could take you to some of the many haunts of our populous cities, where you may find children pale and sickly, to whom the sunlight and the glad free air never come, unconscious of any world beyond their narrow dens, or of any God in heaven, wearing away a life more like a lingering death, where you may find men whose hearts are dark with sorrow and poverty and vice, women to whom the sepulchre without any resurrection were a blissful escape from a living grave ;—if I could show you a tithe of what historians and philanthropists have detailed of the darker pictures of human life, you would feel that we need not go beyond the limits of earth to find a hell dark and hopeless enough.

But perhaps it may be objected that such pictures of human society are exceptional and have little to do with us ; we will therefore turn to aspects of life nearer and more familiar to ourselves. In my intercourse with men who have approached the middle or later stage of life, I have frequently met with expressions of what perhaps most men feel more or less ;—

that there is very little in life worth living for, that it would be no great sacrifice to give up life. This is said, not from any bright anticipation of the future, but from a mingled weariness and disgust with life. You will perhaps be surprised or even startled when I tell you that I see in this feeling a foreshadowing of hell. Here we are in a world so designed that every object of it is calculated to give refined and pure enjoyment, and this enjoyment is the reflection of a Father's love; our own bodies are also framed to receive sensations of delight; all the relationships of life are capable of filling the heart with a deep and sacred blessedness. I believe that God has given us the means of attaining immense happiness here; I think that some few reach it, and that all might. Now how can we come to esteem such a life so poor and meagre and worthless that we do not even care to retain it? What is it to be a lost man, if it be not this very feeling carried to its extreme point,—that existence has become so darkened, so stripped of what is good, so mean that it is not worth having? What remains but death,—the second death,—hell?

Again, it is a common experience among men, that as years of sin and worldliness increase, the better and purer feelings of early life grow cold and dead. The prayers you used to lisp in childhood are all forgotten, the happy thoughts you sometimes had of a Father in heaven, all lie buried under a heap of paltry cares and the memory of innumerable follies;

you no longer shrink as once you did from falsehood and crime; and as a natural consequence all religious truth has become dim and cheerless, conscience has lost its power, this world, so soon to end for you, has become your all in all, and perhaps you have ceased to believe in anything else. And what, my brother, does all this mean? Were not these things that have faded out from your heart the signs of life,—of the spirit's life? When the heart's pulse has ceased or is ceasing to beat what means it but *death*? Is not this also the beginning of what the Scripture calls hell? Sometimes it is called outer *darkness*. Were not all these better thoughts and feelings like light to your soul? And when the light is gone out of your soul, what remains for you but the night of spiritual death?

But you say, perhaps, that you are well contented with your present condition. This is the very worst feature. The night is not less dark because men choose it for their evil deeds. I think you would admit that those earlier feelings, when God and love could move your hearts, were the happiest you have ever had, that life has never been so calm since you lost them,—that often a strange and dreary heartlessness comes over you, ominous of worse impending calamities, making you painfully restless when you think of death and feel the hours of this intoxicating dream slipping from you. And is this happiness, or is it more like the beginning of misery? Milton

would tell us, and perhaps truly, that even the devils are in a measure content. The slave is content with chains that gall and a degradation that leaves no manhood in him. And I could show you many men who are content with a low and brutal life from which you would recoil with disgust. Oh! that is the hell I most fear; lest a being in the image of God and formed to dwell with God should be *content* to be a demon.

But the contentment men feel in a condition of moral degradation has in it a delusion most fatal. We are in a world where concealment and deception are possible. Our real thoughts we can hide,—even from ourselves, under some false glitter; when sorrow begins to spring up in the soul we can drown it in some intoxication, and many have avowed how bitter is the sadness that lies deep down under the hollow laughter of life. You can make a man racked with agony of body content by administering a sufficient opiate. He may slumber for hours like an innocent babe. But will he not wake presently to groan in aggravated misery? His contented slumber has not healed him. And a deceptive world will end, and leave you alone with that heart, so parched and dry, without a thought of God, of love or real bliss, the sweet light of truth all faded and the memory of sins and follies all fresh! And I fear it will be but a poor satisfaction then—to be content. Yet this is the end that so many are daily and hourly

working out for themselves ; and seem not to know that hell is in it.

I have before alluded to the drunkard's wretchedness. He drinks and is miserable ; he drinks again to drown his misery, and becomes more miserable still ; and if you wanted a picture of the road to deep damnation you could find none more suggestive. But it is not the passion for drink alone that is thus. In the covetous man we may see the passion for gold, a cold, selfish, withering infatuation, drying up every fountain of gentle and noble feeling, crowding into the soul unmanly fears, a restless and insatiable thirst, with a low grovelling anxiety that makes the bystander exclaim, "Poor deluded wretch !" And every year the thirst is more intolerable and more insatiable, the fears grow deeper and the dry heart grows drier. Nor is it otherwise with any evil passion, habit or vice. Even the sin itself is hell.

And what of the remorse it brings ? After the night of error the morning light ever brings its bitter regrets. Of all things sin is the slowest and most unwilling to fade from the soul's memory. Innocence lost, conscience violated, feelings withered, hopes blighted, a past all dreary with the ghastly shadows of crimes as hateful to the memory as they were fascinating to the tempted, a future deepening with gloom, as the harvest of sin ripens, as pestilential vapours from the soul settle down like clouds of tempestuous wrath,—what is this if it be not hell ?

And there is no evil course on earth in which, to a greater or less degree, it is not found. Such is the hell man makes for himself on earth; and it needs no vivid imagination to see what it may grow to, when no opiate is left to drown its woes nor sleep to soothe with rest.

Yet, though it is truly a hell upon earth that we create for ourselves by our sins, it is not irremediable. When and how does it become so,—when does the last hope of restoration disappear? When the last means of restoration have been tried in vain. I say nothing of the millions who have never known divine truth. I am not here to pass any sentence on the unnumbered heathen who have not incurred the guilt of resisting divine love. They are in the hands of the same Father as ourselves; and his law is universal,—that every man is responsible according to the light he has. I speak to men who know the truth; and to them I can only say that hope perishes when all the appeals of truth have been resisted. Every violation of truth renders the truth less powerful, and when life has been spent in resisting or neglecting it, the end is that it ceases to appeal, and no way of return is left open. Towards such an end is all worldly unbelief leading.

Perhaps it may appear as if I had divested both heaven and hell of their most striking or impressive features. But the features that appeal most to an excited imagination touch neither the heart nor the

life. There is no difficulty in painting vivid pictures of the future, drawn from sense and passion, which may excite a transient sensation in an audience ; but it is far more useful to show men how they may find heaven and hell here, in the very midst of their earthly lives. It will do your heart infinitely more good to feel a little of the bitter sorrow and degradation that wrong-doing can inflict upon your nature now, than to have your imagination haunted by unreal horrors in the invisible world, the only effect of which is to make your future utterly incomprehensible, and to throw dishonouring obscurity around the divine character. I cannot too solemnly or too earnestly assure you of my deep conviction, after a long study of the Word of God, that if you create no hell for yourself in your *characters* on earth, God will create none for you in the future life.

Perhaps you may think that the view of the future which I have given differs somewhat from what you have regarded as the teaching of 'evangelical orthodoxy.' I have not told you that professing Christians, baptised or confirmed, labelled after their sect, or duly registered in some church book, are all going to one indiscriminate heaven of perfect bliss ; and all the rest to one indiscriminate hell of infinite torture. This was the creed of my boyhood, which even then perplexed and shocked my sense of the wisdom and love of God ; it drove me away from creeds and commentators to the Word of God, where I found it to be

a huge falsehood of tradition, born of Mohammedan superstitions and wielded by designing priests. Every year of devout study has confirmed the view I give you. I should be lost to all sense of right and truth if I did not dare to brave reproach and ill-will by saying that heaven was never meant for men whose religion is a gaudy pageantry or a childish toy, for men who stand in the pulpit and dare not utter the truth they know, for deacons and church members who are dishonest in their dealings, for officials who take the bread out of the mouths of the poor;—all of whom atone for a week of crime by a Sunday of formality. No! Hell is in these actions and it must dwell in these hearts, unless divine truth and love restore them to holiness and goodness.

Of the heaven and of the hell of which I speak there may be infinite degrees; for only thus could the great law of the spirit world be accomplished—“that whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap,” and that every man shall dwell in a state for which his character fits him.

I am well aware how solemn a responsibility this brings into life, into every action and every moment. To feel that is what we need. We have been too long accustomed to think that death has some magical power by which it can raise a few indifferent Christians suddenly to be saints and angels in infinite bliss, and sink all the rest down to be devils in infinite woe. How great is this delusion! Death will work no such

change in us; it cannot prevent us being, beyond the grave, just what our actions, thoughts and love have made us. If this should destroy the hope of some poor indolent Christian who has pleased his fancy with a beautiful heaven for which he has never toiled, it is best that such a hope should perish, and that he should wake up from his indolence "to work out his salvation with fear and trembling."

Or if it leads some other man to think that, after all, hell is nothing so horrible, let us hope that it may be a good thing to deliver him from a craven, servile fear, and that he will be all the more likely to look on life with love and earnestness. If men will thus connect the mortal with the immortal, their earthly lives will grow in dignity, worth and holiness, and the future life, if it loses the artificial colouring thrown around it by a heated imagination, will gain the purer light which flows from the unclouded Sun of Heaven,—our Father God in Christ the Saviour.

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