

Memoir and Sermons  
of  
Rev. Alexander MacLennan, M.A.  
Minister of  
Canmore Street Congregational Church  
Dunfermline  
1897 - 1906

Edited by  
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Leith

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### **Prefaratory Note**

The sermons in this memorial volume were not prepared with a view to publication. They form part of the routine work of Mr. MacLennan's ministry, and are printed as they were delivered from the pulpit, in that plain, direct and *nervous* style of speech which was so expressive of the strong and intense nature of the preacher. They are published in response to the desire of many friends

H.J.  
Leith, 13<sup>th</sup> December 1906.

“Jesus was but little older than I am when He died leaving His life-work completed! It comes to me with a solemn surprise again and again when I think of it. When I remember how night fell upon Him when His life's sun had scarcely reached its noon, I can hear Him say, in a new tone, ‘The night cometh when no man can work.’ It makes me realise how I must obey life's highest calls and begin to fulfil life's most important duties.

“All those words that are now men's purest laws were the utterances of a young man. That perfect life, sinless and laden with good, was a young man's life. That marvellous tenderness and sympathy with sorrow, suffering, and toil - qualities usually associated with ripe years and long experience - were the qualities of a young man.

“Except perhaps in the field of politics alone, a man's best work is done before he is forty. I think I may say that of literature, poetry, art, science, and, with some notable exceptions, of the pulpit too. It is when the warmth of youth's impulse is given to the things that are best that the most is made of life.”

*From a sermon preached in Dunfermline by the Rev. Alexander MacLennan in his thirty-second year.*

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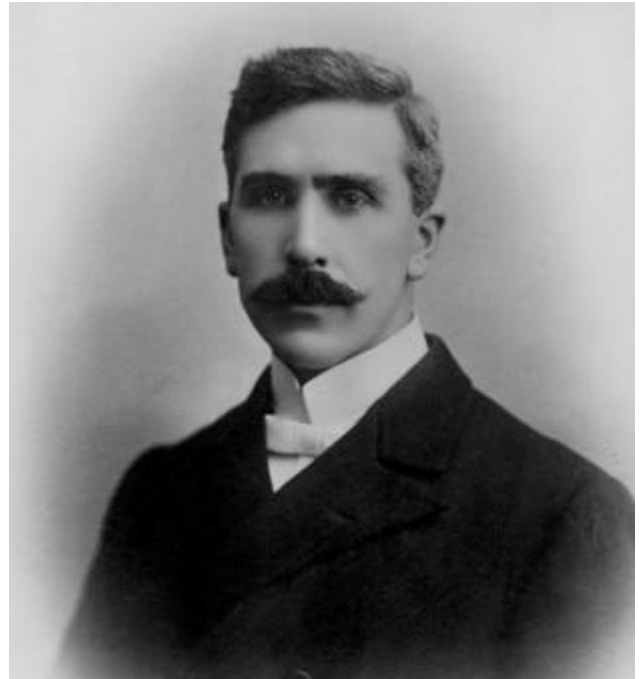
## **Biographical Sketch**

Alexander MacLennan was born in the parish of Rosemarkie, Rossshire, on the 15th of July 1870, and received his early education at Fortrose Academy. During the year 1886, the Congregational Church in Avoch became the centre of a great religious awakening. The whole village was moved and the adjacent country districts shared the blessing of the revival. It was then that Mr. MacLennan, a lad of sixteen, made the great decision of his life. The beginnings of Christian discipleship meant for him no violent rupture with the past, for he had always been, as his classmates testify, a boy of studious ways, earnest mind, and blameless conduct. It meant rather the affirmation with new emphasis and ardour of those fundamental pieties of the soul which had been his from childhood, a solemn oath of loyalty, and the dedication of all the powers of his manhood to the service of the Saviour, from whose love he had never been estranged. It was then, too, that he began that career of Christian service which, though it lasted less than twenty years, must be reckoned great and glorious if judged by the true standard—the multitude of his interests, the intensity of his zeal, the large number of people whom he reached, and the depths at which he influenced them. During the revival he gave evidence of his courage as a disciple, and of what was afterwards to characterise him as a minister—his competent interest in the praise of the church, by leading from the platform the singing of the great congregation. His fellow-workers were amazed at the rapidity of his development, the efficiency of his service, and the readiness with which he won the affection and confidence of the people.

His consecration of himself to Christ and his consciousness of a call to the Christian ministry were experiences almost simultaneous. He began his Arts Curriculum at Edinburgh University in 1889, securing at the outset and retaining until his graduation, a foremost place among the men of his year. He devoted himself with special enthusiasm to the study of English Literature under Professor Masson, and gave—what he afterwards fulfilled—the promise of becoming one of the most widely-read of the younger ministers of his time. But it was in the study of Mental and Moral Philosophy that Mr. MacLennan discovered where his intellectual strength lay. He had the genuine philosophic bent. As a perusal of the sermons in this volume will show, he was on his "native heath" in discussing any psychological or moral problem. One day during his last session at the Hall, as he was climbing the Mound along with a fellow-student who had graduated in Glasgow, Professor Henry Calderwood who was going towards Princes Street greeted him very cordially. "You seem to be on good terms with Calderwood," said his friend. The modest reply was that Calderwood had a knack of remembering his men! The answer was characteristic of MacLennan. He made no mention of the fact, of which his chum was not then aware, that he had taken the second place among the men of his year for a special study of Kant's Ethics, a

task which was annually prescribed in those days by the Professor of Moral Philosophy.

Immediately after coming to Edinburgh in 1889, he



decided to join the Congregational Church which had been instituted in Morningside two years previously, and which was steadily gaining in numbers and in influence under the pastoral care of the Rev. W. Douglas McKenzie, now Principal of Hartford Theological Seminary, U.S.A. It were almost impossible to estimate too highly the debt he owed to Mr McKenzie. Of the many earnest young men who afterwards attended his own ministry in Dunfermline, not one was more appreciative or receptive of his minister's teaching and influence than MacLennan was of Mr McKenzie's during their residence in Edinburgh. When a fellow-student would entice him to one of the larger churches in order to hear some more popular preacher, he would shake his head and say, "I never hear a better or more helpful minister than my own." He was not, however, a mere passive recipient of Mr McKenzie's teaching and of the Church's influence. His diligence as a student did not prevent him from giving ungrudgingly of his time and anxiety for the advancement of the congregation. During his six-years' residence in Edinburgh he took a full share in the work of the Young Men's Fellowship Meeting, the Sunday School, and the Choir, and maintained a living partnership with his fellow-members in all their varied enterprise.

He began his training at the Theological Hall of the Congregational Churches in Scotland, in the summer session following his second winter in Arts and completed his course in five summer and two winter sessions. It was during this period that Dr D. W. Simon was translated to the Presidency of the United College,

Bradford, and that Dr J. M. Hodgson succeeded him in the Principalship in Edinburgh. It fell to Mr MacLennan as senior student to welcome the latter on his assuming the duties of the First Chair. Who, that heard him that morning, can ever forget the warmth of that welcome, the candour with which he declared that all our anxieties as to whether we should like the new Principal or not had been set at rest by the sight of his kindly face, and the sincerity with which he promised that we would all work diligently under his leadership and be good boys!

Two summer sessions of three months each gave Dr Simon nothing more than a bare opportunity of exerting a formative influence over our friend. But this prince of teachers had in Mr MacLennan a ready and receptive disciple, and no one who knows the virility and incisiveness of the teacher, and who marked the younger man's independence of unwarrantable assumptions and his sure-footed movement towards the goal of his thinking, can fail to see that Dr Simon had played no unimportant part in the training and sharpening of his intellect.

In the nature of things he owed still more, of course, to Dr Hodgson and Professor Simpson. He received his training from the one in Systematic Theology, Apologetics, and Science of Religion, and from the other in Hebrew, New Testament Greek, and Old and New Testament Criticism. In our Theological Hall (it is one of the compensations of our hitherto restricted sphere in Scotland) owing to the smallness of the classes, professors and students get very near one another. It is the simple truth to say that we met as friends, that they did not over-awe us, and that we did not shrink from them. We had the inestimable privilege of bringing our professor to a halt in his lecture and of asking an explanation or defence of his statements. Then what discussions would ensue, and what an eager part "Mac," as we affectionately called him, took in them! When Dr Hodgson confessed one morning during his first session that it was a delight to him to meet with men so thoroughly at home in handling the great problems of philosophy, we all knew that MacLennan was one of those of whom he was thinking. The respect of the men for his soundness of judgement was most seen in the Friday morning sermon class. Some of us are to this day made proud at one moment and humble at another by the recollection of his criticisms on our attempts at preaching. In an appreciative article which appeared in *The Scottish Congregationalist* immediately after his death, one of our fellow-students, the Rev. W. J. Collier, M.A.. Bolton, says:—"We often remember—and I am sure that fellow-students will bear me out in this—a certain sermon criticism given by Mr MacLennan which we all agree to be the best student criticism of our time." Next to his personal worth, what called forth our admiration most, however, was his capacity for work, and the speed with which he overtook it. He could take the heart out of a book with amazing rapidity, and could cover the ground in preparation for the examinations at a rate that left most other students considerably behind.

And in every examination without exception he took a high place.

Just before the close of his theological course, he received and accepted an invitation to the pastorate of the Congregational Church in Wick. To permit of his enjoying a holiday, I went north and conducted the services for a month. He had spent only two Sundays among them, but it was easy to see that by his preaching and personal charm he had won the affections of the people. He was ordained in the beginning of September 1895. At the Ordination Service he read a brief statement containing some account of his religious experience, and his reasons for entering the ministry; an acknowledgement of his indebtedness to those who had helped his spiritual life, among whom he made special mention of the late Dr Dale, of whose theological writings he had been a devoted student; and an expression of his doctrinal beliefs and of his views of the constitution and government of a Church of Christ.

The sphere was remote, but the devotion of the Church relieved, if it did not altogether remove, the feeling of isolation. His ministry there lasted less than two years, but in that brief time he rooted himself in the affections of the people. Witness the fact that during his last illness, which continued for eight months, the congregation in Wick united in prayer for him every Sunday.

But it is as "MacLennan of Dunfermline" that he will be held in remembrance. It was there that he reached the zenith of his influence in a sphere commensurate with his gifts and graces. It was with Dunfermline that the outstanding incidents of his personal life were associated. Shortly after his settlement as minister of Canmore Street, he married Edith, daughter of the late Mr Robert Mitchell, Avoch, and Mrs Mitchell, now of Fortrose. I valued at the time and still cherish the remembrance of the honour of preaching for him on that happy Sunday on which he brought his bride to Canmore Street! It was in Dunfermline that his two dear girls, Isabel and Edith (God bless them!) were born. From beginning to end of his ministry there, his heart was at rest in the affections of his people. In keeping with his own previously-expressed desire, his dust sleeps in the cemetery on the hill above the city.

To return to the beginning of his ministry there, it was on 28th February 1897 that he was inducted to the pastorate. He had been invited to the charge in July 1896, but felt constrained to decline in consequence of the shortness of his stay in Wick. During the eight succeeding months the Vacancy Committee (to quote the words of Ex-Provost Walker) "searched the whole of Scotland, and even beyond its borders, but were unsuccessful." It was decided to approach Mr MacLennan a second time, and in view of the continued unanimity of the congregation, he resolved to accept the call.

It soon became evident that the Church, which under his predecessors had already attained a strong position in the city and in the Union, was about to enter, largely in

consequence of the efficiency and devotion of the young pastor, on a period of greater prosperity than ever. His abounding vitality and genius for leadership rendered him a favourite among the workers in the varied organisations of the Church and mission. His genial presence, tactfulness, and tender sympathy made him beloved as a pastor. But it was in the pulpit that his influence was felt in its fullness. What conscientiousness he displayed in the preparation of his sermons! Although never unduly dependent on his manuscript, his sermons were almost without exception written or type-written in full. His church was filled with eager worshippers every Sunday morning and often overflowed in the evenings. What a testimony to the high ideals, the intense earnestness, the deep conviction, and the sweet persuasiveness of the preacher!

Surely no more beautiful tribute was ever rendered to a minister than the following which was paid to Mr MacLennan by an intimate friend, a member of Canmore Street Church:—

Mr MacLennan was in every respect an exceptional man. A stranger entering Canmore Street Church felt at once the influence which he exerted. The prayers—unconventional, almost devoid of quotation, simple, earnest, direct—were the utterance of the heart's deepest needs. The hymns, chosen with fine taste, attuned the mind to the subject of which he was to discourse, and confirmed the deep impression made by the final appeal with which his sermon concluded. The lessons were read with great expression, and often so as to reveal to a listener beauties in the sacred text not previously discovered. The sermon was indescribable; there was a subtle something about it which was peculiarly personal to the preacher. The language was of the plainest; there was no attempt at fine writing, no rhetorical flourish; sometimes there were the homeliest colloquialisms; but there was an insight into human life, a vision of divine love, a practical brotherliness and sympathy which supplied comfort, and encouragement, and guidance, and sorely-needed strength to many a worshipper. Those who knew the preacher most intimately were most deeply impressed. His message did not grow commonplace through custom. The members of his Church often remarked on the homeward walk that the last sermon seemed always the best. Men much his senior in years marvelled at his words of wisdom, and asked each other how a man so young could have earned so deep and rich an experience. Young men hung upon his utterances, and waited at the end of the services, or wrote to him thanking him for the help and hope which they had received. In the home, his sympathy in joy or sorrow, in good fortune or ill, and especially in the sick-room and in the darkened chamber of death, will be a treasured memory to many who now mourn his departure. Unselfish, self-forgetful, considerate, charitable, and lovingly helpful, he was the friend of everyone.

But the name of the city as well as that of the Church was written on Mr MacLennan's heart. His large sympathy and pure public spirit, combined with shrewd judgement in practical matters, won for him the confidence of the people and gave him an honoured place among the leading citizens. He stood as a candidate for the School Board at the election in 1903, and was returned at the head of the poll. He was also appointed one of the School Board's representatives on the Carnegie Dunfermline Trust. While honestly proud of the

material advantages bestowed on Dunfermline by the munificence of Dr Carnegie, and ever eager to do his part in administering these for the highest good of the people, Mr MacLennan never deluded himself into the belief that even the most desirable reforms in environment could render superfluous the great change that Christ calls for within the solemn temple of the individual soul. The sorrows of the people were a burden on his sympathies, their sins a load upon his heart. Take the following as an example of his thoroughness and fearlessness in handling social problems, or, as we ought rather to say, social sins. Preaching on 13th November 1904, the eve of the Town Council elections, on "The Influence of Christian Character," from Matthew v. 13-16, he said:—

The greatest thing in our country, our most valuable asset, is its Christian conscience. And in spite of tendencies to corruption that are prevalent enough, I think even yet that Christian conscience can prevent moral corruption from setting in, and forces of evil from getting their unhampered way. The Christian conscience is the collective influence of many honest people full of the Christian spirit and the Christian conviction. And the moral atmosphere of a town can be affected very directly and very deeply by the sheer weight of Christian influence, if it is brought to bear upon it. It will save it from deterioration and moral shame. You have seen in a home how the influence of a true Christian spirit checks the frivolity and the ill-temper, and sweetens the domestic air. You have seen, too, how a whole workshop feels the silent influence of one genuine Christian workman. He has a bracing effect on all his mates and a restraining effect on their tongues. His character stands between them and sin many a time. And you have seen, when tempers were hot and anger was fast breaking loose in speech and act, how the Christian spirit acted as a calming influence. But don't you see that this very quality of the Christian is a summons to him to exercise it. There are too many Christians who are telling us that the world is growing bad, and worse every day. The blame lies very much at the door of these very people! Whatever forces of corruption are at work in our midst, it is the bounden duty of every man who has any "salt" in him to set his influence against them. Our first consideration is not expediency nor interest. It is not even personal peace and quietness. It is to lay the weight of Christian influence against every-thing that makes for corruption. The Christian has not two masters, but one, and He is the Lord of holiness, the spirit of purity, the lover and Saviour of men. And if I have a spark of His spirit, I can tell at a glance if this proposal or that is for or against His clear will. And before God I cannot understand the Christian who praises God in church and goes out and does nothing to bring a holy influence to bear on the corrupting and degrading forces that are perfectly brazen-faced in our midst. Friendship, business relationship, fellow-citizenship are valuable things in a social order, but a thousand times more sacred and more binding on us is our plain and clear Christian duty. And the aspect of that duty which Christ sets before us here is to stem the progress of everything that tends to moral rot. Intemperance— are you setting your Christian influence against that? Are you helping to create a healthier sentiment about it? Are you using your influence to stem that destructive tide? Or are you going to open the door of the church with one hand and the door of the public-house with the other? How long are Christian people going to tolerate, aye, upon my word, smile upon and bless this engine of moral destruction? How long are we going on pre-tending we don't see it, and it playing havoc all the time with the very people we want most to help and save? I say it solemnly that it is no

wonder that many earnest social workers won't look at our churches, and have long given up expecting help from them as organisations. There is such a shameful failure to show even a decent anxiety to stem the forces of corruption. What we have to do is to salt the community with every particle of Christian salt that is in us. And did Christ say salt? He said also light. And if I take it up aright, He says to every one who has His spirit, See that you light the way of right progress. Who, better than a man taught of Christ, and a man who has drunk of the spirit of Christ, whatever his particular creed may be in the more speculative doctrines of our faith, can lead the road to goodness? Have we a standard in Christ? Then in His name set it up. Stem the evil. Yes, but do more. Show the better way. You are more than torch-bearers, you are yourselves lit by God. Not for yourselves alone, although it is for yourselves too. But out past yourself and through yourself it ought to flash and blaze and shine until men see and love the better way. Strive to show in your own life the sanctifying power and the perfecting power of your religion. There is nothing like that for getting men to glorify God in the way He loves above all—their enrolling of themselves as citizens of His Kingdom.

On Sunday, 22nd October 1905, Mr MacLennan preached the sermon on "The Christian View of Death," which is printed at the end of this volume. It proved to be his last Sunday morning sermon in Canmore Street Church. On the following Sunday he conducted the services in Norwood Church, Liverpool. A few hours after his return home on the Tuesday evening, he was prostrated with pain. A surgical operation was decided upon, and it was performed with results that were at first regarded hopefully. But Mr MacLennan's work on earth was done. The long story of alternating hope and fear in his own heart and in those of his friends cannot here be told. Suffice it to say that after an illness of eight months, during which the prayers of his friends rose for him like a fountain night and day, and notwithstanding the fact that Dr Tuke tended him with all the skill of the ablest of physicians and with the love of a friend, He who has determined man's days and in whose keeping are the number of his months, called him from these earthly scenes. On the evening of Friday, 8th June 1906, God gave His beloved sleep.

Such is the brief record of a noble life. Mr MacLennan had the gracious presence of one born to shape the thoughts, stir the consciences, and direct the endeavours of men. In addition to that, he had two gifts which do not often go together. The first was an overflowing kindness of nature which gave him an extraordinary power of charm. The second was a wonderfully rich, deep, and beautiful mind. You could not be in his company without feeling his magnetism. In a singularly tender appreciation delivered in Canmore Street Church on the Sunday after Mr MacLennan's death, his friend and neighbour, the Rev. Alexander Badenoch, M.A., said :—"What I think has struck very many of us most forcibly about our dear brother, what perhaps some of us envied most in him, was his singular attractiveness to young men, his power of drawing young men about him." He was the young men's friend. They were drawn to him as filings to a magnet.

But people of all ages acknowledged his charm. How dearly he loved the children, and how dearly they loved him! On the day that he returned from Wick, and his fellow-students learned that "Mac" had been "called," we constituted ourselves a miniature "Presbytery," and one of the men with assumed gravity asked the question, "Have you used any illicit means in order to procure this call?" "None," he answered gravely — an assurance which was followed by his merry laugh as he added, "except some chocolates for the children; but I assure the "Presbytery" that I really could not help it: they were such nice bairnies!" The children loved and revered him, for he had in all his comings and goings with them that mingling of strength and kindness which at once woos and sanctifies. The boys and girls in Dunfermline knew his love for them and did not fail to reciprocate it. Often during his illness, when on their way to school, they would waylay friends who, they thought, would know and go forward shyly and ask how the minister was today. Of all the proofs of sympathy bestowed on him during those long months of pain and weariness, there was none that he prized more than the gifts of flowers continually brought to him by the children. An examiner for our Welfare of Youth Committee assures me that in the number of scholars competing and in the efficiency of their work, the Canmore Street Sunday Schools are second to none in the Union. The testimony gratifies but does not surprise us when we remember that teachers and scholars were led by a pastor who ever loved tenderly and wisely the lambs of the flock.

Hardly less remarkable than his attractiveness to the young was the extent to which he influenced and even fascinated those in the third and the fourth watches of life. In most churches the thoughts and affections of the elderly people are backward bent. But in Dunfermline the gracious personality of the young preacher was such that, while the past was allowed to claim the reverence that was its due, the profoundest respect and warmest affection even of the old were reserved for the prophet of the hour. People long past middle life acknowledged that they had been influenced by him as by no other, and when he died they mourned for him as for a son.

To the mental power with which he was endowed, let the discourses in this little volume be witness. Not one of them, be it remembered, was composed with a view to publication. The fact that he produced such sermons as part of the routine work of his ministry amid the many demands made upon him as educationist, citizen, and pastor of a large congregation, is eloquent not only of the faithfulness of the man, but also of the extraordinary intellectual talent committed to his trust.

Alexander MacLennan was one of the few men who come near to absolute sincerity in dealing with Jesus Christ as Saviour and King. Endowed, as has been said, with great gifts, he gave Christ a real opportunity of making the most of him. "I do not think," said Mr Badenoch in the discourse already referred to, "that ever in my experience have I met with so indisputably good a man that had absolutely no detractors." Those who knew

him best and who have acquaintance with the Church, the city, and the denomination in whose interests his life was lived, will readily make that statement the expression of their own experience. His hearers knew that his words were those of a consecrated man, one of whom they could say, as Chaucer did of his Poor Parson:—

But Christe's lore, and His apostles twelve,  
He taughte, but first he folwed it himselve.

The factor that told most for good in the lives of his hearers was the acknowledged sterling spiritual manhood of the preacher. All who knew him felt that the man was greater than anything he ever did. It were absurd to try to trace his influence to anything superficial, such as the tricks of the elocutionist or the arts of the orator. It was due rather to the fact that he was known to be a man who went about continually doing good. "*First he wroughte, and afterward he taughte.*"

Was ever a man more diligent, more intensely devoted to whatever he undertook? He was accustomed to spend Monday morning at golf on the "Ferry Hills." So "keen" was he on his game that he soon became one of the steadiest players on the course. He carried this earnestness into everything. I have been told by a friend who was at school with him that even then he worked with all diligence, as one who realised, so far as a boy could, that life is a sacred trust from God. During our entire course at the Theological Hall, I never knew him waste five minutes of his working day. He was intensely interested in the welfare of the aided Churches of the Union. As Secretary to the Church-Aid Committee, he lost no opportunity of stimulating our little country Churches both by correspondence and visitation, and at the Union meetings he roused the ministers and delegates of the larger and wealthier congregations to deeper interest and larger sacrifice on their behalf. In this work, he had as his valued colleague, Mr John Orr ex-Chairman of the Union, and none of his fellow-workers will miss his help and comradeship more sorely than he.

Another feature in his character was consistency. He kept going on. He always kept going on in the same way. He could truly say, "This one thing I do." Someone has said, "If you want to know a minister's real worth ask his fellow-students." As one of his comrades, I can look back with pride over the years that are gone and say that in all my intimate intercourse with him, in work and play, in our debating society and our prayer meeting, in our Saturday afternoon walks up and down Arthur's Seat, or across the Pentlands, even in those hours of banter, when young men are apt to be off their guard, I never knew

him fall one inch below the level of a Christian gentleman. His influence went all in one direction. He scattered the unmixed seed of the Kingdom of God. The Great Husbandman will have no cause to point to any part of his harvest and say, "An enemy hath done this." I cannot recall an unkind word he ever spoke, a bitter feeling he ever induced. His life was like a piece of sweet music, keyed into harmony with the spirit of our Master and Lord.

His singleness of purpose and consecration to duty did not prevent him from being one of the most approachable of men. He was a healthy-minded man, entirely free from morbidness, ever ready to do a kindly turn. His heart overflowed with practical brotherliness and sympathy. He enjoyed the heartiest co-operation of his deacons, who did much to lighten the otherwise too heavy burden of a busy and prosperous Church. His assistants loved him and reckoned it a priceless privilege to begin their work under his guidance and with the stimulus of his fellowship. His advice and help were constantly sought by young people in the solemn crises of their lives. He was continually cheered by the written acknowledgements of blessing received under his preaching.

Noble in work, he was nobler still in suffering. Have we any explanation of the mystery of his long illness? May it not be that God desired him to leave a complete testimony, an all-round influence? He who would bequeath these must show not only how to do, but also how to endure God's will. This Mr Maclennan did. How tender his heart became, how rich his mind, how mellow his spirit during those months of lingering pain! He showed how, in spite of everything that would convince to the contrary, to believe that God is good. Again and again when sorely tried by pain and weakness, he asserted his trust, in the words of a favourite poet:—

I know not where His islands lift  
Their fronded palms in air.  
I only know I cannot drift  
Beyond His love and care.

The Lord had need of him in a higher sphere of service. It is thus that faith penetrates the mystery of his early death. "The Lord gave and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord." He was His to give and His to take. He lent him to us for a few brief years. He has only taken back His own. And it becomes us to be for ever grateful to God for the loan of Alexander Maclennan.

*Hugh Jenkins.*

A Tribute  
To Alexander MacLennan  
From His Friend  
Henry Beveridge  
White Flowers And Purple

True friend, for thee I have woven a garland  
Tear-spangled; ill-twined, a slight thing, yet love-wreathen;  
Of flowers from my garden unkempt not unordered;  
Of lilac, June lilac—of white flowers and purple,  
For thee have I twined it.  
Feet washed—clean every whit—white flowers become  
thee!

Feet tear-besprinkled — here is white for our grief,  
And purple for mastery; purple for triumph!

He hath left us—the friend I have loved.  
Death hath called for him, death that visiteth all men.  
We mourn!—In the flush of his youth we encountered;  
We loved; but now he is gone, and his cheerful voice,  
Deep, resonant, friendly, I shall hear no more  
Upon earth! Scarce half-a-score years have I known him,  
Youth ended, I elder, have held him for comrade;  
For counsellor sure, wise, faithful, and fearless.  
But now I have lost him.

Friends he had many: many men loved him,  
Dwelt on the winged words that he uttered—  
Faithful, sincere, weighty, well pondered;  
But now he hath left us we mourn! Not on earth—  
Not on earth shall we find him!—Where dwells he?  
Death, speak thou! Say, what realm conceals him?  
Death speaketh not, heedeth not—spirit relentless!

O Spirit of God now speak thou within me!  
As a child weaned from the breast of his mother,  
Friend, sweetly rest. Thy Father upholds thee.  
In the arms of thy Maker rest thee and fear not.  
Farewell, sweet friend! In the land where thou dwellest  
There is no sorrow but joy in God's presence.  
Darkness obscures not—for God's face doth light it.  
There serving thy Master, rejoice thou for ever.

Not lost is his spirit, that my soul tells me;  
Not lost the heart that bare with the burdened,  
Nor lost the mind that directed, the wise voice  
That scattered on earth the true seed of heaven—  
Heaven's bread dividing to each man his portion.  
He counselled the weak, the friendless, the fallen;  
He divined the need and suffering of others,  
He lied not to self, he resisted the tempter  
Who all men assaileth. Shepherd of souls, he

Spending for others the spirit within him  
Saved not his own soul but followed his Master.

Such is the friend I have lost. Him full of life—  
That he hath passed from me—I mourn. Gone, lost,  
Dead: yet I know that he liveth!—But where?  
Where shall I find him? I know not the secret—  
Open to those who the gulf have passed over—  
From us hidden.—But, brother, thou knowest!—  
I listen for God's voice—He Father, we children:  
God's voice speaks within us—we sons of the Father!  
O thou strong son translated, God's love surrounds thee!  
—Now fears all faith-vanquished, I trust, and at day dawn  
In the increasing glory stretch hands forth.  
See, darkness passes! Cloud disperses. Sun rises,  
Glory exceedeth!—Turn thee.—Mark well! and now,  
In my soul, behold God's Becoming!

God is love: God ruleth. He is order and greatness.  
He is life: in Him all things have being.  
God is all: man is nothing. God is light. Behold,  
The light shineth, our darkness illumeth! All is God!  
In heaven for sure many mansions are builded;  
The work is divine, God is the Architect.  
All things sustains He. He alone is Ruler:  
All things sustains He throughout the wide universe—  
Endless and boundless the reach of God's Spirit!  
His reason fills all things—the star and the sand-grain.  
The Spirit of God is one with His creature:  
Return ye! Return ye! O children of men!

Who searcheth the deeps of God's goodness and greatness?  
Thou O free spirit! Fresh day hath dawned on thee;  
Changed thou arisest—eyes once holden, opened.  
As knoweth not mortal, thou knowest the fulness  
Of God's work: thou beholdest sheer verity.  
Loved spirit twice-born in the realms of the blessed  
Surely, somewhere, in God's field sowing the seed,  
And reaping, thou labourest, with joy of the harvest.  
Son of the Highest, thy work is not ended!

Ye mourners, weep no more! Weave ye fresh garlands!  
And scatter ye, scatter, white flowers and purple!  
White flowers for purity; purple, achievement!  
For thy triumph, rejoicing, our paeans we raise to thee.  
Evohé! Evohé! Hail Leader! Hail to thee!



## The Measurable and The Immeasurable.

“And he looked up, and saw the rich men casting their gifts into the treasury. And he saw also a certain poor widow casting in thither two mites. And he said, Of a truth I say unto you, that this poor widow hath cast in more than they all : For all these have of their abundance cast in unto the offerings of God: but she of her penury hath cast in all the living that she had.” - LUKE xxi. 1-4.

Ask the official at the door how much the widow put into the collection plate that morning. Two mites. And if he is a worldly-minded official, who estimates everything by its money value, he will say, “How are we ever to pay our priests and all the working expenses if people put no more than their smallest coppers into the collection plate?” The practical official thinks of ways and means, and I daresay that, in the case of many of the coppers, he would be perfectly justified in grumbling a little. But the official must be careful not to make a mistake in the count, and pass judgment on the gift. *Two mites* as addition goes, and in current coin. But Christ sees the contribution, and His arithmetic works on a different principle, for He introduces new factors into the addition, and declares it the largest contribution that day, although “many who were rich,” as St. Mark tells us, “put in much.” “She threw in two mites which makes one farthing,” says the man who sees only the coppers. “She hath cast in more than they all,” says He who sees all and knows all - all the purse, all the poverty at home, the thread-bare garments, and the pious heart which they cover. It is no premium on coppers. It is a divine estimate of the pious generosity of poverty. And do you ask me what great truth it unfolds to me for our common spiritual education this morning? The truth is this, that behind the *measurable* there is the vast extent of the *immeasurable*, which is apt to be overlooked and forgotten in estimating human life and action. And because that unseen, unknown region, with its secret unmeasured elements, is neglected, we are often misjudging lives and gifts.

The Measurable and the Immeasurable - let that be what I shall call my subject this morning. There are, I daresay, things to which you can apply a foot-rule or a tapeline, and you can be accurate to a fraction of an inch in your measurement of them. Ezekiel gives a careful statement of the dimensions of the altar in cubits; but he is careful to say that these are the measures of the altar *after the cubits*. That is to say—If you look on the thing geometrically, that is its measurement; but if you look on it spiritually and as a symbol, it is immeasurable. A great many of our errors in estimating what is human and spiritual arise through supposing that we have measured the full extent when we have reduced an act or a gift or a life to figures. Arithmetic is a most spiritual exercise if it is understood aright.

### I. The Immeasurable in Giving.

It does not take much labour or time to count the widow's contribution to the temple. Two mites = one farthing. An eight-year-old school-boy would think it beneath his dignity to be asked to add it up. Well, that is the measurable in the gift. But would Jesus draw attention to it as the most handsome gift that day, if all its value were declared when you said, Two mites = one farthing? No, I think not. Christ saw far more than two small coppers. He was always swift to penetrate the unwritten history of

generosity. If you would know the real value of that seemingly meagre gift, you must get into the widow's confidence all the week before - if she will let you into her confidence, about her purse and its condition. But I question if she will. And if she does not, do not hurt her feelings by asking her to let you. It is as cruel a thing as you could do. But if you know anything of the human heart, you will know the story of these two mites. And when you do, you will never say “two mites” again, because you will forget the smallness of the actual sum in the pathos and beauty of the life that gave them. She had to do without something that she might have two mites that Sabbath. It is easy for some of you to deny yourselves something because you do not live just on the bare necessities of life. But go into that poor widow's house and look at her grate, her table, her Sunday best, and tell me where she can deny herself without pain. And yet she did it, God alone knows at what cost, all for her love of God. Add that to the two mites. They are putting our shillings and half-sovereigns to shame.

More than that, think of the depth of piety that prompted such self-denial. Had she been less religious she would have reasoned thus with herself - “They cannot expect me to give anything. The temple is rich. I am poor, and my mites will not be missed. I must keep myself in bread.” And we would have much sympathy with her, I assure you, if she excused herself from giving on these grounds. But you are looking at the matter from a wrong angle. That was not the widow's standpoint. She gave not for the temple's need, but to satisfy her own soul. Her gift was part of her piety. And we are looking at our giving from the wrong end entirely-if we do not regard it as a duty to ourselves. I know people who give from their beds and out of no abounding wealth, but the opposite, to the Church. Shall I, shall the deacons, say to such persons - “We don't think you should give anything: you more than need it yourself.” We shall offer no such brutal insult to a pious soul. These are the mites that make a Church truly rich - and without the love and self-denial that give them, and the prayer and piety with which they have been consecrated, a Church would be poor indeed. More than that, the Church would be undeserving of the name of its Master if it did not hold them as amongst its best-prized treasures. There is a measurable in our gift, you see. But that is not a fraction of the gift. The immeasurable is behind it, and in that we shall include love and self-denial and prayer, until the mites are no longer coppers, but pure gold multiplied by the abundance of the heart's devotion.

### II. The Immeasurable in the Service of Man.

But although the illustration in our text of the true measure of things deals with gifts to the treasury of the sanctuary, the principle of the calculation covers far more. It covers, for example, the service of a man to his fellows, and it will help us to a correct estimate of the extent of obligation to each other if we apply it to that. There is a measurable in service and there is an immeasurable.

Suppose that I am in adverse circumstances, I and those who depend on me for bread, and I can see no rift in my leaden sky. When I am at an extremity of hopelessness a friend comes and puts in my hand a £5 note. More than that and even better, he puts me in the way of a steady pay. Tell

me by what foot-rule, by what rule of arithmetic, am I to measure and sum up the service he has rendered me? Shall I say that he could easily afford the money, that it is a trifle to him, that he will never miss it? Shall I add that he has given me work, but that I shall give him the worth of his wages and more every day? Were I to speak like that, would I not be the most thankless wretch under the sun? £5 and a wage are measurable, but the kindness and the thoughtful-ness and sympathy, these are immeasurable - I could not put these into figures, but I am perfectly sure that the thought of these would do even more for me than the £5 note and the work.

Then there is another side to it still. I have to measure the service done to me by the anxiety I felt lest my dear ones should suffer, and by the relief I now have in knowing that they will not suffer. And so, when I get past the coin and the wage and begin to reckon the things of the heart, I get lost. These things are simply immeasurable. They are too great to be compassed by figures, and beyond the intelligence of the mere arithmetician.

Again, am I to measure the service only by its-money value, and forget to measure the occasion? I measure it by my need at the time. Friendliness is doubly precious to me when I feel friendless and forsaken. I see Christ alone in the shadow of gathering danger, and in the thick of that agony of anticipation a woman comes and lavishes her love in costly spikenard over His feet, and Christ estimates it not at its money value - Judas did that - but by the love that prompted it, the self-sacrifice that made it possible. But more, He measured it by His own distressful outlook. So the good deed done to me in my trouble must be measured by the depth of my trouble. You measure the deed by your conventional figuring, but tell me - can you measure the will? "A man may tak' a neebour's pairt, yet ha'e nae cash to spare him," Burns says. "Silver and gold have I none," said Peter, "but such as I have give I thee." I do not measure the man's heart by what he actually does for me, and I hope he does not. I think most of his intention. And so I learn the deep truth of the oft-repeated advice of Browning to judge men by what they would do, and not by the little that it is in their power to do. *A farthing* - say the hard and dry figures. *The greatest gift* to-day, says the Christ who sees the heart and can measure what to the ordinary onlooker is immeasurable.

### III. The Immeasurable in the Home.

Then I am always very anxious that the home should get its due. And, if it is to get that, depend on it there is an immeasurable quantity in it which will have to be considered and regarded as chief of all. You can measure the *house* if you like. It is a place of so many rooms with its strip of garden, in a certain street. It is rented at so much a year, and so we measure the house - accurately enough, too, so far as the measurable goes. But have you measured the *home*? No, only the house. The home stands for love, for congenial fellowship, for daily inspiration. It is the centre point of life, the place where my fairest hopes and my richest treasures are con-centrated. You may measure the house, and think little of it. But tell me, can you measure the sentiment? No: that is the immeasurable element, and it is the essential part of home. And while I am anxious that the outsiders should know what factors to take account of in measuring the home, I am more anxious still that the young men and women in the home should make no mistake about it. What is the

measure of your indebtedness to the home? Does the young man say to his father, "My food and clothing must have cost you so much, and my education must have been so much more, and you must have paid a further sum to start me in life, and that, I think, is all, and I want to pay you back for it?" It is a good desire to pay back. But look here now! Is that really all that the home did for you? Can you measure your parents' love, their anxiety, their planning, and foresight on your behalf, their doing without, that you might have? Can you reckon the value of their counsel, instruction, and intercession? No, you cannot. And yet that is infinitely the greater part of your debt, because it has been their chief expenditure on your account. A life-time of love will not repay. And are you thinking that a few pounds will settle it? And will you neglect to think of it, although it is not reducible to figures? Before God, I beseech you, do not forget the Immeasurable in the home.

### IV. The Immeasurable in Christian Life and Work.

I would also remind you of the Immeasurable in Christian life and work. And I do it because forgetfulness of it is always causing us to lose faith, and so to lose power and heartiness in our work. The devil never deceives the church more than when he gets it to measure itself and reduce itself and its work to figures. There is an element that is calculable in all our churches. You can say that the yearly income is over a £1000, but you will go quite wrong if you do not think past the figures. What self-denial is evidenced by that sum! Perhaps what meanness, too, and niggardliness! The Immeasurable element of the increase is not in the manual. You say the membership of a Church is four hundred or five hundred. That can be expressed in figures, but can you tell me what vast resources of influence and faith and prayer are there? No, these cannot be measured, and yet it is these, rather than the figures on the membership roll, that constitute the true strength of a Church. You say that thirty or forty new members were added during the year. Are we to gauge our growth in that way? May we be ever kept from such a folly. Amongst the thirty or forty there may be one who, for service and the future Kingdom of Christ, is worth twenty. You know how a pastor was reviewing his year's work with a heavy heart, as many of us do, and he could not get past the fact that only one member was added all that year, and his office-bearers were inclined to think their minister a failure. But time showed him that he had never had so successful a year as the one in which he added that member. For that member was Robert Moffat, and when he added the gardener lad, he added thousands of souls in South Africa to Christ's Kingdom.

I get schedules and figures from our little country Churches up and down Scotland, and seldom, indeed, do they show an increased membership. They can-not hold their own in a city-ward flowing population, and yet I could go back over the history of many of them and give facts that would astonish you - how, for instance, from one Church with a membership of forty, no fewer than twenty-three have gone out in the course of its history, to preach the Gospel at home or abroad. And in the cities there are men to-day playing a leading and a Christ-like part, who were added to some little country Church at the rate of one a year. Think, I beseech you, of the Immeasurable in Church life, of quality, of worth, of ability, of promise, and then estimate if you can

the Church's work. It would be no very difficult task to count the audience here this morning. It would be easier still to count heads at our weekly Prayer Meeting. But when you have done it, what have you? Spiritually speaking, nothing. For you cannot compute, by any rule of arithmetic that I know, the sin, the sorrow, the disappointment, the burden, the faith, the love, the receptiveness, and above all you cannot measure the power of the Holy Spirit. These great and awful realities belong to the Immeasurable.

You can measure a sermon, too, if you are so inclined, by figures. You can measure it by your watches. You can measure it by the number of its heads, by its grammar, by its wording. But I could tell you much about it which is not likely to occur to you in such calculations. And those to whom it has been a message of hope and life could tell you more. And so you can always measure the number of your words, but who can tell how far they carry, and what their effect will be on the life of a fellow-being?

And on and on we might carry this theme to-day, and add illustration after illustration; but I will have done what God bade me do if I have got you to see and believe that, on the highest planes of life, we are in a realm where figures are at best but signs of immeasurable realities, that in gift and mutual service, in speech and home and church, there is a vast immeasurable - elements and forces and influences and powers that cannot be reduced to figures, sorrow that has no language, hope and intention far out-soaring all apparent fulfilment. But over against the treasury into which we cast our gifts, and a silent witness of all our life's most obscure doing, there sits Jesus Christ. He is the infallible Judge, and the infallible Recorder of it all. And at length, when the Books are opened, we shall see it all as it appeared in His eyes. The day shall declare it. May we so live and so labour that whether man can measure our life or not, in God's estimate and His measurement our life will not be found to be a poor thing, but rich beyond all our highest hopes and dreams.

## The Battle Ground of Prayer.

“And being in an agony he prayed more earnestly: and his sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground”  
- LUKE xxii. 44.

THINK we all feel that this experience of our Lord in Gethsemane is not a subject for discussion. It is rather one for awed and reverent meditation.

He knelt, the Saviour knelt and prayed,  
When but His Father's eye  
Looked through the lonely garden's shade,  
On that dread agony:  
The Lord of all, above, beneath,  
Was bowed with sorrow unto death.

But although the most sacred hours of the most holy life are not to be rudely profaned by an unhallowed inquisitiveness, still there is a record of them, and the record is for us. And this most sacred hour in Christ's life sheds most helpful light for us on the very important subject of prayer. I am not wrong, surely, in saying that our most valuable guidance in the practice of prayer is gained from the example of Jesus Christ. And the time we spend in considering the practice of prayer in the light of Christ's example is worth infinitely more to us than hours spent in arguing about its reasonableness, or about any intellectual difficulties that it may present to a human mind.

You will not find any example in the practice of Christ for our so frequent prayer for pardon. Christ did not need to confess sin. He did not confess sin. And that is a very significant fact, shedding a world of light on His character. But I think that in every-thing else, Christ's example is our best light, and our full warrant regarding prayer.

And the aspect of Christ's prayer here in the garden, which bears on our life very directly, is one which we are not in the habit of emphasising enough. I learn here in Gethsemane, and I learn elsewhere too, that Christ made prayer the battlefield of His life. It was in prayer that He faced the Enemy and routed Him. It was in prayer that He came face to face with His stern trial and triumphed over it. And what I say is that this aspect of Christ's praying is a light on prayer in which we too seldom walk. It is a light in which we should walk continually. Every day, prayer should be the field where the battle of our life is fought and won.

I know that all prayer is not soul-struggle. Often it is soul-rest. It is the life leaning back exhausted, but trustful, on the Father's bosom in order that it may enter into fresh strength and new calm and peace. And many an hour of Christ's praying was an hour of peace and quiet, apart from the stir of multitudes and the babel of men's tongues. And so will it be frequently to us.

I know, too, that we commend and practice prayer as a preparation for a coming struggle. That aspect of it we dwell constantly on in relation to Christ. We see Him on the dark and silent hillside on His knees, and then the next scene shows Him expending His virtue in stilling a storm of nature, or a stormy and raging soul. We are apt to say that the strain and hardness of Christ's life lay in the stress of duty, in facing the defiant ills, or the hostile spirits of men. And we look on the hour of prayer as the preparation in quiet and holy peace for that coming strife. But when we think a little more about the matter, and look a little more closely, it is to find that in reality the hour of action was the hour of

calm and confidence. The hour of prayer was the hour of battle. Not just a preparation to enter the battle, but the battle itself. That is what Gethsemane tells us most distinctly. It came near the end of His earthly day. It was His last battle.

But if you go back to the beginning of His ministry you will find another illustration of the same truth. I seem to read the story of the great temptation in the wilderness most correctly, and to most profit, when I look on it as a season of prayer. And in that lonely season, Christ fought grimly with the temptations which threatened His future work - the temptations to misdirect His power, and to yield to prevalent ideals. Locally the struggle was in the wilderness, but spiritually it was in a praying soul. You say it was a preparation for His work - the work He was going out to do for men. Yes, but it was far more. It was the actual battle fought and won on His knees, and He did not have that battle again. For when He entered on His work He was calm, confident, and unmoved by such temptations. The fight was past. And the doing of the work was calm, when He was actually in it. There is no struggle in public like that struggle in loneliness; because in lonely prayer the struggle took place and the battle was won. Prayer was the battlefield of life.

But let us return from that initial battle in the wilderness to this final one in Gethsemane. Here truly prayer is Christ's battleground. Gethsemane is a place of agony and strain and even of blood. There is no effort to minimise the account of that struggle. It is given with a realism which awes us.

But leave Gethsemane. Stand with Christ before His captors, and there is no struggle. Go with Him to the seats of His judges. You see no agony, nothing but courageous calm. See Him mocked, slandered, buffeted, condemned - see Him even crucified. Is there any struggle? None whatever. He is not fighting His battle when events are happening. It was fought in Gethsemane, and in Gethsemane He had won His victory. He gained the victory while He was praying.

Now, if I have asked you to consider those two occasions in Christ's experience, one at the commencement, and the other at the close of His redeeming ministry on earth - occasions when we see that prayer was to Christ the place of his life's battles - I may leave it to you to find the same true of not a few of the occasions of prayer that lay between the wilderness and Gethsemane. For true you will find it - that prayer was the field of struggle and or victory to Christ.

But come now for a moment and set all that down close up against our own life, and especially beside our practice in prayer. Prayer is of immeasurable benefit to us in every way, but we fail to grasp its bearing on the most practical and hardest side of our life's lot if we do not make it, as Christ did, the real battle of our life. Prayer is more than the armoury where you put on your breastplate, and gird your sword on your thigh. The morally victorious man will not only arm there, but do the fighting as well. A man can fight his battles there beforehand, so that when the circumstances meet him, all that he has to do is to speak a word, and the enemy will fall backward on the ground. You know what it all means. It is just this, that our real struggles in our moral warfare and our duty are mainly struggles with ourselves. And our victory lies in getting that self with its desires and likings and fears and impulses dealt with and subdued

beforehand, and then we can face the world, the flesh, and the devil, and neither yield nor flinch. If you have gone to your Geth-semene, and have had your struggle there, then even your Calvary - the very extremity of life's demands on you - will not find you unprepared, not even unwilling, but calm and strong.

How does it work out in actual life? Let me give you one or two instances.

1. One of the most helpful of devotional books, and one which I would commend to you as a very tonic and guide to soul-prosperity, is the Diary and Journal of David Brainerd. Brainerd was the earliest missionary to the Red Indians, and the story of what he suffered, and how he laboured, and especially how he prayed, will make you feel that you have really never suffered or laboured or prayed at all worth speaking about for men's salvation. Certainly not like David Brainerd. But it is with David Brainerd as a man of prayer that I am at this moment concerned. He had heard that next day the Indians intended to have a feast - an idolatrous feast. He retired to the woods to pray about the morrow, and if ever any one came near his Master in the very sweat of prayer it was David Brainerd that night. Listen: "I was in such anguish, and pleaded with such earnestness, that when I rose from my knees, I felt extremely weak and overcome. I could scarcely walk straight; the sweat ran down my face and body, and nature seemed as if it would dissolve." Here was indeed masterful wrestling. But was it all to move an unwilling God? Nay, such striving is never needed to overcome an unwilling God, for there is no unwilling God. But there is an unwilling self. It was, as David Brainerd himself tells us, to overcome selfish ends. and to fight his own fears, and to raise his own earnestness to the very highest pitch for the souls of those Indians. And the next day was a great day for God amongst those Indians, because that night in the woods with God was the night of his battle and of his victory. And, friends, in all our work for God and for men against Satan, the battle is to get the better of our want of faith, and our want of will and our fear, and if we win men to the Saviour, it will be when, before we approach them, we have approached God, and before Him and through Him have gained the battle over self and doubt and fear, and have felt a new and all-absorbing love for men and for their good.

2. I listened once to a bitter speech, and a some-what unfair attack made on a man in his presence and in a public meeting. My Highland blood was getting very warm, which I would blame no blood for becoming when wrong is being done another. But the man who was attacked showed no heat. He was calm, he was silent, and when he spoke it was in a tone and a spirit which certainly were not gained in that atmosphere. Afterwards, I did what is not always a wise thing to do. I said, "I admired your self-restraint under such provocation." He replied, "I had gained control before ever I came to that meeting." Yes, he had sweated it out in struggle before God beforehand, and when the hour of the event came he was strong in his silence. Yes, men, we shall have to face the actual provocation, but it will be no provocation

to us if we have the battle past in the secret of the garden with God beforehand.

3. It is the same when we relate prayer to the trials of life that circumstances bring upon us. What about that disablement, when a man healthy and strong is in an hour deprived of limb or sight? I went one day to see a man who had lost the sight of both eyes by a terrible accident a day or two before. What could I say to him? I did not need to say much, for with darkened days stretching before him all his life, he had already fought his battle. He had the days still to go through, but he had the spirit that accepted his lot. I heard recently of a lady who knew that in a short time she would be blind. It was a terrible prospect, but she set herself to face it and learned the blind alphabet. She had fought her battle in silence, and came out in calm strength. The dark days were still to come, but she had already conquered in spirit.

4. And when it is death that faces us, again I say that the Last Enemy is really met and overcome, not in the hour and article of death, but in that previous hour, when before God a man sees and knows it all, and says, "Thy will be done." The hour of actual bereavement, too, has lost its bitterness, when you can say after facing the coming loss in secret with God, "The Lord gave and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord."

5. And it is in prayer that a man ought to face and overcome his temptations. It is true the actual events will still have to be faced even after that, but they will have lost their power if your soul has got its power before God. There is a passage in one of General Gordon's letters to his sister which I cannot refrain from quoting to you. He wrote, "I had a hard half-hour this morning hewing Agag in pieces before the Lord." What does he mean? Was Agag some brutal barbarian of the Soudan? Not at all. It was the subtle temptation to act for praise and notice, rather than from the pure motive of duty. The secret of Gordon's modest courage was that he fought his battles before the Lord in prayer. And you and I would not be so weak in the face of our temptations if we fought them out unto sweat and blood in the same way.

Men and women, we are eager to be acting, to be up and doing. It is a busy world we live in, and our work is our first call when our senses throw off in the morning' the spell of sleep. We want to get at it. We think that it is face to face with work that we are effective, and all time else is lost to useful activity. Men and women, we are wrong. We are doing that work when we face it in prayer beforehand. We are fighting our battle when we have no enemy in sight, but when we get our souls in trim before God. The secret of victory in the open life, is a previous victory in secret prayer. Bring your life, in the whole, and in the detail, before God in private. Summon your sins to meet you there, and life with its sins and sorrows, and trials and unwelcome duties, will not appal you, for your Calvary is really past when you have finished that dark hour of agonising-prayer in the silence of your Gethsemene. Make prayer your life's battlefield. Christ did.

## Christ's Doctrine of His Death.

"From that time forth began Jesus to shew unto his disciples, how that he must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day" - MATT. xvi. 21.

"For even the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many" - MARK x. 45. JOHN xii. i-9.

"For this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins" - MATT. xxvi. 28.

I think the most remarkable fact in Christianity is the prominent place which is given to the death of Jesus Christ. Of course, every event and every word in the life and work of Christ is important. Christ never did nor said anything to which we are justified in attaching small weight. The way in which we pick and choose among Christ's sayings, laying stress on what suits us, and quietly passing by what is disagreeable, is altogether inconsistent with our beliefs, for we believe that all His words and acts are great and important. But when we find that in the New Testament and all down the course of Christianity, the supreme place in Christ's work is given to His death, it makes us stop and think. We want to know why it is so. Why is Christ's death spoken of so much? Why is it looked upon as some thing greater than any other act or service of His to man?

The Christian Church has put the death of Jesus in the forefront of its teaching and preaching I think for two reasons. First, *because experience has taught Christian teachers and preachers that there is a strange power in the preaching of the Cross, which somehow is not present to the same extent when the Cross is forgotten or neglected.* We need all the teaching of Christ to guide and control our lives. We dare not omit any of it. If we do so it is at our spiritual peril. But history has shown us more than once, aye, again and again has it shown us, that without the preaching of Christ crucified, the power of Christianity seems somehow to fail. All the rest that was preached may have been perfectly true. And yet without the direct preaching of Christ crucified no enthusiasm was aroused, no response was made, Christianity became cold and lifeless and lacked the power to touch men's hearts. And we know that without warmth, without heart-response, Christianity can make no headway: it loses its motive power. Now is not that a striking fact? You may try to explain it as you like. I am only asking you just now to ponder the fact that the preaching of the Cross of Christ - of a Saviour who died to save men - has proved to be the power of God to move men, and as if to set that beyond dispute, we find that when the Cross of Christ - a Saviour dying to save - was let drop out of Christian preaching, a coldness and lifelessness followed, even although other Christian doctrine and moral teaching were earnestly enough set before the people.

That, then, the evidence of experience, went and goes still to shew that the death of Christ preached and taught, seems to be essential to vital Christianity. And that is one reason, why we should keep Christ's death for us in the forefront. We preach Christ crucified because it is the only preaching that can bear the practical test.

The other reason why Christianity has always put Christ's death in the forefront is that *the New Testament writers and especially the writers of the Epistles give it such prominence.* Almost every Epistle is saturated with the

doctrine of the Cross. To try to quote in support of this statement would be to epitomise the Epistles. Almost every Epistle has the death of Christ as its central idea. Paul, Peter, John, the writer to the Hebrews, and even James, make it prominent. Paul makes it central. Now Paul gets the credit in these days of distorting a good deal of His Master's teaching, and of emphasising what Christ *did not* emphasise, of turning the simple Christianity of Jesus into a complicated system very difficult to understand. And since Paul was such a thorough Jew, steeped to the lips in rabbinical teaching, I daresay there are some things which are far simpler in Christ's words than in Paul's. But what must strike us in his teaching on this subject is, that so soon after such an ignominious death, that very death which was to the world a stamp and sign of defeat and shame, should become an object of glorying, and a fact alongside which even the marvellous teaching of the dead Master was as moonlight is to sunlight, and as water is to wine.

Now let us get back a bit further. That is the place which Christian teaching and preaching have given to the death of Christ. It is given because experience shows that it must be kept to the front, and because when we look back to the earliest age, which was also the freshest age of Christianity, the death of Christ is found to be at the centre of Christianity.

Did the apostles then, did the New Testament writers, did the Christian Church down the centuries, do we make a mistake in speaking so much of the death of Christ? In a word, have we given it a place which Christ did not give to it? What did He say about it? We want to have fresh from His own lips, in His very words, all that we can get about His death. So I wish you to consider with me for a few minutes more, the chief of Christ's references to His death. We shall understand it best, and give it its proper place, when we know what place Christ Himself gave to it.

It is worth our while to notice, before quoting any of His sayings, that Christ did not begin to speak of His death at the very commencement of His ministry. If you read the Gospels, and especially the first three, which perhaps give the general outline of Christ's life more in the actual order of events than the meditative keen-visioned John does, you find that there is no mention by Christ of His death until well on into the last of the three years of His ministry. He went on for a time, teaching and healing without speaking at all about His death. Now why was this? If His death was to be the most important act of His mission, why was He silent about it so long? Why did He not announce it right away at the beginning? Well, for that, two main reasons have been given. The first explanation of His long silence about His death is, that as it was true of Jesus the boy that He *increased* in wisdom, in other words, that His wisdom and knowledge were a growth, so it was true of Jesus grown to manhood that, with regard to many matters, and in particular with regard to His death, *the true meaning and importance of it was not possessed by Him at first.* It grew with Him as He went on with His work. According to this view, therefore, the reason of Christ's silence for so long about His death was due to the fact that its importance only gradually dawned on His own mind. It was only towards the close of life that He saw clearly the great part which His death was to

play in His mission. He saw that He could not live. Therefore death was to do what life could not. Possibly those who make this the chief reason of Christ's silence are in danger of pressing their theory too far, and of making Christ's silence out to be Christ's ignorance. Is there not another and a more satisfactory reason for Christ's silence about His death for so long?

It is said that on one occasion Christ spoke unto His disciples many things as they were able to bear them. Now do you not think that in that phrase - *as they were able to bear them* - there is the reason of the silence? Christ usually spoke of things that His hearers could understand. Especially was it needful that He should do this with the disciples. They were far from being men of strong faith to begin with. There were truths which they were simply not able to stand, at first. They needed to be educated up to receiving them. If they were told the truth too soon, before their faith in Himself was properly established, their faith would be shattered. And for a long time it was very evident that they could not take in the idea of a Saviour who would have to suffer and die. Two things are necessary in the divine dealings with us, and God has acted in accordance with them all along the course of history:-

(1) *A revelation must not be over our heads: we must be able to understand it.* Otherwise it would be lost on us. And the gradual growth of our knowledge of God is proof of this. We must be prepared for the truth, otherwise the truth will not find us. And Christ had to wait, to withhold His teaching about His death until His disciples had advanced far enough under His instruction to apprehend His meaning.

(2) *Then God's revelation must never crush us.* There are times in our life when it would kill us to know the truth outright. It has to be broken to us gradually after being held back as long as possible. It is kind to us to do so. Now the disciples could not at first have borne the thought that their Master was to suffer and die. It would have crushed them. And so Christ waited until their faith was strong before He said anything to them about His death. I think this accounts sufficiently for Christ's long silence at first about His death.

The occasion in His life when He felt that the time had come for Him to speak out, was when He discovered that the disciples believed Him to be the Son of God. Immediately after that He spoke of His death. He felt that the disciples, after reaching that stage of faith, could be trusted to bear the momentous announcement.

In His references to His death after this point - and these references are very few, but they are very weighty - Christ presents His death under four aspects, and I think these aspects of His death must all be remembered and have their due weight given them. Before I mention them, there is one other thing that must be noted. It is that Christ gives the simpler aspect first, and each after reference goes deeper - the second deeper than the first, the third than the second, and the deepest truth connected with the death comes last. I may briefly sum up the four aspects of His death which Christ set before His disciples thus:-

- (1) He died a martyr for truth and righteousness.
- (2) He died for mankind.
- (3) He died to show God's generous love.
- (4) He died to put away sin.

These are the four aspects of His death which Christ presented to His disciples. Other references there are to His death, but these are the ones that show what Christ believed to be the purpose of His death. Let me say a word or two upon each.

(1) *He died a martyr for truth and righteousness.* This is the simplest idea of Christ's death, and Christ expressed it first. He did so when he said, "*The Son of Man must go unto Jerusalem and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes and be killed*" (Matt. xvi. 21). That was the first plain statement that Christ made about His death. And it said this much at least, that it would be occasioned by His persistence in speaking truths which simply cut the hearts of the religious hypocrites. It was very clear to the disciples then that the popularity of Christ was a thing of the past. The teaching and the works, which at first impressed people by their very strangeness, were found to be very keenly pointed. It was now going to be a battle between right and unrighteousness, truth and falsehood, reality and formality, Christ on the one side and the mass of the people led by the priests and scribes on the other. Christ knew how it would end, because the customs and traditions of the people were such that the exponent of truth and righteousness would have to go in the very teeth of them. In several directions He provoked deadly enmity. For example, He exposed pitilessly the hollow hypocrisy of the scribes. He was the sworn foe of sham in religion, and the condemned knew it. But the very fact that they knew it made them all the madder against Him who saw through them. Christ made some strange friends, the scribes thought. He went and dined and fraternized with the social outcasts of His time. This was thrown in His teeth with all the force that hate could muster. Besides those offences, Christ also denounced the kind of thing that was called righteousness, and which was simply robbery and injustice done in the name of religion. Now when it is one against a nation, the one knows how things are likely to end. And Christ knew that it was only a question of time until the hate of His countrymen should break out into open violence, and that this violence would culminate in His death. This was the first aspect of the Cross of which Christ spoke. Christ was a martyr in the cause of truth and righteousness: and *so far* His followers could go - must be ready to go. It was the aspect of His death which Christ had before Him when He spoke of the Cross which His followers must take up and carry if they are to follow Him. This was the baptism which men could share. This is what makes the martyr's death to this extent akin to Christ's, that he suffers for his cause. He will do the will of God, though it cost him his life. That spirit is for every-one of us. *All* that Christ's death means we cannot share; but the spirit of devotion to righteousness, willingness to face a hostile mob, led by the personification of tradition and custom, is what we too may share, and for this reason we remember the martyr aspect of the death of Jesus.

(2) The second aspect of His death presented by Christ is in the words, "*The Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve and to give His life a ransom for the many*" (Mark x. 45). What He emphasises here is that He died on behalf of mankind. This is a deeper idea than the mere martyrdom. He spoke it in connection with the question of greatness. Christ said that true greatness depended on real service done. The more a man serves others, the greater that man is. It is not

the man who in virtue of an assumed superiority, says to one, "Go and he goeth, and to his servant, Do this and he doeth it," who is the truly great man. It is he who does most for his fellows. And, Christ says, the greatest service that one man can do to another is to lay down his life on that other's behalf: and Christ's thought is that if His kingship is to be acknowledged it will not be by merely asserting His royalty, but by winning men's loyalty, through service done them, and this service was the laying down of His life for them. But we do not adequately define that service, when we say that Jesus died in a heroic attempt to save men, and that in saving others He failed to save himself. It was more than that. The word "ransom" is there and it goes deeper and makes Christ's work unique. He died for us, died that we might live. His work of reconciliation made it necessary. He had the power to lay down His life. He gave it willingly. He gave himself for the world. That is the second aspect of His death, which Christ presented in His teaching. He died for us on our behalf, to win the benefit for us, that we might not die.

(3) *The third aspect of His death is that it showed the generous love of God to us.* This is dwelt on with much tenderness and gratitude in the Epistles. "We love because He first loved us." "God commendeth His love toward us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us." But Christ Himself felt no less than Paul that His death commended the love of God. There is one incident in the life of Jesus which He took up and read as a parable of the Cross. It was the anointing of His feet by Mary of Bethany (John xii. i). And one of the points of similarity between Mary's act and Christ's was the generous love that it showed. It was lavish. It looked like waste, but it was really the expression of a deep love that could only show itself in such a generous extravagant fashion. Now there is the same generous element, Christ would have us to understand, in the death on

the Cross. It looks like waste. Could it not be done for less? Would not a cheaper salvation have sufficed? No. God had to show His love, therefore the act had to be as generous, as lavish, as was the love in His heart towards mankind. So the death of Christ was the proof of the love that gave. It was Christ's love that prompted Him to give Himself, but it pointed beyond Himself to the very heart of the Everlasting Father.

(4) The final revelation is reached at the very close of His earthly days. On the betrayal night, with Calvary in sight, He took the cup and said that it was the symbol of His blood shed for the remission of sins (Matt. xxvi. 28). This was the final stage of Christ's teaching about His death: it was the deepest truth He had to state about it. *He died to take away the world's sin.* Christ kept this conception of His death to the last. It was most difficult to understand. The disciples needed higher training in order to comprehend it. It was the summit of the revelation of Christ about His death. It completes the other aspects. It puts the death of Christ in a unique position. He tasted death as no other tasted it. He tasted death for every man. His death is the pledge of forgiveness and of cleansing.

It was this last aspect of Christ's death that the apostles seized and elaborated and taught in season and out of season, and they laid the stress on the right place and on the loftiest thought. And if we are to have a true idea of the meaning of that death on Calvary, we must learn as they did, of Him who alone could explain how much it meant. Gradually as they were able to bear it He showed His followers what His dying meant - first, His martyrdom, second, His act for the ransom of the many, third, His highest proof of divine love, and last, His putting away of sin. As far as is possible to us, let us have the same spirit as was seen in the Cross. And in those higher aspects of it, which we can never repeat, let us trust the love that takes away our heart's sad guilt.



## Conversion.

“And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus”—II. TIMOTHY iii. 15.

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

When we try to define such a word as Conversion, we are apt to use terms which are so theological that they miss the mark of the human heart. You will allow me, therefore, to describe the spiritual experience that goes by that name in language of an every-day colour. The word means simply to turn round, to face about, and go in the other direction. I have seen it put like this. The human soul is at home only with God. When we forsake God, we go away from home. But when we recognize this, and, bethinking ourselves, turn back to God, we begin to come home, and this turning round and coming home is conversion.

I do not want to lead you into theological subtleties, but I wish to remind you that there are two other words which are very closely connected with this word conversion in our spiritual experience. The one is *repentance*. Again and again in Scripture they stand together in the one appeal, “Repent and be converted,” or more accurately, “Repent and convert,” turn. To repent is just to change your mind. The natural order is, first, think better of it, and then turn. The other word that is closely connected with conversion is *regeneration*. It describes God’s part in the process. It is the giving of new life and power to the human soul. But you see that the three things are very close to one another in experience. The one precedes the turning round, on the human side. The other is God’s reinforcement of the soul in its new direction. To regenerate is God’s work. To turn is my work.

Professor Candlish, in his very helpful book, *The Work of the Holy Spirit*, points out a very striking fact. It is that, in Scripture, while it is very distinctly declared that Regeneration, being born from above, is an absolute essential for entering the Kingdom of God, that is not said anywhere about Conversion. And while it must be said to all whose faces are in the wrong direction, “Except ye turn, ye shall not enter into the Kingdom of Heaven,” there are others who do not need to have that said to them, because as a matter of fact they have not turned their backs on God. Professor James, in his book, *Varieties of Religious Experience*, looks at conversion from his own point of view - the point of view of a psychologist, and he says the same thing. He phrases it in a novel way. He says: “God has two families of children on earth, the once-born and the twice-born.” He is not using the word “born” there in our theological sense. What he means by the once-born is that there are people in the world whose life is one unbroken unity towards God. They have never left the paternal home. They have always lived in the light of God. They have not been spiritual wanderers. They do not need to turn. In a peculiar sense this is true of children. Christ said that to become as little children, is to be fit for Heavenly citizenship. In a deeper sense than the poetic, Heaven lies about us in our infancy. I think we have instance after instance of this in Scripture. You know that Samuel lived and walked with God, but you cannot point to any turning, any conversion. One who does not depart, does not need to turn back. And you have John the Baptist, whose spiritual

growth is described in this way, “The child grew and waxed strong in spirit.” And farther down in the New Testament you have Timothy to whom St. Paul says, “From a child thou hast known the holy scriptures.”

Bad theology has affected our training of our children very injuriously. We think we must wait for their conversion later on. Whereas, if we only guided them right, they would grow up in the love of God and the sense of God from the very first, and would never need conversion, in the exact sense of that word. And there are many of the best souls to-day who cannot point to any revolutionary experience in their life and say - That was my conversion. They were like one whose words I shall quote to you. “I always knew God loved me, and I was always grateful to Him for the world in which He placed me.” A child who is early taught that he is God’s child, that he may live and move and have his being in God, will doubtless make more of life than one who is told that he is born the child of wrath. I know men who say (and my personal experience enables me to understand them) that they cannot tell when they were converted, or if ever they were converted, who cannot recall a time when their hearts did not turn in trust and obedience to God. Now such once-born souls may not be perfect, they may not be without sin; but neither can that be said of one who has passed through a turning movement in his spiritual life. Life is a growing likeness to Christ, a deepening love to Christ, a fuller acceptance of His salvation. And may God help us, who are parents and Sunday School teachers, to guide and guard the souls of the young, so that they will not stray into the far country at all, but belong to the family of the once-born, whose lives have never been out of vital touch with God.

II. The other truth about Conversion which I want to bring before you lies at the other extreme from what I have been saying. It is this, that if there are some who do not need to be converted at all, in the exact Scriptural sense of the word, there are others who have been converted many times. Not that they have to go back to the beginning and start afresh every time, but that, having gone a certain distance all right, they have turned into the wrong way again, and they have to face about once more, if they are to be in a right attitude, and reach their home in God at last.

Suppose you turn to your Gospels for illustration of this. Among the disciples there were several different types of spiritual life, and as many types of conversion. And along the lines of our thought this morning, two stand out as types of the truths I have stated. I should say that John was one of the once-born. He seems to have had his heart always in a sensitive attitude towards God. The light from Heaven always awakened him, when it played on his nature. He always recognised the higher when he saw it. When John the Baptist came, he became his disciple. And he did so, because he was every day with his windows open towards Heaven, and the Baptist drew him nearer Heaven than he was before. He was obedient to the Heavenly vision. And then days passed, and Another came, a greater than John the Baptist, and this sensitive nature again responded to the higher call, and the fuller light that came in Christ. All along the hard and weary road that Jesus walked, John was by His side. Every day, and every new experience, gave additional

enrichment to his receptive nature, until you can see that he entered into the spirit and purposes of his Master more fully and more intelligently than any other among the apostolic band. He was a plant grown up in his youth. He was the once-born among the disciples.

Now, if you except Judas, the biggest contrast to John among the disciples was Peter. And we can gather enough from the Gospels to warrant us in saying that Peter was not one of the once-born. He must have lived a rough life in his youth. The influences that go to purify and chasten some natures seem to have upon others an exactly opposite effect. The fisherman's life which made John a poet, and a philosopher, and a man of vivid spiritual imagination, helped to make Peter a rough-spoken, ill-regulated, and wayward kind of man. Now when Jesus met John, He found a nature just fitted for the indwelling of His own spirit. On the other hand, in Peter he met one who needed to be changed in moral conduct. And we know that the first contact with Christ had just this effect on Peter, it made him feel his sinfulness. Did he not say, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord?" But Christ changed Peter. He got him to turn. Peter was converted. His face was turned in the right direction, and he followed Christ, doubtless knowing something of the great strain that a man feels who steps out of a rough and careless life, into the fellowship of Christ, and seeks to walk true with Him. No doubt, many a time he had to suppress the rougher side of his nature. But there came an hour when it quite got the better of him. So long as he had the steadying arm of Christ beside him, he stood erect and triumphant, but when he found himself among rough characters, who goaded him unmercifully, he failed and fell, and the coarse habits of his youth came back.

He cursed and swore, and told his lie as resolutely as ever he did in his unregenerate days. In that moment he was diverted and perverted. His Master had foreknown what would happen to him, for He knew his character right well. So in anticipation He said to him, "When thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren." Peter, then, distinctly needed a second conversion. There was something very like a third conversion, too, in Peter's history later on, when he mistook the right policy of the Church, and St. Paul spoke to him those straight words which helped to turn him round on the question of Christian freedom. So that if we wish an example of repeated conversion, we have it in Scripture in Peter the apostle.

And we have it in life, too, about us. Dr. John Watson, of Liverpool, was in America a year or two ago, and he tells of a man whom he met in the far West. As they were speaking together, this man pointed to a lady and said, "That lady's husband was the first to convert me, and it took fifteen minutes. Since then I have been converted six times." He was a man who had roughed it, but, said Dr Watson, "I think he was converted now for the last time, if I might judge from his life." You say his way of putting it was the way of a man ignorant of the refinements of theology. You say that it is

absurd for a man to speak of having been converted six times. Well, I don't know that he is not more Scriptural than you imagine. And it is only because we speak loosely about conversion that we have such difficulty in thinking it. For again, let me ask, what is conversion? Is it not turning your back upon sin and your face towards God?

I may be speaking just now to some one who said years ago, I have turned from sin to God. And you did turn. But since then you have found what many of us have discovered, that after turning your back on sin in the general, you have afterwards to turn your back on sin more in the particular. It is the company of Christ that exposes sin to you. You see meanness and envy, and strife, and loose speaking to be sins, as you did not before, and you have to take a definite stand against those sins, if you would not have them stand between you and God. You must turn from them. And if you were converted long ago and yet feel that some particular sin is dwarfing your life, and keeping your conscience pricked, then Scripture is my authority, and the facts of human nature are my authority in support of Scripture, when I ask you to turn your back definitely on that sin. The life of God is truly within you. Do not doubt that for a moment. But more life, and more perfect life will be yours, if you convert, if you turn round about, and give your back to that sin. I may be speaking to some one who gave up a sin years ago in the strength of Christ, and your pain to-day is that the old sin is getting a fresh grip of you. You tremble when you think of what may happen. Will you believe that to-day, you may do again what you did long ago? You may turn your back on it in the strength of Christ. Do not go on worrying that you a Christian are sinning. Realise rather that you will be a better Christian if you turn. Convert, turn again, and get your face to God and your back to that sin. You have not left Christ, and the eternal life has not oozed from your soul, but to reach the fuller life, you must turn your back on that sin. Will you do it?

In this Scripture teaching about conversion there is a tender and loving message to the young. You are still untainted by the grosser and darker sins of life. You may have sometimes looked towards the far country, but your gaze and your feet are not set that way. Will you take Christ's way right on? And then you will not need to turn back out of sin. You will be kept out of it. God's saving love will be always around you. If you go definitely away, you are sure to be sorry for it, and you are sure to want back sometime, and oh, it is not easy to turn after a bit, and there is a lot to undo, and you can never be as if you did not go away. Remain, I entreat you, in the saving love of God.

But there are some others here to whom I want to say a single word. It is you who know that your faces are turned away from God, and know that you have eaten forbidden fruit, and tasted sin. If you would live, if you would be on good terms with God, on such terms as give peace and strength in life, you must turn. You must turn your back on your sin, and return to the Father.

## Sin Working Death Through Good.

“Sin, that it might appear sin, working death in me by that which is good; that sin by the commandment might become exceeding sinful” - ROMANS vii. 13.

This whole chapter is a marvellous piece of soul-history. More than that, it is a soul-history which could be written only by a man who was pre-eminently skilled in observation. Most people could tell you the outward history of their conversion, but not one in ten could give you in an intelligent way the inner history. The latter is far more difficult to put into words. But St. Paul does that. Before doing it, however, he gives a clear statement of how he came to feel his need of conversion. And that need appeared, not in any criticism he had to pass on his outward life - it seldom is the outward conduct of a man that compels him to see that he ought to get converted to God - but in the inner discord, and the inner power of sin. And St. Paul was psychologist enough to be able to describe clearly in words how sin in his heart was in the habit of acting. And in no other thing does his knowledge of the human heart, and of his own human heart in particular, appear more markedly than in this statement which he makes about the subtle and crooked way that sin has of corrupting the inner life of a man. *Sin*, he says, *actually gets hold of the good in me, and through that very good, does me to death.* That is the striking thing about the statement. It is not that sin seizes the *evil* within and working out its natural course ends in spiritual death. That is what everything we know about life would lead us to expect. But it is more than that. And more tragic than that. The most painful possibility in our nature is that, if we are not on the watch, the very good in us may aid and abet in working out our doom. The light from Heaven may lead astray. As Christ puts it, *the light that is in us may become darkness.* Now when it is put that way, it seems a thing almost incredible, but St. Paul knew his facts, and knew himself; and the very knowledge of it all was one of the most urgent reasons for his conversion. And if we would take it home to ourselves as St. Paul did, we should see something so fearfully sad in this distortion of the best in us by sin, that we should neither eat nor drink nor lay us down to sleep until we saw to it that the good in us was the colleague of the good above us, and was working out our final life instead of our final death. For a man is in a most perilous state when the richness of his nature, the ability of his mind, the love of his heart, the fires of his zeal, and the very elements of his greatness are not merely stunted, but enlisted on the wrong side-making not for his doing, but for his undoing, not for life, but for death.

### I.

Now St. Paul gives us the general statement. He does not stop to amplify and illustrate it. He has left us to do that. And, unfortunately, the thing is so common - I say it is so common a thing in human life - to have sin turning the good in us into an instrument of evil, that we have not far to go in search of illustrations. And right to our hand is this fact, that our life is under the order and guidance of certain laws of God. And if God is good, as we are convinced He is, and if He intended all that is, for the perfecting of human life, as again we firmly believe He has, then all these laws were originally intended to further life, and establish its goings in a right direction. And yet it is an indisputable fact *that those very laws are often annexed by evil, and that evil works through them instead of good.*

Take, for instance, *the law of habit.* How shall we define this law? We may do it in this way. A thing is more easily done the second time than the first time, and again it is more easily done the third time than the second, and frequent repetition makes the doing of it almost automatic. It only needs the stimulus, and it does itself. Indeed, it is easier to do it than not to do it. Now, when you think of it, that is one of the most wonderful of the laws of human action. The brain and the will commit action to the care of the nerves and muscles. The physical part of us takes over the thing and does it for us. And what a beneficent law it is! Not only may we teach our muscles to be our true servants, but when we do that, we leave our higher part, our mind, more free for higher functions. All we have to do is to set this law agoing in the right direction. And what can you say about this law of God, but that it was intended to make the progress of life easier for us? It was intended to fix good in us so that it might become habitual.

Let us not always say -

Spite of this flesh to-day

I strove, made head, gained ground upon the whole!

As the bird wings and sings

Let us cry All good things

Are ours, nor soul helps flesh more, now, than flesh helps soul.

But the pity is that it is the other side of this law that we speak of most - how flesh *hinders* soul. Habit means too often with us bad habit. And why? Because sin has taken the good law, and by it is working out death in us. And how? Oh, because we were mad and bad enough to set the wheel going in the wrong direction, and the law of habit which says that the second time you do a good thing is easier than the first time you do it, says the same about a bad thing. The second time you do a bad thing, you do it more easily. You have less inertia to overcome to set the machine of your being in motion, and if you go on doing it many times more, it will be easier for you to do it than to refrain from doing it. And that is how sin takes the good law and makes it the instrument, and a very powerful instrument, too, of evil. And there is not a person here who has six grains of sense who will not stop and ponder this fact, and see to it this very day that this great and powerful law of habit, which God meant to confirm us in being and in doing good, is not annexed by the evil in us, and made to work out our bondage instead of that habit of good, which is the truest liberty.

### II.

Then, may I not remind you that we have given to all of us *human instincts*, which are a real endowment of wealth to our nature. They were intended, so far as wisdom can show us, to help to preserve us in life, to help to link our lives beneficially to others, to help to make our lives richer in good. And it is the commonest thing in our experience for sin to get hold of them and use them balefully on our life.

*Take the instinct of possession.* It is ingrained in us to wish to have. You cannot get past that. It is a fundamental thing in our composition. And how else could we ever gain true enrichment of our life, how could we fill it up and have anything else than an empty life? Every part of our life was meant to gain to itself the things that are in harmony with its essence. The body was meant to add to itself comfort and strength, the mind to gain knowledge, the spirit to acquire

what is in keeping with itself. This instinct of possession belongs to all parts of our being. Now sin does not rob us of that instinct. It does not even lessen the force of the instinct. What it does is this. *It degrades the instinct.* It takes nothing from the desire to have, but it sets that desire after the wrong things. Instead of coveting, what St. Paul and Jesus would call and have named the best gifts, it sets the instinct of possession on the track of the lower things. Sin inverts our sense of the value of things. It gets a man to believe that he may let go the intellectual possessions and occupy himself with the material. And in an age like this you have only to go to the mirror to see one whose higher instincts of possession are misdirected and set agoing in hot haste after the things that are fleeting and transient. And if you want to know further of this instinct, and how sin annexes and uses it to lower and smother the true life of a man, you have only to think of the way in which it develops into selfishness, and rank individualism, and utter disregard for the rights of others. Now one of the works of God's spirit in converting us will be to redeem this instinct from the mastery of sin and restore it to its proper and divinely-intended function, of impelling us to seek material good only as a means to intellectual good, and intellectual good, not as a minister of pride, but for the benefit of men, and above all spiritual good, for one's own lasting good, and for the full redemption of the world.

2. Then another good instinct which is apt to be detached from its proper end in our life and set to work our harm, is the *instinct of happiness*. I do not think I make a mistake in saying that this is an instinct with which we have been gifted by God. I firmly believe that God meant us for happiness in this world. Christ's first sermon was a sermon on happiness, and how it could be got - how the poor and the sorrowing might be made happy. He opened His mouth saying, "Happy are ye poor." That was a recognition by our Saviour of this instinct in us all. Now when Sin said, If only I can get possession of the channels of good, I will get a hold over human life, it straightway began, too, with a sermon on happiness. Sin does not ignore the instinct. What it does is to debase the idea of happiness. And it does it by appealing to the lower elements in us, to the physical side of the instinct it you like. It gets a man to be so occupied with the pleasure that is sensuous, that he is led to forget that there is anything higher. The highest happiness is without doubt religious happiness. It is the joy of a soul at rest, yet striving ever after the best. It is the felicity of one who has discovered a balm for every woe and a solace for every sorrow. But what Sin says is - I can show you an easier spring of happiness. Drink and forget your sorrow. Indulge in sensuous. pleasure and you will rise above your disappointment: you will satisfy your instinct of happiness. And the element in that devil's trick which fascinates and deceives, is that happiness like that is a temporary elevation above care and sorrow. But it is a spurious joy, and it is a sham heaven into which a man is lifted. He awakes again to find himself in the ditch. And if you value your true life, you will take infinite care that you are not taken in by that sort of happiness, but that you keep the instinct for felicity pure, and set on lofty satisfaction. And again I say, conversion is partly a change of mind regarding what will minister to the true happiness, and a recapture of that deep-laid instinct, for the higher life of a man is a life in which happiness is in keeping with his high nature.

And although I have not time to do it, you will be wise to-day, if you think of all the deeply-rooted instincts of your nature, the instinct for friendship, the instinct of love, and half-a-score more, which were implanted in you by God to urge you to your full perfection, and you will question yourselves and see if they are kept pure, or if sin has usurped authority, and is working your death spiritually by means of them. And if you find that you have made them the servants of its tragic purposes, you will cry to God to have them restored to their proper function.

### III.

Then do we not remember that the *extraordinary talents*, as well as the ordinary talents of men, are powers of good bestowed on men for the greater service of others and the greater glory of God? Whatever you have in abundance, is your extra power to live and make the world alive. And power to its last particle is holy duty. *But the tragedy of history is the frequency with which great gifts have been turned to great sins.* Sin does not destroy the talent. It diverts it. It turns it from working out good, and makes it work out evil. We have to say many and many a time with sorrow that this man has great gifts, but they are *misdirected*. They are the instruments of sin rather than the instruments of God in the world. The talent that makes a thief successful is simply God's gift of cleverness, of keenness of mind, of ingenuity misdirected. Thus sin works moral death by what is good. The man who wrecks himself by indulgence is often led into it by a perfect talent for friendship and kindness, sin again working death by what is good. The sensualist, ugly though he is in his sins, was not always like that. He became that by the very strength of passion and warmth of nature which might have been fires for God had they only been kept clean. And you can again go the round of human endowments, and where you find them wasted, it is because the holy things have been given to dogs. The worst is the corruption of the best. Evil has made good its instrument. The soil that is capable of bearing rank weeds, is a soil that was meant to grow abundant harvests for God and men. And there is nothing sadder than to see great gifts, not merely lost to the world and to God, but actually becoming the agents of the Devil, and what was given to a man to lift him, to help him to rise to Heaven, hurrying him down the slope to death.

Men and women, there are many ways in which the deadly nature of sin is brought home to us. Think of the pains, think of the penalties of sin here and hereafter, and in the light of your thoughts see what sin is, what sin can do, and what it can bring on us. But perhaps there is no aspect of the work of sin that should appeal to us with more force than just this one which is here held up to our shamed contemplation by the Apostle. Think of how it frustrates the true greatness of a being made in the image of God. Think of the wasted powers of men and women. Think of the wretchedness wrought by the misuse of what God endowed us with for the perfecting of our being. The moral perversion of god-like powers is one of the most pathetic sights that life presents to us. We are overwhelmed with life's sorrow, we are perplexed by its pains, we are depressed by its disappointments. But I ask you is there anything so much a matter for tears, as that the good in us, by our wilfulness and sin, should be, not killed - that would be bad enough - but made the instrument of sin, and thus further wrong in the world and defeat the purpose of our being? And if there is

nothing in all God's world of men to compare with that for sorrow, there is nothing surely in God's world of grace to be compared with that salvation which can take hold of a man and restore his reason to him, making him see the drift of a misdirected life, and regaining Paradise for him by regaining for God and his own true life those god-like powers which

become through perversion the servants of sin and death. And if you do know that in you there is such misdirection, such prostitution, will you this day spring to that hand stretched out to rescue you, and yield your members and your instincts and your powers to be the instruments of God?

## The Divided House.

“So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin”—ROMANS vii. 25.

R.L.Stevenson, in his picturesque notes on Edinburgh, tells a very weird tale of two maiden sisters. They lived together. They occupied one room between them. But, unfortunately, they fell out, and that so bitterly that not a word was spoken between them from that day of their quarrel. You would think that they would separate. But no. They had that distorted estimate of things which said - You are allowed to quarrel if you like, but it is an awful and a sinful thing to make a scandal. So they kept on living together. But from the day of their bitter feud they drew a chalk line across the floor in such a way that it ran from the middle of the door to the middle of the fireplace. They could go out and in, they could even cook their food, without trespassing on each other's domain. And there for years they lived in hateful silence, and, says Stevenson, in the night, in the dark watches, each could hear the breathing of her enemy. It is a pitiful spectacle that he pictures to us. Yet nobody knew better than he did how true an allegory of human life this bisected room, this divided house, was. Indeed, this unlovely division in human life was always before Stevenson. It was he who gave us that freezing tale of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde - two men in one - the lovable, genial, kindly Jekyll, who at another hour of the day became disfigured into the villainous Mr Hyde.

Now the sad thing about life is that all up and down it, where God intended that there should be, if not uniformity, at least harmony and unity, what we really find is antagonism, enmity, bitter and sharp division. We see gulfs fixed where there should be no gulfs, ill-will where there should be charity, discord and confusion where there should be ordered purpose, elements warring where they should all unite for one high and noble end. The great problem is how these antagonisms are to be overcome, how the bitternesses are to be sweetened, and the divisions to be healed. How are you to get the warring and jarring elements to combine? I want to show you that it is in Christ that we have the one commanding power and the one potent influence which unifies the divisions of life, brings peace where there is strife, and harmony where there is discord.

Let me ask you to think of the division there *is in this very house of your own heart*. It has the chalk line across the floor, not drawn to a straight edge, I know, but winding about at all sorts of angles. But always you find on one side of this line the diviner elements, the purer yearnings, the nobler aims. While on the other side of the chalk line you have all sorts of devilish things, passions that are foul, aims that are impudently selfish, promptings that have the Devil just at their back. A French writer exclaims, *Homo duplex, homo duplex!* (Man is double). He was thinking about the day that his brother died, and he broke into bitter tears of grief. But, next moment he found himself thinking how well that scene - the dead man with his brother bending over him in uncontrollable grief - would look on the stage. *Homo duplex* - one part of him grieving, the other part posing! Barrie has a very subtle analysis of the man of sentiment. He shows him one day nobly and heroically saving a boy from drowning, but he has hardly got him to the bank of the river into which he has fallen before he wonders how it will all appear in the paper. *Homo duplex* again. Noble bravery on

one side of the chalk, the spirit of a petty peacock on the other, and both in the same man. But this division cuts down deeper than that. It cleaves a man's life to its very foundations. You are, one bit of you, all for duty, no matter how hard. You declare that you will do everything that may become a man. But you know that if you are going to live up to that, you will have to fight for it. You will have to contend not merely against things outside of you, but against the members of your own household, against other impulses that beat against the circle of your own breast. There is no man but has felt this. If one part of you says duty, the other part says, See if you cannot get out of doing the thing. Why should you trouble? There you have the divided self. Which is going to win? Duty or Ease?

Take another phase of this internal division. You know, and I know too, something of the division and strife that lie between our ideals and our habits. A good vision is the gift of God to every man: it was given to be the leading light of our moral life. One side of me sees and knows that better thing which God has before me, and which I ought to strive after. Follow the gleam, says the better part of me. But from the other side of the chalk there is a voice, and it says - It is much easier to go on as you are doing. That is the appeal and power of habit. Vision bids me get out of that course. Habit says - Your life is set: you are in the ruts. It is not easy to get switched out: just go on. There again you have personal knowledge of what this division in one's own life is. You remember that time when your conscience said - I must make a change from this way of doing. It is neither manly nor godly. I will make a fresh start. And you did. But you had hardly set off on the new tack when you heard a very insinuating and a very persistent voice pleading with you to come back. And then the battle began. Ideal against habit! And you told me that habit gained the day. But you were never happy there. For no sooner did you go with habit than the voice of conscience began again, and it never gives a man peace until it wins. You will never know true and harmonious life until you go with conscience and let habit know that you have crossed the line. If only you are firm, habit will slowly cross the line too, and take the side of conscience. I mean that you can get the law of habit to work for your good. You can make your flesh your friend.

You could go on giving picture after picture of the divisions that are everywhere amongst the elements that compose our being, finding contradictions and fightings and discords - duty pulling one way and pleasure another, conscience urging in one way and habit in another, the spirit on one side and the flesh on the other. We are as a union of angel and devil, and the vital question is - Which is going to predominate? Is it the angel, or is it the fiend? Now, an old philosopher, in an allegory, pointed out that the many and different elements within us are so many animals, and the secret of peace is good government. If reason rules, all is well; but if passion, or pride, or impulse, or temper, has the upper hand, then there is nothing but hopeless discord. All that is exactly the case. The whole secret of our life is one of proper government. It is far less cutting out than it is right control. We are often wishing before God that we were made a little differently from what we are. We wish we had less passion, or less pride, or more warmth. But really there is no original element in us that we can do without. We may do

without the ones that we have imported, but none of the native elements can be parted with without loss. It is a great mistake, then, to mutilate life in any way. It is wrong to let any element in us run to waste. The true treatment of discord is to introduce proper government. When that is done, in time - it may take a little time - the rebellious fires in us will become subdued, and from being dangerous they will prove most useful. For the inward fires are like the outward ones, good servants but bad masters. All our energies are needed for life. The important thing is that they be rightly directed. If the chalk mark is not to remain, if it is to be obliterated so that no part of our nature shall be in antagonism to any other part, it must be by the proper spirit ruling. If the wild discords are to merge into a sweet harmony, the instruments must be tuned aright, and must sound to the right time-beat. Before the conductor comes into the concert room, every musician seems to be doing what is right in his own eyes. All the instruments are joining in a fearful discord. But when the conductor appears, and taps his baton, the noise is over, the music begins. The many wills and instruments are governed by the will of that one conductor. And the result is fellowship and harmony. Now it seems to me that in your life and mine, if there is not going to be division and discord right on to the end, we must see that the higher rules. I mean that in all our life the higher must rule the lower. If the lower is ruling the higher, life is upside down. It has no proportion, and no order, and no true purpose. And yet that is what is spoiling life for hundreds in our midst to-day. The lower is ruling the higher in them. The appetite has more say than the reason. Passion has the reins when sober and calm judgment should be driving. And you cannot wonder if the result is that a man's life is a failure on those terms. You may be perfectly sure that the way to ruin life is to thrust the higher powers from their throne and exalt some usurper to their place.

I ask you to-night to subject yourselves to a thorough examination. You feel the pulling in two opposite directions. For all that you are worth, do not be guided in your way by the strength of the pulling, but see who are at the ends of the ropes! It seems to me that we are always too ready to say that we must go in the line of the strongest force. Strong temptation is an unailing source of excuse for the sinner. The pressure he assures us was so strong that he could not resist. What should weigh with us far more than the strength of the pressure is *the one who is exerting the pressure upon us*. When Luther was in his great strait betwixt two - whether he should be true to conscience or to the overwhelming pressure of human force - did he simply reckon the strength of the rivals? Nay: he looked to see who the rivals were. And on the one side he saw all the forces of the Church and all the harm that they could work him. But then he turned to the other side, and there, urging him to the opposite course, was *God!* His pressure was purely an inward compulsion, a compulsion which a man often resists, because it is invisible, but in God's urgency through his conscience Luther saw his duty. The division was healed by accepting God. And in your life there may be the appeal of this passion and that habit, and the appeal may be very strong and very prolonged.

But the question for you is not about the strength or length of the appeal. It is whether God or His opposite is to rule. And depend upon it, true peace can only be got, the divisions can only be really healed, when God rules. And as you think to-night of the inward discord that is in your heart - the pulling about you get, with sin wanting you and God wanting you, one part of you reaching up to Heaven and another part as if its roots were set in Hell - do you think there is any power that will break down the division but the rule and reign of Christ within you?

Unity is the great law of being - unity in thought, in aim, in law. And in our life the watchword of grace is unity. Put Christ in charge of your life and the first thing He will do is to rub out the chalk line. He will have no part set over against another and contradicting it. He will have every power and every passion and every feeling enlisted in the one great work of furthering you along the way of righteousness. He blends all the sounds into one grand harmony. But before He does that, He does something else - He tunes the instruments. He takes each instrument separately and brings it up to concert pitch. He takes the warring elements one by one and Christianises them. That is, He not only so works upon them that they can harmonise with the others, but He exalts and purifies them. He will take your conscience and educate it until it becomes really a good conscience. He will take your passions, and while preserving the fire, will make it burn up its own dross until it is a pure flame to do His work with. He will go next to your pride and take it in hand. He will severely prune it of all loftiness and superciliousness and contempt of others, and when He has finished with it, it will be transformed into a true self-respect and a gentle dignity. After that He will deal with the ambitions and purge them of their selfishness and their shameless worldliness, retaining indeed, the ambitious spirit, but making it your spur to holiness. He will not rest either until He takes your zeal and drives out of it all narrowness and uncharity and bitterness, infuses wisdom into it, and turns it into the channel of good works. He will take the affections, give them a pure love, steady them, and wed them wisely to reason. He will take a man's will, and if need be, stiffen it into strength. He will temper its obstinacy and make it the motive and power of truth and righteousness. He will even take your body and make it a sanctified instrument of Good. That is what Christ will do. And when He has wrought His beneficent will upon us, our being is no longer the divided and discordant thing that it is without Him. There is no warring, or if there is at all, it will pass into peace when the highest triumphs. And instead of one part of us fighting against the other, we shall have the whole fitted together into the true harmony of a Christ-filled life. When Christ rules we have peace, we have unity within, we have a harmonious whole moving forward to life's greatest and to God's glory. And all the elements in us will be so sanctified by Him as to be fit instruments for our own perfection and for His high ends in the world. Are you going to put your life with all its divisions and discords, with all its antagonisms and weaknesses, into the power of Christ?

## Simon of Cyrene.

“And as they led him away, they laid hold upon one Simon, Cyrenian, coming out of the country, and on him they laid the cross, that he might bear it after Jesus,” - LUKE xxiii. 26.

Two hundred years and more before this day of the Cross, of which all the Evangelists write so fully - in the dark and unsettled days through which the Jewish nation passed after the exile, in the time when the Ptolemies were in their power - a hundred thousand Jews were transported from their native land to the North of Africa. They were compelled to settle there in the district of Libya, which lay half way between Alexandria and the ancient historic town of Carthage. But the Jew did not transplant well. East or west his heart was in Palestine. Outside Palestine he was a stranger in a strange land. He was like the Scot who sang in his exile -

Oh, why left I my home?  
Why did I cross the deep?  
Oh, why left I the land  
Where my forefathers sleep?

So the Hebrew had his song of exile, and whether it was in Babylon or Libya it was the same: “If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning.” The dream of his days and nights was to visit Jerusalem, and to share in the joy of the religious festivals. And the Hebrew band in Libya, if they did not hang their harps upon the willows, at any rate cheered one another, and strengthened each other’s faith, by constantly recalling to their own mind, and their children’s, the glorious past of their nation. Thus the flame of patriotism and religion was kept alive from generation to generation. And this Simon, who was probably a descendant of one of those exiled families of Ptolemy’s day, caught the patriotic sentiment, and made his way from Cyrene, the capital of Libya, back to Jerusalem, and the song that was always bursting from his lips as he went was, “My feet shall stand within thy gates, O Jerusalem.” But when he reached the Holy City in time for the passover, he found no place to lodge within the gates, and had to pass the night in one of the villages near by. So it came to pass that, the night before the great day of the world’s history, Simon slept the sleep of the pious, calm and undisturbed in that village cottage, in ignorance of all that was happening within a few miles of him. In the morning, with the passover joy in his heart, he set out for the city.

### I

As we gather the truths suggested to us by this simple soul, the place he occupied in the drama of the Crucifixion, and the service he rendered to Jesus, he reminds us of *how near one may be to the world’s greatest events without being at all aware of them*. Simon was sleeping. We know what was taking place while Jesus was in the thick shadow of His approaching death. With a marvellous self-restraint and self-forgetfulness, He was pouring balm into the souls of His followers when they were sore stricken with great sorrow. And then He went out to fight His own battle in silence and alone, with not a soul to bear Him sympathy. In His last and greatest temptation - the hour of His supreme agony - He won His victory. But it was only to see His followers betray Him and to find Himself bound and hustled along to the greatest travesty and mockery of justice the world has ever beheld. That day witnessed the world’s greatest mistake, earth’s most pitiable tragedy. But Simon, near though he was

to it all, knew nothing of it. Even that morning when he met the crowd coming out of the city, he still knew nothing of its mad purpose. The event that was going to change the whole of the world’s history was in the process of happening, but Simon was not aware of it.

Now I cannot but think that you and I closely resemble Simon in his unconsciousness of the supreme importance of what is happening before our very eyes. The world’s greatest events are not understood until they are long past. They do not happen always with outward and noisy demonstration. They come silently and pass ere we recognize their meaning. And even when they are far from silent - when there is the clamour of tongues and the tramp of many feet, and the crush and tumult of the multitude - the appearance belies the reality. What is all the stir about? And the casual spectator answers, “Oh, only three criminals going to their execution.” That was what it was outwardly. But go deeper, and it was the supreme sign of God’s love: it was the Saviour of the world carrying in His soul the world’s guilt. We may be near the event and not know its meaning. There are tragedies, too, in the same street, next door it may be, and we do not know it. Hearts are being broken by the sins of others. We pass sternly silent men and women who are being crushed by life’s terrible weight, and we go on our way never thinking of their slow martyrdom. We meet a man in the street and wish him good morning. He returns the salutation and we think no more about him. But in his heart there is going on a life-and-death struggle of which we are absolutely ignorant. Let Simon, therefore, remind us of this, and may the memory of it be always with us, to give a penetration to our look and a tenderness to our heart. The tragedy of life lies around us. God open our eyes to see and our hearts to feel it.

### II

*Another thought suggested to us by Simon is that, on the surface, life’s best things seem to come often by sheer accident.* The greatest hour in Simon’s life was the one he spent in the company of Jesus. It is the only bit of his lifetime that we know anything about for certain. As minutes fly it was a very brief spell, but it was a crowded hour of glorious life to Simon. And when you think of it, does it not look the merest chance that he should have had it at all? For this, although by no plan of *his* making, he had come hundreds of miles. It was “lucky” that he came that year to Jerusalem. He had to lodge outside the city. How fortunate that he happened to meet the crowd going to Golgotha that morning. Had he been an hour later, what a difference it would have made to Simon. And then how did *he* happen to be set upon by the mob and compelled to carry the Cross? Why was it not the man next him? It seems all a series of coincidences. But do you think that Simon in after-days spoke about luck and accident when he told the story of that day to the Cyrenian Jews? Chance! He never mentioned the word. It was all providence and divine leading. Men and women, the great occasions and opportunities of life come oftener than not in this fashion. A man crosses three thousand miles of sea, and in some out-of-the-world village he meets, apparently by the purest accident, the one who from that day is to be the star of his life and the angel in his home. Another forgets his umbrella, and, as he steps into a church porch to escape a thunder shower, a stray word



reaches his heart, and he is for God all his life afterwards. You go by accident rather than intention to see a friend. The visit of an angel from Heaven could not be more opportune, for it is a time when friendship is sorely needed, and when your going means to your friend all the difference between hope and despair, between life and death. You can philosophise it into "a fortuitous concourse of circumstances," as some people philosophise the universe into a fortuitous concourse of atoms, but the religious man will never yield to that philosophy. His philosophy is – *God's hand was in it*. When we know life longer, and when we see it whole at last, we shall confess that there was less chance in it and more of God's providence than we had imagined.

Lowell tells us in his *Glance behind the curtain*, how the gate of England and of freedom once seemed wavering in the heart of one plain man. Cromwell and Hampden stood on the pier looking on the lazy current of the Thames, intending to flee the country and seek that land where men as yet were free. But a thought stirred Cromwell's soul, and it kept him in England to do his great life's work. That thought saved England. Was it just by chance that it came then? If so, the lives of men and nations are woefully insecure. But Lowell finds the source of that thought in the encircling spirit world, and tells us that destiny is but the breath of God. Men and women, look deeper into things. Take opportunities as God-given. Take your tide at its flood. If this very day your heart feels strongly the claims of God, believe it is God's call to you. It is no accident. It is God's will. He has made the opportunity for you. Do not let it slip, I beg of you.

### III

I come next to say something *about the service that Simon rendered to Jesus*. As Simon met the crowd that morning and got drawn into it, there was one name that was being passed from mouth to mouth. The central object of interest in that procession was Jesus. And Simon, by dint of pushing and elbowing his way, soon found himself as close to Jesus as the soldiers would allow. It was while Simon was being swept along, keeping near Christ, that the Sufferer's strength gave way, and He sank to the ground under the Cross He was carrying. It was the only time that His strength failed Him of which we know anything. But when you think of that awful night, and of the strain of that very morning, what wonder that it gave way. The soldiers looked round to find a substitute for Jesus. It would be unspeakable degradation for a Roman to carry a cross. They dare not compel any Jew of standing to do it. But looking about them they saw this big, broad-shouldered, simple-looking soul, whose very face showed that he had some real sympathy with the over-burdened prisoner, and in a trice they put the wood on his shoulder, and he marched willingly enough with it up the slope of Calvary, just behind Jesus. Thus it was that Simon rendered his great service to Jesus when He was on the way to die for mankind.

I think two features are worth noting in this service, (1) Its timeliness. It was the service required at the time. In the life of Jesus, opportunities to do Him service were frequent. At one time He needed some one to preach for Him. At another what He desired was a drink of water. Again, it was an ass to ride on. Or, again, it was a room to sup in, or a home in which to pass the night. The occasion always pointed out the special form of service. Now on His way to

Calvary, it is some one to carry the cross who will serve Him best. And so to-day occasion will reveal to us the service to Christ which is timely and desired. Maintain strong and alert within you the spirit of earnest desire to do service to Christ, and be willing to turn your hand to anything that has the claim of Christ stamped upon it, and opportunities will spring up at every step. And remember that there are services which - if we turn aside from them unwillingly when they call for us - will be for ever undone. Occasion will not wait. We must seize it when it calls.

(2) Another feature of this service is its uniqueness. We envy all those who did Jesus service in those days of His earthly ministry - the women who ministered to Him, Martha and Mary who opened their door to Him, Mary who anointed Him with the costly spikenard, Joseph who provided a resting place for His dead body. But Simon's service stood by itself. For a brief time he was the substitute of Jesus. Jesus was the substitute of all men, but no man was ever Christ's substitute save Simon the Cyrenian. He alone stood in the place of Him who was the substitute of all.

And yet, if we enter into the inner meaning of this scene, it is to remember that spiritually, the greatest service we can render to Christ to-day is to take up and carry the Cross of Jesus. For it is to do for Jesus Christ what He cannot now do for Himself. Finer than all preaching, more beautiful than all philanthropy, is the spirit that bears trial and suffering for Jesus' sake. When we are true to the Master in the midst of sin and falsehood, of contempt and scorn, are we not bearing His Cross? When we feel the burden of human sin, and carry it on the heart, we enter into the fellowship of Christ's sufferings, and yield Him a service no less than that which Simon rendered on the day of His passion.

### IV

Let us consider for a moment *Simon's reward*, I do not know that Simon took up that Cross on his strong shoulders for the sake of what he would get for it, and I do not think you or I should serve Christ just for the reward it will gain us; but we know that Jesus never allowed any kindness done Him to pass unrecognized. What was Simon's reward? No small part of it was *the satisfaction of the deed itself*. A good deed is its own reward. And part of our reward will always be the inward joy that follows well-doing. An approving conscience is an essential part of human happiness. And Simon had this. Even had he never known anything more of Jesus than that He was a poor prisoner about to be executed, he would have looked back with thankfulness because he had been able to relieve him for a moment. But how much that feeling of satisfaction must have been enhanced by the thought of the Person for whom the deed was done! Have we ourselves not felt oftentimes that our service has been handsomely rewarded by the joy we have felt at the thought of having done something for Him? And when we have done or borne anything for "one of the least of these," do we not feel that we receive an exceeding great reward when we hear the Master say, "Ye did it unto me?"

(2) It was reward to Simon to have even the silent company of Jesus up the slope of Calvary. Simon's instincts told him that it was good to be in that company. The calmness of the sufferer, the strength of soul that was underneath the weakness of the body could not be hid. Simon felt their influence enter his soul as they went both of them together. It is not recorded that a single word passed

between them. But much may pass between souls though not a word is spoken. And the influence of that day never passed from Simon's life. Holy influences may not take effect at the moment they bear on the heart, but they do not fade away into nothingness. Simon became a disciple, not that day perhaps, but that day's work was a potent influence in his conversion. So then let us exert our best influence. It can never be lost. Time will deepen it, or recall it, and it will lead souls to salvation.

(3) But great though that reward was, it did not stop there. The father who serves Christ by carrying His Cross often shares in Simon's reward here. If there is one thing a Christian father desires more than another it is that his sons may grow up to walk in godly ways. And the sweetest part

of Simon's reward for that day's service of Christ was that his two boys, Alexander and Rufus, grew up to hold an honoured place in Christ's Church. At the time when Mark wrote they were evidently so well known that the Evangelist could name them, feeling that their names were household words among early Christians.

This glad fact in Simon's life has a message for both parents and children. To the parents it says - Fathers and mothers, if you would see the members of your family enlisted in Christ's service, serve Him yourselves with all your heart. And to sons and daughters of godly parents, it addresses this question - Are you serving and honouring the God of your father and mother by personal faithfulness and loyalty?

## The God that Carries Us.

“And even to your old age I am He; and even to hoar hairs will I carry you: I have made, and I will bear; even I will carry, and will deliver you” - ISAIAH xlvi. 4.

More than once in his appeal to the people, Isaiah tries to stimulate their faith in God, by comparing and contrasting Him with the gods of Babylon. And here he does it once again. The occasion was just immediately before the fall of Babylon. The army of Cyrus was on the eve of a great triumph. They were on the point of taking the city, as anyone could see. And the prophet pictures the fall. Now, such a picture might have many woful details in it, such as the fall of a besieged city is bound to present. But from his religious standpoint, what Isaiah is here concerned with, and what fills his picture for the moment, is the part and the fate of the gods of Babylon. In the day of calamity, what can they do for their worshippers? Instead of aiding men in the hour of distress, they are helpless and useless. They are, in the picturesque language of the prophet, only so much baggage and dead weight which can be saved from destruction by being packed on beasts' backs and hurried away beyond the reach of the destroying invader. They can give no help. They have rather to be laboriously and perspiringly borne away, inert stocks.

Over against that grotesque picture of wooden divinity, Isaiah sets his God - Israel's God and ours. Babylon's gods are dead logs. The God of Israel is a living spirit. Their gods were dead weights that could not help themselves, but had to be carried; His God was one who lifted, bore up, and carried the burdens, distresses, and lives of men. “Even to hoar hairs will I carry you: I have made, and I will bear; even I will carry, and will deliver.”

Now, the prophet's theme is one which may be readily lifted out of the particular circumstances of his hour. It is always a pertinent and timely question about religion whether you and I regard it as a burden or a help. Professor George Adam Smith puts the permanent question which this prophecy provokes in his own pointed and penetrating way. He says, “ It makes all the difference to a man how he conceives his religion - whether as something that he has to carry or as something that will carry him.” There is a cleavage between men on this point. On the one hand you have those who think of God and religion as burdens they have to carry, and on the other hand you have those to whom religion is the one great influence and God the one great power that carries and bears up both them and their burdens. There are people who are trying to carry their God, and there are people who are allowing God to carry them. And I hardly need to say who have the right end of the matter, and which of these two conceptions of religion is the right one, and further, which of them has the joy and strength and Inspiration of religion. The right and the joy both belong to those who believe and know that God carries them. They do not carry God as a burden nor their religion as a crushing load.

Now, I want to say something a little more direct and practical about these two ideas of Christianity, about the wrong conception of it which holds it to be a burden, and about the right conception which says that it is the power which bears up these lives of ours.

Look back over the days of the prophets in Israel, and you find the idea of religion as a load very prevalent among the people. So much so that the people had scarcely any other idea of serving God than what was expressed in offering sacrifices, keeping feasts, and generally carrying out a laborious and costly programme of burdensome ceremonies. Looked at in one way it is easier to do that than to give the worship of love and life; but looked at in another way it robs people of that thought of God which is a real help to the life. If you think you have to do everything for God, and do not see that God does anything for you, you have an idea of religion which ministers nothing to your life, but which, instead of that, is constantly draining it of all strength and hope.

Again, in Christ's earthly day, this conception of religion as a burden was peculiarly tyrannous. You can hardly open a page of the Gospels without meeting it. You have it in the rules for fasting, for sacrifice, for keeping feasts, and set days. It was almost the only conception of religion that was allowed to exist. And you never find Christ so indignant as when He tells the religious leaders that in the name of religion they are binding on the backs of men burdens grievous to be borne. It belies God when He is so held up to men. But what was the Gospel of Christ? Was it not - Away with such wrong conceptions of God! Was it not that He came from God to lift men, not to burden them, to help them, not to load them, to show them that religion was not a programme of laborious and crushing formalities, but that it was God in love wanting to save men, to bear them up, to carry them by His loving strength?

Now, if one were to pass a judgment on any type of religious life to-day, it might be very truly directed against those who are always living as if they were carrying God, instead of being upheld and carried by Him. What a painful, burdensome thing religion seems to be to some people! They never seem to reach the joy of it. They give the impression to others that religion is a very laborious thing. The reason of their attitude is that they have never entered far enough into religion to know the joy and to receive the strength it gives. But life is too burdened already for God to add another. He would not do it. And if we look on Christianity as another duty, toilsome and exacting, added to what we have already to bear, it is because we have a false idea of religion. It is because we have not grasped the power of it. For God's one wish expressed in Christ to us is to help us, to lift us up, to give us cheer and hope, and an antidote to our fear, distress, and sorrow, and all life's other darker experiences.

Further, and very specially, let me ask if it is not the case that many of us will not commit ourselves to Christ and His religion because we have the idea that it will be an extra strain on us, and that alone. Do you know anyone who enjoys the pleasures of life just too well, and do you see that one contemplating religion? How hard he is to win for Christ. And why? Because he thinks that religion will be a drag on his pleasure. Do you not know that if Christ bids you give up a pleasure, He first of all changes the attitude of the heart to that pleasure? Come and judge it by His high test, and you will find it not wrench at all to give it up, because Jesus will show you better and worthier things to follow after.

Let me instance another man who is kept from accepting Christ and His religion because he has the idea it will be a burden. This man is greatly exercised about the matter of creeds, and he looks at Christianity in this way - To be a Christian is to say I believe this and that, this doctrine and that doctrine, and that is a burden I cannot bear: I do not see how I can believe them. Now, Christianity is not first and foremost the acceptance of this article of a creed or that. There are people who are sticklers for creeds whose lives are not exactly Christian lives. No. Christianity is first of all acceptance of the help of Christ in your struggle with evil, and trouble, and duty. It is walking in His light by His help. Begin there, and the matter of creeds will fall into its proper place all right.

Another who conceives religion as a burden is the man or woman who identifies it with certain acts and exercises and formalities, such as going to church, saying prayers, reading the Bible, giving money to "good causes. Now, do not make a mistake. All of these are prompted by religion, but when you put them all together they are not religion. No, religion is first the identification of one's weak life with Christ the Saviour and Helper. It is the receiving of His spirit into your's. When you have done that, those exercises will come to be very valuable to you. They will be the means by which you refresh your soul and revive your strength, and they will be no more a burden to you than taking your food or drinking a draught from a refreshing fountain.

Shall I name another who makes the mistake of thinking that Christianity is a burden rather than a help? It is the man who sees that Christ asks of him a higher and more perfect kind of life than he seems able for. He says, "If I commit myself to following Christ I am facing moral demands that I simply cannot fulfil. The burden of Christ's commandments is too great." Now, it is certainly true that Christ's ideal of life is high and hard. But if Christ did nothing more than show us higher laws and make higher demands on us, I for one would feel that I had a poor Gospel to preach to you, for that would be indeed laying a burden upon you too heavy to be borne. I know that it looks as if we were simplifying Christianity when we say that it is just doing what Christ bade us do, but that is simplifying it by robbing it of the very truth which is a man's inspiration.

That truth is that Christ is not a law-giver alone: He is a helper and a strength-giver. God is not a task-master merely, but the God who carries, who bears up, who will carry and will deliver. And it will make all the difference in the world to you whether you conceive God as a load that you have to carry, or on the other hand as the One who upholds and carries you.

And all Scripture is with the prophet when he represents God as the carrying God. I could take you right through both Testaments and show you that the one central message that rings out from almost every page is that God is the great Helper and Upbearer of men, and that when He sent Christ, it was not as a hard task-master, but to be the supreme proof of His highest desire - to be the Helper and Deliverer of men. And the Gospel of Christ is the great message of help to you.

Now, in the hope that it may bring it home to your hearts the better, will you let me mention one or two ways in which God shows Himself in history and experience as the God that carries and helps His children?

Professor Drummond used to say that the universe is against the man who does wrong and is on the side of the man who tries to rise. Emerson, who was not an evangelical Christian as we understand that description, said the same thing in other words. He said, "Things are arranged for truth and benefit; there is no den in the wide world to hide a rogue." They were only stating the great truth that to believe in God is to believe that righteousness is at the foundation of things. And if the force of gravitation helps a man to walk erect on the solid earth, I know of nothing that gives more bracing to the soul, and erectness and confidence to us in following right than that the laws of the universe are supporting the laws of our conscience. There, in the very heart and centre of the universe, God declares Himself a carrying God. There He declares that right is right, and right the day shall win.

Again, God braces up the soul of a man, and bears him up on the wings of hope by assuring him that He carries the burden of all good work done for Him. There are times when we and others with us, who are trying to put right what is wrong and to lead back erring and sinful men to righteousness, feel very downhearted. And in all conscience there is more than enough to discourage us in these days. We are going about our work like beaten men. There is not the ring and pose of confidence about us. We feel as if the whole burden rested on us. Now, here again, the fact of the carrying God is the fact we want above all things to remind ourselves of. God accepts responsibility for His world. He will not suffer the righteous to fail. He sends us out, not at our own charges. He is in the battle.

Thrice blest is he to whom is given  
The instinct that can tell  
That God is on the field when He  
Is most invisible.

Surely a truth like that cannot but support the man who is trying to make the world even a little better than he finds it. That is to me an inspiration and a lift. I know that God is bearing the burden of every sincere labour for good.

There are, no doubt, some who are listening to me now who feel themselves in the grip of sin - sin of sense, or, what is worse, sin of the spirit. When you hear me say that God desires and commands you to give up that sin, do not, I beg of you, think that God asks of you and gives you nothing. God wants to be a lifting and delivering God to you. And what you may do this day is to throw yourself away from your sin on to His strength, and He will deliver you and keep you. For if there is any burden He has taken upon Himself it is the load of human sin. And He wants to take yours. Will you accept His lifting-power and let Him get you up out of the mess and pit of your sin?

Others here to-day are crushed down with disappointment and loss. You feel the strain of life more than you can bear. Now, could I ask you to accept Christ if I thought that it was to add another burden to your already too-burdened life? No, surely not. But I know this, that there is no tonic to the exhausted, nor cheer to the downhearted, nor hope to the disappointed, like religion. To have Christ as your constant thought and companion is to have the strength and guidance and uplifting of God Himself in your distress.

And to-day some of you have aching hearts. You have lost dear ones, and the earth is empty to you. Could I ask you to accept Christ if I did not know that in Him God has taken

on Himself the burden that is on your heart? And the one great ray of comfort that will ease your sorrow is just that Christ has so spoken of death that it is no longer our foe but our friend. And He who can so transform the great enemy into a friend is surely lifting a load that no other could lift off our laden hearts. We see in Christ not death but life. He gives us and ours the life unending. He is a God who bears and carries and delivers.

And if you to-day stop thinking of God and religion in that false way that makes them out an added burden and a harder task for you, and more and more see in God the bearer and carrier and deliverer of human life, from this day your life will take on a new brightness, and it will be filled with a new strength. You will cast your sins, your cares, your duties, your sorrows with a new hope on God. You will join your life to His. You will have the secret of certain victory.

## Revival in the Midst of the Years.

“O Lord, revive thy work in the midst of the years, in the midst of the years make known” - HABAKKUK iii. 2.

It is on this phrase, *the midst of the years*, that the prophet is laying the stress when he is praying for a revival of God’s work. We can infer that from the way in which he repeats it. And it is on that phrase that I want to ring the changes this morning, because I want to be true to the prophetic emphasis, and true also to the application I want to make of the prayer.

There are two facts about the prophet which will help us to catch his accent and his meaning, and help us too to make his prayer our own. First, he stood midway in the prophetic line. The voices of prophets were common sounds in the nation’s ear when he spoke. The people had become used to prophets, and had ceased from being terrified by their messages of doom, and had become unresponsive to their religious appeals. Prophecy had become a common thing. It had lost its early freshness in the ears of the people, and they were treating it as an oft-told tale. That is one fact. The other is this. Habakkuk was himself a man in middle life, and he knew himself too well not to know also the sort of feeling that middle life is apt to bring with it to a man—a tendency to slacken off, a subtle sense of the staleness of life, a touch of hard cynicism, and sundry other elements of a mood that is not for the good of a man in middle life or at any stage in life, but a mood which the man in middle life is specially apt to take on. And when I have mentioned these two facts, you can see how fitting on his lips was the prayer for revival in the midst of the years. He stood midway among the prophets. He was in the middle stretch of life, continuing work begun years ago, after the first interest had died.

I think you see already what I wish to emphasise to-day. It is this, that if life is to be kept fresh and full, there must be a constant renewal of our sense of its worth and its work, and the middle years of our life are the years that need it specially. Again, if religion is to be living: and effective amongst us, its claims and its power have to be felt anew, and especially after years of effort is this necessary.

### I

*Take it first as the prayer of the man in middle life.* And let me guard myself at the start. It would be a mistake to say that all men and women when they reach middle life, lose their fire and their zeal and their energy, and find life stale and flat. It would not be true. We all know people who have carried into the years that lie after forty an interest in life that only grew with the growing years. They are as much alive as when they were in their teens. They have the spirit which years cannot touch, except to intensify. It would be a slander on life to say that all joy in it ended with youth. *And yet you need only use your powers of observation to see that with a great many people in middle life, what they need most is to have a new interest in life kindled in their souls.* For they seem to have lost all ambition, and to have settled down into a life of routine, and they have almost stopped indulging in any great hope or outlook. Wordsworth in his Ode - *Intimations of Immortality* - describes the gradual losing of the glow and joy which belong to the morning of life.

Heaven lies about us in our infancy!  
Shades of the prison-house begin to close  
Upon the growing Boy,  
But he beholds the light, and whence it flows,  
He sees it in his joy;  
The Youth, who daily farther from the east  
Must travel, still is Nature’s Priest,  
And by the vision splendid  
Is on his way attended;  
At length the Man perceives it die away,  
And fade into the light of common day.

And part of the reason why middle life is flat and dull and dreary to anyone is because what the years have brought is poor in comparison with the dreams of early years. The visions have not come true. The dreams have not been realised. The world has been found to be of much stiffer and more stubborn material than youth imagined.

We trusted then, aspired, believed  
The earth could be re-made to-morrow.

Middle life has been a time of disenchantment to many a man, when he saw one after one of his hopes become dimmer and dimmer, and less likely every day to be realised. It is the commonness of this sort of mood that led Victor Hugo to say that the saddest part of life is between forty and fifty. He called that the old age of youth. After fifty began the youth of old age - the revival set in. Of course, dealing in years is misleading, for the spirit of a man is never regulated by the calendar. But wherever there is this mood in the midst of the years of life - you may feel it on you to-day - the very fact that it is there, is a call for revival.

*Another need for revival in the midst of life’s years lies in the fact that the duties of life too often sink into a kind of routine which kills the spirit.* There is great interest in the commencement of one’s life-work, in learning one’s trade or profession. The staleness comes later on when the man has gone on for some years, and the work has lost its novelty, and it becomes a thing that has to be repeated day after day. He gets to a point where he seems to stick, and he succumbs to the spirit which says - What’s the use? And there are scores of men and women who are just there to-day living a sort of routine soulless life in a soulless way. Now, I do not know any trade or profession in which one day’s duties are not pretty much a repetition of the duties of the day before. We need not try to escape the repetition and the routine. We simply cannot. But all the same we can escape and ought to escape the routine spirit, and it is to counteract this tendency to staleness through the routine of duty that we have need to pray - Revive us again in the midst of the years.

*I have noticed also the need for revival in men and women who have tried foolishly to make life a long spell of pleasure-seeking.* They set out with the idea that happiness was the great thing. And they went after happiness and hunted her from flower to flower, but they never seemed to attain happiness. It is well to learn that happiness is one of those things that can never be got when you go straight after them. It comes when you are not seeking it, when you are engaged on something else of use and value in God’s world. And to seek it in any other way is to come one day to find that life has seemed to cheat you. But it is not “life” that cheated you, it is you who have cheated yourself. And that is

how, now in the middle of life, you are *blasé* and stale and dissatisfied. You need revival in the midst of your years.

*There is also a staleness and sense of lassitude that creeps over the man who has tried and failed.* If you have been pegging away, earnestly trying to leave a good mark somewhere, and it seems as if you had not left a single trace of yourself anywhere, perhaps you have lost heart a bit and feel like giving it all up and not trying any more. And perhaps there is another type of middle life here - *a man who has grown hard and cynical with the years.* It may be disappointment that did it, or it may be selfishness. Anyhow there you are now in middle life, and what you are best at doing is sneering at everything worth doing, and criticising and playing the dog-in-the-manger generally. And every such mood as that, is badly in need of a real revival of interest in the realities of life. For it will be by that, that the cure will come. The days of manhood should be life's best days. Yes, better than the heyday of youth, with all its enthusiasms and visions and hopes. It is the time when experience may have subdued the heats, but it should have shaped them into horses for the chariot of wisdom.

We are in the midst of a time when a great fallacy is abroad. It is that no man over forty is worth anything". No man should accept any such doctrine. No man should by his life help to give it force. The world needs the fruits of experience applied to it. And there is surely energy enough in middle life to apply its wisdom. There would be, if men did not feel as they too much do, that it is time they rested at forty, and if they did not cultivate so much the mood that says - Take it easy, let the world jog: along. And if we cry out to-day for the control and restraint of youth with its pleasure-loving spirit, there is as much need for a revival of interest in life and its work in those who are in the middle of life. And the revival will come in the heart of every one who prays for it with this prophet. And praying for it is not easy in middle life. Praying is pretty hard work then, especially when it is for a changed mind and a clarified vision. But praying will bring it, if you mean it. And when God takes you and shows you that you were going: to lose half your life, and the best half, too, because you let a lot of despicable and false spirits get the upper hand with you, when He shows you the glory of a life got from Christ, persevered in through middle life on to the end, it will be a second youth to you, it will be perpetual youth to you and perpetual service, and untiring service, and perpetual joy too.

## II

But is it not true also that this is the very prayer for the lips and heart of the *Christian* man and woman? You marvel at the great miracle of creation. It is a greater miracle, I would almost go the length of saying, to keep the created in sustained being. It is also a great miracle to begin the Christian life in a heart. But again, I would say, the greater miracle alongside that one, to me, is the miracle or *continuing* that life, feeding it, developing it, making and keeping it serviceable. And how hard it is to keep the fire of God burning on the hearth of the human heart! As the years go on how often have we had the sadness and the pain of seeing it sink and sink, until in the midst of the years there is not enough fire to warm your heart at, on a frosty day. Yes, the Christian life becomes to some a bit stale as time goes on. I do not know how it is. It is not the fault of the life or of the Life-giver. It is just that pitiable tendency in human life

to get tired of a thing, even the most vital thing. And that is the weakness of Church life to-day. Men and women joined the Church in an ecstasy of enthusiasm, and then they rapidly lost their heat.

A minister wrote me last June to come and preach for him sometime next winter. And among other things he said, "We are needing an evangelistic mission in our Church, but I feel that before that, we must have a better spiritual life in the members of the Church itself." And he had the thing in the right order, I am convinced. What will ensure the bringing in of the indifferent, will not be the indifference of those who are in the Church nominally already, but the change of that indifference into a hot zeal for the realities of the Gospel—a revival in the midst of the years of spiritual life. And there would be an acceptance of Jesus by scores who are outside the Kingdom, such an acceptance as would surprise you, if you only came afresh to God this day and got your spiritual life quickened. It is because you are living a stale kind of soul life that it is so hard to get outsiders vitally interested. But if you pray to have the flame of love kindled afresh in you, and the sense of sin and the greatness of God's grace felt afresh by you, then you will be revived in the very innermost and deepest and most vital parts of your life, and the revived life, freshly alive to God and His salvation, and filled with His love for men, will be simply irresistible. You will come to me right away and say, "I have not done much for the Master in connection with the Church. Is there anything I can do?" And the whole of the Church work would be revitalised from top to bottom. Oh, would it not?

And I have my own anxiety and my own need for revival too. I know that the passing years do not add to the ease of the ministry. I know that in some ways the eighth year will be harder than the seventh, and if there were no revival as the years went on. it would be harder still. As a profession, the ministry would grow very stale, but as a summons from God to preach Christ, it never can grow stale. It was Thomas Goodwin, that old Independent, who asked himself, "How can an old minister keep himself fresh, preaching the simple Gospel?" And his reply to his own question was - "Just by realising that there is a pardon for sinners every morning." And he went on to say, "When I was threatening to become cold in my ministry, I took a turn up and down among the sins of my past life, and I always came back again with a broken heart ready to preach, as it was preached in the beginning, the forgiveness of sins." Yes, it is the freshness of God's love and the newness of His pardon fresh every morning, that keeps the heart humble and warm and the speech fresh. And the preacher has no secret but what is for you too.

And this is my closing word to-day. Part of Habakkuk's trouble and part of the reason for the smallness of the impression he made was that the people had listened to prophets until their message became stale in their ears. They were kind of Gospel hardened. That was another need for revival. And to-day, the very fact that you have heard so many sermons may prevent this one from going home to your heart, and the fact that you have heard about Christ so often may make another appeal commonplace to your ears. But if you just listen to Christ calling you and come after Him, it will be no stale thing I assure you. It will be the very freshest sensation that ever shook your soul into life. It will be your thorough and complete revival.

## The Incomplete Character.

“The young man saith unto him, All these things have I kept from my youth up: what lack I yet?” - MATT. xix. 20.

To young and old alike, this story of the rich young ruler has always proved very fascinating. We are drawn to the man by the charm and beauty of his character. He was a young man of such fair promise that, if he had only done as Christ bade him, he would have been one of the brightest ornaments and one of the most powerful influences in the early Church.

There is another element in the story that fascinates us, and that is the question of his fate. An uncertainty hangs over it. And right from the beginning the question has been asked, Was he saved or was he lost? And from the beginning people have differed in the reply to that question. The answer usually depends on the temperament of the questioner. The hard man will dwell on the fact that he went away, and laying all the emphasis on that, will say that he was lost. The kindlier disposition will dwell on the fact that he went away *sorrowful*. He will lay the emphasis on that word *sorrowful*, and his imagination will picture the young man finding his joy restored again in salvation. Now, it certainly appears from the way in which Christ regarded him when he came, and spoke of him after he went away, that He at least took a kindly view of him. He even did what the young man did not dare to do himself. He made what looks like an excuse for him. It was as if He said, “Poor fellow, I know how hard it must have looked to a rich man like him.”

But after all, the answer to the question whether he was saved or lost is not raised by the narrative itself. It is a higher question, and do not misunderstand me when I say that. The question raised is not one of conversion, but of salvation *viewed as the perfecting of character*. The young man had asked two questions. The first was, “What shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?” and in answer to it Jesus told him what he had to do, adding, “This do and thou shalt live.” A soul can have a bare living on that. But evidently something in Christ’s tone and an ache in his own heart led him to ask the further question, “What lack I yet?” It was then that Christ gave His second reply - If you want full life, if you seek the complete character, sell up and follow me.

What we have then is a young man of incomplete character. He lacked something, and the question is how to perfect the incomplete. But do not for a moment think that, even if this young man had sold all and gone and followed Christ, he would have been perfect in the sense of having a life full-rounded to a perfect sphere, and with no possibility of further progress. There is no perfection of that kind in this world. If we speak of complete perfect character in the New Testament sense, what we mean and what the New Testament means is a character that has all the true elements of Christian growth in it. It has not reached the goal, but it is on the right road to get there. Again and again in Scripture we find the word *perfect* used in that sense. It is, I believe, the sense Christ meant, and it is the sense in which I use the words complete and incomplete to-night. The incomplete character is not merely short of the goal in its development. It is lacking in elements without which final completeness cannot be. I do not say that Christ would require every one who asked of Him, What lack I yet? to sell all if he would follow Him. As a matter of fact, there were scores of

disciples in His day to whom He did not say it. But what He does always is to call a man to the possession of the lacking element. He says to you and me, I will show you the perfect way.

Now, what I wish to do for a few minutes more to-night is to apply this aspect of the story to our lives. My aim is to lay it on your conscience, saint and sinner alike, to ask this question - Has my life all those elements which develop together into the full-rounded character, or is it incomplete? Are there elements lacking? As you stand in the presence of Christ, put this question to yourself and to Him, What lack I yet? It is a question for the Christian as truly as for the man who does not claim to be a Christian. For that matter of it, it is pre-eminently *the* question for the Christian. I remember that St. Paul in writing to the Romans says to them, “Let not your good be evil spoken of.” He knows that the common fault with many people is not that they lack goodness, but that it fails to win and to impress others through some little thing wanting in it. It is good, but incomplete. It is spoiled it may be through want of a touch and a flavour.

### I

I think I am right in saying that what is lacking in the character of some of us is *Charity*. Our good deeds and our other good qualities lose much of their effect and influence all for the want of charity. And if we were to seek an interview with Christ and ask Him, “What lack I yet?” He would say, You are living a bare life as it is, but if you would be perfect, if you would have all the elements, you must add to your faith and virtue charity. You are correct in your conduct, but there is no warmth about you. You have no stain upon you, but you are icily faultless. Your virtue is a cold thing. It lacks flesh and blood. The milk of human kindness has dried in it.

The touch of love makes all the difference in the world to our goodness. That is what makes it attractive. That is what makes it winsome. We may respect cold and faultless righteousness, but we do not draw to it. Goodness should know how to forgive. It should be able with charity to forget a multitude of sins. And yet the incompleteness of many a life is due to just the want of this charitable spirit that forgives. Get that, and up rises your character with a bound. Goodness should also have that charity which pities the man that is down. And there again we fail when we are lacking in sympathy with the fallen and the miserable. And if you would be perfect, says Christ to you - you who know, as you stand before Him, that it is heart you lack - Follow me, and I will perfect you in what you lack, and in yourself and in your influence you will have a fresh completeness. It is the suffusion of goodness with a new spirit that you need, and I will breathe my loving, pitying spirit into you, and all your life will have the charm of charity and the winsomeness of love.

### II

I believe that some others to-night might come to Christ and ask Him this question, What lack I yet? and His answer would be, *What you lack is the spirit of sacrifice*. You do not give yourself sufficiently. I would not say to-night that it should be always a painful thing to live the Christian life. But on the other hand I do think some people make it a very selfish thin ?. They started by accepting salvation as a gift,



and they have not advanced to this further truth, that it is a call to a life of self-abnegation. And I have known men and women who had an amazing capacity for enjoying sermons and all the *getting* side of Christianity, who forgot that there is another side to it all. You are the followers of One whose every step was on the way of sacrifice. We speak about leaning on His sacrifice. Has it led us to make any sacrifice of our own? Do you deny yourself even a spiritual pleasure, to do a Christian act? Sentiment without sacrifice makes a very incomplete character. And Christ calls to every one like that, and says - Follow me, and learn that life is woefully incomplete if it has not in it the spirit and the practice of self-denial. But if you live with me I will breathe my spirit into you, and you will breathe out and act out again that spirit, and it will add to the completeness of your life.

### III

I come to another person, and bid him go and stand in the presence of Christ and ask this question, "What lack I yet?" And Christ looking on him, pities him, and says, *The shortcoming in your life is that you insist on clinging to that sin.* If you will be perfect, go and sell that sin and buy peace and purity. You lack the courage to give up a sin. That is where your lack is. Now, I am convinced that in this, above most things, lies the weakness of many an otherwise excellent life. We know scores of people who are very worthy Christians, but they spoil their testimony and their influence through one failing as we call it. It is really a slavery to some wrong habit. Perhaps, too, no one knows about it but themselves. There are worms that gnaw in secret. There are sins of the night and the locked door. And no man indulges a sin in private but it tells on his life before men. He knows about it, and it thrusts itself on him, crippling his arm, and making his tongue to stammer, when he should be strong for God before men. *There*, if you want to know it, is the secret of decay. Life takes on the taint of the secret hours. Now, when you stand before Christ to-night, and ask that question, "What lack I yet?" and Christ sees and knows well that your incompleteness and ineffectiveness are due to your sticking to a sin, he says again - Leave your sin behind! The perfect life comes

through following Me. You can never live truly if you live in sin. That is the challenge. That is the test of your sincerity.

### IV

Another man here might come to Christ and ask that question, and Christ's answer would be, *You are right so far, but you are stepping short of Me.* You say you are doing your best. Well that is not wrong. But remember, do not speak of best without including in it Christ's standard. He is the pure light by which all our life is to be tried. Christ must be your test and nothing less than Christ. And if you would be perfect, you must not stop short of His standard.

Now, you want to live the complete life. Every true instinct in you urges you to do it. And if you would do it, first of all, you must let Christ answer for you the question, What lack I yet? He will declare it to you deep and unmistakably in your soul. He will show you where the shortcoming is. And He will do more. He will tell you that the one way to complete your life is to follow Him, to let His influence play on you - His holiness, His love, His power - and He will perfect that which concerneth you. But remember, do not think it is easy. We misjudge ourselves many a time. We think we will do anything, and give up anything, but oh! when it comes to the bit, it wrings the very blood out of us. The last demand is always the hardest. The last step is the hardest to take, and yet, if we come to that, with only a step, spiritually speaking, between us and the eternal life, can we draw back? Christ wants to perfect us through contact and fellowship with Himself. Let nothing keep us back.

When a man sees what way life lies, and has it in his power through divine help to take that way, he has come to the critical hour of his life. If you to-night see how your life may be completed, how your soul may be purified, how you may rise to God, it is your critical hour. If you follow the vision, you have chosen the good part. You have chosen life. If you turn away from the vision, you forego all hope of the completed life, and you not only go away sad, you go away a worse man than you came. For what more tragic damage could you do your life, than to know your way to the highest and refuse to take it? God keep you from doing that to-night.

## The Secret of a Man's Strength.

“As the man is, so is his strength” - JUDGES viii. 21.

In his career of conquest, Gideon had captured two king's, Zeba and Zaimunna, whose army he had defeated and broken up. He was inclined to be merciful to them. He felt that deserved respect which every true soldier feels for brave opponents, that kind of respect and honour which General Noji and all the world with him bestow on General Stoessell, the gallant defender of Port-Arthur. Gideon would have spared their lives, but for one thing. He heard of a mean slaughter that had been perpetrated in his home country, and on inquiring- more strictly into it, he discovered that his brothers had been murdered. For fair fight he can forgive his enemy, but for foul play and treacherous dealing he has no mercy. The duty of avenger of blood fell on himself as next of kin to his slain brothers, but he passed on the duty to his son who was little more than a boy. The boy shrank from the task of killing the stalwart men who stood before him. And the kings felt the indignity of being- hacked to death by a boy, so they appealed to Gideon that he should slay them himself. And they accompanied the appeal with the words that I take as my text - “For as the man is, so is his strength.” It is as much as to say, a man has a man's strength for the task. The words themselves were doubtless a proverb. As such they are very rich in meaning- for us, for they hit the very secret of strength in a man. Put it otherwise, and this is how we might read it. A man's strength depends on the kind of man he is. The secret of a man's strength lies in his character. It may be that character depends on something-further back. If so, we shall ask what that something is. But let me first illustrate the truth of the first stage, that your strength and mine - our efficiency, our fitness for our part in life - depends on our character. The kind of men we are in our inner life will determine our fitness and our success in the struggle of life. Sir Galahad expressed the truth I am preaching to you when he said,

My strength is as the strength of ten  
Because my heart is pure.

Now, this is one of the most vital of truths, and yet it is one that hundreds of men and women forget to take account of. And they try to keep up a show of strength, and want to do the work of strong people, but all the time they forget that strength, whether it be physical strength or mental strength or moral strength, has its springs not on the surface of life, but deep down in the centre of their being. And when they fail through weakness, they blame the surface, and try to tinker up the surface, whereas the secret of failure lies much deeper than they think. And that deeper region is the part of them that will have to be seen to if the strength is to be renewed.

Again, all people have a right admiration for the strong, whether they be strong physically or intellectually or morally. You admire and praise endurance. You are amazed at feats of intellectual power. You are put to shame by the calm and strong heroism of those on whom life's disasters and sorrows have fallen, and you feel a sympathetic pride in those who can be true and honest and uncorrupted in the face of fierce temptations that would, you think, lay you low in a moment. But where you are apt to make a mistake, is not in your sincere admiration for all such people, but in the explanation you offer to yourself of their strength. You lay it

down to temperament. You say it came natural to them to be strong there. You say if they were like you they would never be able to do it. That is the far too common and weak sort of speech that we are accustomed to make about such strength and heroism. But, allow as you like for differences in temperament, the secret of the strong does not lie there a tittle so much as it does in the way they govern and control their life from within. Purpose, will-power, conscience, and a sense of God, have far more to do with their strong attitude to life than any inherent superior power they got with their birth. It is not so much the amount we originally get, that makes us strong- or weak in life, as what we do with what we get, be it much or little. The silver spoon, the brilliant gift, the social advantage, the educational opportunity, and the smile of fortune will not do half so much, not if you put them all together, for a man who has not learned the secret of inward self-command aright, as poverty, and poor chances, and mediocre gifts will do for the man who has learned to be a true man in character, with all the purpose and self-command that right character means.

### I

Think for example how what a man is in his inward life affects his *physical fitness* for life's demands. A sound body to start with is a huge advantage. It gives a man twice the chance of one who is born delicate. But then, if it all depended on that original advantage, why, it would be the six-foot, sound-chested men of perfect digestion who would be the greatest workers in the world and the best men in spirit and in life. But we know that a physical advantage does not always turn out like that. Where it has - where the Apollos and the Herculese have lived and laboured notably - it has always been when they have made their strength the servant of a good will, when the inner life was rightly set, and they used the strength of body and limb as its hand-maid. And if you have to-night a fine athletic strength in you, the very best you can do with it is to make it the servant of a pure purpose.

There is another angle from which we see how the inner life, the character of a man, affects the physical side of him. Here is one who was once a man of splendid physique. What might he not have accomplished with it! But the sorrow of it is that he had not an inner strength of character with which to guide it properly. And to-day, for want of that inner guidance and control, what with sensualist, and what with excessive drinking, his fine physique that once was, is now a shattered hulk. And if you are going to keep any physical advantage you may have in life, you must not think of the muscles first, you must think of your character, and set it up properly. It is the very best preservative of the body's strength that I know.

The other side of this is also true. There are men and women who are physically at a great disadvantage. They have to fight for health every day, and yet these are often the people who, by sheer will power and pure heart, get their physical being- to do most in the world. Sand showed signs of consumption, but he set himself to regain strength. The body was made to obey the mind. R.L.Stevenson had death shadowing- his steps all the years that he did his best work. And Herbert Spencer was a semi-invalid half his life, and yet what man of last century was more abundant in labours?

Robertson of Brighton, suffered from ill-health and pain constantly, but what preacher has given more light or spiritual leading- to his brethren? And we have all of us known men and women within our circle of acquaintance, whose physical weakness seems to be rather a spur than a drawback to their efficiency and industry, and all because it is the force behind, *the character* that is the dominant force, which even with a poor equipment of health can do wonders. I would ask you in spite of every physical disability to cultivate the inner life. It will make the most delicate frame in the hour of bodily pain productive of good for yourself, and blessed in service for the world.

## II

It is true also that as the man is, so is his *intellectual strength*. It is the character that gives to the mind of a man its efficiency in the world. We know that just as one man gets a fitter body than another to start with, so minds are not all of one mould, nor of one power. There is the man of five talents, and the man of two, and the man of one. There are distinct differences. But we also know that it is not always the man who had most advantage here who gives the most to his fellows. When the man of talent does great things, it is not because, having talent, he could not help doing them. It is because he has made talent the handmaiden of a definite purpose. The inner life, the character, the will - call it what you please - was the directing- influence. You know, as well as I, men of great natural ability, who dazzled us by their gifts, but who are now among the failures of humanity, living by their wits in some slum, with shattered powers and darkened brain. They had the power, but they have lost it now. And the secret of their failure is just that they were slack and reckless in the inner life. They thought that talent was enough to make a man strong- in life, and forgot that it needed even more than talent - that subtle balance of the life called character. If you are wise you will not trust to mere and bare cleverness. You will see to the force behind, the force of a pure purpose and a wise will.

And further, the world owes quite as much to the men of mediocre talent as to those of brilliant genius. Indeed, the mediocre man often lifts himself on to the plane of the genius, by the determination with which he applies himself to his duty. The force behind the brain, the character and purpose, the inner man it is that has most to do with intellectual strength. The plodder, the man of perseverance, the man who feels that, though he be no genius, still God has given him his work to do, and tools to. work withal, is the man who will show mental strength. And in this day when brain-work is so essential to success, the motto for every young man who wishes success is, "As the man is, so is his strength." It is not whether you get this or that, or did not get it, when you were born, but whether you have in you that grit and determination to do your utmost with the mind you have. Many of our intellectual giants have come from the lowliest and poorest places. They picked up their schooling- while they herded sheep, or at night, after they had wrought with their hands through a long day They gained their strength as they brought more and more to bear on their pursuit of knowledge the hidden force of character.

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

That force behind - *character* - the sense of a call from God was the secret of their strength.

## III

This other phase of the subject. There is nothing more striking than the way in which men face the temptations that are all around their path every day of their life. How differently different people take them ! One man moves on past them, with either an indifferent or a defiant look. They have no power to move him. Another man is in abject terror of them before he has to face them, and then they have such an irresistible fascination for him that he cannot get past them. He is snared in them. Now when we see that difference between men as they come face to face with temptation, and ask how it arises, we are apt to say that one man is naturally immune from its influence, while another is highly susceptible to it. And there is no doubt that just as men differ in temperament, so will they differ in their attitude to things which may be moral temptations. But there is far less original difference than we sometimes think. And more than that. There is many a man who is supposed to be perfectly impervious to a temptation, who has to clench his teeth and fight it every day. And yet he seems to be free from it. Certainly in the life of temptation we know not what's resisted. Temptation is the common lot of men. No man escapes it. But when you ask the secret of that strong man who never yields, it does not lie so much as you think in a natural freedom from the fascination of it. It lies in the power of the inner life over the instincts and appetites and desires. Through grace and much pain he has gained the mastery. Over against the sweetness of indulgence or unholy possession, he has got into the habit of placing- the dignity of his man-hood, and the will of his God, and he feels that he does not want to debase his life. He sees life in too divine a light for that. That is the secret of resistance. And the man who will go down to-morrow before temptation, may blame circumstances and a naturally weak nature, but he will not strike the root of his weakness when he has mentioned these two. For it lies not in thing's he cannot help, but in what is in his own hands under God, that is, in the quality of his soul life, in the purpose that dominates him there. As the man is, so is his weakness in temptation. And if you want to be strong-morally, you must see that your central purpose is rightly directed.

Now I have spoken long enough, but I have spoken to little purpose if I have not got you to consider this question to-night. The true strength, the true efficiency of your life, bodily, mentally, and morally, depends less on natural gifts and talents than you think, and far more than you think on the state of your inner life and character. Set that inner life right. Accept the divine will for your life, and every part of your life will get new power. You will make of body and mind and conscience more than you can dream of, if they are but guided from within by wisdom and pure purpose. "The heart's aye the pairt aye that maks us richt or wrang." Out of the heart proceed the issues of life. That is the seat of strength or the source of weakness. And if you want it to be the seat of strength in you, what you have to do is to bid Christ live there and reign there. And I cannot stop with saying, Be strong. I must put it in this other way, Be strengthened. Unite your life to Christ. Let Him master you, rule you, befriend you. Make up your mind to follow Him. Let Him save you. Put it any way you like, but however you

put it in words, put yourself under His influence, and you will know in experience, what cannot be altogether, no, nor half described in words, that you can do all things through

Christ who strengtheneth you. His strength will be yours and His victory will also be yours.

## Follow Me.

“Come ye after me” - MARK i. 17.

Christ gives us in this command, “Come ye after me,” the simplest possible description of Christian discipleship. It is following Christ. Now, it is not always wise for Christian men and women to be emphasising the minimum of creed and faith and practice on which one can be a Christian. That is indicative of a spirit which contents itself with just the elements of Christian faith and life - a spirit not at all to be encouraged. But it is wise to describe Christianity in the simplest possible fashion to the many who are seeking Christ, and to that far larger number whom Christ is seeking and trying to persuade to become His disciples.

And when I go back to Christ for guidance, as I must do about the matter and the method of preaching, I find that when He wished to win people to Himself He was careful to put the central and essential issue very plainly, and quite unencumbered with either theory or polity. “Come ye after me.”

I think it is a wise Church that studies and copies its Master’s simplicity when it appeals to men and women in its Master’s name. And this is the first thought suggested to me by the call addressed to Andrew and Peter.

### I

The directness and simplicity of Christ’s appeal.

It is direct. It is from one person to another. It is simple. It asks for a single contrived act of free obedience. Now I venture to say that with all our elaborations of doctrines and with all our repeated philosophies of conversion, we have to go back for effectiveness to the simplest statement, and to the direct presentation of the one central thing in conversion. It is that we follow Christ. Now I want to put in a plea for this simple way of stating Christ’s appeal for several reasons. First of all, because this is a day when people are impatient of the language of mystery. There is no disguising the fact that the old doctrinal watchwords are not understood in such a way that they can help people to faith in Christ, and a Christian life. They are stumbling blocks rather than stepping-stones. They are well-known sounds that convey no meaning to the heart.

To the Christian they are precious, they are laden with spiritual riches. He has dug into them and appropriated their enriching truth. And the person who is now a seeker, or who is only being sought by Christ, will most likely by and by find them also packed with nourishment for the spiritual life. But what I say is this, that we must not burden the seeker with a bewildering profusion of the riches of Christian truth. Christ has many things to say to him, but he cannot bear them now. By and by he will seek them of his own accord. Just now he wants to know in the language he can understand, in his mother-tongue spiritually speaking, and not in a foreign language, what he has got to do to be a Christian. And I cannot conceive of a more simple and direct reply than this - You have to follow Christ. That is sufficient to go on with. Get started there, and you will soon know more.

I want to put in a plea for this directness and simplicity to-day for another reason. Life has not only a great many theological difficulties which are the discouragement and the despair of a seeker after Christ, it has also a great many

practical problems as well. And never were they more absolutely and fearlessly stated than to-day. The worst has been said I think about the thousand wrongs and the apparent Divine indifference to them. There are the problems of the source and development and issue of life. God is made responsible for the world and humanity in a way which would make our fathers shudder with horror. Now I fear that a great many think that getting these problems solved, and becoming Christians, mean one and the same thing, or at least that they cannot be Christians until they find some satisfactory explanation of these hard questions. We want to tell them that this is a mistake. Satisfaction on these points is not Christianity. Nor need you wait for satisfaction before becoming a Christian. And so I say, for this reason also, we want to go back to the simple and direct appeal of Christ - Follow Me. Leave problems aside. They affect life, but they are not life. Here is life itself - Follow Christ. In that you will probably get your problems solved, but even if you do not, still that - following Christ is life at its best: it is Christian life.

If I urge you to follow Christ, I do so because it is the simplest way that I can express the step you must take in entering the Christian life. And I put it like that for another reason. Not a few to-day insist on keeping themselves aloof from Churches and from Christianity in them, because they are under the idea that Christianity is a set of beliefs to which they must say Amen, and they cannot say Amen to them. Now, I am not the one to speak lightly of beliefs. They are too near the roots of my life to allow me to belittle them. But I am speaking now of the initial step into Christianity, and there, I say, we must make it clear that it is follow Christ first, and make your creed afterwards and in His company. And yet I know that there is only too good excuse for those who keep aloof from Christianity under the idea that Christianity is a set of beliefs. We have thrust theology too much before men in their seeking stage, and that is what Christ never did. He always put the experimental before the theological, and so must we. And we have made the creed and the profession too much the test of true Christianity, when we should have looked to the spirit and the life. I beseech you do not err there.

My memory goes back to one who climbed the same stairs with me and shared the same rooms with me in Edinburgh, and if ever there was a Christian he was one, and he heard Christ calling him to go to Africa. But the Mission Board said his creed was defective, I do not know where; but I do know that his was the kind of religion that would win men to Christ in Africa or in Scotland. He managed to get to Africa, and after doing the work of four men for two years for the bodies and souls of those East Africans, he died in his tent one night from exhaustion and fever. It must have been, after all, a good creed that made so good a follower of Jesus Christ. It is this overdone insistence on beliefs rather than spirit that has led so many to think that Christianity is only another name for creed.

A man wrote me some time ago that he would like to believe certain things. What could I reply but that Christianity is to follow Christ? It is not prevailing upon oneself to give intellectual assent to this or that. I have dwelt on this perhaps too long, but it seems to me that we have a

simple and direct appeal here to make in the name of Christ - an appeal free from the burdens of problems and theories. And you who are following Christ - will you make it in His name? And you for whom Christ is waiting - will you listen just to this appeal from Christ, "Come ye after me?" Do not let any distraction turn your thoughts away from it until you say, "Yes, Lord, I will come after thee."

## II

But this call of Christ suggests to me another thought which I must try to express in as few words as I can. Let me put it in this way. What amount of previous knowledge will warrant a man to respond to this appeal? I do not think that Christ would ask a man to follow Him who was absolutely ignorant of Him. Those men, Andrew and Peter, were not without knowledge of Christ. They got it from John the Baptist. Andrew at least knew Christ already at first hand. They knew Him sufficiently to be able to trust themselves with Him. Now, when you and I appeal to men, when I appeal to you to-day to follow Christ, I do not ask you to follow one who is an entire stranger to you. You could not be ignorant of Him if you tried.

It is true that a life-time in the company of Christ will not give you a full knowledge of the unsearchable riches of His character. Every day will reveal to you greater depth and height and diviner glory in Christ. You must not expect to know Him at first, as He can only be known after long companionship. But this is the true order and the true development of life. It was long after Christ said, "Follow me," that he asked the question, "Who say ye that I am?" The revelation of a long contact was needed to answer that question. You must not say, I want a doctrine of the person of Christ before I can follow Him. The true doctrine grows out of the following. It is enough to warrant you in following Christ to know, as you cannot help knowing, that in things moral and in things spiritual He is supreme, and the moral and the spiritual are the highest realms of life.

It would be telling you what you know full well already, if I were to remind you of the perfect character of Christ, of the unceasing love He bestowed on men, of the moral grandeur of His teaching about life's relations and duties. And you know, too, of the higher and nobler views of God that men have lived in since He lived. He has revealed life, He has revealed God. You have proof at your side of how He can change the sinful life and fill it with the new and

holier aims, and from the individual you can go to history and see how His power and influence have permeated and raised life in the mass of men.

You cannot be ignorant of all this and live and walk this earth. And that is the knowledge that concerns you most. It is knowledge enough surely, to guarantee that, if you follow Christ, you will not be duped, but find the fullest and the highest and the greatest life.

## III

The third thought suggested to me by Christ's call of Andrew and Peter is the wisdom of a prompt response.

I know that much can be said, and said very wisely, about counting the cost, of doing nothing rashly, of questioning the impulse. But, on the other hand, remember that there is an over-prudence and there is an excess of caution which paralyse the life, or at least kill our good impulses and lose for us our golden opportunities. We are prone in looking over the past to waste ourselves in unnecessary regrets, and in too long drawn-out sorrow for our mistakes. We forget that the light and wisdom of to-day have come to us since yesterday's mistake and perhaps through it, and we are apt to be over-fearful about the future just as we are over-sorrowful for the past. The fact is that while we see possibilities of troubles ahead, we do not have as clear a vision of the grace we shall receive to meet them with. We see the duty ahead often without seeing the wisdom. We sniff the battle without having beforehand the sense of power with which we shall fight. The fear of to-morrow must never be allowed to prevent the duty of to-day. Can you not trust the future? Can you not believe that the hour will bring it's strength with it? And so I say - Act promptly, do not let the good impulse die, do not scare it with unnecessary fears. You can well risk yourself with Christ. If the risk were greater would it not be still your wisdom as it is your highest duty?

To-day, then, putting aside all the many intricate and difficult questions that gather round the problems of life, the articles of our faith, and even the person of our Saviour, will you begin simply and trustfully to follow Christ? And if you hear Him saying to-day, "Come after me," just rise and go with Him, do not let the moment pass. It is for you to take this step, not asking to see "the distant scene," but obeying gladly the call of to-day.

## Reuben the Unstable.

“Unstable as water, thou shalt not excel” - GEN. xlix. 4.

Like many a father on his deathbed, Jacob gathered his family about him, to take final leave of them for this world, and to give them a parting message. And as Jacob's sons, one by one, came close to the bedside, he addressed them. Perhaps the most striking thing in what he says to each will appear to you to be the way in which he forecasts his future. It looks as if to the eyes which were dim to earth, the future was opened, and he saw days to come. But if you ponder those prophecies for a moment, you will see that his foresight was largely due to his insight. It usually is so with us. The man of insight will be the man of foresight, and the man who lacks insight is a man unskilled in the future. And Jacob was able to read off the future of his sons, very largely because he read their characters so well. You see that, in the main, the future he foretold was in keeping with the man's character and his past. And if he said of Reuben that he would not excel, it was because he knew the character of the man - his passionate, uncontrolled, unstable disposition.

### I

Now, out of this emerges an eternal principle. *What you will be in days to come depends on what you were yesterday and what you are to-day.* And yet that is one of the things we are slowest in learning. We have a delusion that the future is on the lap of the gods, and that they can give us what they please. It is not so. They give us according to what we are. A fond and ambitious mother came once to Christ and asked that her sons might have places of special honour in His Kingdom. Christ told her the thing was not an arbitrary matter. It was not in His hands. The high places are for those who deserve them.

No, a future cannot be given to you. You must grow into it. A father may give his son a position in a business, but unless that son's character is in keeping with the place, it will be no future for him. He will wreck it. And when a man like Reuben, a man passionate and unstable, wants a future of a worthy kind, the moral laws are against him. No man need look for a future which has no relation to his own character. Friends, there is a moral continuity in life which we simply cannot evade. And yet the delusion of a Wayward life is that, by some magic, some day to come it will be well-ordered. The fiery-tempered man expects that one day he will wake up quite meek and lamb-like. A man who is going the pace thinks he will steady up when he marries. A wastrel in Scotland thinks the moment his feet touch the shores of South Africa he will be a moral model of a man. The man who wastes his master's time and, as Carlyle said, breaks every commandment in the decalogue with every stroke of his hammer, believes that if he were only his own master he would be a prosperous man. Aye, and the man who fritters his life away here thinks that, once he gets to Heaven, he will be quite transformed and perfected. Everywhere you find this delusion about the future. But Jacob drives home the true moral principle that controls the coming of the future both on the earth and beyond it. It is that a man's future depends on his character. And if you are weak and unstable now, and make no effort to gain a steady persevering character, no other - not your father on his death-bed, not God himself - can promise you a future of

glory and credit, for in God's moral universe character makes destiny.

### II

*What robbed Reuben of his future was his instability.* “Unstable as water, thou shalt not excel.” And many a man finds himself described and his future read to him in that short sentence. Far more than most things to-day, instability of character is the ruin of otherwise good men. They have good parts, and they have plenty of ambition, but they have a mercurial character. They cannot stick at a thing. If they could only do that they would have a splendid future, but they seem to lose relish of every purpose, as a child tires of a toy. And ambition without steadiness and perseverance is a will-o'-the-wisp.

(1) *Look how instability ruins a man's chances of temporal success.* Here is a man who, when he was boy, used to get by heart healthy little proverbs like these: - “No pains, no gains,” and “Where there is a will, there is a way.” And he saw the proverbs being verified in the lives of others. But when he came to face the world himself and climb the ladder, he thought that was too slow for him, and he flitted from flower to flower, from this place to that, everything by turns and nothing long, wanting gold to drop from the sky. It did not drop, and at forty he finds himself far behind the tortoise he used to laugh at. Instability has spoiled his chances.

(2) *See how it wrecks a man's intellectual life.* In our day there is a deplorable lack of patience and perseverance in mental culture. Solid books are left in the dust of our libraries, and the shallow frothy books are dirty and torn from much use. There is little patience with literature that is really informing and character-shaping towards the highest life. And this restless mood prevents hundreds of us from reaching that robust intelligence which makes good men and good citizens.

(3) The unstable character shows itself, and rather painfully too, often in the *matter of friendships*. In the Book of Proverbs it is said that the man who has many friends has them to his own hurt. It is a strange saying, but is applicable I think just to this instability that is always gushing over a new friend and forgetting the old. And the hurt it works to a man's self is just that he makes his nature more and more frivolous and incapable of deep and lasting affection. It is the steadfast friendship that gives your nature its opportunity of revealing itself and of cultivating the spirit of unselfishness and helpfulness, which are a true enrichment of life.

(4) And, not to accumulate instances further, *what harm instability works in religious life and work!* Here you have a man who seems to be blown over with every gust of infidelity that blows. There is one who throws up a most important and valuable bit of work out of sheer whim. Here is another whose faith rises and falls with every passing mood, who never gets down to the deeper experiences of the soul, because everything only scratches the surface. And all up and down life - in business, in culture, in friendship, in religion - the man who is unstable as water simply cannot excel. And the discredit of it is all the greater where, as in Reuben's case, a man's chances were so many and so favourable.

### III

Reuben's case next reminds us that instability of character is often due to sin indulged. It may not be so always. Sometimes it is associated with a general 'fecklessness' of nature, which seems incapable of following and holding on to a set purpose. And, certainly, that is the case to-day with not a few. They do not seem fit to apply themselves. They drift as a log in a storm. They are driven to and fro and tossed. They are as easily displaced as water. Anybody can have them. They are at the mercy of the next man they meet. They cannot say No. They have no convictions. They float on the changing sea of opinions. They are not bad: they are just backboneless.

But Reuben's case calls our attention to a very serious fact. It is that sin indulged weakens the will, and unfits a man for carrying out steadfast purpose. Deeply graven on Jacob's mind was the memory of a sin committed by Reuben in earlier days. It was a sin of sensual indulgence. It was a breach of self-control. Now, a solitary lapse a man may, through God's grace, live down and overcome in life. But with Reuben, it seems that his weakness all along was the indulgence of appetite. It had become a permanent weakness. And the moral law which is illustrated, and on which I want to lay some stress is this, that you cannot be strong on one side of your character if you are weak on another. Put it another way. If you are cherishing some sin, especially any secret sin of appetite, you cannot confine the effect of that sin. It spreads over all your nature and affects it at every opening. I think this fact explains a good deal that is often mysterious in the failure of a man. If a man drinks excessively you may not know it in his walk nor in his face. But perhaps you will find it in some meanness or lapse from honour in your dealings with him. You may find it in his inability to grasp quickly an idea. You may find it in an inability to apply himself or to make up his mind promptly and in accord with high principle. A man, you see, is a moral unity. He is not built in separate sections. He is one complete whole, and if one member suffers the whole body suffers. If you sin on one side of your nature you cannot keep the effects of that sin to that bit of your life. The effect will touch you at every point. The influence of it will soak right through your nature. And it will weaken you at a point which you perhaps thought that sin would never touch. And do not think that this is true only of gross sins of sense. It is true also of such a thing as envy. A wrong spirit like that will tinge the whole of life and give it an ill-colour. It will affect regions of being that seem quite remote from it. So I beseech you, do not be under any delusion in this matter. The pervasive influence of sin is one of life's moral facts, and such a thing as instability, restlessness, want of perseverance, unreliability may be due to some sin. The cause lies in quite another side of your nature from where the weakness is.

### IV

Another truth that emerges from the case of Reuben is that a defect of character perpetuates itself. In that respect it

only follows the law which governs the continuity of life. "The evil that men do lives after them." Whether it be heredity, or example, or both, the parent has a way of coming out in the child. Baring Gould in one of his books gives us a man who is a very picture of feckless instability. He seems incapable of bringing anything at all to the touchstone of right and wrong. He drifts the easiest road. However, he is kept from entire moral collapse by his daughter, who had a strong will which she certainly never got from her father. But her brother goes one worse than the father. He lives a life of reckless uncontrolled appetite. The father's instability was there, only in his case it was not under any external influence that could control it. And it was a startling moment to his sister when she saw as in a flash that her brother was just her father over again in disposition. The weakness was perpetuating itself.

And Reuben sent down a heritage of weakness, which we see in the Reubenites in after history - the same traits, the same instability and want of set purpose. They abode by the water courses instead of joining in the defence of their country. And all down Scripture *Reubenite* is another name for weakness, selfishness, and instability. Men and women, we have not ourselves alone to consider. Even that would be a great matter. Our own life is worth making strong, and freeing from moral weakness and whatever causes it. But we live for others, for those about us, and for those who come after us. Let us make the law of moral influence our chance to contribute something to the good of the wider life. Do not let us hand out and on a legacy of weakness and impoverishment.

### V

And now take this further. *Your future will be as your character is.* You need not expect to sow thorns and reap grapes. Your future is in your own hands. Nothing can come to you that is alien to your real nature. And you are wasting time if you dream of good and look for it by and by and live evil to-day. You cannot in particular have a future strong in purpose and achievement if you are to-day letting yourself drift, if you are in your soul life unstable as water. Get your character renewed and your future is assured to you. And I bring before you again Jesus Christ, perfect in all things. See Him in relation to this. His motto was ever the Father's will. It was His meat and drink. Steadfast and with face set like a flint He went forward and wrought your salvation and mine. And what He was in life He can make you in life. He took the most impulsive natures, the most unstable - Peter, John, and Mark for instance - and they dwelt with Him, and He dwelt in them until the nature was transformed. There is no hopeless moral necessity in life with Christ by. He can change the weakest and make him strong. He can make the unstable man a very rock. And if you let yourself come to-night under His mighty influence, even those weaknesses and defects of nature, which you have been inclined to think are hopeless, will yield to that divine influence. He has done it for thousands. He will do it for you.



## Christ's Words to His Mother at Cana.

"Jesus saith unto her. Woman, what have I to do with thee? mine hour is not yet come" - JOHN ii. 4.

These words which Jesus spoke to His mother at Cana are a difficulty and a stumbling-block to many. I think we have all felt when we were reading them that they jarred on our feelings. We know that Jesus spoke again and again with great severity. But although He did so, His severest words seemed always to be more than fully justified. Certainly that is so when He rebuked hypocrites, and when He dealt with people who degraded religion, or broke the most elementary moral laws, in the name of religion. We feel about such utterances, that they were called for, and were entirely in keeping with the spirit and character of Jesus. Christ's woes and denunciations were terrible, but then they were turned against glaring sin and wrong. But what makes us feel as we do about these words of Jesus to His mother is that they appear needlessly harsh. The occasion did not seem to call for them. More than that, we are astonished to hear one who we believe was the perfect son, use them to His mother. And at first sight at least, we fail to see in what way she deserved to be rebuked that day.

Now, the traditional way of taking the words is to regard them as a rebuke and a rebuff to Mary, for being too officious and interfering. And Protestants, in their rebound from anything like undue reverence for the Holy Virgin, have been very ready to put the harshest interpretation on them, blaming Mary all the time for bringing them on herself, and saying that here surely is proof that Mary is but a simple blundering woman, and no object of worship for men and women. Here is Christ in the most public way snapping the bond of obligation to His mother. Now, it is true that Mary did not understand Jesus when He entered on His larger ministry. Many a mother to-day, is unable to understand sympathetically her son, as he moves out from her usual sphere, and undertakes work which she simply cannot comprehend. But no true son, with love in his heart, would publicly snub his mother if she spoke in his ear as Mary did to Jesus that day. And I do not think we have the right key at all to understanding the scene if we say that Jesus spoke to His mother in a harsh or unfeeling way that day. I think the words are to be explained in a way that does not do violence to the character of Jesus, in a way which is not at variance with a sonship of tender and sensitive love. And one reason for saying so is that there was nothing in the circumstances to warrant us in thinking they were meant for a snub. There seems no call for a rebuke in all that Mary did. Her appeal to Jesus was rather the kindly observant interest of the anxious housewife. She felt for the embarrassment of the hosts. Perhaps she felt that the presence of her son there, drew to the marriage unexpected guests, and that the trouble of their hosts was partly His blame in an indirect way. Anyhow, what could be wrong in her coming to her son and saying to Him, "They have no wine?" He was accessible to all who wished to talk with Him, and why should not His mother feel free to tell Him of this worry that the host felt? But was she not dictating to Him? says some-one. Well, I fail to see any presumption in her say-ing "They have no wine." Do not forget that it was but yesterday that Jesus was her prop and stay in the house at Nazareth, and had been ever since Joseph died. It was to Jesus she had been in the habit of turning in the most natural way in her every

difficulty. She may not have expected Him to work a miracle on this occasion. Most likely she did not, for as yet He had wrought no miracle. What she knew was, that many a time in Nazareth she had found Him resourceful when food and wine were scant. He had been in the habit of relieving her of many a domestic anxiety by His loving forethought, and she believed that He would doubtless find a way here, as He had so often done in other matters in the old home. And even when she whispered to the servants to do what Jesus might ask them, there does not seem to be any spirit of dictation and unwise interference. It was just the action of a loving mother dependent on a loving and resourceful son. So that there seems nothing in the circumstances to warrant us in think-ing that the words are a simple and direct rebuke to Mary.

Then the words themselves have a harsher sound in the translation than they bear in the original language. It was a common expression of depreca-tion among people. Then the tone would tell a great deal as it always does. But I am not going to make that an argument. The fact is that in the words there is a revelation of strong feeling. Jesus was deeply moved when He uttered them. But it was not against His mother that He felt the strong feel-ing. He spoke moved by strong feeling, but again, I say, it was not in rebuke of His mother that He spoke. And if she provided the occasion by her appeal to His help, it was not that appeal alone that moved Him. He had His own thoughts and hopes and outlook, His own anxiety even, about His future work, and it was because this appeal of His mother brought all this before His mind, with all the pain and trial and final death which it involved, that He was moved so mightily, and was so strangely stirred, and spoke as He was moved.

Now, this way of reading the incident seems to me the right way. And when I turn to other stages in the life of Christ, I find other occasions which are not unlike this one - occasions when Jesus was moved deeply and sometimes spoke under strong feeling. I recall that scene with Peter. Jesus had foretold His death and the sufferings and ill-usage that would precede it. And no sooner had He ceased speaking than Peter broke in, "This be far from thee, Lord., this shall not be unto thee." It was the kindly and loving protest of an anxious friend who wished above all things to shield His Master from pain and wrong-But see how Christ was affected by what Peter said I He was deeply moved. He turned almost roughly and said, "Get thee behind me, Satan: for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but the things that be of men." Now, can we say that such language was directed against Peter? I do not think so. I cannot conceive Jesus being so harsh to one whose only fault was loving His Master and being over-anxious about Him. What then is the explanation of this? strong expression? It is that the words of Peter touched sorely on the burden of the future which lay already so heavily on the heart of Jesus. They reminded Him painfully of what He had to go through in His work of redeeming men. They strengthened the natural shrinking of His human being from death. And it is in that inner region of His own soul that we find the explanation of His strong utterance, and not just in the protest of His, disciple.

There are other occasions in which we have the same deep movement of His nature and the same strange stirring of His soul. I shall just name one of them. You remember that some Greeks once came to Jesus. They evidently were a deputation asking Jesus to leave Galilee and the unresponsive Jews, and find a warm welcome and a ready response among the Greeks. But Jesus, instead of answering them directly, went on to speak of His death, and John says that as He did so He was troubled in spirit. He was moved deeply, and His soul was in a tumult. But again, it was not at the Greeks. Their coming was a compliment to Him. The cause of His inward distress was that their visit brought home to Him, in a keen and painful way, His sufferings and coming death in the work of redemption.

These instances, the incident with Peter and the incident with the Greeks, are of the same kind as this incident in Cana. Here He was standing at the beginning of that road which ended at the Cross. In His soul was the memory of the great temptation He had just passed through - temptation to display, to use wrong means for the work of His life, temptation to presume on the care of God. And standing there, in the midst of a scene of happiness, in this appeal of His mother, He felt the shadow of the future fall across His heart, and He was stirred to the depths of His nature. His mother touched springs in Him of which she was quite ignorant, and under the deep feeling that stirred within Him, He spoke, not so much to her, as to relieve His burdened spirit. And if I may paraphrase what He said, I would do it like this. "Oh, my mother, you little know what your words involve. You think you are calling me to help a friend out of an awkward difficulty. In reality you are bidding me take that step from which there is no turning back. You are asking me to use that power of miracle which will be to my enemies a constant occasion for paining and defying me. You are launching me out on a sea of trouble. I can see what is before me. You cannot see it. I see privation, I see misunderstanding, fickle favour, and bitter hostility. I see suffering and death. You little know, my mother, that you are unsheathing the sword which will, as the prophet said, pierce your own heart. Oh, that it should be your voice which opens the door to all that for me." That, I think, is the right interpretation of the mood of Christ and the utterance of Christ, which seem so harsh and un-son-like.

And when we think of what came after this in His life, we see that it was just the working of miracles, which began that day at the appeal of His mother, that involved Him in a publicity which grew more and more painful as days passed, and which led to bitter opposition and final death on the Cross. And we feel more and more certain that these words at Cana were no harsh rebuke to His mother, but the exclamation of one who felt the pressure of the future and all that it held in its bosom for Him of suffering and trial, and even death itself, and who saw that the very one who would want above everybody to shield Him from it, is all

unconsciously, and innocently, opening the door for Him into it. Who would spare Him like His mother? And yet His mother is, all unknown to herself, urging Him to tread the wine-press, by appealing to Him to help a marriage party to get wine.

Shall I just remind you of the everyday counterpart to this? Friends, the inner life of a man is a hidden thing. On the surface you see no ripple. All is smooth and glittering you think in the sunshine. But not far under the surface there often rolls a very storm and tumult of feeling. Sorrow is there, and fear and hope and despair, not on the surface, I say, but just underneath. And the touch of a finger, the utterance of an innocent word, the appeal even of friendship, may cause the deeper springs to break out. You wonder why a man speaks out with such sudden and unexpected feeling. You wonder why anything you have said could have touched him so keenly. The explanation is not in your words alone. It lies in the strain that was upon his heart when you spoke. That is how the innocent word will let loose a flood of tears, why an unconscious reference to some matter will move a man to anger in a way you do not understand, or why a single word will strain a heart to breaking. The secret lies in the heart of a man. And just because you never know that inner life where a man fights his battles, bears his humiliations, represses his sorrow, and looks anxiously on to-morrow, you should cultivate Christian tact and sensitiveness of nature, so that you be not brutal when you mean to be kind, and pain when you would rather shield from pain. Remember, too, that the inner struggle and agony are often the explanation of what you think is that strangeness and preoccupation in your friend, which you are too ready to call coldness to yourself. If you have learned to read the secret side of your own life, and through it to understand other lives, you will know that this outward attitude - the sudden outburst, the irritation - is a sure sign of inner trouble and pain. And you will know when to be silent, and when to make allowance, and you will not open the gates of pain nor pinch the tender spot, but rather apply leaves of healing. For the cultivation of this sensitiveness and insight is an art too little exercised in the Christian life.

And this last sentence. If you wonder why the hurrying on of the hour of Christ's public work was so unwelcome to Him that day, and stirred Him so much, you do not get a full answer when you say that it was because the way to the Cross was a painful way. That is true, but that is not half the answer. The greatest pain to Christ was that every pain inflicted on Him was a sin on the part of man. The way to the Cross was hurried on by human sin, and as he thought of that, is it any wonder that He was moved so deeply, and felt so keenly the appeal that called Him out to reveal the depth of the sin of the world? And it is when we understand something of the weight that man's sin was, on the heart of Christ, that we shall feel the burden too, and seek salvation from it.

## The Christian View of Death.

“These things said he: and after that he saith unto them, Our friend Lazarus sleepeth; but I go, that I may awake him out of sleep, Then said his disciples. Lord, if he sleep, he shall do well. Howbeit Jesus spake of his death: but they thought that he had spoken of taking of rest in sleep. Then said Jesus unto them plainly, Lazarus is dead” - JOHN xi. 11-14.

In writing to the Corinthians St. Paul says a striking thing about death. He classes it among the boons and blessings and advantages which are the heritage of the Christian. All things are yours, he says, the world, life, death, things present and things to come; all are yours. We are not surprised that he should count all the others as blessings, but it does at first seem a new thought that he should as much as say that death is one of the precious belongings of the Christian. Looked at with enlightened eyes death becomes no longer a thing of terror, but something which is all for good to man. Now, that view of death we owe to Christianity. Go back to the Old Testament, and, with the exception of one or two hints of a morning after the night, death is regarded with dread, with shrinking, and as a deplorable necessity in human experience. Turn to Greece and you find that the one form of melancholy which brooded over that people with whom we associate so much sweetness and beauty and light, was the shadow of death. And, wherever Christian light has not come, or where it is not appreciated, death remains a thing dark, mysterious, and hopeless. It is quite true that even without the Christian faith, men and women may brace themselves bravely to meet it, and many have done so. But it is one thing to face stoically the inevitable, and another thing to face it in the faith that it is no foe but a friend; that instead of its being an outrage and a blot on human experience, it is one of the unrecognised blessings and gains.

Now, we have a way of saying that what cannot be cured must be endured. And on the same principle, I can imagine people saying that it is making a virtue of a necessity to try to make out that death is a blessing. We have to go through it, so we may as well make the best of it and say the best of it we can. While that would be a method all for hope, and a way of distilling light out of a dark thing, what I say is, that we are not reduced to that somewhat forced optimism regarding this subject. We cannot learn of Christ without knowing well that part of His work was to take the sting from death, and to liberate those who, from fear of death, were in bondage of soul all their days. And the way in which Christ has done that is, first by His direct teaching about death, and then by passing through it Himself, and showing how it did not really touch Him, but left Him essentially as He was.

Now, to-day, there is room and call for the acceptance of a decently Christian view of death. Notwithstanding all that Christ has said and done, we are still more than half pagan in our attitude to physical death. We are its slaves, instead of its masters, and our attitude to it stands in need of Christianising.

### I

Taking the general attitude and teaching of Christ as our guide, I think the first step towards a healthy and true doctrine of death is, to rid ourselves of the thought that physical death is due to sin, that if sin had not entered into

the world there would have been no death of the body, and that but for Adam's transgression all the life that ever was in the world would have continued until this day. This idea has been rooted in our thinking. And there is this much to be said for it. Certainly it is sin that is the sting of death. Sin hastens death, too, in many a case. It is sin that gives death its terror, for the sinner cannot but think of what may lie beyond death for him. In all these ways sin has made death a thing of terror, but, all the same, it did not cause death itself to be. Then again, on the surface at least, it seems as if Scripture gave support to the idea that the death of the body is due to sin. You ask, does not Genesis distinctly say, “In the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die?” And does not St. Paul interpreting that, say – “Death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned?” Now, will you look at these passages which may represent others for a moment. The fact is when you read your Genesis you find that the passage, which declares the penalty for sin, takes physical death for granted as the natural heritage of man. And the real penalty for sin lies in the discordant relation it produces between man and his surroundings, man and his duty, man and his God. These are the results of sin as recorded in Genesis, for it continues - “Dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return.” Man's mortality is taken for granted. If you say, What do you make of that warning - “In the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die?” my reply is that the word *die* is not used here of the physical at all, but of the spiritual. As a matter of fact they did not die physically on the day that they ate of the forbidden fruit. What happened was inward. Spiritual deterioration and spiritual death began within them. And if I trace the use of the word “death” through the Gospels, and especially note the use of it by Christ, I find that with Him the word death had always this deeper significance. He did not use it of the body, except under protest, and then it was to accommodate Himself to the current coin of language. He will not speak of the parting of body and soul as death, but as sleep. He will not say the maid is dead, He says the maid is *not* dead. She is “asleep,” and yet according to common speech she was dead. “Our friend Lazarus sleepeth,” He said, and yet we know that Lazarus was dead. And all through you find Christ refusing to use the word “dead” of physical dissolution. He wished to teach us to look on it in a new way, in a kindlier way, not as an enemy but as a friend.

Besides Christ's reluctance to use the word “death” of the physical, we have His constant use of it to denote a spiritual fact. The man who believes in Christ has passed from death to life. And yet we know that that man has no exemption from mortality, but his soul has had its resurrection. Again, “If a man keep My word, he shall never see death,” and yet we know that all saints reach Heaven through the gateway of what we call death. Evidently, therefore, Christ does not mean the death of the body at all, when He uses the word death, but something deeper and more awful, because it is spiritual.

Then, if you consider St. Paul's use of the word, you will find no support to the idea that physical death is due to sin. He also employs this-word death as a spiritual term. He says that the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made him free from the law of sin and death; but it was plain to him that the Christian faith did not exempt a man from passing

through the valley of the shadow. Good men die in that sense as well as bad men. And so, without burdening what I am saying with quotation, it is, enough to say that, just as the life which Christ gives, is not mere physical existence, but an inward and soul enrichment, so the death, from which He saves us, is not the death of the body, but of the soul and the spiritual powers. There is a death which is the wages of sin, but it is a death of the highest within, of the soul, of the powers of the soul. Christ sought to produce a right attitude to the death of the body by refusing to regard it as death, and by asking men to look on it as simply as they do on the sleep that rounds a day's toil. And St. Paul drove home his Master's teaching.

Further, Christianity not only urges us to separate mortality and sin, and so to look upon physical death not as due to sin, but as an inevitable incident in our human experience: it goes further. It bids us use the scientific light we have on the subject, and when we do that, we find for one thing that the testimony of the rocks on which God has written part of His revelation, is that long before man appeared, death was the natural lot of living things. And what sin did when it intruded, was to make what was simple and natural, to be shadowed about with gloomy terror.

## II

Again, death is ours, in the Christian sense, when we look on it as a divine method of progress in the world. Look at it not as in the individual life, in which strong emotions blur our view, but in the light of God's broad and universal purposes. Nature is our teacher. And Nature teaches us every autumn and every spring time that death is the condition of further life. The old life dies that there may be new and fuller life. And in human experience it is the same. It is all in the interests of progress that instead of a set number of men, living on and on, there should be a multitude of successive generations, each of a fuller humanity than the one that preceded it. It is in the interests of humanity that man's life should pass away after the brief threescore years and ten, when he has played his part and made his contribution to the enrichment of humanity. Another generation is knocking at the door, whose fresh dreams and active energies will carry on life's tasks. When we think along lines like these, lines which Christianity has taught us specially to follow, thinking of the general march of good, rather than of the individual life, we can see as we could not do otherwise, that a Wise Providence has made death His factor in working out His purposes. And if you think that although the race benefit, the single man loses, you are wrong. Because you forget that, although man's earthly work-time is comparatively brief, when he has done his part and lived his life here, it is God's intention that he should play a further part, God alone knows how glorious a part, in the Unseen. You will then gladly acquiesce in God's way of making death a stepping-stone, not only to the higher life of the man, but of the race as well.

## III

Then again, Death becomes our friend and not our enemy, when we remember how the thought of its approach affects our attitude to life and duty. Were there no death, no limit to man's existence here on earth, how could he realise the value and meaning of life? "Man goeth unto his work and to his labour until the evening," but his work is made strenuous and earnest when he has before him this fact that "the night cometh when no man can work." You have not an

eternity in which to bless the world. You have only a few short days. You must seize the days. The fact that there is a time limit makes life fuller and greater and nobler to the earnest man. You have this idea expressed in match-less English in George Elliot's *Legend of Jubal*. In the old sweet days before men knew death save in the solitary deed of Cain, they lived in idleness. They played and sang and danced the live-long day. Life had no seriousness and no greatness. But when the second death came, and men saw that this was to be the lot of their race, a new meaning stole into life. Time took a new value, affection became nobler, men took up life's tasks in a new spirit. Death bade them live in earnest. Death became as it now is, a spur to activity.

## IV

And if the thought of how brief our time is, makes us live the better, is it not also true that the thought that we may lose our dear ones gives an added tenderness to all the relations of life? I may lose my loved ones. They will be all the dearer to me, while I have them, on that account. And if this possibility of loss were always, not exactly in the fore-front, but just in the background of our thoughts, how it would sweeten and hallow all our love! Would it not crush back the angry word? Would it not make us more forgiving? Would it not root out much of the selfishness and meanness that corrupt our lives? Would it not keep our thoughts off our petty disagreements and unite us in loving labour for one another to sweeten the days that are, for the day will too soon near its close?

## V

And if you will allow me to come a little closer still, Christianity makes death kindlier even when it robs us. There are facts about it which will mitigate our grief even in our darkest hour. Death is not loss but gain to those who die. Death lulls for ever the storm, and cools the fever, and ends the strife. And in the desolation it leaves, it is the survivor that dies. But even to the desolate this thought comes. No good life, however short, is lived in vain. Twenty years of such a life is an imperishable gift to home and friends. The very incompleteness of such lives urges those who remain to complete them in their own lives. Do you never find yourself referring to the spirit of one who is gone for approval and for inspiration? We neither pray for the dead nor to the dead, and yet we know that in a very true sense they are the "sceptred sovran that still rule our spirits from their urns." They are part of the cloud of witnesses - witnesses in this that they have given their testimony, and also in this sense that they seem to be onlookers while we strive and labour.

Dr Fairbairn tells how he once had a bosom friend who was more to him than a brother. They were much together. Together they faced the breeze, they climbed the hillside together, they studied together. The one helped to keep alive the flame in the other's breast. The same week saw them started in their different spheres of labour, the one to die, the other to work to the close of his longer day. "But," says Principal Fairbairn, "he has gone, and yet he has lived ever since, and I live feeling as if the soul within me belonged to the man who died. A part of him has lived in me to move me on to noble ends. Death robbed, but death gave back more than it took."

## VI

And, last of all, let me say that Death is our friend through Christ, in that it unites more than it divides. We dwell in our sorrow on the separation. In reality death rather unites. The majority, as we commonly say, are on the other side. Death opens the door for us to join them. Tennyson, in a semi-pantheistic way, says:-

“The sun, the moon, and the stars, this weight of  
body and limb,  
Are they not the symbol and sign of our division  
from Him?”

He feels that the life that is, only divides from the life universal. We, in a Christian sense, say the same. And the more treasures we have in Heaven the more will death be to us the symbol of union and less the sign of separation.

Now, these are only a few thoughts on a great subject. But I think it is along lines like these, lines of Christ's own pointing out and illuminating, that we reach that doctrine of death which is His doctrine, and which will make death to be to us no longer the King of Terrors, but even a Friend.

## Funeral Services.

The funeral of the late Rev. Alexander MacLennan took place on 12th June 1906.

At half-past two a service was held in Canmore Street Church. The Rev. James Foote, minister of Bath Street Congregational Church, presided. Prayer was offered by Mr Foote and the Rev. T. J. Hagen. The Rev. Robert Stevenson, of the Abbey Church, read the Scripture lesson.

Simultaneously a service was held at Transy Place, the residence of the deceased.

The following extract is from *The Dunfermline Journal*, of 16th June 1906:-

The City has seldom seen a more impressive funeral! Such was the testimony on Tuesday after-noon of men of mature age, who have witnessed many large mournful processions in Dunfermline. The solemn service in Canmore Street Church; the advance of the mourning company along the lengthened lines of streets from Canmore Street to the Kirkgate, and from the Corporation Buildings to the cemetery; the closing of the shutters of the shop windows in the High Street; the great concourse of sympathetic spectators wearing mourning attire - all contributed to emphasise the demonstration on Tuesday of general sorrow for the death of a young minister cut down in his early manhood, of sympathy for his widow and family, of admiration for his character, and gratitude for his work. At the bidding of a common sentiment, without any elaborate prearrangement, but spontaneously and reverently, all classes of citizens joined in the procession. The Provost and the Sheriff, the Town Councillors, the Carnegie Trustees and the School Board members, ministers and doctors, bankers and lawyers, and other professional men, employers of labour and workmen publicly associated themselves with the relatives of the late minister and the office-bearers and members of his congregation, the Principal of the Congregational Theological College and former fellow-students, as they followed the body to the grave. Not one in the great concourse of mourners who walked in the procession or who

lined the streets as sympathetic onlookers was able to recall a disservice done in word or deed by the deceased. The universal testimony, as friend exchanged thought with friend, was that Mr MacLennan had lived in Dunfermline a true and beneficent life as a disciple of his Heavenly Master and as a preacher of His Gospel of human ennoblement by reconciliation with the Almighty Father. Thus it was that Dunfermline, in full loyalty to the old faith, repeated the testimony of the Psalmist:-

“Who shall ascend unto the hill of the Lord? or who shall stand in his holy place?

He that hath clean hands and a pure heart; who hath not lifted up his soul unto vanity, nor sworn deceitfully.

He shall receive the blessing from the Lord and righteousness from the God of his salvation.”

At the grave, Principal Hodgson, who nine years ago gave the young minister of Canmore Street the warmest of commendations and the most loving of benedictions, sorrowfully read a funeral service, while the Rev. Mr Jenkins, Leith, a friend and companion of the late minister, offered an earnest and touching prayer. The grave was lined with purple drapery, and had a chain of white lily stars at the surface, and a bed of white May blossom for the coffin at the bottom.

The site of the grave is the crest of the hill at the eastern side of the most recently-annexed burying ground. It commands a most beautiful prospect in every direction. On Tuesday afternoon, however, the thoughts of the large assemblage that occupied the heights were evidently fixed on other prospects as Dr Hodgson in gentle sympathetic accents recited a selection of the sweet consolations of the Christian faith, and as Mr Jenkins in tremulous tones, which told of deep emotion, thanked God for the many gifts with which his brother-minister had been endowed, and commended the widow and children to the care of All-loving Father.