

Gospel of John-F.B.Meyer-5

GOSPEL OF JOHN THE LIFE AND LIGHT OF MEN LOVE TO THE UTTERMOST

F. B. Meyer

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1 THREE PARADOXES

"I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you." "The world seeth Me no more; but ye see Me." "Because I live, ye shall live also." John 14:18-19.

THE BIBLE and the Christian life are full of paradoxes. Paul loved to enumerate them; they abound also in the discourses of our Lord. Here are three.

The Master had declared his purpose of leaving his apostles and friends and returning to his Father: but in the same breath He says, "I will not leave you desolate; I come to you."

Again, He had forewarned them that He would be hidden from them; yet now He tells them that they would still behold Him.

Further, with growing emphasis and clearness, He had unfolded his approaching death by the cruel Roman method of the cross; yet He claims the timeless life of an ever-present tense, and insists that their life will depend on his.

Absent, yet present; hidden, yet visible; dying, yet living and life-giving--such are the paradoxes of this paragraph in his marvellous farewell discourse; and they reveal three facts of which we may live in perpetual cognizance.

I. WE MAY ENJOY THE PERPETUAL RECOGNITION OF THE ADVENT OF CHRIST.

"I will not leave you orphans [or desolate]: I come unto you" (R.V.).

Note the majesty of those last words; they are worthy of Deity; He speaks as though He were always drawing nigh those He loves: "I come unto you."

Christ is always present, yet He comes.--The Creator had been always immanent in his universe, but He came in each creative act; the Lawgiver had been ever-present in the Church in the wilderness, but He came down on Sinai, and his glory lit up the peaks of sandstone rock; the Deliverer was never for a moment absent from the side of the shepherd-king, but in answer to his cry for help He came down riding upon a cherub, flying on the wings of wind; the Holy Spirit had been in the world from the earliest days of prayer and inspired speech, but He came down from the Throne to sit on each bowed head in lambent flame. So Christ is with us all the days, yet He comes. He will come at last to receive his own to Himself, and to judge the world; but He comes in dark and lonely hours that we may not be desolate.

THREE PARADOXES

"For warm, sweet, tender, even yet

A present help is He;

And faith has yet its Olivet,

And love its Galilee.

The healing of his seamless dress

Is by our beds of pain;

We touch Him in life's throng and press,

And we are whole again."

He comes when we need Him most.--When the storm is high, and the water is pouring into the boat; when the house is empty because the life that made it home has fled; when Jericho has to be attacked on the morrow, and the Jordan crossed; when lover and friend stand aloof; when light is fading before dimming eyes, and names and faces elude the grasp of the aged mind; when the last coal is turning to grey ash; when the rush of the river is heard in the valley below--Jesus says, I come. It is in the hour of desolation, when Lazarus has been in the grave four days already, that the glad tidings are whispered in the ear of the mourner, "The Master is come." "I will not leave you orphans," He said: "I come unto you." Oh, blessed orphanhood, it were well to be bereaved, to have such comforting!

He pays surprise visits.

He does not always wait to be invited; but sometimes, when we lie sleeping with wakeful hearts, we hear his gentle voice calling to us, "Arise, my love, and come away." Then as we lift the door-latch, we are refreshed with the sweet-smelling myrrh which betrays his presence. How often when we have been losing ground, getting lukewarm and worldly, we have suddenly been made aware of his reviving presence, and He has said, I come. He comes, as the wood-anemones and snowdrops (the most fragile and tender flowerets of spring) penetrate the hard ground to announce that the winter is over and gone, and that the time of the singing of birds is come.

It is well to put ourselves in his way.

There are certain beaten tracks well-worn by his feet, and if we would meet Him we must frequent their neighbourhood. Olivet, where He used to pray; Calvary, where He died; Joseph's garden, where He rose, are dear to Him yet. When we pray or meditate; when we commemorate his dying love at the memorial feast; when we realise our union with Him in death and resurrection; when we open our hearts to the breathing of the Holy Spirit--we put ourselves in his way, and are more likely to encounter Him when He comes. "To them that look for Him shall He appear." "Behold, the Bridegroom cometh: go ye out to meet Him" --but take the path by which He is sure to travel. Be in the upper room, with the rest of the disciples, so that you may not, like Thomas, miss Him when He comes.

His footsteps are noiseless.

It is said of old, "Thy footsteps are not known"; therefore we need not be surprised if He steal in upon us as a thief in the night, or as spring over the wolds. There is no blare of trumpet or voice of herald; we cannot say, Lo here, or Lo there; when the King comes there is no outward show. "He does not strive, nor cry, nor cause his voice to be heard in the street."

"He entered not by the eyes," says St. Bernard, "for his presence was not marked by colour; nor by the ears, for there was no sound; nor by the touch, for He was impalpable. How then did I know that He was present? Because He was a quickening power. As soon as He entered, He awoke my slumbering soul. He moved and pierced my heart, Which before was stony, hard, and sick. He began also to pluck up and destroy, to build and plant, to freshen the inner drought, to enlighten the darkness, to open the prison-house, to make the crooked straight and the rough smooth; so that my heart could bless the Lord with all that was within me."

Oh, lonely, desolate soul, open thy door to Him; wait not on the alert to detect his entrance, only believe that He is there: and presently, and before ever thou art aware, thou wilt find a new fragrance distilling through the heart-chamber, a new power throbbing in thy pulse.

II. WE MAY ENJOY THE PERPETUAL RECOGNITION OF THE PRESENCE OF CHRIST.

"The world beholdeth Me no more; but ye behold Me." Nothing makes men so humble and yet so strong as the vision of Christ.

It induces humility.

When Isaiah beheld his glory more resplendent than the sheen of the sapphire Throne, he cried that he was undone; when Peter caught the first flash of his miraculous power gleaming across the waves of Galilee, just when the fish were struggling in the full net, he besought Him to depart, because he felt himself a sinful man; and when John saw Him on the Isle of Patmos, he fell at his feet as dead--though, surely, if any of the apostles could have faced Him unabashed, it had been he.

This is specially noticeable in the Book of Job. Few books are so misunderstood. It is supposed to contain the description of the victory of Job's patience; in reality it delineates its testing and failure. It shows how he who was perfect, according to the measure of his light, broke down in the fiery ordeal to which he was exposed, and finally was forced to cry, "I have heard of Thee by the hearing of the ear, but now mine eye seeth Thee; wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes."

Wouldst thou be humble? wouldst thou know thyself a worm and no man? wouldst thou see that thou art verily undone, defiled, and helpless? Then ask the blessed Spirit to reveal Jesus in all his matchless beauty and holiness, eliciting the confession that thou art the least of saints and the chief of sinners, This is no forced estimate, when we take into account the opportunities we have missed, the gifts we have misused, the time we have wasted, the light we have resisted, the love we have requited with neglect.

It produces strength.

See that man of God prone on the floor of his chamber, shedding bitter tears of godly sorrow, not forgiving himself, albeit that he knows himself forgiven; bowing his head as a bulrush, crying that he is helpless, broken, and at the end of himself--will he be able to stand as a rock against the beat of temptation, and the assault of the foe? Yes, verily; for the same presence which is to him a source of humility in private, will inspire to great deeds of faith and heroism when he is called to stand in the breach or lead the assault.

It is this vision of the present Lord that, in every age of the Church, has made sufferers strong. "The Lord is on my right hand, I shall not be moved," said one. "The Lord stood by me, and strengthened me," said another. In many a dark day of suffering and persecution; in the catacombs; in the dens and caves where Waldenses hid; on the hillsides where the Covenanters met to pray; in the beleaguered cities of the Netherlands; in prison and at the stake--God's saints have looked to Him, and been lightened, and their faces have not been ashamed. "Behold," said the first martyr, "I see the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing on the right hand of God."

Oh for more of the open vision of Jesus, ministered to us by the gracious Spirit! Would that his words, "Ye behold Me," were oftener verified in our experience! He is always with us; and if only our eyes were not holden, we should behold Him with the quick perception of the heart. Indeed, the race can only be rightly run by those who have learnt the blessed secret of looking off unto Him. "We see Jesus."

It is a most salutary habit to say often, when one is alone; "Thou art near, O Lord"; "Behold, the Lord is in this place." We may not at first realise the truth of what we are saying. His presence may be veiled, as the forms of mountains swathed in morning cloud. But as we persist in our quest, putting away from us all that would grieve Him, and cultivating the attitude of pure devotion, we shall become aware of a divine presence which shall be more to us than a voice speaking from out the Infinite.

III. WE MAY ENJOY THE PERPETUAL RECOGNITION OF THE LIVING CHRIST.

"Because I live, ye shall live also." There are many life-verses in this Gospel which shine like stars in the firmament of Scripture. For example--in the first chapter, that in the Word, as manifested to men, was life; and in the fifth chapter, that "as the Father had life in Himself, He gave to the Son to have life also in Himself." The Father is the fountain of life. Eternal life is ever rising up in his infinite Being with perennial vigour; and all things living, from the tiny humming-birds in the tropical forest to the strongest archangel beside the sapphire Throne, derive their being from Him. Thus we have seen ferns around a fountain, nourishing their fronds on its spray. All things owe their existence and continued being to the unmeasured life which has been from all eternity treasured up in God, and is ever flowing out from God.

This life was Christ's, in the mystery of the eternal Trinity, before the worlds were made; but it was necessary that He should receive it into his human nature, so as to become the reservoir and storehouse from which all who were one with Him might receive grace on grace. "I am come," He said, "that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly." This life dwelt in Him during his earthly ministry, though comparatively few availed themselves of it; his death set it abroad for all the world; the smitten rock yielded streams of living water; the last Adam became a life-giving Spirit; from his throne He proclaimed Himself as He that liveth, though He became dead, and is alive for evermore.

We live by his life.

Our life is as dependent upon Him as a babe's on its mother. Could aught happen to Him, we should instantly feel the effect. We have no independent, self-derived, or self-sustained life. Apart from Him we wither.

We live in his life.

The tiny streamlet of our being has joined his, is merged in it, and flows on together with it, to the great ocean of eternity. To us to live is Christ, both here and hereafter. Our aims and purposes are merged in his; we are enriched in all that enriches Him;

gladdened by all that promotes his happiness and glory; made more than conquerors through our oneness with Him, in the victory that has overcome the world.

We live because He lives in us

At the moment of regeneration He came to indwell. He that hath the Son hath life; he that hath life hath the Son. It has pleased God to reveal his Son in us. We have found Him of whom Moses in the law and the prophets did write, and we have found Him in our hearts. Where dwellest Thou? we asked Him; and He replied, Come and see : and He manifested Himself as having become to us the inward principle of an endless life. Christ dwells deep in our heart, and we are beginning to comprehend the immensity of the Divine love of which He is the exponent.

Let us draw on this life more confidently, availing ourselves of it perpetually in all our time of need--in all time of our sickness and of our wealth, in adversity and prosperity, in the hour of mortal anguish and the day of judgment; and finding what we could not do or bear or encounter, Jesus can do and bear and meet in and through us, to the Father's eternal glory.

Lord Jesus Christ, grow Thou in me,

And all things else recede

2 MANY MANSIONS FOR GOD

"If a man love Me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him; and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him." John 14:23.

THE IMMANENCE OF God! That God should be willing to make his home with man is much; but that He should be willing to come into indwell, occupy, and possess our nature--this is incomprehensible to the intellect, though it may be received and rejoiced in by the heart. This is no subject for light and thoughtless speech. We touch on the profoundest mysteries of the Being of the Infinite, and the capacity of human nature. Be reverent, O my soul, in the consideration of such a theme; and take the shoes from off thy feet, for the Bush burns with fire!

It was owing to the question of Jude that the universal application of our Master's words is so clear. A day or two before, our Lord had entered Jerusalem amid the enthusiasm of the crowds, and the disciples fondly thought the long-expected time had arrived when He would manifest Himself to the world as the Messiah. "This is the beginning of the Messianic reign," said each apostle in his secret heart, as the great procession passed over the shoulder of Olivet; and each began to wonder what special post would be allotted to him in the new empire that seemed so close at hand. These nascent hopes, however, had been rudely dissipated by our Lord's declaration that the world was to see Him no more qualified nevertheless by the promise, "But ye see Me."

The apostles therefore were inclined to think that in some special form the manifestations of his grace and glory would be confined to them. Hence Jude's question, "What is come to pass, Master, that Thou wilt manifest Thyself unto us, and not unto the world?" Jesus answered in effect, "Think not that thou and thy fellows are to have the exclusive rights of beholding and communing with Me. What I offer to you is open to all who believe, love, and obey. The gate which I throw open shall stand wide for all who choose to enter. The vail shall be rent, that any who fulfil the spiritual conditions may see the light, and hear the voice, and stand in the inner court. If a man love Me... " Note those emphatic words, "a man"--any man; thou and I.

I. THE DIVINE IMMANENCE.

"We will make our abode." The word "abode" is here a translation of the Greek word which is rendered "mansions" in a former part of this chapter. "We will make our mansion with him." God is willing to become the mansion of the soul that believes in Christ; but asks in return that such a one should prepare a guest-chamber, and become a mansion in which He may dwell. As He steals with noiseless tread into the loving, believing heart, I hear Him say, "This is my rest for ever; here will I dwell, for I have desired it."

(1) It is the Immanence of the Father.

Who is this of whom the Saviour speaks? The infinite God! Time with all its ages is but the flash of a moment in his eternity! Space, "beyond the soar of angel wings," is but a corner in his dwelling-place! Matter, with its ponderous mass, is but the light dust that will not affect the level of the scale! The mighty sun, which is the centre of all worlds, is but a mote floating in the beam of his being! All the gathered wisdom of man, stored in the libraries of the world, is but as a glow-worm's spark compared with the meridian light of his wisdom! O souls of men, consider how marvellous that such a One, whom the heavens cannot contain, who overflows their limits, will yet become the resident of our nature!

Its motive is Love

"The Father will love him."

This is wonderful --the more so as we are told that his love toward us is identical with that which He has toward our Lord. Speaking of those who shall believe through his apostles' word, Jesus said, "That the world may know that Thou lovedst them even as Thou lovedst Me." That God should condescend to think about our planet, which is as a leaf in the forest of being; that He should deign to regard mankind, who, in comparison with the material universe, are as a colony of ants compared with the Himalaya, at the foot of which they may have built their home; that He should pity our race--this were much. But that He should love the world, that He should love individuals belonging to our race, that He should love them with the love He has toward the Only-begotten--we could not have believed this unless we had been assured by the lips of infallible Truth. But the supreme revelation which towers above the rest, like some great banyan tree amid the slender growth of the Indian forest, is that the Creator should indwell and find a mansion in the heart of his creatures.

It is dual, yet one

"We will come."

We! Then, are there more than one? Who is this who dares class Himself with the supreme God within the limits of a common pronoun; that challenges the love and trust and obedience of man; that poses as King? The meekest and humblest of men. The One who, above all others of the human family, seems to have least to disturb or darken the incidence of the rays of truth upon his soul; who has cast a light on all the dark problems of human life, and could not possibly have been deceived in respect to his own nature. His conceptions of the holiness, greatness, and purity of God have stood out in unrivalled magnificence from all others whatsoever; yet it is He who in one small word couples his humanity with Deity, his meekness with the Infinite Majesty, his personality with God's. Is not this proof enough that He was conscious of his divine nature? Is not the fact of his not counting it robbery to be equal with God evidence that He was God? What can they make of this We, who hold that He was only a good man and a great teacher? Good men are humble men; great teachers know best their own limitations.

It is in, and with, and through the Son, and by the Spirit, that the Father comes to indwell.

(2) It is the Immanence of the Son. To be loved by Him were much!

"I will love him."

His love is of the rarest quality. True and tender, strong and sweet, inexorable in its demands upon Himself, inexhaustible in its outflow towards the objects of his affectionate regard. Such love as He gave to John, who grew like Him beneath the magic power of that environment; as He gave to Mary, who perhaps most deeply understood Him; as He gave to Peter, winning him back from his waywardness--brings with it a heaven of bliss, for which a man may well be prepared to count all things but loss. But there is a bliss beyond all this. The Lover of men would indwell them!

It were much that He should seek our love

"He that loveth Me."

We might have supposed that He would have been satisfied with the vastness of his dominion, and the myriad bright spirits that wait on his word! But no; the thirst for love cannot be satisfied with gold, or bright angelic servants. As Isaac could not find a companion among those who tended the flocks that browsed over the wolds of Canaan, or among the troops of slaves that gathered round his father's tents, but Eliezer must bring a bride from across the desert; so the Son of God must needs come as a suitor to our world to find his Bride, who can share his inner thoughts and purposes. Here is a marvel indeed. As the village becomes famous which provides the emperor's bride, so earth, though it be least among her sister-spheres, shall have the proud pre-eminence of having furnished from her population the Spouse of the Lamb. But, great as this marvel is, it is followed by the greater, that the Immortal Lover is willing to tenant the poor hearts whose love at the best is so faint and cold.

It were much that He should give us manifestation of his love

"I will manifest Myself unto him."

Have you not sometimes taken up a daisy, and looked into its little upturned eye, and thought and thought again, fill through the gate of the flower you have passed into an infinite world of life, beauty, and mystery? There are moments when even a flower is transfigured before us, and manifests itself to us as a thought of God, a ray of his glory, the frail product of his infinite mind, the wick around which trembles the fire of the Shekinah! Have you not sometimes stood alone amid mountains, glaciers, wooded valleys, and rushing streamlets, till Nature has dropped her vail, and revealed herself in a phase of beauty and a depth of meaning which struck you as altogether unique and singular? So there are moments in the life of the believer, when Christ, who is ever with us, manifests Himself as He does not to the world. There is borne in upon the spirit a consciousness that He is near; there is a waft of his breath, a savour of his fragrant dress, fresh from the ivory palaces.

All this is much: but how much more to be told that this glorious Christ, the Fellow of Jehovah, who with the Father and the Spirit is God; the Organ of creation; the Mouthpiece of the Godhead; the Mediator of Redemption; the Monarch of all worlds; the Supreme Teacher, Guide, and Saviour of men--is prepared to repeat the experiences of Bethlehem, and make his abode in man! "We will come unto him, and make our abode with him."

(3) Learn to revere the work of God in the souls of others

"For thy meat," said the Apostle, "destroy not the soul for whom Christ died." He might have added, "and in whom Christ lives." Weak and erring, trying and vexatious, that fellow-believer may be, yet there is a chamber in his nature in which God has already taken up his abode. The conflict between the light and darkness, the Christ-spirit and the self-spirit, may be long and arduous, but the issue is certain. Help, but do not hinder, the process. Be reverent, careful, mindful of the presence of God.

Be hopeful for thyself.--When an art-student asked Mr. Ruskin whether he would ever be able to paint like Turner, the great critic replied, "It is more likely that you will become Emperor of all the Russias!" But God never daunts a soul with such discouragement. He first sets before it a great ideal--the faith of Abraham, the meekness of Moses, the prayer of Elijah, the love of John--and then, as the source of all perfection, He enters the soul, to be in it all that He has taught it to desire.

Count on the indwelling of his power.--The merchant of to-day has facilities granted to no previous age. The cablegram, telegram, and telephone, put him in communication with the markets of the world; steam and electricity are his willing slaves in manufacture; machinery with its unwearying iron fingers toils for him. A single human brain, which knows how to avail itself of these resources, can multiply its conceptions indefinitely. How vast the space between the untutored savage, doing everything with his hands, and the merchant prince, who has but to press the ivory-plated pushes fixed upon the walls of his room! But not less is the difference between the work we can accomplish by our natural resources, and that which we achieve when we recognise that what is impossible to us is possible to Him who has come in to abide. I cannot; but God is within me, and He can.

II. THE CONDITIONS OF THE DIVINE IMMANENCE.

(1) Love to Christ.

"He that loveth Me shall..."

We would love Him, but how? Do not think of your love, but of his. "Love is of God." Open the shutters of your being towards the love of God; we love because He first loved. Love is the reflection from us of what we have first received from God.

Love is shed abroad in the heart by the Holy Spirit. The fruit of the Spirit is love. Seek the infilling and inworking of the Spirit; be careful to obey his promptings to love; avoid grieving Him by bitterness, wrath, or evil-speaking; sit as his willing pupil in the school of love; cast on Him the responsibility of securing in your nature obedience to the primal law, which is fulfilled in the one word, "Thou shalt love."

Beneath the nurturing grace of the Spirit, we shall be led to meditate much on the love of Jesus to us, especially as manifested in the death of the cross; and as we muse, the fire will burn, love will glow, and afford the condition of soul which is infinitely attractive to the divine Lover, who requires our love, and produces the love which He requires.

(2) Obedience to Christ.

Where there is true love, there will be obedience. This rather than emotion. Many a sincere soul, who questions its love because its emotions are low or fluctuating, would rather die than disobey the least jot or tittle of his commandments. Such a one loves. "He that hath my commandments" (treasured in memory and heart), "he it is that loveth Me." Why do ye call Him, Lord, Lord, and do not the things that He says? There may be the luscious language of the lip, but it does not deceive Him. He looks under the leaves for fruit.

Disobedience robs the soul of the sweet sense of Christ's indwelling. Nothing can compensate for failure to obey. Whatever the protestations, there is no real love to Christ where his commands are knowingly disregarded and set at naught. But each time we dare to step out in simple obedience to his will, it seems as though the inner light shines deeper down into the hidden places of our being, and the residence of Christ extends to new chambers of the heart.

3 CHRIST'S LEGACY AND GIFT OF PEACE

"Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid."--John 14:27.

IT SEEMS a little anomalous to talk of peace at a time when the war-clouds are being swiftly blown up from the horizon, the sea roaring, and men's hearts failing them for fear : and yet, in the deepest aspects, this is of all times the most suitable. It is when the storm rattles on the window-panes that the family draws closer round the fire, and the mother clasps her babe to her breast.

The word Peace is the Eastern salutation and benediction. When one stranger encounters another, as they meet and part they wish each other peace. It was befitting, therefore, that at Christ's entrance into our world the first salutation to men, as conveyed by the angels, should be "Peace on earth"; and that his parting words should be "Peace be unto you." But with what a wealth of meaning does the Lord invest familiar words when they issue from his lips! Let us draw nigh, and allow his sweet and soothing consolations to have their full effect.

I. LET US DISTINGUISH BETWEEN "PEACE" AND "MY PEACE."

"Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you." There is a distinction between these two. The former refers to the result of his work for us on the cross : "Being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ"; the latter refers to his indwelling, who is our Peace. The one He has bequeathed as a legacy to all men: the Testator died, and left in his will a perfect reconciliation between God and man, which is for all who are willing to avail themselves of it; the other is a gift, which must be appropriated and used, or it will be ineffectual.

The order of these two varieties of peace is invariable.--We must have peace with God before we can enjoy the peace of God. We must receive the atonement, with all its blessed comfort, before we can enter upon our heritage in Christ Jesus. A believer, whose feet were dipping in the chill waters of the river, said to me recently, when speaking of her enjoyment of some of the deeper aspects of Christian experience, "I am afraid I have been building from the top. I see now, as I come near eternity, that one's foundations must be strong and sure before one can build on them. I need now more than ever the blood of Christ." This, perhaps, is one of the perils of the present day. The Church is arraying herself in her beautiful garments. The gold pieces of Christian thought and life are becoming current coin; they are being taken from the coffers, where they have too long lain, and distributed broadcast. Treatises and tractlets on the innermost aspects of the blessed life are plentiful as flowers in May. There is a danger, therefore, of young converts and others occupying themselves with such themes, and not paying sufficient attention to the divine order.

Christ dying for us on the cross must precede Christ living in us by his Spirit; justification with its evidence must be well apprehended before sanctification with its fruits; the peace with God must shed its benediction over the soul before it can enter upon the peace of God. Ah, soul! thou hast experienced the former; dost thou know the latter? Dost thou know what it is for Christ to enter into the closed doors of the inner chamber of the heart, and say, "Peace be unto thee"? Dost thou know what it is to hear his voice speaking above the tumult of the inland lake of thy soul, and making a great calm? Dost thou know what it is for Him to deal with the springs of the inner life, which lie deeper than emotion or fancy, and pour in his infinite serenity, so that the outflow may be pellucid and tranquil?

Christ lays stress on his peace. He must mean the very peace that filled his own heart; not something like it, but the same, always keeping the heart with the affections, and the mind with its thoughts. This being so, we infer--

That his peace is consistent with a perfect knowledge of coming sorrow.--He knew all things that awaited Him (John 18:4): the treachery of Judas, the denial by Peter, the forsaking by all, the shame and spitting, the cross and the grave; and yet He spoke serenely of his peace. It is therefore consistent with the certain outlook towards darkness and the shadow of death. You may know from certain symptoms that cancer has struck its fangs into your flesh, and that paralysis has begun to creep along your spine; that your dearest is barked by the Woodsman for felling; that your means of subsistence will inevitably dry up: but, facing all these, as Jesus faced the cross, you may still be conscious of a peace that passeth understanding.

That it is consistent with energetic action.--Men are disposed to think that peace is one of the last fruits of the tree of life which drop into the hand of the aged. A man says to himself, I shall have to relinquish this active life, to settle in some quiet country home in the midst of nature, and then perhaps I shall know what peace means. A snug home and a competence, the culture of flowers, the slow march of the seasons, tender home-love far away from the hustling throng of the world--these are the conditions of peace. Not so, says Christ: "Arise, let us go hence." Let us leave this quiet harbour, and launch out into the stormy deep. Let us leave this still chamber, around the windows of which the vines cling, and go forth into the garden where the cedars fight with the tempest; and amidst it all we shall find it possible to enjoy the peace that passeth knowledge. Let men and women immersed in the throng of daily toil, young men, busy men, understand that Christ's peace is for those who hear the bugle note of duty summoning them to arise and go hence.

That the chief evidence of this peace is in the leisureliness of the heart.---Christ's possession of peace was very evident through all

the stormy scenes that followed. With perfect composure He could heal the ear of Malchus, and stay the impetuosity of Peter; could reason quietly with the slave that smote Him, and bid the daughters of Jerusalem cease their weeping; could open Paradise to the dying thief, and the door of John's home to the reception of His mother. Few things betray the presence of his peace more than the absence of irritability, fretfulness, and feverish haste, which expend the tissues of life.

Oh that you may now receive from Christ this blessed gift! Let the peace of Christ rule in your heart; it is your high privilege, be not backward in availing yourself of it. It will be as oil to the machinery of life.

II. THE SOURCES OF CHRIST'S PEACE.

(1) The vision of the Father--

"If ye loved Me, ye would rejoice because I said, I go unto the Father."

Throughout these closing chapters He seems able to speak of nothing else. His mind ranges from the disciples whom He was leaving to the Father to whom He was going. Almost unconsciously He gives us a glimpse of his self-repression in staying so long away from his Father's manifested presence, when He says that if we loved Him we would be glad to lose his bodily presence because He had gone to be with the Father. He gives us to understand how real and near the Father was to Him, and how He longed to be again in his bosom! He was so occupied with this thought, that He reckoned little of what lay between. Hail! ye stormy waters of death, stormy winds, and boisterous waves: ye do but waft my soul nearer its haven in the Father's love!

It is the thought of the Father that gives peace, because it robs life of its terrors and death of its sting. Why fear what life may bring, when the Father has arranged each successive step of its pathway! Why dread Judas or Caiaphas, Herod or Pilate, since the Father lies between them and the soul as a rampart of rock! Why lose heart amid the perplexities and discouragements whose dark shadows lie heavily on the hills, when in the green pastures of the valley the Father's love tends the sheep! Ask Christ to reveal the Father to you. Live in his everlasting love, and learn what He can be amid the storm and tumult as a very present help.

(2) Disentanglement from the world

"The prince of this world cometh, and hath nothing in Me."

He came first at the beginning of the Saviour's life, with temptations to his ambition; he came again at its close, with temptations to that natural shrinking from pain which is characteristic of a highly organised nature. "Back, Son of Man! Thou canst not bear the cross and spear, the nail and thorn! Thy tender flesh will ill sustain Thee when the sorrows of death and the pains of hell get hold upon Thee!" So Satan came; but there was no response in the heart of Christ, no answering voice from the depths of his soul, no traitor within to join hands with the tempter without. There was no square inch of territory in all Christ's nature which the devil could claim, or from which he could operate.

This is a clue to Christ's peace, which we do well to follow till it lead us out into the open. As long as we are entangled with this world, peace evades us--just as sleep, which comes easily to the labouring man who has nothing beyond his daily wage, vanishes from the pillow of the merchant, who on stormy nights thinks uneasily of the vessels which carry his wealth far out at sea. We must stand clear of the ambitions of the world, of the fear or favour of man, of the avaricious craving for wealth, or of the fear of poverty. We must put the cross of Christ between us and the world, which was judged at Calvary. We must be able to say truly that our treasure is in heaven, and our heart also; and that we seek the things where Christ sitteth at the right hand of God. Then the stock-market may fluctuate; riches go or come; men praise or hate--nought will affect our peace, any more than the tumults of a Continental city, in which we are spending a night in transit, can cause us serious disturbance.

(3) Supreme love

"I love the Father."

I have often noticed how a supreme love in a young girl's life seems to calm and quiet her, because it draws the whole of her nature in one strong flow towards the man of her choice. Before that, there was a waywardness, a vacillation, a nervous excitement, which passed away as soon as love dawned upon her soul. So long as the heart is subject to every influence, it quivers and wavers as the magnet needle when swept by streams of electricity. A strong uniting love does for us what the strong attraction of the pole does for the needle. Christ loved the Father. There was no difficulty in bearing what He sent, or doing what He bade. There were no rival claimants, no questionings or debate within the palace of his heart. Every passion and emotion was quieted and stilled in the set of his whole being towards the Father. If you too would have peace, you must love; you must love supremely Him who alone is worthy, who can never disappoint or fail. And in proportion as you love God, you will find pleasure in all beautiful things, in all lovely persons, in all the fair gifts of nature and life. Oh, love the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me, love his holy name!

(4) A supreme source of authority

"As the Father gave Me commandment, even so I do." Every soul must have a supreme source of authority in its life, if it is to have peace. Its own whim, the suggestion of passion, the vagrant impulse of the moment, are inconsistent with tranquillity. There must be for each of us one voice which is imperative, one command which is indisputable, one authority which admits of no gainsaying. If you will search your heart you will see that this is so. Compare the restlessness of the times of the Judges with the tranquillity of the reign of Solomon, and you will have an apt illustration of your own experience before consecration put Christ on his throne, and afterwards. When the true Melchisedec established his reign within you, at once your heart became Salem, the city of peace. When you put the government upon his shoulder, He set up his reign within you as the Prince of Peace. Happily for you, if of the increase of his government there is no end; for of the increase of your peace there will be no end either.

Combine these four--the sense of God's presence and providence in the details of life; detachment from the world; a supreme love to God; the recognition in everything that you are his bond-servant--and you will comply with the conditions of participating in the peace of Christ which He offers. Some persons have a marvellous faculty of imparting their own tranquillity in an accident, a storm, an illness; their aspect, tones, manner, are like the repose of a summer's evening after a sultry day: so shall Christ be to you, and you to others.

III. CHRIST'S GIVING CONTRASTED WITH THE WORLD'S

"Not as the world giveth, give I unto you."

The world wishes peace, but lightly speaks the word; frequently wishing it when there is least warrant for it; wishing it without doing anything to produce it; wishing it whilst glorying over a wrong, healing slightly a wound, covering with the turf the crater of a volcano. Christ, on the other hand, lays the foundations of peace in suitable conditions of a holy and healthy life.

With the world, peace is a passing emotion; with Christ, a settled principle of action--the perfect balance and equilibrium of the soul, out of which comes all that is fair, strong, wholesome.

The world's peace consists in the absence of untoward circumstances; Christ's is altogether independent of circumstances, and consists in the state of the heart. It matters nothing that in the world we have tribulation; He bids us be of good cheer, because in Him we shall have peace. The wildest conjunction of outward things cannot break the perfect peace of the soul which nestles to his heart, as Noah's dove to the hand which plucked it in from the weltering waters.

"Let not your heart be troubled," the Master says again. You may be troubled on every side; but be not troubled! Do not let the trouble come inside. Watch carefully against its intrusion, as you would against that of any other form of temptation. Let my peace, like a sentinel, keep you; and as you look forward to the unknown future, out of which spectral figures emerge, do not be afraid. There is a part for you to do, as well as for Me. I can give you my peace; but you must avoid any and every thing that will militate against its possession and growth.

4 THE STORY OF THE VINE

"I am the true Vine, and my Father is the Husbandman." John 15:1.

WE HAVE now a story to tell which, in the eye of heaven, will make our world for ever memorable and wonderful among her sister spheres. It is the story of the Vine, and how it was the divine purpose that our earth should be its fruitful soil, and our race intimately associated with its growth and history.

"I am the true Vine," said our Lord. Not improbably, as He was passing forth with his disciples into the moonlit air, He perceived a vine clustering around the window or door; and with an eye ever awake to each touch of natural beauty, and a heart always alert for spiritual lessons, He turned to them and said, What that vine is in the world of nature, I am in relation to all true and faithful souls. I am the true Vine--true, not as opposed to false, but true in the sense of real, substantial, and enduring: the essential, as distinguished from the circumstantial; the eternal, as distinct from the temporary and transient.

Nature is a parable of God. In each of her forms we have a revelation of God--not so complete as that given through the mind of prophets, or the life of Jesus Christ; but still a revelation of the Divine. Each natural object, as it stood in Eden's untainted beauty, displayed some aspect of Him whom no man can see and live. The apple-tree among the trees of the wood; the rose of Sharon; the lily of the vale; the cedar, with its dark green foliage; the rock with its strength; the sea with its multitudinousness; the heaven with its limpid blue, like the divine compassion, over-arching all--these are some of the forth-shadowings in the natural world of spiritual qualities in the nature of God. The vine was made the clinging, helpless plant it is, that it might for ever remind men of certain deep characteristics of the divine nature.

I. THE VINE AND ITS BRANCHES.

The unity of the vine.

The vine and its branches constitute one plant. Some branches may be trailed along the trellis-work outside the cottage door, others conducted through hothouse after hothouse; yet one life, one stream of sap, one essential quality and character, pervades them all--from the dark root, buried in the soil, to the farthest twig or leaf. Yonder branch, waving its fronds high up against the hothouse glass, cannot say to that long leafless branch hidden beneath the shelf, You do not belong to me, nor I to you. No twig is independent of another twig. However different the functions, root and branches, leaves and cluster, all together make one composite but organic whole. So is it with Christ. All who are one with Him are one with each other. The branches that were nearest the root in the days of Pentecost are incomplete without the last converts that shall be added in the old age of the world. Those without these will not be made perfect.

This is the underlying truth of the holy Catholic Church. Men have tried to show that it must be an outward and visible organisation, consisting of those who had received, through a long line of apostolical succession, some mystic power of administering rites and conferring absolution upon those who came beneath the touch of their priestly hands. That theory has notoriously broken down. But the truth of which it is a grotesque travesty is presented in our Lord's conception of the vine, deeply planted in the dark grave of Joseph's garden, which has reached down its branches through the ages, and in which every believing soul has a part. Touch Christ; become one with Him in living union; abide in Him--and you are one with the glorious company of the apostles, the goodly fellowship of the prophets, the noble army of martyrs, and the Church of the Firstborn, whose names are written in heaven.

The pliancy of the vine.

More than most plants it needs a husbandman. It cannot stand upright like other fruit-trees; but requires a skilful hand to guide its pliant branches along the espaliers, or to entwine them in the trellis-work. It suggests a true thought of the appearance presented to the world by Christ and his Church.

Mrs. Hamilton King, in her description of the sermon preached in the hospital by Ugo Bassi, on the eve of the great movement which, by the expulsion of the Austrians, gave Italy to the Italians, specially dwells on this. Down five wards the prisoners are living on the hospital-beds from which they will never rise again. To them the deep voice of the hero-preacher tells the story of the vine: how "it is tied to a stake, and if its arms stretch out, it is but crosswise; they are also forced and bound."

Thus it was with Christ. Never following his own way, always bound to the imperative must of the Father's will, He yielded to the cross as a willing Sufferer. And so it has been with his followers. Not strong to stand alone, but always yielded to the Father's will, that He should lead them whither He would--to a cross, if needs be; to persecution and shame, if this would better serve his purpose; to a Gethsemane, if that were the only gate to life.

Yield thyself to those loving hands. They may lead thee afar from thy original purpose--twisting thee in and out with many a contortion; fixing thee with nail and fastening; trailing thee over the wall, to droop thy clusters to the hands of strangers. Nevertheless, be sure to let Him have his way with thee; this is necessary for the accomplishment of his purpose.

The suffering of the vine.

When, in the spring, "the grace of the green vine makes all the land lovely, and the shoots begin to wind and wave in the blue air," the husbandman comes in with pruning-hook and shears, and strips it bare of all its innocent pride. Nor is this all. Even in the vintage it is not allowed to glory in the results of the year; "the bunches are torn down and trodden in the winepress, while the vine stands stripped and desolate."

So it has always been. The Church has always, but at an infinite cost to herself, been instrumental in promoting the well-being of the world. Christ's people have always been a suffering people; and it is in exact proportion to their anguish that they have enriched mankind. They have saved others, but not themselves. The red stream of blood that has vitalised the world has flowed from broken hearts.

Measure thy life by loss instead of gain;

Not by the wine drunk, but by the wine poured forth:

For Love's strength standeth in Love's sacrifice,

And whoso suffers most hath most to give.

The interdependence of vine and branches.--In God from eternity dwelt a wealth of love, pity, and yearning over the souls of men, that could not find direct expression. There was no language for the infinite passion of the divine heart. Hence the gift of the Son, through whom, when He had become flesh, the Infinite might express Himself. But even this was not sufficient. The vine-root is not

enough in itself; it must have branches to carry its rich juices to the clusters, so that these may hang free of each other in the sun and air. Christ must have branches--long lines of saved souls extending down the centuries --through which to communicate Himself to men.

We have seen how necessary the Vine is to the branches. Only from it can our fruit be found. But let us humbly, yet gladly, believe that we are also necessary to Christ. He cannot do without us. The Son wants sons; angels will not suffice. Through redeemed men alone can He achieve his eternal purpose. I hear the Vine pleading for more and yet more branch-life, that it may cover the world with goodly shadow and fruit.

II. FRUIT OR NO FRUIT?

From all that has been said, it is clear that the one purpose in the vine is fruit-bearing. See here how the divine Teacher accentuates it. "Fruit," "much fruit," "more fruit." Nothing less will content Him in any one of us. For this, we were taken out of the wild vine in which we were by nature, and grafted into Him; for this, the regeneration of the Holy Ghost, and the discipline of life; for this, the sunshine of his love, and the dew of the Holy Ghost. It becomes each seriously to ask, "Am I bringing forth fruit unto God?" There may be orthodoxy of doctrine, correctness in life, and even heartiness of service; but is there fruit, much fruit, more fruit?

Fruit!--This is the only condition of being retained in living union with the Vine.

Much fruit!--Only thus will the Father be glorified.

More fruit!--Otherwise there must be the repeated use of the knife. Nowhere does the Lord contemplate a little fruit. A berry here and there! A thin bunch of sour, unripened grapes! Yet it is too true that many believers yield no more than this. He comes to us hungry for grapes; but behold, a few mildewed bunches, not fit to eat!

Where there is no fruit, there has been no real union with the Vine. Probably you are a professor, but not a possessor; a nominal Christian, an attendant at church or chapel, but not really one with Christ. True union with Him produces a temper, a disposition, a ripe and mellow experience, which certainly indicate that Christ is within. You cannot simulate the holy joy, the thoughtful love, the tranquil serenity, the strong self-control, which mark the soul that is in real union with Jesus; but where there is real abiding, these things will be in us and abound, and we shall be neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

III. THE KNIFE AND THE FIRE.

"Every branch in Me that beareth fruit," the Father, who is the Husbandman, "purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit."

Too many children of God, when passing through great physical and other suffering, account it punishment. Nay, it is not punitive, but purgative. This is the pruning-knife, cutting away the shoots of the self-life, that the whole energy of the soul may be directed to the manifesting of the life of the Lord Jesus. It may seem a grievous waste to see the floor of the hothouse or vineyard littered with fronds and shoots and leaves, but there need be no lament: the branches of the autumn will well repay each stroke of that keen edge with fuller, richer fruit. So we gain by loss; we live as we die; the inward man is renewed as the outward decays.

The knife is in the Father's hand; let us never forget that. He will not entrust this delicate and difficult work to man or angel. Shall we not be in subjection to the Father of our spirits and live? Blessed be the Father of our Lord Jesus, and our Father in Him. He that spared not Christ may be trusted to do the best for us.

Employing the same word, the Master said, Now ye have been pruned through the word that I have spoken to you. Perhaps if we were more often to yield ourselves to the pruning of the Word, we should escape the pruning of sore pain and trial. If the work were done by the golden edge of Scripture, it might make the iron edge of chastisement needless. Therefore, when we take the Word of God in hand, let us ask the great Husbandman to use it for the pruning away of all that is carnal or evil, so that his life may have unhindered sway.

But if we will not bear fruit, we must be taken away. We shall lose our sphere of Christian service, and be exposed as hollow and lifeless professors. The vine-branch that has no wealth of purple clusters is good for nothing. Salt which is savourless is fit neither for the land nor the dunghill. Vine-branches that bear no fruit are cast into the fire. Professors that lack the grace of a holy temper, and the beauty of a consistent life, are taken away. "Men cast them into the fire, and they are burned."

These three years the divine Husbandman has come hungrily seeking fruit of thee, yet in vain. Nevertheless, He will spare thee for this year also, that thou mayest mend thy ways. This is the reason of thy multiplied anxieties; He is pruning thee. If thou bearest fruit, it will be well, eternally well; but if not, then it is inevitable that thou shalt be cut away as dead and useless wood.

5 "ABIDE IN ME, AND I IN YOU"

"Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in Me." John 15:4.

THESE words are so familiar by constant repetition, that their power to awaken the soul is greatly lessened. They go and come through ear and mind--as a lodger who has gone and come with exactly the same appearance and at precisely the same hours for years, and no one notices him now, because there is nothing novel about him to awake notice or remark. How good would it be if we could hear this tender injunction for the first time! Next to this, let us ask the divine Spirit to rid it of the familiarity of long use: to re-mint it, and to make it fresh and vital; that it may seem to us that we have never before realized how much Jesus meant when He said, Abide in Me.

Perhaps it may assist us if we adopt another English word for abide; and one which, in some respects even more closely, especially in sound, resembles the Greek. It is the word remain; so that we may read the Master's bidding thus : Remain in Me, and I in you.

This word is often employed in the New Testament in connection with house and home. "Mary abode [or remained] with Elisabeth for three months"; and, "There abide [or remain]," said our Lord, when giving his disciples directions for their preaching tour, and referring to some hospitable house which had been opened to welcome them. It is used three times in that memorable colloquy which introduced John and Andrew to their future Teacher and Lord: "Master," they said, "where abidest [or remainest] Thou? He saith unto them, Come, and ye shall see. They came therefore, and saw where He abode, and they abode with Him that day." And again: "Zaccheus, make haste and come down, for to-day I must abide [or remain] in thy house." We are to remain in Christ as a man stays in his home.

It is inferred, of course, that we are in Christ.--It would be absurd to bid a man remain in a house unless he were already within its doors. We must be sure that we are in Christ. Naturally we were outside--"Remember," says the Apostle, "that aforetime ye were separate from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of the promise, having no hope and without God in the world." We were shoots in the wild vine, partaking of its nature, involved in its curse, threatened by the axe which lay at its root. But all this is altered now. The Father, who is the Husbandman, of his abundant grace and mercy, has taken us out of the wild vine and grafted us into the true. "Of God are ye in Christ Jesus."

It is quite true that we repented of our sins, and turned towards God; that we have believed in Christ, and taken his yoke; that we have found rest under the shelter of his cross, and joy in expecting his advent: but we must never forget that behind all these movements of our will, and choice, and faith, were the willing and doing of God Himself. It is the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes. "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath begotten us again unto a living hope." What confidence this gives us! We are in Christ by the act of God's grace and power; and surely He who puts us in can keep us there. Did He not shut Noah into the ark, and keep him there amid all the crash of the pitiless deluge! We have only to consent to remain, and allow God to perfect that which concerneth us. Be confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ.

The stress which the Master lays on our abiding in Him.--He appears to summon all his forces to accentuate his parting message. You always reserve your most important injunctions to the last, that they may remain fresh and impressive as the train steams out of the station, as the boat leaves the landing-stage; so Christ left this entreaty to the last, that it might carry with it the emphasis of a parting message for evermore. But note how He drives it home. Its keyword occurs eleven times in eleven consecutive verses. He depicts the terrible result if we do not abide: we shall wither, be taken away, and consigned to the fire. He shows how utterly we shall miss the one end of our existence --the glorification of the Father by fruit-bearing--unless we strenuously and continuously abide. He allures by the thought of the much fruit; by the assurance of success in prayer; by the promise of fullness of joy, of love, and of blessedness. He entreats, commands, exhorts, all in one breath. It is as though He were to say, "Children, I am leaving you : there are many things I desire for you, many commands to utter, many cautions, many lessons; but I am content to leave all unsaid, if only you will remember this one all-inclusive bidding--Abide in Me, remain in Me; stay where God has put you; deepen, emphasize, intensify, the union already existing between you and Me. From Me is your fruit found. Without Me ye can do nothing. Abide in Me, and I in you. Grow up into Me in all things, which am the Head; rooted and built up in Me, and stablished by your faith, even as ye were taught."

There are many analogies to this appeal.

The sun says to the little earth-planet, Abide in me. Resist the temptation to fly into space, remain in the solar sphere; and I will abide in the formation of thy rocks, the verdure of thy vegetation, and all living things, baptizing them in my fire.

A bid in me, says the ocean to the alcove, that shows symptoms of division from its waves. Keep thy channel unsilted and open, and twice in every twenty-four hours I will pour my fullness up to thy farthest shore.

Abide in me: the vine says it to the branch, that it may impart supplies of life and fruit; the air says to the lung, that it may administer ozone and oxygen to its cells; the magnet says it to the needle, that it may communicate its own specific quality, and fit it to guide across the ocean the mighty steamer, laden with the freight of human life.

Abide in me : the artist says it to the novice; Edison would say it to some young Faraday; the preacher to the student. Any man who is eager to impart his ideas to coming time is glad when some young life, eager, quick to receive formative impressions, presents itself. Here, says he, is my opportunity of incarnating myself afresh, and still living, speaking, painting, when my life is done. "Stay with me, young soul; share my home; saturate yourself with my ideas and methods of expression; go to no other fields to glean--and I will give my best self in return."

So, also, the mother speaks to the child. If she is wise, she will be chary of handing it over to the nurse, or sending it away to the care of strangers, except for the hours necessary for education. The child will bring companions and games, books and studies, within the influences of her love; and she, in return, will gladly bestow herself to the eager life that waits on her every movement, look, and word.

In all these cases, it is always the stronger that pleads with the weaker to abide, promising the communication of fuller life. Each, in measure, says, in the words of the glorious Christ, "I am stronger, wiser, fuller, better, than you. All is mine that it may be yours: therefore, abide in Me, and I will abide in you."

Notice Christ's consciousness of sufficiency for the needs of men.-It were blasphemous audacity to speak thus, if He were not more than man. He affirms that there can be no life apart from Him; that souls not united with Him wither on the forest floor. He says that fruit-bearing is only possible to those who receive from his fullness grace for grace. He says that to be in union with Him will secure union with all holy souls. He says that if his words are carefully pondered and obeyed, we shall make no petition which his Father will not grant. He says that his love, in quality and quantity, is like the love that God has towards Himself; that his commands take rank with those of Deity. He offers Himself to all mankind in coming ages, as their contemporary, and as the one sufficient source of life and godliness. All these assumptions are made in the range of these verses; and as we ponder them, we feel that the Speaker must be conscious of being other than human, and as possessing those infinite attributes which are the sole property of the Eternal.

Yet who shall say that He has offered more than He can give? Have not we tested Him in each of these particulars, and do not we, who have come to Him by Faith, know that in no one item has He been guilty of exaggeration? We were dead; but behold, we live! We spent our energies in profitless work; but now we bear fruit unto God. We were lonely and isolated; but now have come to the heavenly Jerusalem, to the innumerable company of angels, and to the Church of the First-born. Our prayers were aimless and ineffective; but now we have the petitions we desired. New hope and joy have filled our hearts --as the ruddy clusters hang full and ripe in the autumn. Prove Him for yourself, and see if this shall not be so for you also. Only give yourself entirely up to Christ. Abide in Him. Remain in Him. Let thought and speech and life be bathed in the influences of his Holy Spirit; let the sap of his life flow where the sap of the self-life was wont to flow; and lo! old things will pass away, and all things will become new.

The law and method of abiding.

There are two currents always flowing within our reach:

The "Not I," and the "I." The last Adam, and the first. The Spirit, and the flesh.

God has put us by his grace into the first of these. The Master says, "Stop there." Much as when a father puts his tittle boy in the railway carriage, en route for home, and says, "My boy, stop where you are. Do not get out; no change is necessary." We are in Christ by regeneration and faith. We may not always be thinking about Him; but we remain in Him, unless by unfaithfulness or sin we consciously and voluntarily leave Him. And if we have left Him for a single moment, it is always possible by confession and renewal to regain our old position.

This is confessedly an inadequate figure of speech. There is a sense in which the member cannot be amputated from the body, and the soul cannot be divorced from its union with Christ. But we are not dealing now with our integral oneness with Christ for life, but with our abiding union with Him for fruit-bearing and service. And again we say, for those who are so immersed in daily business as to be unable for long together to keep their minds fixed on Christ, that their abiding in Him does not depend on their perpetual realisation and consciousness of his presence, but on the faith that they have done and said nothing inconsistent with the holy bond of fellowship.

You are in a lift until you step out of it, though you may not be thinking of the lift. You keep on a road until you take a turning right or left, although, engrossed in converse with your friend, you do not think of the road. You are in Christ, amid the pressure of daily care, and the haste of business, so long as your face is towards the Lord, your attitude that of humble submission, and your conscience void of offence. During the day it is therefore possible at any moment to say, "I am in Thee, O blessed Christ. I have not

all the rapture and passion of more radiant hours; but I am in Thee, because I would not by a single act leave thy secret place." If at such a moment you are conscious that you are not able to say as much, instantly go back over the past few hours, discover the place where you severed yourself from your Lord, and return.

Study Godet's beautiful definition of abiding: "It is the continuous act by which the Christian lays aside all he might draw from his own wisdom, strength and merit, to desire all from Christ by the inward aspiration of faith."

When, therefore, temptation arises to leave the words of Christ (John 15:7) for the maxims of the world, step back, remain in Him, deny yourself.

Whenever you are tempted to leave the narrow path of his commandments (John 15:10) to follow the impulses of your own nature, reckon yourself dead to these, that you may run in those.

Whenever you are tempted to forsake the holy temper of Christ's love, for jealousy, envy, hatred--step back and say, I will not go out of my hiding-place; I elect to remain in the love of God. The one effort of life is therefore reduced to a persistent resistance of all the suggestions of the world, the flesh, and the devil, that we should step out of that Blessed Man into whom the Father has grafted us. Then He abides in us. He is strong where we are weak; loving and tender where we are thoughtless; holy where we fail. He is in us as wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption; and as the hope of glory.

6 PRAYER THAT PREVAILS

"If ye abide in Me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you."--John 15:7.

CHRIST expected answers to his prayers; and in all his teaching leads us to feel that we shall be able to obtain, through prayer, what otherwise would not come to our hand. He knew all that was to be known of natural law and the Father's heart; but, notwithstanding his perfect acquaintance with the mysteries of the Father's government, He said, "Ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you."

A careful comparison of the confident assurances of the Master and the experience of Christians as detailed in their biographies or personal confessions, discloses a wide difference between his words and the findings of his disciples. Many have become accustomed to disappointment in prayer. They have asked so many things which they have never received; have sought so much without finding; have knocked so repeatedly, but the door has remained closed. We are in the habit of accounting for our failure by saying that probably our prayer was not according to the will of God, or that God withheld the less that He might give us something better. In some cases there may be even an unspoken misgiving about the harmony of prayer with our Father's love and wisdom, or with a perfect confidence in Him as doing the best for us in the world. We forget that if we prayed as we should, we should ask what was according to his will. We evade Christ's definite words, "Whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do."

When we consider the lives of some who have wrought mightily for God, it is clear that they had learnt a secret which eludes many of us. Take this, for instance, from the biography of Dr. Burns Thomson. "When much together as students," writes his friend, "we agreed on special petitions, and the Lord encouraged us by giving answers, so early and so definite, as could only have come from Himself; so that no room was left for the shadow of a doubt that God was the Hearer and Answerer of prayer. Once the answer came the same day, and at another time, whilst we were yet speaking. My friend often spoke of our agreement, to the glory of Him who fulfilled to us his promise; and I refer to it to encourage others." This is but one leaf out of the great library of prayers, intercessions, and supplications for all saints, which stand recorded before God.

We naturally turn to our Lord's last utterances, in which his instructions about prevailing prayer are fuller than those of the Sermon on the Mount; and than those given in the mid-passage of his earthly life, which depict the importunity of the widow with the unjust judge, and of the friend with his friend at midnight. The words spoken in the chapter we are now considering are particularly pertinent to our purpose, because they deal exclusively with the age to which our Lord frequently referred as "that day"--the day of Pentecost, the age of the Holy Ghost, the day of this dispensation.

I. OUR LORD TEACHES THAT ANY PRAYER WHICH IS TO PREVAIL WITH GOD MUST PASS FIVE TESTS;

Though these are but different phases of the same attitude.

(1) The glory of the Father

"That the Father may be glorified in the Son" (John 14:13).

The one purpose of Christ on earth was to glorify the Father; and at the close of his life here He was conscious that He had not striven in vain. "Now," said He, "is the Son of Man glorified, and God is glorified in Him." This was the purpose of his earthly career,

and it was perfectly consistent with that of his eternal being; for each person of the Holy Trinity is ever intent on unfolding and displaying the moral beauty of the other twain. Having sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, Christ still pursues his cherished purpose of making his Father known, loved, and adored. No prayer, therefore, can hope to succeed with Him, or can claim his concurrent intercession, which is out of harmony with this sublime intent.

Whatever petition we offer should be submitted to this standard--can we establish it in the presence of Christ, that our request will promote the glory of the Father? Bring in your evidence--establish your pleas--adduce your strong reasons. If you can make good your claim, your prayer is already granted. But be sure that it is impossible to seek the glory of God consistently with selfish aims. These two can no more co-exist than light and darkness in the same cubic space. The glory of God will ever triumph at our cost. It is equally certain that none of us can truly pray for the glory of God, unless we are living for it. It is only out of the heart that has but one purpose in life and death that those prayers emanate which touch the tenderest chord in the Saviour's nature, and awaken all his energies to their highest activity: "That will I do."

(2) In Christ's Name

"Whatsoever ye shall ask in my name" (John 14:13).

Throughout the Holy Scriptures, name stands for nature. The Master says, "You must ask in my nature." In other words, when we pray, it must not be as the self-nature, but as the Christian-nature, dictates. We always know when that is paramount. It excludes boasting; it is pure, peaceable, and loving; it is far removed from the glare and gaud of the world; it is full of Calvary, Olivet, and Pentecost. There are days in our life when we feel borne along on its tidal current. When Christ is in us, the hope of glory; when a power is working within us beyond what we can ask or think; when we live, yet not we, but Christ in us--these are the times most propitious for prayer. Pour out your heart before God. Let the Christ-nature, which is in you by the Holy Spirit, speak to Christ on the Throne. Let the living water, which has descended from the eternal city, return back to its source through the channel of your heart. This is praying in his name, and according to his nature.

Before we can expect our prayers to prosper, let us sit quietly down, and, putting aside all other voices, permit the Christ-nature to speak. It is only in proportion as it countersigns our petitions that they will reach the audience-chamber of eternity. Surely, if this test were properly applied, many of the petitions we now offer so glibly would never leave our lips; and we should be satisfied about the fate of many another prayer which, like some ill-fated barque, has left our shores, and never been heard of again. But again let it be remembered that none can pray in the name of Christ who do not live for that name--like those early evangelists of whom John says that for the sake of the Name they took nothing of the Gentiles. The name of Christ must be predominant in life, if it is to be efficacious in prayer.

(3) Abide in Christ

"If ye abide in Me ... ask what ye will" (John 15:7)

We are in Christ by the grafting of the great Husbandman, who took us out of the wild vine of nature, and incorporated us with Christ. That union is for ever; but its conscious enjoyment and helpfulness arise only in so far as we keep his commandments. A limb may be in the body, and yet be dislocated and useless. If you are in a train running through to your destination at the terminus, all that is necessary is to resist the temptation to alight at the stations en route, and to remain where you are. If, then, God the Father has put you into Christ, and is seeking to establish you in Him, be careful to resist every temptation or suggestion to depart from living fellowship by any act of disobedience or unbelief.

If you abide in Christ in daily fellowship, it will not be difficult to pray aright, for He has promised to abide in those who abide in Him; and the sap of the Holy Ghost, securing for you fellowship with your unseen Lord, will produce in you, as fruit, desires and petitions similar to those which He unceasingly presents to his Father. Throughout the ages Christ has been asking of God. This is the perpetual attitude of the Son to the Father. He cannot ask what the Father may not give. To get, then, into the current of his prayer is to be sure of success. Abide in Him, that He may abide in you; not only in the activities of holy service, but in the intercessions and supplications of the hour of private prayer.

(4) Submit prayer to the correction of the Word--"If my words abide in you" (John 15:7). Christ's words have been compared to a court of solemn and stately personages, sitting to try our prayers before they pass on into the Master's presence.

Here is a prayer which is selfish and earth-born, grasping at the prizes of worldly ambition and greed. But as it enters it encounters that solemn word, "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness," and it turns back surprised and ashamed.

Here is another prayer, full of imprecation and unkindness towards someone who has maligned or injured the petitioner. But it is met by that solemn word of the Master, "Love your enemies, pray for them that despitefully use you," and it hastens to retire.

Here is another prayer full of murmuring regret because of the pressure of the cross, the weight of the restraining yoke. But

forthwith that notable word of Christ forbids its further progress, saying, "In the world ye shall have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world." In the presence of that reminder and rebuke, the prayer, abashed, turns away its face and departs. Like the accusers of the woman taken in the act of sin, prayers like these are inwardly convicted of unfitness, and go forth.

The words of Christ forbid unsuitable prayer; but they also stir the heart with great desire for the realization of those good things which Christ has promised to them that love Him. In this sense prayer becomes a dialogue between the Master who says, "Seek ye my face," and the disciple who responds, "Thy face, Lord, will I seek."

(5) Fruit-bearing.

"I appointed you that ye should go and bear fruit that... " (John 15:16).

In other words, answers to prayer depend very largely on our ministry to others. If we are prompted by desire for our own comfort, peace, or enjoyment, we shall stand but a poor chance of audience in the secret of his presence. If, on the other hand, our prayers are connected with our fruit-bearing--that is, with our ministry to others, with the coming of the kingdom, and the accomplishment of God's purpose of salvation--the golden sceptre will be extended to us, as when Ahasuerus said to Esther, "What is thy request? Even to the half of the kingdom it shall be performed."

Is sun needed to ripen the fruit? Ask for it. The Father waits to give it. Is dew or rain needed that the pitchers may be filled to the brim with water which is to be made wine? Ask for it. God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labour of love. Ask for all but pruning; this the Father will administer, according to the good pleasure of his goodness. The fruit-bearing branches have a fight to claim and appropriate all that is needed for the sweetening and ripening of their precious burden.

The temple of prayer is thus guarded from the intrusion of the unprepared footstep by many tests. At the foot of the marble steps we are challenged for the watchword; and if we do not speak in harmony with God's glory our further passage is peremptorily stayed. The key, engraven with the name of Jesus, will only obey the hand in which his nature is throbbing. We must be in Him, if He is to plead in us. His words must prune, direct, and control our aspirations; his service must engage our energies. We must take part in the camp with his soldiers, in the vineyard with his husbandmen, in the temple-building with his artificers. It is as we serve our King that we can reckon absolutely on his answer to our prayers.

II. THREE CONCLUDING THOUGHTS REMAIN.

First. It is clear that our prayers depend very largely on our inner life. Where that is vigorous and healthy, they will be the same. But let deterioration and failure set in, and the effect will be instantly apparent in our prayers. Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks; and when the mouth is opened in prayer and supplication, the heart speaks.

Second. Bespeak the Spirit's indwelling. He is the bond of communion and fellowship between the Father and the Son, and will lift us into the holy circle of that eternal life, so that the current may pass through us with uninterrupted velocity and force. He makes inward intercession for the saints according to the will and mind of God.

Third. Expect that prayer will become ever more engrossing, as the divine impulse is yielded to; so that what now occupies but a comparatively small portion of time and energy will become with us, as with the great Apostle, an exercise which we prosecute with unceasing ardour, an ever-delightful method of promoting the Redeemer's kingdom.

7 THE HATRED OF THE WORLD

"They shall put you out of the synagogues: yea, the time cometh, that whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth God service. And these things will they do unto you, because they have not known the Father, nor Me."--John 16:2-3.

HOW NEAR love and hate dwell in these words of Jesus! He had been urging his disciples to cultivate perfect love, the love of God; He now turns to describe the inevitable hatred with which they would be assailed in the world that knew neither the Father nor Himself. And if an additional motive were needed to induce that love, it would surely be given by the consideration of that hate.

This is no unimportant theme. It touches very nearly the lives of thousands of believers amongst us. Though they have not to face the thumbscrew and the stake, they discover painfully enough that the offence of the cross has not ceased. There are amongst us many who daily quiver under the venomous gibe of neighbour and fellow-work-man, and find that their acceptance of Jesus Christ as Saviour and Master has suddenly changed their family life and their working life from a garden of roses into a bed of thorns. Many a young man in the city counting-house, many a mechanic at the bench, many a traveller in the commercial-room, many a student on the college-benches, is doomed to discover that the world does not love the Church better than in those days when the fires gleamed in Smithfield, and men and women were burned to death for loving God. But how sweet to know that all this verifies the Master's words: "Ye are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. If ye were of the world, the world would love his own;

but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you."

I. WHAT, THEN, IS "THE WORLD"?

It consists of those who are destitute of the life and love of God, as contrasted with those who have received and welcomed the unspeakable gift which is offered to all in Jesus Christ. The great mass of the unregenerate and unbelieving, considered as a unity, is "the world," as that term is sometimes distinctively used by Christ and his apostles.

The world has its god; its religion, which was first instituted by Cain at the gates of Eden; its prince, and court, and laws; its maxims and principles; its literature and pleasures, it is dominated by a peculiar spirit which the Apostle calls a lust or fashion, and resembles the German Zeit-Geist: an infection, an influence, a pageantry, a witchery; reminding us of the fabled mountain of loadstone which attracted vessels to itself for the iron that was in them, and presently drew the nails from the timbers, so that the whole fabric fell a helpless, shapeless mass into the waves. The votaries of the world attach themselves to the objects of sense, to the things which are seen and temporal. They have the utmost horror of poverty, suffering, and humiliation; these they consider their chief evils, to be avoided at any cost; whilst they regard as the chief good, riches, pleasure, and honour.

The world is thus a great unity and entity; standing together as a mighty kingdom; united and compacted together as Nebuchadnezzar's image; environing the Church, as the great kingdoms of Assyria and Egypt did the chosen people of God in the days of the kings. It resembles a pack of wolves. "Behold," said Christ, "I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves." Between such irreconcilable opposites as the Church and the world, there cannot but be antagonism and strife. Each treasures and seeks what the other rejects as worthless. Each is devoted to ends that are inimical to the dearest interests of the other. Each follows a prince, who met the prince of the other in mortal conflict. Let us thank Him who out of this world chose us for Himself.

II. LET US TRACE THE STORY OF THE WORLD'S HATRED.

It was foretold in Eden. "I will put enmity," so God spoke to the serpent, "between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed." We are not disposed to treat that ancient record with which our Bible opens as romance or fairy-story; but to regard it as containing a true and authentic record of what actually transpired. That declaration is the key to the Bible. On every page we meet the conflict, the bruising of the Church's heel by the dark powers, and the increasing area of victory covered by our Emmanuel, the Virgin's Child. This hatred is then in the very nature of things, for this is but another name for God. It is, like others of the deepest facts in the experience of man, fundamental and inevitable, the outcome of mysteries which lie beyond the ken of man.

And it has characterised every age.--Abel is slain by Cain, who was of the evil one, and slew his brother. Joseph is put into a pit by his brethren, and into a prison by his master's wife; the Hebrew is smitten by the Egyptian; David is hunted by Saul as a partridge on the mountains; Micaiah is hated by Ahab because he always testifies against him; Jeremiah lives a very suffering stricken life, until he is slain in Egypt for remonstrating against a policy he could not alter; each of the little company then listening to Christ is forecast for a martyr's death, with, perhaps, the exception of John himself, whose life was martyrdom enough; Stephen sheds the blood of his pure and noble nature; and from that day to this the blood of the saints has poured in streams, until the last harrowing records which have come to light of the indescribable tortures and death of Armenian martyrs.

Each age has had its martyr-roll. They have been tortured, not accepting deliverance; have had trial of mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover of bonds and imprisonment; have been stoned, sawn asunder, tempted, and slain with the sword; wandering in deserts and mountains and caves and the holes of the earth: of whom the world was not worthy.

The root or ground of hatred is not due to the evil discovered in the persons who are the objects of the world's hate.--"They hated Me without a cause," our Saviour sorrowfully said. There might have been some cloak for the shamelessness of the world's sin, if He had not spoken words and done works among them such as none other ever said and did; but in the face of the perfect beauty of his character, the grace and truth of his words, and the loveliness of his deeds, it was by their perfidy He was crucified and slain. In vain He challenged them to convince Him of sin, and to bear witness to any evil which might justify their malicious cruelty. They knew it was innocent blood; but this knowledge, so far from mollifying them, only exasperated them the more.

The world hates the Church, not for the evil that is in it, but for the good. It hates without cause. The holier and purer a life is, the more certainly it will attract to itself malignity and dislike. The more Christlike we are, the more we must suffer the relentless hate that drove the nails into his hands, and the spear into his side. Do not be surprised at this. Think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which cometh to prove you, as though a strange thing happened unto you; but doubt and question and be in fear, if you meet only smiles and flattery and such honours as the world can give. You may then ask yourselves whether you are not one of the world's own.

The real origin and fountain of the hatred of the world is due to Satan's antagonism to God.--In his original creation, he was doubtless as fair as any of the firstborn sons of light; but in his pride he substituted himself for God, and love faded out of his being, making way for the unutterable darkness of diabolic hate. Satan hates God with a hatred for which there are no words; and

therefore when the Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world, Satan gathered up every energy and resource of his nature to dog his steps, and make his course through the world as painful as possible. Do you wonder that the life of Jesus was so full of suffering? It could not have been otherwise. Directly God, in the person of Jesus, stepped down into the time-sphere, and assumed the conditions of earth and death, He came within the range of the utmost that Satan could do to molest and injure Him. Similarly, when the blessed Lord becomes the tenant of the heart, and in proportion as He is so, that heart attracts to itself the hatred with which the devil from the beginning has hated God. "If they have persecuted Me, they will also persecute you. If they have kept my saying, they will keep yours also. And these things will they do unto you, because they have not known the Father, nor Me."

It is natural for the evil to hate the good.--First, the sinner has an uneasy conscience; and it hurts him to come in contact with those whose character reminds him of what he ought to be, and might be, and perhaps once was. The diseased eye dreads the light. The uncanny, slimy things that lurk beneath stones, and in dark caves, squirm in pain when you let in the day. The Turkish Sultan disliked the presence of British representatives, and correspondents of the Daily Press, amid the dark deeds of blood and lust by which he has made Armenia a desert. "Everyone that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved."

In addition to an uneasy conscience, the sinner has an unbroken will. He stoutly resists the impression of a superior and condemning goodness. He hardens his heart, and strengthens its defences. "Who is the Lord, that I should obey his voice? Double the tale of bricks: summon the choice chariots and veteran soldiers of Egypt, that we may pursue, overtake, and divide the spoil." Such are the successive boasts and challenges of the hardened heart.

Is it to be wondered at, under such conditions, that the wicked plotteth against the just, and gnasheth upon him with his teeth; that he draws his sword and bends his bow, to shoot privily at the upright of heart? "The wicked watcheth the righteous, and seeketh to slay him. The Lord will not leave him in his hand, nor condemn him when he is judged."

The great object of this hatred is to overcome the good.--In this respect the hate of the world is like the love of the Church. The child of God loves, that he may overcome the evil in the world, by converting evil-doers from the error of their ways and assimilating them to holiness; the child of the devil hates, that he may overcome the good of the world, by arresting their goodness, and assimilating them to evil. Ah, how thankful we may be that we are not of the world, but have been chosen out of it; for it lieth in the wicked one, and is infected with the hatred of hell.

It is not difficult, therefore, to go through the world, and escape its hate. We have only to adopt its maxims, speak its language, and conform to its ways. In a well-known picture, the young girl, with pleading, upturned face, seeks to tie the Royalist scarf around the arm of her Huguenot lover. She will secure his safety if she succeeds! Ah, how many pleading glances are cast at us to induce us to spare ourselves and others, by toning down our speech, and covering our regimentals by the disguising cloak of conformity to the world around! "If you do not approve, at least you need not express your disapproval." "If you cannot vote for, at least do not vote against." If you dissent, put your sentiments in courtly phrase, and so pare them down that they may not offend sensitive ears. Such is the advice which is freely proffered. But those who follow it quickly discover that the compromise of principle involves certainly and awfully the loss of influence for good.

III. OUR BEHAVIOUR AMID THE WORLD'S HATRED.

We have fallen on evil days. The world has been coated over with a Christian veneer, whilst the Church has become leavened with the subtle spirit of the world. It is hard to come out and be separate, because in the dim twilight one is apt to mistake friend and foe. The bribes are so rich for those who conform, the dissuasives so strong for those who refuse to bow to the great golden image. But our duty is clear. We must be true to the Spirit of Christ. We must live a holy and unworldly life; we must avoid all that might be construed as an unworthy compromise of the interests of our Master's Kingdom.

And through all the pitiless storm of hate that beats in our faces, we must be glad. "Blessed are ye," said our Lord, "when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake: rejoice and be exceeding glad." And why rejoice? Because your reward is great in heaven; because you know that you are not of the world; because you are shown to be on the path trodden by the saints before you, every step of which has been trodden amid similar manifestations of the devil's hate.

Moreover, abound in love. Let there be no slackening of the patient, tender, pitying love, which heaps coals of fire on the head of the wrong-doer, and will never rest content until it has subdued the evil of his heart, overcoming it with good. Love must ultimately conquer hate, as surely as to-morrow's sun will conquer the darkness that now veils the landscape,

8 THE WORK OF THE HOLY SPIRIT ON THE WORLD

"He will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment."--John 16:8.

THREE FACTS forced themselves home on the apostles while listening to the Lord's parting words. First, that they were to be bereaved of their Master's presence (John 16:5). Second, that they were to be left alone, amid the world's hatred--"Whosoever killeth you" (John 16:2). Third, that their mission would be witness-bearing to the unseen Lord (John 15:27).

And as they fully realised all that these facts involved, they became too absorbed in their own sorrowful conclusions to inquire what bourn the Master sought as He set sail from these earthly shores. "O Master," they said in effect, "why canst Thou not stay? Our orphaned hearts will never be able to endure the blank which thy absence will cause. Easier could a flock of sheep withstand the onset of a pack of wolves than we the hatred of the world! And as for our witness-bearing, it will be too feeble to avail aught."

And the Master, in effect, answered thus: "I will not leave you without aid. I shall still be with you, though unseen. My presence shall be revealed to your spirits, and made livingly real through the Blessed Comforter. He will be with you, and in you. He will authenticate and corroborate your witness. He shall testify of Me; and when He is come, He will convince the world of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment. You see then that I shall be able to help you better by sending the Holy Spirit than by staying with you Myself. It is expedient for you that I go away; for if I go not away the Comforter will not come to you, but if I depart I will send Him unto you."

We may not be able to fathom all the reasons for Christ's withdrawal before the Spirit's advent was possible. But some of them are obvious enough. The full union of the Son of God with our race must be secured through death and resurrection; and his full union with the Father must be indicated in his glorification with the glory He had or ever the worlds were made--before He could be the perfect channel of communicating the divine fullness to our human nature. The Head must be anointed before the Body. There must be no physical distraction arising from the outward life of Jesus to compete with the spiritual impression of his unseen presence. The text must be completed before the sermon can be preached. Christ must die, or there can be no witness to his atonement; must rise, or there can be no testimony to his resurrection; must ascend, or there can be no declaration as to his finished work and eternal intercession. Since the Spirit reveals Christ, all that was appointed unto Christ to do must be completed ere the Spirit can commence his ministry.

The work of the Spirit on the world is through the Church, and is described by our Lord as threefold. By his revelation of Christ He creates three convictions. Each of these is necessary to the regeneration of man. There must be the sense of sin, or he will not seek the Saviour. There must be a belief that righteousness is possible, or the convicted sinner will die of despair. There must be the assurance that sin is doomed, and shall be finally vanquished, or the baffled warrior will give up the long conflict as hopeless.

I. THE CONVICTION OF SIN.

We are constantly meeting people who are perfectly indifferent to Christianity, because they say they do not feel their need of it. Why should they trouble about it, when they suppose themselves able to do perfectly well without it?

In dealing with these, it is a great mistake to entice them towards the Gospel by describing the moral grandeur of Christ's character and teaching. We should at once seek to arouse them to a sense of their great sinfulness. When a man realises that his life is being eaten out by some insidious disease, he will need no further urging to go to a physician. This is the weakness of modern preaching--that we expatiate on the value of the remedy to men who have never realised their dire necessity.

But what is the truth most appropriate for producing the conviction of sin in the human breast? "Preach the Ten Commandments in all their stern and uncompromising 'shalts' and 'shalt-nots,'" cries one. "Read out the descriptions given in Scripture of the evil things that lurk in the heart of man as filthy things in darksome caves," says another. "Show men the results of sin, take them to the edge of the bottomless pit," insists a third. But not one of these is the chosen weapon of the Holy Spirit. He convicts men of the sin of refusing to believe in Jesus Christ.

There stands the cross, the evidence and symbol of God's love; and there stands the risen Christ, offering Himself to men. There is nothing which more certainly proves the innate evil of the human heart than its refusal of that mystery of grace. Disbelief is the creature, not of the intellect, but of the will. It is not the result of inability to understand, but of stubborn obstinacy and stiffneckedness. Here is the supreme manifestation of moral beauty; but man has no eyes for it. Here is the highest revelation of God's desire for man to be reconciled to Him, and be at one with Him, as his happy child; but man either despises or spurns his overtures. Here is the offer of pardon for all the past, of heirship of all the promises, of blessedness in all the future; but man owns that he is indifferent to the existence and claims of God, and is quite willing to accept the sleeping retribution of bygone years, and to risk a future irradiated by no star of hope. Here is God in Christ beseeching him to be reconciled, declaring how much the reconciliation has cost; but the frail child of yesterday absolutely refuses to be at peace. No trace of tears in his voice, no shame on his face, no response to God's love in his heart.

This is sin at its worst. Not in a Nero drenched with the blood of relatives and saints; nor in an Alva expert to invent new methods of torture; nor in the brutalised expression of the felon; nor in the degradation of the heathen : but in those beside you, who have heard of the love of Jesus from their earliest childhood, and who know that He died for them, and waits to bless them, but who deliberately and persistently refuse Him--you will find the most terrible revelation of what man is capable of. "This is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil."

Conviction in itself is not enough. Many have been convicted who have never gone on to conversion, resembling untimely fruit, which, blighted before its maturity, has dropped to the ground.

Conviction of sin does not come to all in the same manner or to the same extent. Indeed, those who have come to Christ in early life are in a degree exempt from drinking this bitter cup, though they have much tenderness of conscience afterwards.

Do not wait for more conviction; but come to Jesus as you are, and tell Him that the saddest symptom in your case is your inability to feel as you know you should. Do not tarry to be convinced of sin. Do not stay away till you feel more deeply. Do not suppose that strongly roused emotions purchase his favour. His command is absolute, Believe! But whenever that true repentance is wrought which needs not to be repented of, or those tears of penitence fall from the eyes of the suppliant, the means will always be the person and work and love of Jesus Christ. This is the burning-glass through which the Spirit focuses the rays of God's love on ice-bound hearts.

II. THE CONVICTION OF RIGHTEOUSNESS.

The aggravation of sin of which the Spirit convicts the sinner seems to present a gloom too dark for any ray to penetrate. He cannot forget. The dead past will not bury its dead. The wind of eternity blows away the leaves with which he tries to hide the corpses of murdered opportunities, broken hearts, and dissipated years. He cannot forget. He may close his eyes, but still the memories of the past will haunt him--the deeds he would undo, the words he would recall, the dark ingratitude towards the love of Jesus. Conscience is a flaming terror till a man finds Christ as his Saviour. Her brow is girt with fire, her voice peals with doom.

"Can I ever be cleansed?" cries the convicted soul. "Can these awful gnawings be ended, and these terrors laid? Can I rise from this ruin and become a new, righteous, God-like man?" These questions are answered by the Spirit who induced them. "There is righteousness," He says, "because Christ is gone to the Father, and ye see Him no more."

He is gone to the Father; and the seal of Divine authenticity has therefore been placed on all He said and did in the Father's name.

He is gone to the Father; and it is clear, therefore, that He has been accepted as the Saviour and Redeemer of men.

He is gone to the Father in the likeness and nature of men; evidently, then, man is an object of God's love, is reconciled to God, and is admitted to the rights and privileges of a son and heir.

The work of Jesus on man's behalf, finished at the cross, accepted by the Father--of which the resurrection is witness--presented by our Great High Priest within the veil, is the momentous truth which the Holy Spirit brings home to the convinced sinner. And inasmuch as we are unable to see within the veil and discern the divine marks of approval and acceptance, the Holy Spirit descends, and in his advent proves that Jesus has gone whither He said, and has done what He promised.

How do we know that the work of Jesus Christ has been accepted in the courts of eternity? On this wise. Before He died the Master said that He was going to the Father, and that when He was glorified He would ask and receive the Spirit in his fullness. After days had elapsed and the second week from his ascension was already passing, the Spirit in Pentecostal fullness fell upon the waiting Church, giving it an altogether new power with which to combat the world. What the waggons were to Jacob, proving that Joseph lived and thought of him still, and was indeed supreme in Egypt, that the day of Pentecost was in declaring that Christ's personal righteousness had been vindicated, and that the righteousness He had wrought out for man had received the hall-mark of the divine assay. Therefore the Apostle says, "The Holy Ghost also is a witness to us that He hath perfected for ever by one offering them that are sanctified." And again, "Him hath God exalted with his right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour; and the Holy Ghost, whom God hath given to them that obey Him, is witness of these things."

III. THE CONVICTION OF JUDGMENT.

When we have been freed from sin, and made righteous in Christ, we are left face to face with a tremendous struggle against sin. The sin of the past is indeed forgiven, the voice of conscience has been hushed, the sinner rejoices to know that he is accepted on the ground of righteousness; but the old temptations still crop up. Passion prompts us to live for present gratification; the flesh deadens the burning aspirations of the spirit. We ask in sad earnestness, How shall we be able to survive the terrible struggle and to come off victorious? It appears a vain hope that we should ever rise to perfect and victorious purity.

At such a time the Comforter convinces us of judgment. Not, as the words are so often misquoted, of judgment to come; but in the

sense in which our Lord spoke of judgment to the inquiring Greeks : "Now is the judgment of this world; now shall the prince of this world be cast out." Our Lord's references to the existence and power of Satan are always distinct and unhesitating. It is impossible to accept Him as our supreme Teacher without accepting his statements concerning his great antagonist, to undo whose work brought the Son of God to earth.

The whole Gospel is a story of the duel in which our Lord for ever worsted and mastered Satan. The conflict began with the lonely struggle of the temptation in the wilderness; it pervaded Christ's earthly career; it culminated in the cross. Its first note was, "If Thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread"; its last note was, "If Thou be the son of God, come down from the cross." But when our Lord cried, "It is finished!" with the shout of a conqueror He proclaimed to the universe that, though tempted to the uttermost, He had not yielded in one particular, that evil was not an eternal power, that wrong was not omnipotent. The cross was the crisis of this world's history : the prince of this world measured himself for one final wrestle with the Son of God. Had he succeeded, evil would have reigned; but since he failed, he fell as lightning from heaven.

On this fact the Holy Spirit loves to dwell. He unfolds its full meaning. "See," He says, "Christ has conquered for you, and in your nature. You meet a foe who is not invincible. Christ conquered, not for Himself, but for all who believe. The prince of this world has been judged and found wanting. He is condemned for evermore. Only abide in the last Adam, the Lord from heaven, and let Him abide in you, and He will repeat through you his olden victories."

What a majestic thought is here! The world comes to us first with her fascinations and delights. She comes to us next with her frowns and tortures. Behind her is her prince. But since he has been cast out by a Stronger than himself, and exists only on sufferance, his most potent bribes and lures, his most violent onsets, his most unscrupulous suggestions, must collapse. Believer, meet him as a discredited and fallen foe. He can have no power at all over thee. The cross bruised his head. Thou hast no need to fear judgment. It awaits those only who are still in the devil's power. But thou mayest rejoice that for thee a victory waits, the measure of which will only be realised when thou seest the devil cast into the bottomless pit and thence into the lake of fire.

9 CHRIST'S RETICENCE SUPPLEMENTED BY THE SPIRIT'S ADVENT

"I have yet many things to say unto you; but ye cannot bear them now."--John 16:12-15.

HOW CONFIDENTLY our Lord speaks of the Spirit's advent; not more so did the prophets foretell his own. Repeatedly He returns to the phrase, When He is come. The advent of the Spirit to the heart of the Church on the day of Pentecost was as distinct and marked an event as the advent of the Son of God Himself to the manger-bed of Bethlehem. Let every reader of these words be sure of having taken full advantage of the presence of the Spirit, just as we would wish to have availed ourselves to the uttermost of the physical presence of Christ, had our lot so befallen.

I. THE THEME OF THIS PARAGRAPH IS THE INCOMPLETENESS OF OUR LORD'S TEACHING.

For three and a half years He was perpetually pouring forth his wonderful words; in many different places--the market-place, the home at Bethany, the hillside, the Temple cloister; to many different audiences--now in thronging crowds, and again to the secret disciple whose footfall startled the night, or the lone woman drawing water from the well; on many different themes--to mention all of which would be impossible, though He never spoke on any subject, common as a wayside flower, without associating with it thoughts that can never die. We have but a small portion of his words recorded in the Gospels; it is therefore the more remarkable that He left anything unsaid, and that at the close of his ministry He should have to say, I have yet many things to say unto you. Many parables, fair as his tenderest, woven in the productive loom of his imagination, remained unuttered; many discourses, inimitable as the Sermon on the Mount, or as this in the upper room, unspoken; many heavenly mysteries unrevealed.

A comparison between the Gospels and the Epistles will indicate how much our Lord had left unsaid. The relation of the law of Moses to his finished work was left to the Epistle to the Romans : the relation between his Church and the usages of the heathen world, for the Epistle to Corinth : the effect of his resurrection on the sleeping saints, for the Epistle to the Thessalonians. He said nothing about the union of Jew and Gentile on terms of equality in his Church; this mystery, hidden from ages and from generations, was only fully unveiled in the Epistle to the Ephesians. It was left for the Epistle to the Hebrews to disclose the superseding of the Temple and its ritual by the realities of the Christian dispensation. The practical precepts for the right ordering of the churches were left for the pastoral Epistles; and the course of the Church through the ages of the world's history, for the Apocalypse of the beloved Apostle. When we perceive the many things, taught in the Epistles, which were not unfolded by the Lord, we discern a fresh meaning in his assurance that He left much unsaid.

We are perpetually assailed by the cry, "Back to Christ," which is significant of men's weariness of theological system and organised ecclesiasticism, and of a desire to get away from the accretions of the Middle Ages and the dead hand of Church Tradition, into the pure, serene, and holy presence of Jesus of Nazareth. It always seems to us as if the cry should be Up to Christ, rather than Back to Him. To put it as men generally do, suggests the inference that Christ lies far in the wake of human progress, and behind the haze of eighteen centuries; that He was, but is no longer, a potent factor in the world's life : whereas He is here,

now, with us, in us, leading us as of old through rugged passes, and to mountains of transfiguration.

If the endeavour to get back to Christ means the reception of the Synoptic Gospels to the exclusion of the Fourth, or the Epistles; or the Sermon on the Mount to the exclusion of the Epistle to the Romans; or Jesus to the exclusion of his apostles--we feel it is but half the truth. Our Lord Himself protested that his teachings were incomplete; that there was much left unsaid which would be said by the Comforter, as even He could not--because the Spirit of God speaks in the inner shrine of the soul, uttering to the inner ear truths which no voice could speak or ear receive. Let us always remember therefore that the Gospels must be completed by the Epistles; and that the Spirit who spake in the Son spake also in those whom the Son had prepared to be his mouthpieces to men.

II. THE PARTIAL MEASURE OF HUMAN ABILITY TO KNOW.

"Ye cannot bear them now." Our Lord's reticence did not arise from ignorance--all things were naked and open to his eye; but He had a tender regard for these men whom He loved.

Their bodies could not bear more.

When the mind is strongly wrought upon, the delicate organism of the body is deeply affected. On the banks of the River Hiddekel, words of such wondrous importance were uttered to Daniel, that the lonely exile fainted, and was sick many days. "When I saw Him," said John, "I fell at his feet as dead." Flavel, on more than one occasion, asked that the excessive revelation might be stayed. Our Lord, therefore, feared that in their weakened state, torn by anxiety and sorrow, his followers would collapse if further strain were imposed upon their powers of spiritual apprehension.

Their minds could not bear more.

The mind cannot receive more than a certain amount. After awhile its eye gets weary, it ceases to receive, and even to remember. There are multitudes of cases in which, when too great a weight has been crowded on the delicate organism through which thoughts move, its balance has been upset, and it has drivelled into idiocy. Against this danger, also, our Lord guarded, for his disciples were already excited and overstrained. Their brains were so exhausted that in a few moments they would be sleeping on the cold ground of Gethsemane. Had He poured the light of the other world in full measure upon them, the tide of glory had submerged them, like spent swimmers.

Their affections could not bear more.

Because He had spoken to them, sorrow had filled their heart; and He forbore to describe the valley of the shadow through which they were still to pass, lest their hearts should break. They had hardly commenced to drink its cup: what would its dregs be? The footmen had wearied them : how would they contend with the horses? The brink had terrified them: how would they do in the swellings of Jordan?

It is thus that He deals with us still. He knows our frame, and proportions our trials to our strength. He carefully feels our pulse before commencing the operation through which He would lead us to perfect health. He tempers his discipline to our spiritual capacity. We desire to know many things : the reason why sin has been permitted; the fate of the impenitent; the state of the great masses of men who have passed into eternity without a true knowledge of God. Peter asks for John, "What shall this man do?" Each wants to know the secret plans, whether for himself, or his beloved, which are lying in the mind and purpose of the Eternal. What will the end be? Where does that path lead by which I am going, and which descends steeply into the ravine? Will the fight between evil and good be much prolonged? What are hell, and the bottomless pit, and the meaning of Christ's references to the undying worm and unquenchable flame? And Christ says, "My child, you cannot bear it; you could not sleep at night, you could not play with the merry children by day, you could not perform your slender tasks, if you knew all that I know, and see as I see. Be at rest. Trust Me. I will tell you as soon as you are strong enough. Nothing shall be kept back from you, all shall be revealed." And surely the sufferings and limitations of this present time will not be worthy to be compared with the exceeding weight of glory, when in the presence of our Lord we shall see eye to eye, and know even as we are known.

In the light of these words we may get comfort.

When some crushing trouble befalls us, He who only spoke as they were able to bear will not permit the flame to be hotter, the tide stronger, or the task more trying, than we have strength for. We often do not know our strength nor the power of his grace. Sorrow may be sent to reveal us to ourselves, and show how much spiritual energy we have been silently acquiring. Do not therefore run to and fro and say, "It is too much, I cannot bear it." But know and be sure that Christ has ascertained your resources, and is sure of your ability, before He permits the extreme ordeal to overtake you. Dare to say with the Apostle, "I can do all things through Christ who strengtheneth me."

III. THE TEACHING OF THE DIVINE SPIRIT.

His personality is unmistakable; though the Greek word for Spirit is neuter, a masculine pronoun is used in conjunction with it when Jesus says, "He, the Spirit of Truth." The personal Christ sent as a substitute for Himself no mere breath or influence, but the personal Spirit. The Advocate before the Throne is well represented by the Advocate in the heart of the Church; and these two agree in one--distinct as different Persons, but one in the mystical unity of the Holy Trinity.

Note the method of the Holy Spirit. He teaches truth by taking of the things of Christ and revealing them. There are two methods of teaching children--by precept, and by example. I go into a schoolroom one summer afternoon, and remark the hot cheeks and tired eyes of the little ones. Outside the open window the bees are droning past, the butterflies flit from flower to flower, and Nature seems to cry to the little hearts, "Come and play with me." Does a garden ever look so beautiful as to children shut up to their studies? "What are you learning, little ones?" I say. "Botany," is the sad answer. "We've got to learn all these hard names, and copy these diagrams." "Well," I say, "shut up your books, and come with me." And presently I teach them more botany by contact with the flowers themselves, than they would have learned by hours of poring over lesson-books. It is so the Spirit teaches. Is gentleness or purity, self-sacrifice or prayer, the lesson that we are set to acquire? There is no need for Him to make a new revelation to us. It is enough if He but bring us face to face with Jesus, and show these qualities shining through his words and deeds. The truth certainly, but the truth as it is in Jesus.

The condition of proficiency in the Spirit's school is obedience. "He will guide you into all truth." This word is very significant. Literally it means, Show the way. Ordinarily, men ask to know the truth before they obey. The Spirit demands that they should obey before they know. Let me know the outcome of this act--its philosophy, its reasonableness, its result--then I will obey. But the Spirit answers, "It is enough for thee, O child of man, to know Me. Canst thou not trust? Wilt thou not obey? And as thou obeyest thou shalt know. Take this path, plod along its difficult way, climb where it climbs; so shalt thou ascend the steep of obedience, and at each step a further horizon of the truth will open outspread beneath thee."

Let us be more sensitive to the guidance of the Spirit, following whithersoever He clearly indicates--as when the Spirit said to Philip, "Go, join thyself to this chariot." We shall know when we follow on to know the Lord. His going forth is prepared for those who are prepared to obey whatsoever He may appoint.

The purpose of the Spirit is to glorify our Lord. "He shall glorify Me, for He shall receive of mine." The Spirit's presence, as such, should not be a subject of our close scrutiny, lest we conflict with his holy purpose of being hidden, that Jesus may be all in all before the gaze of saint and sinner. He is so anxious that nothing should divert the soul's gaze from the Lord whom He would reveal, that He carefully withdraws Himself from view. "There must be nothing, not even God Himself, to distract the heart from Jesus, through whom we come to God. But remember that when you have the most precious views of your dear Lord, it is because the Holy Spirit, all unseen, is witnessing and working within you."

The authority of the Holy Spirit appears in the words, "He shall not speak of Himself; but whatsoever He shall hear, that shall He speak." Where does He hear the truths He utters? Where? There is only one place. In the depths of the eternal Throne, in the heart of Deity itself, in the secret place of the Most High. Oh, marvel! surpassing thought, yet true--that things which pass between the Father and the Son, in the depths which no angel can penetrate, may be disclosed and made known to those humble and contrite hearts who are willing to make a space and pause for the divine Spirit to speak the deep things of God.

May it be ours to be patient and willing pupils in this heavenly school, in which the Holy Spirit is Teacher, and Jesus the Text-Book, and obedience the essential condition of knowledge.