

Gospel of John-F.B.Meyer-1

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

F. B. Meyer

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PREFACE

This is the Gospel of the Divine Life of Jesus. The eagle has always been its recognised emblem, as denoting its sublime and heavenly character. And, clearly, in its diction, its insight into the deepest truths, its repeated testimony to the Glory and Deity of our Lord, it holds a unique, place among the records of His life. It soars. It holds fellowship with the Throne. Its eyrie is in the Heart of God. And yet, in one of its aspects, this Gospel is as much the record of the Man Christ Jesus, as of the Only-begotten Son; and for this it is of inestimable worth to all who desire to follow in His steps. There is no part of Scripture more conducive to the culture of the inner life; and it is under this aspect that it is considered in the following pages. This attempt to present some of the unsearchable wealth of this Gospel may be compared to a shell-full of water dipped up by a child from a vast fresh-water lake; but such as it is, it is commended to the people of God with the desire that it may be used by the Divine Spirit to bring them into a deeper knowledge of Life, Light, and Love, as they are in Jesus Christ our Lord. - F. B. MEYER.

1. THE WORD

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God."--John 1:1.

How AMAZING is the opening of this Gospel! The writer does not stay to introduce himself, to mention his name, or give proofs of his trustworthiness. With singular abruptness, with no attempt to substantiate his own claims or the claims of this marvellous treatise, he casts it into the teeming world of human thought and life, as Jochebed launched the cradle on the bosom of the Nile.

Did he feel that the matter of the book would sufficiently vindicate its truthfulness; and that it would authenticate itself as bread, and light, and water, and spring flowers do? Did he feel that the Spirit who inspired it might be left to care for it? To ask such questions is to suggest the answer But is there not a marvellous audacity in the casting forth of this Gospel, unannounced, unauthenticated by the recommendations of great names? Yet the result has vindicated the Evangelist. For, as the experience of the Church grows--nay, as our own experience grows--new depths of beauty and truthfulness reveal themselves in its pages, and compel belief in all whose hearts are pure enough to recognise the Divine.

Our writer does not name the gross errors of his time, which were beginning to obscure the dawn of our holy faith, as clouds steal up upon a too radiant sunrise. Why should he preserve these flies in amber? It is enough for him to announce, positively and dogmatically, the Truth; sure that the conscience of man would not fail to recognise her face and the accents of her voice, and eventually turn from all others to cleave to her alone.

Nor can we wonder that the fisherman of Galilee was able thus to write for all the world to hear. Truths of universal importance are perceived less by the intellect than by the heart. Things which are hidden from the wise and prudent are revealed to babes. An intense religious conviction will stimulate the action of all the faculties; as a jar of oxygen quickens into brilliant coruscations the burning phosphorus. But how much must we not attribute to the teaching of that blessed Spirit, who found congenial work in glorifying the Lord through the pen of his dearest friend and aptest pupil! Very majestic are the opening words, and this designation of our Lord.

THE WORD.

We need not ask whence this term came. It may have been a pebble from the brook of Old Testament Scripture, or a phrase borrowed, as Neander suggests, from the current talk of Ephesus, where this Gospel was written about the year A.D. 97. But, whencesoever it came, it is here re-minted by the Spirit of God, and is most significant.

As words utter thought, so does Christ utter God.--A man, newly arrived from the busy outer world, sits among his family, absorbed and rapt in thought. Wife and child are hushed into a great stillness as they look upon his face, which tells a tale of inner conflict; as the foam-flecked surface of a mountain stream reveals the agony of its boulder-broken career. They cannot even guess what oppresses him until he opens his lips and speaks. The friends who gathered to the consecration of the angel-heralded boy had no idea by what name the aged priest would call him, till the trembling hand indented the wax of the writing-tablet with the Divinely-appointed name of Christ's forerunner.

So man had not known God, unless Christ had uttered Him. An Egyptian temple bore this inscription on its portico: "I am He that is, and was, and shall be; and no mortal has ever lifted my veil." A profound Eastern thinker, in the very dawn of the world's life, cried: "Oh that I knew where I might find Him! ... Behold, I go forward, but He is not there; and backward, but I cannot perceive Him." An altar in Athens, the brain of the world, was erected to "the unknown God." But Christ uttered God. "No man hath seen God at any time; the only-begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, He hath declared Him."

There are three ways in which Christ has uttered God, as these introductory verses prove: in Creation; in his Teaching', and in his Incarnation.

God is Life.--Not simply living, in contrast to dead idols; but life-giving. The fountain of life ever rises from the depths of the abysmal Godhead. Yet that life had been an unknown quantity, had not the Word uttered it in creation, which his hands have wrought; so that the universe is a poem (in the strict meaning of that word) wrought out of the majestic substance of God's underived and eternal Being.

God is Light.--But the light had been undiscovered, because insufferable, unless the Word had shed it forth on created vision, revealing yet tempering its beauty, passing it through the luminous and yet shrouding veil of his words.

God is Love.--Love is the essence of his being, and all love everywhere is the far-travelled beam and ray of his heart (Ep 3:15note, mar.). But that love had never been realised, unless the Word had embodied it in a human life, with caresses for little children, tears for broken hearts, tender pity for the lost, agony unto death for mankind.

Lift up your eyes and hearts, and behold with devout rapture your glorious Lord, uttering the depths, the hidden depths of God (1Cor. 2:10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15 16). He has not only done so, but He will continue to do so through all ages, as we are able to bear it (John 17:26). We have only yet, at his feet, commenced to learn the alphabet, the first broken syllables of the Divine Science; but it is probable that the ages of eternity are to witness an eternal progression in this sublime theology. Our knowledge ever increasing our capacity to know; our capacity ever leading to fresh hunger, our hunger ever appropriating the blessedness of the fourth Beatitude. Remember the majestic Apocalyptic vision, in which the seer beheld Christ riding forth on his snow-white steed, his eyes as flame, his head girt with many crowns, his vesture dipped in blood; but this is the name by which He was known --a name symbolic of his eternal ministry--his name is called the Word of God (Rev. 19:13-note).

Before illustrating in detail our Lord's three-fold utterance of the Father, there are one or two thoughts suggested by the sublime opening sentences of this Gospel which we do well to notice.

I. THE ETERNITY OF THE BEING OF THE LORD JESUS.

"In the beginning was the Word." Is there not here an evident reference to the opening of the Book of Genesis, "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth." But what a contrast! At that moment, described as the beginning, and which may be pushed back far enough to include all the demands of modern geologists, you do not find the heavens and the earth, which as yet are not; but you do find the Word already in existence. The words in the one case expressly exclude the eternity of matter; but in the other they expressly include the eternity of the Word. Moses strikes the chord to descend the stream of Time; John strikes it to look out on the expanse of Eternity lying beyond created things, but in which the Word was already existing.

It is not so difficult to wend one's way slowly back into the past, or to imagine the successive ages during which the world was being prepared for man's habitation. But when we reach the place where the links of the time-chain stop, and we stand at the first moment of the creation of time and matter, and look out into the void on the other side--it is then that thought staggers and gives way.

There is no light to guide us--sun, moon, and stars are not created. No spirit to lead us; cherubim have not begun to love, or

seraphim to burn. No stepping-stone for our feet; for space is unoccupied save by the all-pervasive presence of God. No sufficient unit of measurement; since, when arithmetic has reached its uttermost, the mighty aggregate is but a mote floating in the sunshine of the Being of God. What shall we do then, as we learn the pre-existence of the Word, but worship Him?

That mind must indeed be slow to perceive which does not recognise that what is eternal must be Divine. If it be true that before the mountains were brought forth, or the earth was formed, the Word was, then, from everlasting to everlasting He must be God. Wherefore "unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God, be honour and glory for ever and ever."

II. THE PERSONALITY OF THE LORD JESUS.

"He was with God." We may not at first perceive the significance of this clause, any more than the casual tourist sees the importance of an embrasure in the fortifications where sheep browse, and soldiers stand at ease. But if ever there should come again days of conflict, like those which swept across the early Church, in which men should assert that the Word was but a momentary and impersonal manifestation of God, we should instantly revert to this significant clause, and cry, It cannot be--The Word was WITH God. The same was in the beginning WITH God.

The preposition selected by the Evangelist is very significant. It means communion with and movement towards. It denotes the intimate fellowship subsisting between two, and well befits the intercourse of the distinct Persons of the one and ever-blessed God. "The face of the everlasting Word was ever directed towards the face of the everlasting Father." He was in the bosom of the Father. "He makes the Divine glory shine outwardly because He is filled inwardly. He contemplates before He reflects. He receives before He gives."

We are not then surprised to hear the Divine colloquy: "Let us make man"; or to learn that Jesus knew the Father (John 1:10,15). How could He do other, when, "trailing clouds of glory behind him," He proceeded and came forth from God?

Let us never forget that our Saviour, who rived, and died, and rose, and is our familiar Friend, is a distinct personality, who was before all worlds, and will be unchanged for evermore. This is what we want. It is not enough to give us an abstraction, an ideal, a word. Our hearts crave One, and, blessed be God, they may have One who may be a living, bright reality.

III. THE DEITY OF OUR LORD JESUS

"The Word was God." He is not said to be the God; for that assertion would ascribe to the Son the totality of the Divine Being, and contradict the doctrine of the Holy Trinity. And He is not said to be Divine, which would lessen the emphasis. But He is said, distinctly and emphatically, to be God. "God manifest in the flesh."

He was born of a woman; yet He made woman. He ate and hungered, drank and thirsted; yet He made corn to grow on the mountains, and poured the rivers from his crystal chalices. He needed sleep; yet He slumbers not, and needs not to repair his wasted energy. He wept; yet He created the lachrymal duct. He died; yet He is the ever-living Jehovah, and made the tree of his cross. He inherited all things by death; yet they were his before by inherent right.

And what is the Word to us?--In his first Epistle, the holy Apostle tells us his intention in declaring that which he had seen and heard and handled of the Word: it was that others might share with him his fellowship with the Father and the Son. And fellowship means partnership, a common participation in a common stock; and, in this case, a blessed share in the very life and fight and love of God.

But how many such things become ours? There is a sense in which the orator, the thinker, the friend, is able to infuse himself into us by his fervid and quickening words. And is there not also a deep sense in which Jesus is the Word of God, because through Him God is ever pouring Himself into our hearts and lives? As a man puts himself into his words, and by them communicates himself to others, so has God embodied Himself in Jesus, and those who receive the Son receive the Father, who has sent Him (Mt. 10:40).

As the Father has put Himself into the Word, so has the Word put Himself into his words. "The words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life." Live then in meditation on the words of Jesus; so that his being may become infused into yours, and through the Word the eternal Father may come and make his abode within you (John 14:23).

So shall you be inspired by the very life and indwelling of God, and be rifted increasingly out of the time-sphere into the eternal; into fellowship with all noble souls, with all saints and angels, with all who, through all worlds, live on Him, who is the Eternal and Divine Word, ever-blessed, ever to be adored.

More present to faith's vision keen

Than any earthly object seen;

More dear, more intimately nigh,

Than e'en the dearest earthly tie.

2. THE WORD IN CREATION

"The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by Him; and without Him was not any thing made that was made."
John 1:2-3.

IT IS A distinct loss to many of us, whose lives are spent in the heart of great towns, that we miss those enlarged conceptions of Nature which are suggested by the far horizon of the sea; the outlines of distant hills; the snowy summits of the Alps; or the outspread panorama of woods, rivers, and pasture lands. And the privation affects us principally in this, that contracted views of Nature sometimes carry with them more limited views of God's being and glory than if we dwelt in habitual contemplation of the vastness and splendour of his Creation.

One of the first thoughts which occur to the devout mind, on emerging from the straitened conditions of city life into the larger word of Nature, is to reproach itself that it has entertained such dwarfed ideas of God. And whilst it does not abate one note of the tender strain, Our Father, it adds to it the deep bass of the Psalmist's awe, "Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised, and his greatness is unsearchable."

Such thoughts open straight on the passage before us. We look, and rightly, on the Lord Jesus, as Brother, Saviour, Friend; but do we always conceive of Him as invested with the awful glory of Godhead? We cannot be too intimate and tender in our relations to Him; but we do well sometimes to go outside to see what He has done, that we may know how great He is, who is so near and dear.

"THE SAME WAS IN THE BEGINNING WITH GOD."

At first this seems merely to sum up and repeat the previous verse. But -it does more. It tells us that He who was before the beginning was also at the beginning; and that face-to-face fellowship, which had subsisted before all worlds, was in active exercise at the august moment when the ever-blessed Trinity proceeded to create. "Let us make man."

"ALL THINGS MADE BY HIM."

The Greek is very significant: All things became, i.e., came into being, through Him. This became is in striking contrast to the was of the previous verse, and indicates the passage from nothingness to being. Became, i.e., all things emerged out of nothing at the creative fiat. There is a beautiful parallel in another passage of this Gospel, in which our Lord affirms, "Before Abraham became, I am" (John 8:58).

The preposition "through" is always used of the office of our blessed Lord in the work of creation (1Cor. 8:6; Col. 1:16; Heb. 1:2) and is full of meaning. It leaves God the Father as the origin and source of all things, so that the elders are justified in their perpetual ascription of worship before his throne (Rev 4:11-note); but God the Son, our Lord, is the organ through which the creative purpose moves. Through Him the infinite God utters Himself in his works.

In the ancient record of creation with which the Bible opens, two phrases are to be noticed---created (Ge 1:1, 21, 27) and God said (which occurs ten times). Into each of these we must now read the announcement of this text. Note those three acts of creation. Whatever else we may concede to men of science, we must insist on retaining these for God, and ascribing them to our Lord. And whenever God is said to speak, we must listen for the well-known accents of a voice we love.

It was the voice of Jesus that said, "Let there be light"; and the new ethereal substance spread like a haze of glory through space. It was the hand of Jesus that made the expanse between cloud and sea, in which the birds fly (Ge 1:20). It was the bidding of Jesus that drove the turbulent waters from the land into the ocean-bed which He had scooped. It was the thought of Jesus to splinter the mountain peaks; to thrust the frozen glacier down into the valley by inches; to pour forth the rivers; and to shake down over the hills the falling foam of the cataract. It was Jesus that carpeted the earth with flowers, and devised the innumerable sorts of plants, and planted the noble forest-trees. It was Jesus that rolled the stars on their orbits, to tell forth the glory of God, and to keep time on Nature's dial. It was Jesus that made the fish to flash in the deep; the reptile to creep in the brake; the firefly to glance through the forest; the birds to sing in the woods; flocks to browse on the hills; and herds to traverse the prairies.

It was Jesus who created the human nature which, in after years, He was to assume. He made man in the image and after the likeness of what He was Himself to be in the fullness of time. What strange emotions must have filled his heart as He built up that first man from the red earth!

"WITHOUT HIM WAS NOT ANYTHING MADE THAT WAS MADE."

This is added to make exceptions impossible. The Greek is very emphatic, not one single thing. You must not except angels

because too great, nor emmets because too small; not worlds because too ponderous, nor dust-atoms because too insignificant; not electricity, nor light, nor heat, because too ethereal, nor the ichthyosaurus, nor the toad because too ungainly. The hand of inspiration writes the name of Jesus where artists put theirs, beneath all things in heaven and on earth, visible or invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers.

Not a flower

But shows some touch, in freckle, streak, or stain,

Of his unrivalled pencil.

"IN HIM WAS LIFE."

We must light up these words by his own: "As the Father hath life in Himself," the source and fountain of all being, "so hath He given to the Son" that is, in the subordinate position which He voluntarily assumed for the purposes of creation and redemption--"to have life in Himself." All life is of God in its original reservoir; and all life is in the Lord Jesus, as a cistern of supply, from which all demands for life of every sort are met.

All life--natural and physical, animal and intellectual, spiritual and religious--is in Him. The whole universe of living things was not simply brought into being by Christ; but it is kept in existence and sustained in living beauty by the constant communications of his fullness --as a vale is kept in fertile beauty, luxuriant with vegetation, by the spray of a perennial waterfall. As the Word, He creates; as the Life, He sustains. As the Word, He declares God; as the Life, He communicates his essence. "As the Word, He is God without us; as the Life, He is God within us."

Apart from Christ, you may exist; but you have no life in you. "He that hath not the Son of God, hath not life." You may have many attractive and amiable qualities, much that is correct in behaviour, and beautiful in appearance; but you have no life.

But if you are in Christ, opening all your being to Him, door behind door, back into the most sacred chambers of your being, so that He has free and unhindered entrance into your entire nature; then, as the Nile, descending through the channels cut by the Egyptian peasantry, bears life and fertility into their gardens and cornfields, so will He bring his own life, the life of God, "life indeed," into you, and though you were dead, yet shall you live (John 11:25).

(1) Say "No" to your Self-life.--

It is in proportion as we curtail the self-life that we increase the Christ-life. Michael Angelo was wont to say of the D that fell thick on the floor of his studio, "While the marble wastes, the image grows"; and as we chip away ourselves by daily watchfulness and self-denial, the life of Jesus becomes more manifest in our mortal body (2Co 4:10, 11). A rosebud may be grafted into a briar; but the briar must never be allowed to put forth its own shoots beneath it, or they will drain away its strength: therefore the gardener must ever mercilessly bud them off. After the same manner must we deal with every assertion of self. "I have been, and am, crucified with Christ, Christ liveth in me." (Gal 2:20-note)

(2) Yield to the Christ-life.--

This is the law of all natural forces; if you want them to help you, you must yield them obedience. In using them, you are less their master, and more their slave, than you suppose. They are willing to toil for you day and night; but on the one condition that you should study and obey the laws of their operation. And it is so with respect to that greatest of all forces, the life of the Son of God. It is throbbing in every believer's heart. And the difference between Christians consists in this, that some ignore its presence, or, at least, are very careless of its promptings, whilst others are ever on the alert to translate into instant obedience, the tiniest impressions. As you yield to the Spirit of life which is in Christ Jesus, you become more conscious of his blessed strivings within, they increase in number and power, and bear you upward, as when the ocean pours its tides up an estuary or river, and reverses the direction of its flow.

(3) Replenish waste by going again to the source.--

There is so much leakage in us that we speedily exhaust what we have received. The oxygen absorbed by the blood is soon exhausted by its contact with the waste of our tissues, and needs to be drawn back through the veins to be soaked again in the air of our lungs; so does the freshness of the Divine life within us need to be daily renewed, and we must go back to Him in whom it is ever brimming, that out of his fullness we may receive, and grace for grace. It is in the reading of his Word, in prayer, and in waiting upon his ordinances, especially in the Lord's Supper, that the inner life becomes thus replenished and "fulfilled with his grace and heavenly benediction."

"THE LIFE WAS THE LIGHT OF MEN."

All true life is luminous. The lowest forms of physical life are light; as when the keel of the vessel ploughs up the wave, and leaves long lines of phosphorescent glory in its wake. And who does not know of some community which has been lit up by the glow of some noble life! During his life in our mortal body, Jesus could not be hid; no bushel of obscurity sufficed to conceal Him. And now, when He enters into contact with any soul or life, that soul begins to glow, that life to shine.

We are like so many unlit candles, some of coarser and some of more refined material, clustered together in a darkened chamber, but not one of us able to dispel its gloom, or cope with its dense obscurity; but just so soon as we touch Jesus Christ, or are touched by Him, we begin to sparkle and shine. His Life is Light. "Arise, shine! for thy light is come." "Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light."

These then are our closing reflections:

(1) How great must He be, through whom this great universe was made, who was one with God the Father in its inception, and one in its execution! He could not have been less than divine, or the infinite God could not have found adequate expression through his means. Only the Infinite can be the channel for the Infinite.

(2) We may learn something of the beauty of his mind. The beauty sleeping in a seed reveals itself by the colours of the flower as they unfurl to the sun, and the fragrance that fills the air. The beauty in the unexplored heart of a friend reveals itself in the verses we suddenly light upon, or the books which bear his name. The beauty of the artist's mind is discovered in the pictures or statues which he has produced. And what revelations are made to us of the beauty of the conceptions of our Lord, as we and our eyes with telescope or microscope, and study the infinite above or the infinite beneath!

(3) We can trace some lingering remnants of the grandeur of our original nature, in that we ourselves, sinful and fallen though we be, are able to admire the works of his hands, and to repeat his "very good" of all that we behold of his power and skill. Devils seem devoid of this power; for they are pictured as haunting uninhabited and desolate places, roaming through desert places, and infesting the ruined heaps of the past.

(4) We can understand the miracles and parables better. In the one, our Lord was simply re-asserting his original power over nature; as when Ulysses returned after years of wandering, and bent with ease the bow which had defied the efforts of all who had essayed to use it in his absence. And in the other, He simply read out the meaning which He had hidden in vines, and seeds, and natural processes; for all things around us are made after the pattern and type of spiritual realities.

(5) We may be sure that He who made can and must redeem. It is impossible to suppose that He through whom all things were made could stand by and see them vitiated and spoiled by sin, without making a single effort to arrest the progress of the devastator, and to restore the universe to its pristine beauty and order. We are not then surprised to learn that the same paragraph which tells us that all things were created by Him, also tells us that it pleased the Father by Him to reconcile all things to Himself, whether they be things in earth or things in heaven (Col 1:16-note, Col 1:17, 18, 19, 20-note).

He who is the Alpha must also be the Omega; He who created by a word must redeem by his blood; He who originated must see that He is not robbed of the fruits of his toil; He who said, "Behold, I make," must also say, "Behold I make all things new."

3. THE WORD AS LIGHT

"That was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world."--John 1:9.

IT IS not for us to attempt to celebrate the Praise of Light. What a wonderful conception it was of the mind of God! How delicate the loom of that creative skill on which it is constructed day by day! And how complete an argument for the divine workmanship is afforded by the adaptation between the element of Light and the crystalline gate of the eye by which it enters man's soul! (Lk 11:34, 35, 36.)

Themes like these rather become such as our great epic bard, whose blindness made him more sensible to the value of that which he had lost, and whose lofty genius could alone find terms to describe its worth. Or, better still, Light might well be the subject of a sonnet by that angel minstrel who composed the majestic Psalm of Creation Which is perpetually sung before the throne (Re 4:11-note). But neither could proceed long with his task without rising from the material substance--for ethereal as light seems to be to our dull sense, it is still material--to that glorious Being who made it as a parable and emblem of His Divine nature. "God is Light, and in Him is no darkness at all" (1John 1:5).

But the glory of the Father's nature is of such insupportable splendour that it would be impossible for any creature that He has made to behold and enjoy it; and it is very consolatory to be told in the opening verses of the Epistle to the Hebrews that our Lord

Jesus is "the effulgence of his glory (He 1:3-note). The human eye could not bear the full splendour of the sun's heart or surface of golden cloud, but it can bear the far-travelled and diluted ray; so, though we could not behold the nature of God in its direct and original manifestation, we can behold his glory in the face of Jesus Christ (2Co 4:6). And for this reason we hail thankfully and adoringly the announcement that the Word is the Light.

I. THE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE LIGHT.

Light is pure.--

It is so pure that evil cannot stain or impurity defile it. It will pass through a foetid and poisonous atmosphere without contracting taint, or carrying a germ of poison with it, as it issues forth to pursue its ministries of mercy beyond. So pure was our blessed Lord. Evil fled abashed before Him. He gauged the power of temptation, not by yielding in a hair's breadth, but by resisting and overcoming it. When He died, after thirty three years' close contact with men, his spirit was as absolutely stainless as when He was born of a pure virgin. And the instant effect of his life within our hearts will be to kindle a purity as sweet and chaste and unearthly as his own.

Light is gentle.--

With each dawn its tides revisit us after having traversed the abyss with inconceivable speed; but its wavelets break so gently that they fail to shake the dewdrop from its blade of grass or the trembling petal from the overblown rose. Even the gossamer of the spider's web does not quiver as the sunbeams strike it. And how apt a symbol is here of that gentle goodness which made the shepherd-boy great, which leads the flock into the pastures of tender grass, and fans with anxious care the dull sparkle of smoking flax! And when His love is shed abroad in our hearts, it begets a corresponding gentleness in judgment, speech, and behaviour. All true Christians are gentle folk. "The wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, easy to be entreated, full of mercy" (Jas 3:17).

Light is all pervasive.--

It kindles a line of watch-fires on the pinnacles of an Alpine range; but it does not neglect the hill-slopes up which the plovers follow its last retreating beams. It gilds the golden roofs of the palace; but it glides through prison-bars to sparkle in the tear-drops of the repentant prodigal. It lights the good man to his work, and the bad man to his home after the unholy revels of the night. Nor is it otherwise with the loving-kindness of Christ, which misses none in its daily ministry, however poor, and sad, and lonely; which includes the evil and the good, the just and the unjust; which "lighteth every man that cometh into the world." And it is thus with those in whom his life repeats itself. They, too, are said to be "without partiality." Their lives resemble the sun and the rain (Mt. 5:45-note).

Light reveals.--

It revealed to Jacob the deception practised on him by Laban under the cover of darkness. It revealed to the host of Midian the meagre force before which it had fled panic-stricken, misled by the noise of the crashing pitchers and the flashing of three hundred lights. In darkness the traveller lies down to spend the night beneath the open sky, in terror lest he may stray to the brink of the ravine; but the morning, with rosy finger, reveals that he has been sleeping within a stone's cast of his home. So does Christ reveal. He is the light of all our seeing. He not only lights up our inner sight, but He casts a light on God, and providence, and truth, and the mysteries of redemption, which, apart from Him, notwithstanding all our intelligence, had been obscure and unknown. In his light we see light. Light is whatsoever doth make manifest. Let us lift up our souls unto Him who is light, so that we may be filled and saturated with his nature and being, and made to glow with it in this dark world; as I have seen a certain kind of diamond, which, after having been held up for some short period in sunlight, has continued to sparkle like a star when carried thence into a darkened chamber. "We all, with unveiled face beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are transformed (i.e., transfigured, it is the same Greek word as in Mt. 17:2) into the same image from glory to glory, even as from the Lord the Spirit" (2Co 3:18).

II. THE MINISTRY OF THE LIGHT.

The Word was the Light of unfallen man in Paradise.--In the glades of Eden two trees were planted; the one the tree of life, the other of the knowledge of good and evil. It is impossible not to see in these a lively representation of Him who is Life and Light, and who, from the first, must have been the organ and channel of Divine communication to mankind.

It was in the person of the Son that the ever-blessed God walked with our first parents in the cool of the day; conversed with them; uttered the memorable prohibition; sought them in their fall; and, with sad prevision of all that it must cost, foretold the ultimate triumph of the woman's Seed. Even then He rejoiced in the habitable part of the earth, and his delights were with the sons of men. Even then He was the Light of man's moral nature, teaching him all he knew, and prepared to lead him on to know the deep things which lay concealed as a landscape under a morning haze. Even then the Son had commenced his favourite ministry of

manifesting the Name of his Father (Mt. 11:27; Jn 17:26).

The Word was Light in the World amid the long dark ages which preceded the Incarnation.---"The Light shineth in darkness, and the darkness comprehended it not." There are two methods by which darkness is produced. The one by absence of light; the other by loss of sight. It is dark when the sun sets, and primaeval darkness resumes for a brief parenthesis its ancient sway; but it is also dark when the eye is blind. And the darkness mentioned here is not the first, but the second.

There has never been an age in which the Divine Light has not shone over our world. Not Gospel light, not the light of revelation, not the light as we have it; but still, Light. And whatever light existed was due to the presence and working of the Lord Jesus. He shone in the good He did; giving rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, and in the food and gladness with which He filled men's hearts, so that He left not Himself without witness (Acts 14:17). He shone in the clear testimony given since the creation, through the works of nature, to the everlasting power and divinity of God (Ro. 1:20-note). He shone in the intuitions of truth, which we call conscience, and which are his voice in the human breast, and are so evidently referred to here as the true light, lightening every man coming into the world (Ro 2:14, 15-note). He shone also in those great movements towards righteousness, which seem to have swept from time to time over the heathen world. Whatever of truth there was in any of these must have been due to Him. It was of the heathen that the Apostle spoke when he said : "That which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God manifested it unto them" (Ro 1:19-note).

But the light shone amid blind and darkened hearts, which could not comprehend it. Though men knew God, they glorified Him not as God, neither were thankful; and, as the result, "they became vain in their reasonings, and their senseless heart was darkened" (Ro 1:21-note). Since they would not believe, the god of this world was permitted to blind their eyes.

It is characteristic of this Gospel, and it well befits its theme, that so much space is given to the story of the man born blind (John 1:9.), for such is really the condition of the race; and it is significant that that story is prefaced by the announcement so constantly reiterated by the Lord, "I am the Light of the world" (John 9:5; see also Jn 8:12; 12:35, 36, 37, 38, 39, 40, 41, 42, 43, 44, 45, 46). A family born blind; a race stricken with blindness, as Saul was, and groping for someone to lead it by the hand; a vault, like that in which the dead are buried, around which the sunlight plays, whilst not one beam can enter--such is a picture of our race. "The Light shines in darkness."

The Word was the Light of the chosen people--

Throughout their history God sent them prophets, rising up early and sending them, that they might bear witness to the coming Light. They were not that Light, but they came to bear witness to it (John 1:8); just as the moon and planets bear witness to the sun while he is absent, though every moment is bringing him nearer to close their reign. Of these John the Baptist is here cited as the greatest and last.

We need not recapitulate their names--

the evangelical Isaiah; the plaintive Jeremiah; the seraphic Ezekiel; the abrupt Habakkuk; Amos the herdman; and Haggai the priest. They are not all mentioned here; but are summed up in the greatest of all, John the Baptist, of whom Christ Himself said : "Verily I say unto you, among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater." All these were lights; John was "a burning and shining lamp"; but their light was not their own, it was derived from Him to whom they all bore witness. They spake of Him. The testimony of Jesus was the spirit of prophecy. Overtopping other men in the grandeur of their personal character, and by the gift of the Spirit of Inspiration, they saw the day of Jesus, as mountain-peaks first catch sight of the rising sun; and they declared to the world of men below what glory was on the way.

What a new interest would come into our reading of the Old Testament Scriptures, if we always remembered that they testify of Jesus, and glisten with light caught by anticipation from his life; and if we sought to discover what the Master meant when, beginning at Moses and all the prophets, "He expounded unto them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself."

As every dewdrop on the morning meadow glistens with the sun-light, each of them reflecting the whole sun, so do the paragraphs of the prophets flash with the presence of Jesus. They are beautiful in his beauty; strong in his strength; true in his truth. The lips may be those of man, the voice that of a prophet; but through all, the Word of God speaks, and the true Light shines. In the pages of the prophets the quick ear of love detects the accents of Him who spake as never man spake. Indeed, we are told expressly that the Spirit of Christ was in the prophets announcing that Gospel which is now preached throughout the world (1Pe 1:11, 12-note).

Finally, the Light became incarnate.--

Too bright to be beheld, the Light of God curtailed Himself in human flesh, as the face of Moses beneath his veil, or the Shekinah beneath the folds of the tabernacle. Such is the direct force of the word translated dwelt in John 1:14. It might be better rendered tabernacled. But of this more afterwards.

And it is not possible to do more than take one brief glance at that bright world which awaits us, when, in the ages of eternity, our blessed Lord will be still the Everlasting Light. For it is written that the heavenly city will not need sun nor moon to shine in it, because the Lamb is the light thereof (Rev. 21:23-note). And so, from the first creation of man till the new creation; from the garden of innocence to the city of matured and tested holiness; from the origin of the race in its lonely and single representative to the untold myriads of his progeny who shall stand in the unsullied purity of robes washed white--always and everywhere, the Word of God is the Light of men, the true light, that is the archetypal light, of which all other lights are types and illustrations.

III. THE RECEPTION OF THE LIGHT.

(1) Before his Incarnation "He was in the world."

In every spring, in every sunbeam, in every God-breathed thought, in every providence; walking up and down the aisles of his own temple; brooding over the teeming myriads of mankind. In Him they lived and moved and had their being. He was not an absentee from his own creation. In Him all things consisted and were maintained (Acts 17:28; Col 1:17-note).

"And the world was made by Him." Mark this touching repetition of the world; we shall often meet with it again. It is used repeatedly, as when a bereaved parent, brooding over the sin or misfortune of some beloved child, repeats his name again and again. "O my son Absalom! my son, my son Absalom! O Absalom, my son, my son!" And see how the Holy Spirit emphasizes the fact that our Lord was the organ through whom creation was wrought.

"And the world knew Him not." As though a man might build a splendid mansion--with frescoes on its walls, fountains splashing in marble wells, luxuriant furniture, exquisitely-planned grounds--put it in trust for the sick or destitute, go away for years, and on returning be denied admittance, or watched as an intruder; until, touching some secret spring, he showed such knowledge and power as to compel recognition of his claims.

It was a sorrowful confession, extorted from our Lord, by all his experiences, both before and after his Incarnation--"the world hath not known Thee." And it is confirmed by the Holy Ghost when He says, in the wisdom of God, "the world by wisdom knew not God." Alas for the poor world, vaunting its science and its pride, but not knowing that glorious Being who was in it from the first!

(2) At his Incarnation.--"He came unto his own, and his own received Him not."

Throughout the Old Testament the Jews are spoken of as God's peculiar treasure; but here they are described as Christ's, because Christ is God. They were his by the calling of Abram; by the covenant of circumcision; by the passage of the Red Sea; by the desert discipline; by the education of history: but when He came to them, they cried, "We will not have this Man to reign over us."

"They received Him not." This is a note which we shall hear again; but in the meanwhile, the word seems carefully chosen to suggest that it was not a case of ignorance, but of willfulness. They knew, or might have known, who He was; but they deliberately refused to enquire into his credentials, and they shut the door resolutely in his face. This is why they are a nation of weary-footed wanderers, bronzed by the sun of every clime, having everywhere a recognition, but nowhere a home.

(3) Since the Incarnation.--

There has been no longer a dealing with nations, but with individuals. Many have received Him, rising above the general indifference around. Mary in the highlands of Nazareth; Elisabeth in the hill-country of Judaea; Simeon in the temple; Hannah the prophetess; and Zachariah the priest, are representatives of untold multitudes beside. And to as many as have thus received Him He has given the right to become the sons of God.

Stepping across the humble threshold of their hearts, He has suddenly thrown aside the garments of his great humility, which He had worn as a disguise and test. Then, rising in the full stature of his Divine Manhood, He has taken from out his skirts a parchment patent of sonship and heirship, and, handing it to the recipient and astonished spirit, has declared that from henceforth it may dare to reckon itself, without presumption, a child of God, and an inheritor of the Kingdom of Heaven.

And for lineage, it is revealed that all such may trace their descent past earthly parentage--"not of blood"; past natural instinct or desire --"not of the will of the flesh"; past human volition--"not of the will of man" : to the thought, and purpose, and grace of the Eternal Father, to whom be glory for ever and ever.

4. THE WORD MADE FLESH

"The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only-begotten of the Father), full of grace and truth."--John 1:14.

"THE WORD became flesh," thus the Revised Version better renders the original. But what a profound mystery these words cover!

Open the golden compasses of thought to measure, if it be possible, the distance between these two extremes, the Word, and flesh. The Word, the eternal and ever blessed Son of God; the fellow of Jehovah; able to utter God because Himself God; through whom all things were made. Flesh, a frail and transitory fabric woven from the dust, and destined to return to dust; limited to time and space; comprehending, as it does so evidently, not only the human body, but the entire human nature of which the flesh is the outward and visible embodiment. What verb shall unite extremes so infinitely removed? What link is there for these two?

The Word made flesh? It is true, but not enough.

The Word was wroth with flesh! So it might have been; but this is not the knot of union.

The Word pitied flesh! That had been marvellous, but also insufficient.

The Word clothed Himself with flesh! Even that were inadequate; for in that case He would only have borrowed a temporary disguise, which He might as easily have thrown off, and there had been no entire oneness.

No, THE WORD BECAME FLESH!

He was the same Divine Being as before. He kept his place in the bosom of the Father during his earthly life (John 3:13). Though confined to time and space, He kept his identity with Him whose Being is beyond either. There was no break or cessation in the essential Oneness of his personality, even when He stooped to be born of the pure virgin mother. But, as far as we can understand it, though in the essence of his Being He underwent no change, yet He voluntarily gave up the Divine mode of existence, that He might assume the human, and might bear it with Him through death and resurrection to invest it ultimately with the Divine glory that He had with the Father before the worlds were made (John 17:5).

Note, for a moment longer, that word flesh.--It seems to have been carefully selected, to show that the nature of the Lord Jesus sums up in itself all the different traits and attributes of our many-sided nature, sin excepted. If we had been told that the Word became a man, it would have seemed as if men only could have perfect sympathy with Him, or that his nature contained only the elements of manhood. But, since the word flesh is used, we feel that not one sex but both, not one age but all, not one race but the entire human family, may find its characteristic properties in his lovely glorious Being. No one form of human life has an exclusive right to Him. All forms of life find their counterpart in Him. All rays of colour blend their hues in the white light of his nature. All sides of love, like the double optics of a stereoscope, do but set forth that one infinite love which fills his heart.

"Christ gathers up in Himself the ideal virtues of man and woman, of boyhood and girlhood, of age and middle life," of European and Asiatic. All that is most noble and strong in men, all that is most graceful and tender in women, all that is most winsome and engaging in little children, all that is lovely in anyone, is to be found in our dear Lord in whom is neither Jew nor Greek, neither bond nor free, neither male nor female, since Christ is all and in all (Gal. 3:28; Col. 3:11-note).

This distinguishes Christianity from all religions beside. They are tribal, topical, limited in their range to the people among whom they have originated. Take Mohammedanism, for instance. It no doubt has some grains of precious truth, as, for instance, the unity of God; but it can never become a world-wide religion, because there are large portions of our common human nature which can find no response or representation in the character or teachings of Mohammed. To use the expression of another, "the mosaic of humanity is not totalized in him."

But Christ touches man at every point, man as man, through every grade and variety of manhood. There is no note in the great organ of our humanity, with the exception of the jarring discord of sin, which does not, when it is struck, awaken a sympathetic vibration in the mighty range and scope of the being of Christ.

This is the secret of that wonderful fascination which Jesus has for men. We feel that He can understand us. "He is touched with the feeling of our infirmities." "He is made in all things like unto his brethren." And as, we shall see in a moment, every man can find in Christ the complement of his nature, the supply of his deficiencies, the fullness for his need.

DWELT AMONG US.

Tabernacled is the better word. What is there here but an allusion to the wanderings of the desert, during which Jehovah dwelt in a tent or tabernacle, a pilgrim like the rest! Listen to his own words: "I have not dwelt in any house since the time that I brought up the children of Israel out of Egypt, even to this day; but have walked in a tent and in a tabernacle" (2Sa 7:6).

All that was a symbol of eternal realities. The Tabernacle was a material representation of the great truth of the Incarnation. It was made after the pattern of the nature of our Lord, which, as the sublime antitype, was eternally present to the mind and thought of God. Well then might Jesus speak in the same breath of the temple and of his body (Jn 2:21). And well may the Holy Ghost here use the same comparison.

We are the pilgrim host. Our bodies are but frail, shifting tabernacles, to be as easily dissolved as a tent is struck (2Co 5:1), and amidst us has been reared the true Tabernacle, which God has pitched and not man; and through which the Shekinah has shone, kindling the frail curtains of mortal flesh with dazzling radiance on its passage through their folds in waves of glowing glory.

There were times when the light that shone in the most holy place could not be confined there; but issued forth, and flooded the entire structure so that the multitudes without could discern its splendour. And so in the earthly life of our blessed Lord there were moments when the glory of the Only-Begotten of the Father broke through the limitations which He had assumed, and bathed his mortal body in transcendent light and beauty. Such a season was the Transfiguration, when even his garments became white as the light. Then were the Apostles "eye-witnesses of his majesty." Then did they behold his glory, "the glory as of the Only-Begotten of the Father."

WE BEHELD HIS GLORY.

It is as if the writer said, "There can be no mistake. The Lord was no mere appearance, or phantom, or vision of the imagination. My eyes are dimming now; but once they were bright and keen, and could not have been deceived. My head is white with the snows of many winters; but it often lay on his bosom. I can easily recall the accents of his voice; often have I felt the clasp of his hand. And if there is one day I remember above others, it is that in which He challenged us to behold his hands and his feet, and assure ourselves that it was not a spirit, but Himself. 'We have not followed cunningly devised fables'; and we could not have been mistaken as to the glory, which refused to be hid, but inevitably betrayed his divine power and Godhead."

FULL OF GRACE AND TRUTH.

Grace is mentioned three times in this paragraph; and it is the fitting climax to the golden series of revelations. The keynote of Nature was Order; of History, was Justice; of Conscience, was Righteousness; of Jewish revelation, as summed up in the name of Moses, was Law. But the keynote of the Incarnation was Grace--the unmerited love of God--which made itself of no reputation and took up the nature of man.

God's glory is his grace. When Moses desired to behold his glory, this was the reply wafted back into his soul : "I will make all my goodness pass before thee, and I will proclaim the name of the Lord before thee; and will be gracious."

But it is grace allied with truth.--He is a just God and a Saviour. There is a bridal between his righteousness and his mercy. Deep down in the solid granite of everlasting truth are laid the foundations of the Temple, of which the doors stand ever open to welcome the whosoever of mankind. Who would wish it otherwise? Who would care for a love which contravened the most elementary conceptions of justice in our hearts, and which might one day have to yield to disturbing scruple and compunction?

OF HIS FULLNESS HAVE ALL WE RECEIVED.

The all we cannot only mean the writer himself and his fellow apostles who had seen the Lord, but all the believers of that early age, to whom he wrote, scattered in different places, and removed by sixty years from the death of Christ; and not them alone, but all who have become one with Him by a living faith.

The Apostle sheds an exquisite light on these words when he says, "It pleased the Father that in Him should all fullness dwell. In Him dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily. And in Him ye are made full" (Col 1:19-note; Col 2:9, 10-note).

God longs for us to live full lives; and that we may, He has stored all his glorious resources into the nature of the Man Christ Jesus, so making them accessible and putting them within the reach of the weakest and most sinful of his children. Thus does the channel of the Nile bring water which is generated in the mountains of Central Africa, within reach of the Egyptian peasants, whose gardens are situated on the edge of the burning sands. Why then are we so content with poverty and emptiness? Let us receive out of his fullness. It is continually throbbing like an ocean against the walls of our hearts; it is for us to open and let it in, that it may cover the long unsightly reaches of ooze and sand.

Let us ask the Holy Spirit to teach us the blessed habit of taking what we need from hour to hour. The uplifted eye of faith will at any moment cause a tide of his fullness to enter, enriching, strengthening, and blessing the soul.

GRACE FOR GRACE.

Wave on wave. It is a mistake to rest on past or present experiences, eking them out with jealous care, lest they should run short. The best means of getting more grace is to use the grace we already have. It is the law of all life, especially of spiritual life: "To him that hath shall more be given, and he shall have abundantly."

We may not always perceive the flow of the golden oil of grace from its Divine reservoir. We may not be always sensible of the Divine communications. But if we claim them by a naked faith, and if we live up to the limits of what we have got, so as to become

spendthrifts of our spiritual revenues, there will be no stint in the blessed stores with which we shall be enriched for ever.

5. THE WORD DECLARING THE UNSEEN GOD

"No man hath seen God at any time; the only-begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, He hath declared Him."---John 1:18.

WITH THIS marvellous verse, the Evangelist brings to a close his sublime prologue. It is a befitting introduction to all that follows. Like some noble portal to a temple of transcendent size and beauty, it admits the reverent soul into this Divine Gospel, thrilling the heart, quickening the imagination, and preparing the thought for things which have not entered into the heart of man to conceive. Here is the seed-plot of the Gospel. Here is the standpoint from which the nature and ministry of the Lord are to be viewed. Here are struck those three keynotes --Life, Light, and Love--which, in different combinations, vibrate through the entire range of the writings of the Apostle John.

We believe in the Being of God. Vast as this universe is with depths and heights, and its immeasurable expanse, we believe that it is filled throughout with his mighty Spirit. He is everywhere. He knows everything. He can do all things. But the human heart pines to know what He is. Man seeks after God, groping in the dark, if haply he may feel after Him and find Him, and read the secret of his inner being. "What is God? What does He think and feel? What will He be to me?"

You send me to study Nature. But I find there nothing but his power and Godhead, his deeds, not his heart. And sometimes I am baffled by the apparent working of a malign power by which the creature is brought into subjection.

You send me to study Providence. But the march of God through the ages is so vast, and his footsteps so far apart, that they seem to be hidden in the sea, and his path in the dark waters; so that it is hard to understand the true trend and character of his dealings with the children of men.

You send me to decipher the Names of God. El-Shaddai, the God of Might, on whom difficulties which threaten to overwhelm us break harmlessly, as storms on the brow of the Matterhorn. Jehovah, the Unchangeable, who knows no shadow of turning; whose word is inviolable, and his covenant sure. Jehovah Sabaoth, the Lord of hosts, on whose bidding legions of bright spirits wait. But, after all, these names rather disclose the might and splendour of a sovereign, and do but increase my dread of Him as nay sins come back to memory.

Is there nothing more? May I not see Him? Is there no open door of vision where I may stand and satisfy the hunger of my soul; no spot in all the wilderness where I may shelter behind a rock and catch a glimpse of his majesty as He passes by, escorted by the serried ranks of angel armies? "Oh that I knew where I might find Him, that I might come even to his seat!"

But it may not be! NO MAN HATH SEEN GOD AT ANY TIME. Never yet. Not Moses; for he was hidden under the hand of God, and saw not his face. Not Elijah; for God was not in the earthquake or fire. Not the favoured three; for the cloud of glory dazzled them with its splendour. And even in the Apocalyptic vision, the rapt gaze of the seer beheld only the circumambient halo as of the jasper and sardonyx stone. And if we were to search the annals of any other nation, we should receive from every quarter the reply, addressed by a gray-haired Indian to Sir John Franklin during one of the expeditions of that renowned explorer: "I am an old man now, but I have never seen God."

And the explanation is given in those memorable words of a later Scripture: "He only hath immortality, dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto, whom no man hath seen, nor can see." "The King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God." If the vision of the glory of God as it was veiled by the human nature of our Lord was so awful, in its dimmed radiance of glory, that the beloved disciple fell at his feet as dead, what would not be the effect of its insufferable splendour on the nature of any created being! It is of God's mercy that there are as many dense curtains between Him and us as covered the tabernacle of old, and veiled the unearthly glory of the Light that shone there.

But, surely, there must be some satisfaction for this hunger of the soul to know God, and of that other hunger, more eager still and harder to bear, for love. Our hearts pine for God and for love. What will we not give to appease our yearning for love! This makes us seek so eagerly for human friendships; mourn so bitterly if they are withdrawn; feel so lonely if they come not within our reach. Oh that this great and invisible God were Love! But how can we know? Hush! the Word hath declared Him; hath told the secrets of his inner being; yea, more, hath let those inner secrets reveal themselves through his words and life.

I. THE QUALIFICATIONS OF THE WORD FOR DECLARING THE UNSEEN GOD.

(1) His Eternity.--

This was indicated by John the Baptist (John 1:15). Our Lord was his cousin, younger by six months, and John had already been for eighteen months before the people when Jesus came from Nazareth to be baptized. Thus, in a very true sense, "our Lord came after him." But when the greatest of woman-born saw him approaching, he who had never quailed before the face of man, whether royal or priestly, lowered his erect bearing to a deep humility, and cried: "This one must take precedence of me; it is his by right, for He was before me." And so speaking, he is the spokesman of the entire prophetic band, whom he represents.

Ask Isaiah, the evangelic; or Abraham, the ancestor of the Jewish race; or Noah, standing on the green-sward of a new world; or Adam, the first man; or the oldest star that first glimmered on the bosom of the night; or the most ancient elder who stands at the foot of the eternal throne; and from each the reply comes back dimmer and fainter from ever further distances, He was before me.

Jesus is the Alpha; the beginning; the first. He was before time, as we have seen. As Isaiah tells us, He is the Father of Eternity. And therefore He is well qualified to declare God.

(2) His Nature.--

"The only-begotten Son."

Many ancient manuscripts give this phrase as God only begotten. God has many sons, but only one Son. Angels are sons by their creation. Penitent sinners are sons by regeneration and adoption. But our Lord Jesus is Son in an altogether unique and unrivalled sense. He is Son by generation. "Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten Thee" (Ps 2:7-[note](#); Acts 13:33). And He is the only Son thus begotten.

It is a profound depth, for which our thought has no fathoming-line. But clearly this phrase indicates that our Lord Jesus shares in its fullness the very Nature of God. "He is a partaker of that incommunicable and imperishable essence which is sundered from all created life by an impassable chasm." He is the object of such love as an Abraham might have felt to his son, his only son, Isaac; but multiplied by the difference which must ever part the finite from the infinite. He used the expression of Himself, because it constituted in Jewish speech the very strongest method of claiming equality with God. It was well understood in that sense by the Jews, who instantly charged Him with blasphemy, and sought to avenge so daring an assumption of Deity (Jn 5:18).

Is it not significant that the humblest and meekest Being that ever trod on our world--the pattern of perfect holiness, whose perceptions as to the truth of his own being could not have been mistaken--dared not withdraw a single iota of his claim, but died, rather than evade its entire force? (John 19:7). He could not abate those claims, because He thought it not robbery to be equal with God. He was ever conscious of his Divine oneness with God (Jn 10:30). He knew whence He was (John 8:14). He lived in constant fellowship with God (Jn 10:15). And therefore He was well qualified to declare Him.

(3) His Intimacy with the Heart of God.--

"Which is in the bosom of the Father."

At a Jewish table the guests reclined on couches in such a way that one might easily lean back his head on another's breast. Of this privilege the beloved Apostle availed himself at the last opportunity which offered. The breast is near the heart. By this tender and sacred clue he helped himself, and has helped myriads in succeeding ages, to realize the deep love, the close intimacy, the perfect acquaintance, subsisting between the Word and the unseen God; so that He is well able to declare Him. "I know Him" (John 8:55). The preposition "in" might be rendered "into," as if there was an ever deeper and closer approximation.

(4) His Human Nature.--

"The Word was made flesh."

He was the Son of God; but throughout this Gospel He speaks of Himself repeatedly as the Son of Man. Not A Son of Man. Not the Son of A Man. But, as if He were the child, offspring, and representative of the entire human family--the Son of Man (Jn 3:14). Whilst, therefore, as the Son of God, He was able to know God perfectly, as the Son of Man He was able perfectly to express, unfold, and reveal Him; so that all might understand the deepest thought and being of the ever-blessed One.

II. THE MODE OF DECLARATION.

This is very wonderful. He spoke about God; corrected men's false conceptions; confirmed their vague and visionary hopes; and poured floods of light upon the mysteries of God's nature, which had been hidden from ages and generations.

His choicest revelations were made to the little inner group that gathered closest around Him. He gave them God's word. He manifested the name of God to the men who had been given Him out of the world. In tender, glowing words He made known to them all that was concealed from other eyes in that ever-blessed word, which the Jews dared not pronounce, Jehovah (Jn 17:6, 14, 26). All that language could convey was conveyed in the words of the Word.

But He did more; He so emptied Himself, He became as to his human nature so utterly dependent on his Invisible Companion that the life of God declared itself through his. He did nothing of Himself, but what He saw the Father do. He lived by the Father. He spoke only what his Father said to Him. He made known only what He heard from his Father. His words were not his, but the Father's that sent Him. The very works He did were disclaimed by Him. Remember his emphatic declaration: "The Father which dwelleth in Me, He doeth the works" (Jn 5:19; 6:57; 12:50; 14:10).

And thus, when Philip said to Him on one occasion, "Show us the Father," the demand elicited a sad and heart-weary reply, "Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known Me, Philip? He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father. Believest thou not that I am in the Father, and the Father in Me?"

This then was our Lord's way of declaring God. God wrought and spoke through his human life, that as men beheld its grace and truth, they were able to study as through a veil, or from a reflecting mirror, the very nature of the unseen God. In blessing little children; in welcoming the lost and desolate; in lessening human pain; in weeping true tears of sympathy; in bearing our griefs and carrying our sorrows; in dying for our sins; in seeking and restoring an erring disciple, as a gardener might lift up a flower bent downwards by the storm--in all these things, Jesus declared God, just letting the God that was in Him live through Him in each lovely act and tender word.

III. THE DECLARATION.

"The Father." From his first talk with the woman by the well to that other talk with women at the sepulchre, the one choice word with which he designated God was--Father (John 4:23; 20:17). In that name He came. Of that name He spoke. By that name He taught us to commence our daily prayer. Into that name we must be baptized. Within that precious name, as a rampart of sure defence, we are to live. He is the Father's gift. Heaven is the Father's home. True worshippers are to objects of the Father's search. Humble hearts are the chosen dwellings of the Father's love. All who belong to Him are dear to the Father's heart. God is his Father, and the Father of all those who have received Him, and in doing so have obtained the right to become sons of God. Other men, as Paul said, may be his offspring; but they are sons.

Not orphans or desolate are we! Never lonely again Never pining for a love which mocks our yearnings and evades our reach! Never roaming the universe to escape God, or dreading Him as unknown and unknowable! Never again shrinking from life for its solitudes, or from death for its mystery, or the hereafter for its terrors! But nestling ever in the strong, tender arms of a Father who pities us, and whose love is as much more sensitive than that of any earthly father--as his nature, thoughts, and ways are higher and better than ours; or as the fire is greater than the straw which is lit at its blaze (Ep 3:15-note).

What a blessed lot is this! Let us bathe our tried, fearful hearts in these rays of sunshine, with which Jesus has lit up life and death, earth and heaven; and, as the little child, in the dark tunnel or on the turbulent waves, forgets its alarm with its father's voice in its ear, its father's heart as pillow, its father's arms as encircling walls, so, amid the problems and perplexities of life and death, let us trust the Fatherhood of God, soft as a summer zephyr, deep as ocean depths, and be at peace.

6. THREE MEMORABLE DAYS

"I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness, Make straight the way of the Lord."--John 1:23.

"Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world." John 1:29.

"The two disciples heard him speak, and they followed Jesus." John 1:37.

BETHABARA (KJV translation of Bethany in NAS - Jn 1:28) lay beyond the Jordan from Jerusalem. The river there has a breadth of one hundred feet, and, except at the time of the winter floods, a depth of three to seven feet. It would, therefore, exactly suit the purposes of the great preacher, with his baptism of repentance. The almost tropical luxuriance of the valley is in striking contrast to the wilderness of sand and hill around.

The attention of the nation was as much arrested by his look as by his words. The spare form attenuated by fasting and austerity; the flashing eye, full of living energy; the unshorn Nazarite locks; the rough haircloth garment; the independence of much that other men hold needful; the thrilling herald voice, piercing like a two-edged sword to divide and discern soul and spirit. It is no matter for wonder, then, that the whole community was stirred; and that crowds poured forth to him from the neighbouring metropolis, as well as from the towns and villages clustering at the foot of the Lebanon.

This time of success and fame lasted for, perhaps, twelve or eighteen months. And then there happened the memorable events

described in this paragraph, and which transpired on three following days (Jn 1:29, 30, 31, 32, 33, 34, 35).

The greater number of those that flocked to hear the Baptist returned to their homes to discuss his words or to live out their new vows; but several of the flower of Israel attached themselves to Jesus permanently. Amongst them was the writer of this Gospel; and he was, without doubt, a witness of the events which he describes, the crisis of his own life, and the culminating point of the ministry of his earliest teacher.

I. THE FIRST DAY: SELF-ABNEGATION (Jn 1:19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28).

As the influence of John's preaching spread, it became impossible for the religious authorities to ignore it. The Sanhedrim especially, which is constantly referred to in this Gospel as the Jews, and which held itself entrusted with the religious interests of the nation, was compelled to take action. A deputation of Priests and Levites, principally derived from the Pharisee party (John 1:24), was therefore arranged to go to the Jordan, make inquiries, and report. Their inquiries were to be twofold: first, who he was; secondly, why he baptized. The former question interested the whole council; the latter, the Pharisees, who were the ritualists of their day. Imagine a vast circle. On the one side stands the herald of the new age, surrounded by the chivalry of a noble youth; on the other the grey-beards, representing an order of things old and ready to vanish away. How breathless was the silence which followed the first inquiry! "Who art thou? Art thou the Christ?" Thousands would have been glad to believe he was, and at a word would have unfurled the old standard of the Maccabees, and rallied to rid the land of the usurper. They had not, however, long to wait. Without a moment's vacillation he confessed, and denied not, but confessed: "I am not the Christ." "Who art thou, then? Malachi told us in his closing words, which have lit our path through the gloom of four hundred years, that the great prophet of Horeb should announce the Messianic day. Art thou Elijah?" Had they asked if he preceded the Messiah in the spirit and power of Elijah, he must have answered in the affirmative; but to the question as they put it, there was only one reply: "I am not." There was yet another suggestion. "Moses said that God would raise up a Prophet like unto himself. The Prophet art thou? The abruptness of the question," says Bishop Westcott, "is remarkable."

And again, amid the hushed suspense, the Baptist, with increasing brevity, answered "No."

Each response must have been followed by the murmur of many voices discussing it. And the ardent disciples of the great preacher would have felt some little disappointment and chagrin. It seemed as if he were deliberately spurning the nation's homage, and missing the greatest opportunity of his career.

The suppositions furnished by the generally received Messianic programme were now exhausted; and it only remained to put some general question which should force the Baptist to define his own position. "Then said they unto him, Who art thou? that we may give an answer to them that sent us. What sayest thou of thyself?"

Then came an utterance, sublime in its humility : "I am only a voice crying amid the uninhabited places of the wilderness, Prepare a way for the King."

And this humility was characteristic of John, though he was the greatest of woman-born. He knew that he was not the Light, but sent to bear witness of it; not the Sun, but the star that announces the dawn, and wanes in the growing light; not the Bridegroom, but the Bridegroom's friend; not the Shepherd, but the porter to open the door into the fold (Jn 3:27, 28, 29, 30; 10:3).

This humility is as rare as it is fascinating. We are all so apt to use our relationship to Christ as a means of enhancing our own importance, and attracting attention. Though we formally ascribe the supremacy to our Lord, we are elated when our name is on every lip, and our work in every thought, even though we should never have been heard of had it not been for Him. But there was nothing of this in John. He had the lowest possible conception of himself. Whilst all men mused in their hearts whether he were the Christ, he was ever heralding the Coming One. As they magnified the worth of his baptism, he declared that it was inferior to the Messiah's, as water is to fire in cleansing properties. When they trembled before his searching words, he spoke of the great Husbandman, who, fan in hand, was about thoroughly to purge his floor. The motto of his inner life seems to have been, "I must decrease." Repeatedly he avowed himself unfit even to loose the sandal-thong of Him whose herald he was.

Two things led him to this blessed condition.--In the first place, he realized that a man can receive nothing, except it be given him from heaven; and that therefore all popularity, gifts, and influence, are precious talents to be administered with the best possible stewardship (Jn 3:27). And in the second place, he had seen the Lord, as was clear from the answer he gave to the further inquiry of the deputation concerning his right to baptize.

"It is quite true," said he, in effect, "that I am not the Christ, nor Elijah, nor that Prophet; but listen! Though ye know it not, the Messiah is already come, and I have seen Him. He has stood on these banks. He has mingled with these crowds. He has descended into these waters. He is standing amongst you now. The new era has dawned. And therefore I administer baptism, the sign and initiation of that long-expected time."

What awe must have settled down on the people! How they must have looked at each other, wondering of whom he spake! Could it be that at last the day had come of which kings and prophets and righteous men had spoken, but died without seeing! And can we wonder at the humility of the speaker?

We need to cultivate more of this lovely spirit, content to stand in the shade and cast a light on the blessed Lord; to be voices witnessing for Him, whilst the speaker's form is draped in gloom. But probably nothing but close friendship with the Bridegroom of souls will ever bring this about. We must live nearer to Him, catching the glow of his love, baptized into its furnace heat. Oh, to love Him, to listen for his footfall with a lover's hushed spirit, to find our heaven only in his love, and in the thought that He is loved! Then we shall be timid of attracting a single thought to ourselves which might have found its way to Him. Then we shall be eager to hoard up all the love and devotion which men give us, that we may cast them as crowns at his feet. Then we shall be willing to be pedestals from which his beams shine the farther; as the slender, graceful curves of the lighthouse tower are unseen, whilst from its lantern the reflectors flash beams of light far out to sea. It is only to those thus humble as little children that God reveals the true character of his Son. Thus it was with John the Baptist.

II. THE SECOND DAY; CHRIST-DESIGNATION (John 1:29, 30, 31, 32, 33, 34).

"The next day John seeth Jesus coming to him." He was probably coming straight from the scene of the temptation. For forty days He had been alone, with no companionship save that of wild beasts, amid the sterile hills which stretch for miles on either side of the Dead Sea. Directly John saw Him, he knew Him. "This is He of whom I said, He that cometh after me is become before me, for He was before me." How did John know Him?

It is probable that, though cousins, they had not met till some six weeks before. John had spent his years in the seclusion of the deserts, Jesus in the highlands of Galilee. Therefore John said, "I knew Him not." Was it one of the providential arrangements of the only wise God, that the Christ and his forerunner never met until Jesus came to Jordan to be baptized of John, lest it should be said they were acting in collusion? Or even if John may have known Him as his cousin (i.e., after the flesh), yet he knew Him not as the Baptizer with the Holy Ghost, or the Son of God. But He who sent him to baptize with water had revealed to him a sacred sign by which he should recognize the Lord whom he announced. For that sign he had watched and waited patiently for a long time. Thousands passed through his hands; but as yet he had not beheld it, and the months seemed long, as they slowly passed away.

At last Jesus presented Himself at the Jordan. John would have hindered Him, indeed "was hindering Him". He, doubtless, knew of the events which had preceded His birth; had heard of "that Holy Thing" which had been born; was familiar with his blameless, holy life; and desired, therefore, to debar Him from a rite which implied confession of sin. He felt that he had himself more need to be baptized as a sinner, than to administer the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins to Him, who was, so far as observation went, sinless.

His objections were, however, silenced by the appeal to him to do his part in bringing in the everlasting righteousness, which Daniel identified with the mission of the Messiah. "Thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness."

It was probably the custom that the candidate for John's baptism, either audibly or silently, should confess his sins ere he submitted to the sacred rite. But in this case, having no sins of his own, our Lord would probably make a vicarious confession, confessing the sins of the nation, with which, there and then, as the sacrificed lamb He identified Himself. It was the Jewish custom to set apart four days before the lamb was to be sacrificed in the Passover; and thus there may have been an anticipation of this solemn act of our Lord's baptism in the river Jordan, the river of judgment.

As He emerged from its waters, the long-expected sign was given. The Spirit descended on Him from heaven like a dove. We cannot but recall the ancient record of the deluge, and the ark, and the dove which found no place for her rest. Here at last there was a home in which the dove-like Spirit might take up an abode. Here, at least, was one heart in which He, who had been long an exile, might settle. From the waste of waters He came to the sacred Ark.

Twice over we are told that "He abode on Him." No fitful enduement this! No transient baptism! No ephemeral experience! For us, too, as for Him, there is an abiding experience to be enjoyed--an experience of spiritual grace to break on us; not to wane, as in the case of some of the Old Testament heroes, but to increase in ever-growing power from year to year, until we are filled unto all the fullness of God.

We may not stay to note the energy with which the Spirit drove Him into the wilderness to be tempted. How marvellous that union of brooding gentleness and irresistible driving force! As if the blessed Spirit--who had waited with the patience of God for four thousand years, while, in one dispensation after another, man was continually overcome by the tempter--now that the Second Man was come, impelled Him to the victory which He foreknew. It was from this conflict that He returned on the second of these memorable days.

For six weary weeks the Baptist had eagerly scanned the faces of the crowds to discover that face. But hitherto in vain. At last he descried it--worn with conflict and fasting, but radiant with victory; and as he saw it, he announced the Christ: "This is He of whom I spake. The same is He which baptizeth with the Holy Ghost. Behold the Lamb of God, which beareth away the sin of the world."

Dean Milman suggests that when John, beholding Jesus as He came to him, said, "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world!" he alluded to flocks of lambs, intended for the forthcoming Passover, then passing from the rich pastures of Perea to Jerusalem by the ford near the scene of the Baptist's labours. But surely there is a deeper thought. John was clearly a deep student of Isaiah's prophecies. He cannot but have been quite familiar with that chapter which reads like a fifth Gospel, as it foretells how the servant of the Lord would be led as a lamb to the slaughter, an allusion which, of course, was based on the offering of the morning and evening lamb, and on the great Paschal Feast, which lay at the foundation of the national history.

We cannot stay to trace the complete analogy between the lambs and the Lamb, between the Passover and the supreme event of our Redemption. The points of likeness and contrast are deeply interesting. But we must let that witness of the Holy Ghost, through those human lips, have its due weight with us. Evidently the main aspect in which we are to view our Divine Lord, is in his sacrificial character. "The Lamb as it had been slain" must be beheld both here and hereafter, in this world and in all worlds. Not his character, however fair; not his words, however much light they cast on the mysteries of life and death; not his miracles, however strong their testimony to his Divine mission : but his appointment to bear the sin of the world, this is the primary aspect in which we are to behold Him.

Look into these words; the Gospel glistens in them, as the whole sun in a single dewdrop. They tell us that the sacrifice of the cross is the outcome of the thought and preparation of the infinite God. Jesus is the Lamb of God. They remind us that his propitiation for sin is not for ours only, but for the whole world. They give a clue to the cause of that mysterious anguish which at times overwhelmed Him. They describe the attitude which we should ever adopt of beholding Him--an attitude by which we are able to appropriate the nutriment of his flesh and blood, of which the paschal supper was a type. O blessed Lamb! what shall we say of Thee or to Thee? Words fail us. Thou wast made sin for us. Thou hast washed us from our sins in thy blood. Thou has put away sin by the sacrifice of Thyself. Thou art longing that every soul of man should know and rejoice in thy yearning love, thy glorious work. We praise, and adore, and worship Thee. Worthy is the Lamb that was slain!

But remember ever to unite the double burden of John's preaching. We need not only blood, but fire. It is much to be justified, but we need to be sanctified; much to know of the atoning death, but we need union with the Lamb in his resurrection life; much to have the blood sprinkled on the inner shrine, but we need that the Shekinah fire should burn there with quenchless power; much to have the baptism of water, but at the best that is negative, and we need something positive, searching, quickening, and God-like.

After all, John was right. Christ is the greater Baptizer. Beyond death and the grave He received the Spirit, that He might shed Himself forth. And now He stands among us whom He has redeemed, eager that, having washed us in his blood, He may complete what He has begun with that holy baptism of which John spake, and which is as much our privilege as the cleansing of the blood. Ah! brethren and sisters, we have need to be baptized of Him. Not the blood without the fire; not the fire apart from the blood. Not the Christ of Calvary only, but the Christ of the throne. Not pardon alone, but deliverance and salvation.

But let us remember that just as Jesus could not be manifested to Israel, until John had come baptizing in water (John 1:31); so it is still. John the Baptist must still do his work in the soul. And only when there has been repentance and confession of sin, which submission to John's baptism signified, is a sinner prepared to receive the Saviour. There is profound truth in that saying of McCheyne, "Only a broken-hearted sinner can receive a crucified Christ."

This suggests a very serious question to many who have no clear consciousness of Christ, no glad realization of his presence, no rejoicing with joy unspeakable and full of glory. May not this lack arise from their not having entered into the meaning of those preliminary conditions which were represented by the Baptist? Only as we know the sinfulness of sin, and the preciousness of the atoning blood of Christ, can we apprehend the power of his resurrection and rejoice in the hope of his coming and his kingdom. May God the Holy Spirit make us a people prepared for the Lord (Luke 1:17).

III. THE THIRD DAY; DISCIPLE-DESERTION (John 1:35, 36, 37).

On the third day John again looked wistfully and eagerly on Jesus as He walked. It was perhaps the last time those eyes were to behold Him. Again he designated Jesus as the Lamb of God; but there was a significance in his words which was instantly detected by the two disciples who stood beside him. He meant by those words to transfer their allegiance from him to his Lord. Henceforth they were to behold Him. So at least they seem to have understood him. "They followed Jesus."

As the preacher looked on their retreating forms, and realised that his work was done, and that henceforth all the crowds would follow them and ebb away, did he have a feeling of jealousy or regret? Evidently not. Or if there were a momentary sense of desolation and loneliness, it must have been instantly wiped out by a great sense of joy. To quote his own matchless words, "This

my joy therefore is fulfilled" (John 3:29).

It is sad to see the crowds depart; to note the drying of the brook whose waters were so sweet, the ebbing of the tide, the waning of the day, the falling of the leaves; but, where the soul has learnt to live in Jesus and for Him, it is not so hard to die to all these things, because the Lord has become its light and its salvation, the strength of its life and its everlasting joy.

7. THE SON OF MAN

"Verily, verily, I say unto you, hereafter ye shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man." John 1:51.

THIS CHAPTER abounds in striking names and titles for our Lord. They are a study in themselves. The Word; the Light; the Life of Men; the Only-begotten of the Father; the Christ; the Lamb of God; the Master; Son of God; and King of Israel. But the climax, with which this marvellous enumeration closes, is as wonderful as any: The Son of Man. It occurs eighty times in the Gospels, and is always applied by our Lord to Himself.

It is a glorious word, brimful of hope to every member of the family of mankind. To be Son of David, or Son of Abraham, would limit Him to a family or race; but to be Son of Man is equivalent to being the second Adam, and to have a relationship to every man. He was the epitome of humanity, sin excepted. All can find a response in his nature. The one Man, the Man of men, the supreme flower and glory of the human family, the Divine Man--such was the Son of Man, who as such stands now amid the supernal glory of his Father's throne (Acts 7:56).

The nature of our Lord Jesus is infinite in its extent. On the one hand it touches the heights of Godhead, on the other the depths of manhood. To use his own comparison (John 1:51), it resembles the mystic ladder, which in the dream of the wanderer, linked the far distant depths of sky--where, more brilliant than sun or moon, the light of the Shekinah shone--with the moorland, strewn with huge boulders of stone, on which he lay. At one end is the title, Son of God; at the other, Son of Man. And there is not one of the human family too frail or sinful to pass upward through the blessed Lord, his birth and death, his resurrection and ascension, from the lowest depths of degradation to the furthest heights of blessedness.

Here, probably for the first time, our Lord used this title of Himself. It is possible that its full meaning will only be disclosed long ages after we have entered the meridian light of eternity.

I. THE SON OF MAN ATTRACTING MEN.

He had just come victorious from his encounter with the devil. With an imperative of spiritual energy, which human lips had never addressed to the tempter before.

He had made the prince of this world slink behind Him. The next step was to lay the foundation of a society, through which He might carry forward his victories, opposing the kingdom of darkness with a kingdom of light, until that has been realized for the race which He realized on the mountain brow for Himself.

In the Apocalypse, John beheld the completed city, New Jerusalem, descending out of heaven; and was able to study its foundations, as he could not have done had it been earthborn. They seemed like the breastplate of the high priest in colour, though greatly multiplied in extent. There were the blue sapphire; the green emerald; the dark-red sardonyx; the brilliant topaz; the hyacinth; and the amethyst. And on each the name of an Apostle. In this chapter we find the Master-builder quarrying the stones, which seem common enough in their origin, but which, under his touch, shall glisten as slabs of jewels in the foundations of his Church. There is no forecasting what will be the outcome for the simplest believer who once is willing to let Christ have his way with him.

Christ attracted men largely from the lower ranks.--Macaulay tells the story of the famous cathedral window, constructed by the apprentice from materials which his master threw away, and which was so much more beautiful than his that he made away with his life in jealousy. And it was out of those orders of society which the great men of the time held in contempt that Jesus began to construct the society against which the gates of hell cannot prevail. "The common people heard Him gladly." "Then drew near the publicans and sinners for to hear Him." The true David recruited his army from the lapsed and lost, and chose his officers from the ranks of publicans, and fishermen, and artisans (1Sa 22:2).

Christ attracted men of very different make.--In the Apostolic band there were at least three groups, besides minor varieties. The Boanergic, comprising those of largest gift and strength of character--Peter and Andrew, James and John. The Reflective, who were apt at questioning and slow to believe--Philip and Thomas, Nathanael (or Bartholomew) and Matthew. The Practical, who superintended the business arrangements of catering for the rest. All these varieties were attracted to Jesus. He needed them, and they Him.

Christ attracted men to Himself.--

He published no manifesto; elaborated no system of doctrine; insisted on no theological examination. His person was his theology. He appealed to the craving of the human heart for love, and offered Himself to supply its needs, pledging Himself to lead his disciples from the "Come and see" of the first interview, to the vision of "those greater things," which include the Sermon on the Mount; the Sacrificial Death; the Resurrection and Ascension; the Descent of the Holy Ghost; and which extend also to those marvellous discoveries of Divine truth which fill the Epistles.

"Not the Man through the doctrine; but the doctrine through the Man." Not first the head and then the heart; but first the heart and then the head. The trust of the soul in One who gathers up our intellectual assent as He bears us forward into all the truth.

Men were attracted to Christ in very different ways.--

Some by preaching, as when the Baptist proclaimed Him on the Jordan bank to the disciples standing beside him. Though that sermon failed on the first occasion, on the second it was the means of converting his entire audience: "And they followed Jesus."

Others are brought through human relationships. God has bound us together in families, that these human relationships may become a very network of communicating wires, through which to send the sparks and impulses of his own love. The Bible does not say how many souls Andrew brought afterwards to Jesus; but it does say, he first found his own brother Simon. As boys they had played on the silver sands; as youths they had sailed the long night through in their father's yawl; as young men they had left their homes drawn by a common impulse to the Jordan. And when Andrew found Christ, he had an irresistible influence over Peter and won him. The little taper lit up the great light. Have we all used our home ties enough for the winning of souls to our Lord?

Others were brought by the Master's direct influence. "He findeth Philip, and saith unto him, Follow Me." I love to think of the thousands who owe their all to the direct touch of the love of Christ, falling on them as the light of an infinitely distant star through the tube of the telescope, photographing itself for ever on the prepared paper. Far from the sound of the church-going bell, amid the deep silence of the night watch in the bush or on the prairie, or tossing on the bosom of the deep, the Love of God still finds men.

Others are brought to Christ by the call of friendship, following on long courses of previous preparation. Often must Philip have left the shores of his native lake, and crossed the hills for Cana, where Nathanael dwelt; and the two would earnestly discuss the signs of the times, the desperate straits of their country, the preaching of the Baptist, the advent of the King. And for long periods the guileless Israelite would be lost in deep reverie as he sat beneath his favourite fig-tree, pondering the things which Moses in the Law, and the Prophets, did write, and engaged in earnest prayer. It was not difficult to win such an one, when Philip broke in on his retirement with the news of his discovery.

Jesus Christ is God's magnet put down amongst men to attract them to Himself.

II. THE SON OF MAN READING AND REVEALING MEN.

The Spirit had been given to Him without measure; and by his indwelling He knew what was in man, read men as we read books, and interpreted them to themselves that they might know themselves and Him.

He knew the yearning for love that dwelt in the heart of John, who clearly was one of the two who first followed Him with timid footsteps, longing to know some of the secrets of his inner life: "Master, where dwellest Thou?"

He knew how timid and weak was the soul that lay beneath the burly form and impetuous self-assertion of Andrew's brother, and He called him by a name which well became him--Simon Bar-Jona, the son of a timid dove.

He knew where to find Philip; the qualities which were worth finding in him; and the magnetic sentence which would bind him for ever to his side: "Follow Me."

He knew the guileless simplicity and purity with which Nathanael's soul was filled, untainted by the luxurious tastes with which the Romans were enervating his native land; and had seen the devout thoughts passing through his heart, before Philip called him. The tree has never grown which could conceal a soul from the eye of Jesus.

So He reads us still. He knows our down-sitting and our uprising, and understands our thoughts afar off. We lie before Him naked and opened, as the sacrificial victim before the priest. What though the sharp two-edged sword be in his hand, yet He is not a High-priest who cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities!

The Lord who dwells on high

Knows all, and loves us better than He knows.

III. THE SON OF MAN COMPLETING MEN.

Whatever we need most, we can find in Him. He is the all-sufficiency for all human need; the supply of every lack; the answer to every inquiry. Not his gifts, but Himself. Do we need purity? He does not simply give us purity, but He is in us "that Holy Thing." Do we want life? He does not merely impart it, but He is Himself our life. Do we require strength? The Lord is the strength of our life. As the rest of a circle is the complement of a segment, however small, so is Jesus the complement of all who believe.

Andrew is always ranked with Peter, James, and John; yet he was excluded, not arbitrarily, of course, from three memorable scenes, where the others witnessed the glory of their Lord. He reminds us of men of large gift, who yet fall short of the first rank by some defect in ardour, dash, enthusiasm. O ye Andrews of the Church, come to the Son of Man I that He may supply that missing link; breathe into you that lacking power; baptize you in his sacred fire: "so that ye come behind in no gift," waiting for his coming.

A very different man was Peter. Liking to gird himself; foremost to speak, to act, to deny; the born leader and spokesman of the rest; ardent in love, but sadly needing stability; essaying to walk the waves, and sinking; meeting with God-given answer the Master's challenge as to His nature, and within a few moments becoming an offence; flashing his sword in the moonbeams with terrible execution, and denying with oaths; plunging into the lake for the shore, where in the grey dawn the beloved form was standing, but presently silenced by "What is that to thee?" A strange mixture of strength and weakness, of ardour and inconstancy! Such are some of us. But when men like Peter come to the Son of Man, He completes them, and impregnates them with the strength of his own rock-like character; so that they become rock-men in their degree, as mossy nests are turned to stone beneath the drip of the limestone caves.

John's nature reminds us of the lakes, which, like his own Galilee, lie among the hills. On calm days the placid and pellucid waters mirror the curtains of the heavens, whether blue, or dark, or star-bespangled. But when the wild winds rush down on them, they are lashed into fury, and no boat can live. John was filled with an almost divine power of loving. This won the love of Jesus; led him to lean on that sacred breast; secured the trusteeship of the beloved mother; and enabled him to read the secrets of the Redeemer's character hidden from the rest. But, withal, he would sit on the right or left of the throne, and call for fire from heaven on offending villagers. Evidently, such a nature needed to be softened and toned, and taught how long-suffering, and forbearing, and pitiful, Divine love could be. Some of us also need to take our love to Jesus that it may be rid of earthly elements, and attuned to his own.

Nathanael made use of such fragmentary hints as were within his reach, and arrived at one of the sublimest of conclusions; but there were great gaps which needed to be filled up, like the blanks in the maps of Africa some twenty years ago. He saw something; but he was capable of seeing more, and he was told that he should see greater things than any that had come within his ken. He recognised in Jesus the Son of God, the King of Israel : but he had yet to learn that Jacob's ladder was a sign of blessing beyond the limits of his own children; that it was a type of Jesus the Son of God, who was not only King of Israel, the nation, but Son of Man, the race.

This is Christ's invariable mode. There is always more to follow. On every blessing which He puts into our hands He writes this inscription, "Thou shalt see greater things than these." If conversion, adoption; if adoption, heirship; if heirship, the throne; if grace, glory.

I know not how many maimed and incomplete hearts may be reached by these words. But it may be that hundreds who will read them have been wearily conscious of heart-ache and heart-need; waiting for someone who never comes; watching for a light which never breaks; bemoaning a lack which lies at the bottom of the heart, saying Give, give, but is never satisfied. "Blessed are ye that hunger; for ye shall be filled." But the filling can come from no human or earthly source. In Christ alone can we be replenished and satisfied. Take the infirmity, the deficiency, the yearning, the sense of maimedness, to the Son of Man, whose nature will flow into yours, as an ocean into some new dock or reservoir, adapting itself to the shape of the receptacle, and filling it throughout. "Ye are complete [R.V., made full] in Him."

8. THE FIRST MIRACLE

"This beginning of miracles did Jesus in Cana of Galilee, and manifested forth his glory; and his disciples believed on Him."--John 2:11.

THIS IS one of those precious memories which the mother of our Lord pondered in her heart, and doubtless often recited in that home to which this Evangelist led her from the cross. Several incidents in this Gospel may be traced to that fellowship in love and sorrow which, until her death, must have linked his mother and the disciple whom Jesus loved.

Is it not wonderful that this was our Lord's first miracle! Had we been asked to select the one which seemed most appropriate to stand as the frontispiece of his earthly ministry, we should have selected the raising of Lazarus, the calming of the storm, or the

feeding of the hungry crowds; but who would have chosen this? The inventive genius of man would have conceived an introductory scene which combined the chief features of the Transfiguration and of the giving of the law. How different is the simplicity of this incident!

In the previous chapter we are told that the Apostles beheld in Jesus Christ the glory of the Only-begotten of the Father; and when we ask one of those eye-witnesses to give a sample of its choicest manifestations, we are conducted to a little village in the highlands of Galilee, at the distance of an afternoon's walk from Nazareth, where the Master sits at a simple marriage feast amongst his friends, and makes wine out of water to supply their lack.

The miracles of this Gospel are signs (John 2:11), carefully selected as bearing upon the special characteristics of our Lord's person and work, which the Evangelist had set himself to portray. There was a distinct purpose in his performing this miracle as his first, and in its being set so prominently at the front of this narrative. We are told that He manifested forth his glory; and we reverently ask, How?

As we strive to answer that question, may we again sit at his table, and hear Him speak!

I. IT WAS HIS GLORY TO SHOW THAT TRUE RELIGION IS CONSISTENT WITH ORDINARY LIFE.

There is a common tendency to associate the highest type of religion with rigorous austerity of life, as if the human were too common to be divine. We fancy that he whose thoughts commune most deeply with the Eternal must be a stern, silent, and solitary man. This type of the religious life was exemplified in the old prophets, who dwelt in the solitudes of unfrequented deserts and hills, withdrawn from the common joys and engagements and ties of human existence; only emerging now and again to pour on the ears of awestruck crowds the burning words of the living God. Such had been John the Baptist. The deserts, his home; the locust and wild honey, his fare; the camel's cloth, his dress. And we might have expected to find the Son of God more rigorous still in his isolation; rearing Himself in severe and solitary grandeur, like the Jungfrau among the Alps.

But no. His early years are spent, not in a desert, but a home. He comes eating and drinking. He moves freely amongst men as one of themselves. He interweaves his life with the life of the home, the market-place, and the street. And in pursuance of this purpose He wrought his first miracle at a peasant's wedding.

Travelling by easy stages from the Jordan valley, He had reached Galilee. Finding his mother gone from Nazareth, He followed her over the hills to Cana, and for her sake was invited with his six new-made followers to the simple feast. It was a time of simple-hearted enjoyment. "The bridegroom crowned with flowers with which his mother had crowned him in the day of his espousals; the bride adorned with her jewels, sitting apart among the women." And though He was the Son of God, no cloud would veil his face or cast a restraining spell upon the guests.

This is the harder type.--

Easier, like the anchorite, to be separated from the world, than, like the Saviour, to be in it and not of it. Easier to decline an invitation to the house of the great than to go there and behave as the Son of God. Easier to refuse the things of sense than to use them without abuse. Easier to maintain a life of prayer far from the haunts of men, than to enter them maintaining constant fellowship with God in the unruffled depths of the soul. Nothing but the grace of the Holy Spirit can suffice for this. But this is sufficient if daily and believingly sought.

It is most honouring to God.--

The idea of the ascetic life is that every human feeling is a weakness, and every natural instinct a sin. No woman's caress, no childish voice, no tender love, none of the jewels or flowers of existence, may soften the rigours of that lot. But is not all this a libel on God's original creation? Has He made so great a mistake in creating us that we must thwart his ideal at every step, ere we can rise to our true manhood? Must we make ourselves other than men before we can be saints? Surely, to reason thus is to dishonour the wisdom and love of God in our original creation. And the Incarnation teaches us, as does this miracle, that God does not require an emasculated, but a fulfilled and purified humanity.

It is most useful to the world.--

Of what use is salt, except in contact with the corrupting carcass? The holiness which builds three tabernacles amid almost inaccessible rocks is of little help to the breaking hearts of devil-possessed men in the valley below. This, at least, is not our Saviour's message. "Go," says He, "to Jerusalem and Samaria, to the crowded cities and homes of men. Live amongst them, kindling them with the passion of your holiness. Suffer little children to come to you; publicans and sinners to draw near to you; crowds to follow you. All I ask is that whether ye eat or drink, or whatsoever ye do, ye should do all to the glory of God."

II. IT WAS HIS GLORY TO TEACH THE BEAUTY OF WAITING MEEKLY FOR GOD.

If ever there was a being who might have claimed to act on the prompting of his own spirit, it was surely our blessed Lord. But there never was one who lived in more absolute and entire dependence on the Father from the first. It comes out very clearly here.

His advent with his friends threatened the whole family with a disgrace which to the hospitable mind of the Jew would be irreparable. The wine ran short. Mary, who seems to have had considerable influence in the house, was made aware of the fact, and quickly guessed its cause. She could not endure the thought of inflicting, however unconsciously, so great a mortification on that kindly circle; and she suddenly conceived the hope of helping them through Him whom she had been wont to count her obedient son. Why should He not now assume the position which had been predicted from his birth? She could not have been deceived in all that had been told her; but it had been long and hard to wait. Yet surely the salutation of the Baptist and gathering of disciples were omens of an approaching change. Why should He not now blossom out into all that splendid glory with which Jewish anticipation invested the Messiah?

Her implied request must have appealed closely to the tender heart of Christ. All that she felt, He felt also. But He could not take his commands from her entreaty, or even from the warmth of his own emotions. He addressed her with a title consistent with the most perfect tenderness--indeed, He used it from his cross; but, waiving her suggestion with a common Aramaic expression, went on to announce that henceforth his eye would be, if possible, more closely fixed on the dial-plate of his Father's will, following the index-finger of his purpose, waiting till it should reach the hour, and the alarm for action should ring out. "Mine hour is not yet come."

It was so that He waited or acted throughout his life. The Gospels abound in references to his hour. Before it struck He was calm and peaceful, however pressing might be the apparent need for action. When it struck He acted instantly and decisively. Afterwards, He returned unto his rest. This is almost the hardest lesson in Christian living. We listen to the advice of friend; the threatening of foe; the pressure of circumstance. We think we must do something. Like King Saul, we force ourselves and offer the sacrifice. We pray hurriedly and throw ourselves into the breach, to discover, when too late, that we have run without being sent, and have defeated our own object by too much haste. "My soul, wait thou," might often be addressed to ourselves by ourselves. Not a moment behind God; but not a moment before Him. Ready for his hour to strike.

III. IT WAS HIS GLORY TO SHOW THE INWARDNESS OF TRUE RELIGION.

In the entrance-hall six stone waterpots were standing, "after the manner of the purifying of the Jews." Their superstitious dread of uncleanness made it necessary to have large supplies of water ever at hand. Without washing no one ate (Mark 7:3). The feet of each guest were washed on arrival (Luke 7:44). The washing of cups and jugs and bottles, says the Talmud, went on all day. And in this we have a symbol of that religion which consists in external rites, and is content if only these are maintained.

But the Master turned the water of outward ceremonial washing into wine for inward drinking. Surely there is deep symbolical meaning here, in illustration of which we recall two sentences, the one from the Old Testament, the other from the New. "Thy love is better than wine"; and "Whoso... drinketh my blood hath eternal life."

The most spiritual men in the old Jewish system were constantly emphasising the impotence of mere ritual to save and sanctify the soul. David felt it (Ps 51:16). Isaiah felt it (Is 1:13). Micah brings it out in clear relief (Micah 6:7). And here our Lord in this striking miracle seems to say, "The days of ceremonialism are past; the system which was sent to teach spiritual ideas by material substances and external rites is at an end; the tedious routine of outward ablutions, which has diverted men's attention from the inner life and the befitting garb of the soul, must be laid aside; I am come to teach men to love, to live by faith, to array themselves in robes washed white in my blood, and to rise through close participation in my death to a life of stainless purity and flawless beauty. Not water, but blood. Not washing, but drinking. Not the outward cleanliness, however fair and right; but the purity of the heart, the deliverance of the spirit from the polluting taint of evil." We are not surprised to learn next that He cleansed the Temple, and that He told Nicodemus that even he must be born again.

IV. IT WAS HIS GLORY TO AWAKEN US TO SEE THE DIVINE POWER IN THE ORDINARY PROCESSES OF NATURE.

The world is full of miracles; but they are so gradual and quiet that we are often blinded to their wonderfulness, till the flash of a sudden "sign" awakens us from our strange neglect.

It seems doubtful whether the Lord changed all the contents of the six stone jars, or only that which was drawn from them. The latter would more resemble his way, who gives us, not granaries of grain, but daily bread; and who deals out supplies of daily strength. But, even if He had turned all the water into wine, there would be no obstacle to our faith. The sin of drunkenness was not the sin of Palestine, as it is of London; and therefore did not require the special methods of prevention which the principles of his Gospel now lead us to adopt. And we must remember that the light wines of the Galilean vintage were very different to the brandied intoxicants with which we are too familiar.

But this is the interesting point : that we see compressed into a single flash the same power that works throughout the wine-lands every summer, transforming the dew and rain into the juices that redden the drooping clusters of the vines. The superficial man

looks at this miracle and cries, "Oh, wondrous day that beheld so great a deed!" The spiritual man looks at it, and, whilst not underrating its marvel, walks the world with a new reverence, because he knows that the same Divine power is throbbing all around. The power revealed in feeding the five thousand is required to cover the autumn fields with grain. The power needed to raise the dead shows how much is constantly demanded to keep us living. The power that quells the storm indicates how much is being exercised to maintain the stable equilibrium of the world.

This is the glory of the miracles of Jesus, that they have taught us to look on the world around us with new and opened eyes. We hear his voice in the summer wind, and amid the roar of the pitiless storm. We catch sight of his form awakening Nature from her wintry sleep by his touch, as once the daughter of Jairns from her couch. We stand spellbound before his power, as once they did who saw the wonderful works of his hands. He is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever. In Him all things consist. And as for this world, it teems with the miraculous:

And every common bush afire with God;

But only he who sees takes off his shoes.

V. IT WAS HIS GLORY TO SHOW THE ASCENDING SCALE OF GOD'S GIFTS.

The devil ever gives his best first; and when the appetite is somewhat palled, he puts on his worse, even to the worst. Gold at the crown, clay at the foot. Feasting with harlots, then famine with swine. Goshen with its pastures, followed by Egypt with its fetters. Ah! you who read this page, and are living a heartless, worldly life, make the most of it, it is the best you will ever have. After you have "well drunk," there will come coarser tastes, more depraved appetites. That which has satisfied will fail to satisfy; and in its stead will come forms of sin and temptation from which at the first you would have started back; crying, "Do you take me for a dog, that I should ever come to this!"

The Lord Jesus, on the other hand, is always giving something better. As the taste is being constantly refined, it is provided with more delicate and ravishing delights. That which you know of Him to-day is certainly better than that you tasted when first you sat down at his board. And so it will ever be. The angels, as his servants, have orders to bring in and set before the heirs of glory things which eye hath not seen, and man's heart has not conceived, but which are all prepared. The best of earth will be below the simplest fare of heaven. But what will heaven's best be! If wine in the peasant's house is so luscious, what will be the new wine in the Father's kingdom! What may we not expect from the vintages of the celestial hills! What will it be to sit at the marriage supper of the Lamb, not as guests, but as the Bride! Oh, hasten on, ye slow-moving days; be quick to depart, that we may taste that ravishment of bliss! But for ever and ever, as fresh revelations break on our glad souls, we shall look up to the Master of the feast and cry, "Thou has kept the best until now."

9. THE TEMPLE OF THE BODY

"He spake of the temple of his body"--John 2:21.

WHAT IS your body? An inn, thronged with busy traffic! A library, whose shelves are being gradually filled with the gathering stores of knowledge! A counting-house, dedicated to money-making, in which the amassing of wealth, or the maintenance of a competence is the one and all-important object! A playhouse, used for no higher purpose than pleasure-seeking! A sty, where swinish passions revel! "But He spake of the temple of his Body."

The conception was lull of beauty.--As the temple at Jerusalem, with its marble pavements, its pillared cloisters, its terraced courts, its rich adornment, was one of the fairest spectacles under the sun, so is the human body, designed and built by the Divine skill, worthy of its Creator. Consider those ivory pillars of bone; those alabaster walls of flesh; that many-toned organ of speech; those long corridors of brain and nerve, through which thought and emotion move; those storied archives where memory resides as the custodian of the records of the past: and tell me if you do not see an exquisite beauty and delicacy in the Lord's comparison, as "He spake of the temple of his Body."

The conception was as new as it was beautiful--Men had been wont to consider the body as the seat of evil, and the principal impediment to a saintly life. The Epicurean, like the "fleshy school" of the present day, gave himself up to obey its wildest impulses, as though a rider should throw the reins on the neck of a fiery steed. The Stoic sought to crush out and starve all natural instincts. And this has been the motive of asceticism in all ages. "I fear that I have ill-treated my brother the ass," said St. Francis of Assisi, a few hours before his death, as he looked with a kindly and half-humorous pity on his worn and emaciated body, prematurely exhausted by vigil, fasting and maceration.

At the most, men were prepared to give to God a part of their being, one room out of many to be his shrine, the organ of veneration, the attitude of worship, the hour of morning prayer. But the Son of Man said that the body was not in itself evil, and that it might be the shrine and home of God; the temple of Him who dwells in the high and holy place; whose Being fills the immensity of the universe, but who makes his dwelling-place with loving and contrite hearts. He said, moreover, that not one organ but every organ; not one attitude but all; not one engagement but each--should be pervaded by the thought of worship and dedication, cleansed in the blood of atonement, made fragrant with the perfume of incense, and included in priestly ministry and service.

And the conception became characteristic of Christianity.--Wherever the religion of Jesus went, men conceived a new idea of the sacredness of the body. Had He not worn it? Had He not carried it through death into the light of Easter, and the glory of the throne? Had He not spoken of it as a temple? The natural instincts could be neither common nor unclean. And it must be possible so to order and rule them as that they should be the willing servants of a holy will and consecrated purpose; not impeding the symmetrical beauty of the loftiest characters, but promoting it; and doing the will of God on earth as it is done in heaven.

From this source the Apostle derived the motive-power with which to nerve his converts in their conflict with the evils of their time. Writing to those at Corinth, one of the fairest in the sisterhood of fair cities with which Greece had adorned herself, the beauty of whose temples was only equalled by the voluptuousness and impurity of the worship which defiled the loveliest achievements of human art, he said emphatically, "Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you? If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are." (1Co 3:16, 17; 1Cor 6:19-note; 2Co 6:16)

Is it not significant that, in his first miracle, our Lord hastened to put honour on marriage at the wedding feast; and in his second public act, by a single word, reinstated the body in its rightful place as the help-meet and shrine of the consecrated soul, a thing which may be presented as a sacrifice unto God, holy, and acceptable, and reasonable (Ro 12:1-note)? Surely thus it became Him as Son of Man! "He spake of the temple of his Body."

I. THE TIME OF HIS SPEAKING.

It was the month of April. The land was green with pastures, and carpeted with myriads of flowers; the air vocal with the singing of birds, and laden with sweet scent; the thoroughfares thronged with pilgrims for the Passover, and with flocks for the Paschal Feast. Jerusalem was in her glory. And at such a time there seemed nothing extravagant in the panegyric of the patriot Psalmist, when he sang, "Beautiful for situation, the joy of the whole earth is Mount Zion, the city of the great King."

After the miracle at Cana, our Lord went down to Capernaum, with which most of his disciples were associated, and which thenceforward became his home. But He did not stay there "many days," as the time had come for Him to inaugurate his public ministry in the metropolis of his people, and at the very heart of their religious system.

II. THE PLACE OF HIS SPEAKING.

It was in the temple that He who was Himself the temple of God, spake of the body as a temple. And there was a special fitness in the coincidence. The temple had three divisions. The outer, which lay beneath the gaze of Israel; the inner, or Holy Place, where the white-robed priests went to and fro on their sacred ministries, awed by the sense of the nearness of God's manifested presence; and the innermost, or Most Holy Place, where the Shekinah, in Solomon's temple, shone between the bending forms of the cherubim.

Similarly tripartite is the nature of man. The body is its outer court. Next to that is the soul, the seat of consciousness, of thought and will, of emotion and imagination, a family of priests meant to minister to God, in robes of stainless purity, under the sense of his presence, their every movement music, their every act worship. But beyond this wondrous play of soul-life is the spirit; that in which man is most like God, and by which he is capable of becoming God-filled and God-possessed. For it is through the spirit that man's nature opens out into the world of spirit, of the infinite and eternal, and becomes the residence and shrine of God (1Th 5:23-note; He 4:12-note).

The nature of man is a trinity in unity. Three constituent portions make up each individual unit of the human family. All are not temples, but all may be. In many, alas, the most sacred chamber, with its marvellous capacities for God, is untenanted and unexplored, given over to darkness and neglect. At regeneration the Divine residence is inaugurated. The Holy Ghost is distinctly described as dwelling within the believer; not therefore always patent to our consciousness, because deeper than the sphere of motion, and in the spirit.

In our second birth marvellous possibilities present themselves. Almost immediately the soul, which is the seat of consciousness and choice, must elect whether it will permit itself to be most largely influenced by the body or the spirit. If it choose the former, saved though it be, it will inevitably become carnal, and unable to digest God's deep and secret teaching (1Co 3:2); but, if it choose the latter, it will become increasingly spiritual--the light of the Most Holy will stream with growing intensity into the holy place of

thought and feeling, until the whole tenor of the inner life is ennobled and purified. And thence the waves of blessed life will pass outwards to the body, till every member experiences the sacred influence, and begins to sparkle and glow; as when the light of the Shekinah broke through all curtaining restraints, and bathed in glory the entire fabric, standing in its earliest completeness. How perfectly this was illustrated in the Transfiguration, in which the body of the blessed Lord shone as the sun, and even his clothes were white as the light!

You will never be able to govern the body by the unaided power of the soul. Go deeper than the soul-life, however fervid its love or strenuous its resolves. Avail yourselves of the indwelling grace of the Holy Ghost. Let the parting veil be rent and withdrawn. And then, through the recipient soul, the life and light and love of God will stream forth to ennoble and irradiate the entire nature.

III. THE OCCASION OF HIS SPEAKING.

The hills of Moab were hardly purple with the dawn before the highways were crowded with throngs hurrying to the temple. But the tortuous streets were rendered almost impassable on account of the traffic and business caused by the vast concourse of people. There were sellers of trinkets and souvenirs; drovers of sheep and oxen with their charge; exchangers of the coins of all the world for the half-shekel, which must be paid by every Jew in temple currency. Had all this hubbub been confined to the adjacent streets, it had been sufficiently objectionable; but, for purposes of gain, it had been permitted to intrude into the lower temple court, that of the Gentiles. There, steaming with heat, and filling the sacred edifice with stench and filth, were penned whole flocks of sheep and herds of oxen; while drovers and pilgrims stood around in eager contention as to price. There, too, were men with cages of doves, the offerings of the poor. And beneath the shadow of the arcades, sat the money-changers, each behind his little table, covered with piles of coin. A very shambles, with the noise of an Eastern bazaar!

An apt symbol this, not only of the intrusion of the world-spirit into the Church, but of the harbouring of darker and sadder evils in the heart. Not alone amid the ruins of heathen fanes, but in the secrets of our hearts, do vultures build their filthy nests, and unclean creatures make their lair. Traffic in the forbidden; the forms of brute like passions; the rattle of unhallowed gain; the sweltering press of care and worry and rush--have crowded God out of our life. Mammon, Beelzebub, and Satan, have usurped his place. With us, as in Ezekiel's vision, the walls of the chambers of imagery are covered with delineations of obscene creatures, before which we offer incense. With us, as with Job, our increasing knowledge of God is gauged by a deeper abhorrence of ourselves: "Behold, I am vile."

But when the Lord Jesus enters, He cleanses.--Hastily knotting together a number of small cords, gathered from the litter at his feet, He advanced to the traffickers, and bade them begone. They looked at Him aghast. Who was He, that He should issue such a decree? But they quailed beneath the glance of that flashing eye and the commanding attitude of that spare form. Sin is weakness. The evil-doer cannot stand before the servant of God armed with no weapon save the force of a blameless character and the energy of a quenchless zeal. So, moved by a sudden and irresistible impulse, they slowly and sullenly began to retire, driving their charge before them, and uttering the deepest maledictions against an authority they dared neither dispute nor resist. The dove-sellers followed them, carrying their wicker cages; whilst the money-changers, after a scramble to collect what coins they might amid the ruthless overthrow of their tables, and the pouring forth of their stores, also hastened away. And the temple-court was clear.

Would you be rid of darkness? let in the light! Would you cleanse the stable? let in the river! Would you be delivered from impurity of heart and life? let in the Saviour! He will cleanse the temple. This action was deeply significant of what He will effect in us.

Many would meet Him at the threshold and make terms; but this will never do. You may wish Him to pass into the upper courts without noticing the lower. You may desire to know before admitting Him what He will consider wrong and contraband, and to enter upon a discussion of the whole matter. You may seek to bribe Him into inaction or acquiescence. But it may not be. Jesus must be Lord or nothing. He will have his way, or not enter. He will only take from us what we would be the first to renounce, did we know all that He knows. He will do it gently, if we will let Him, taking away the evil desire, giving us something better, extracting the cancer under chloroform. But He must be free to act.

Sometimes, when He cannot attain his end by gentleness, He uses a scourge of small cords. Very small things aid Him in his work of purification. A child's remark; a case in a newspaper; a sentence in talk, or from a book; a disappointment; an illness; a loss; a sarcastic rejoinder; any one of these may be a strand in the cord, or a cord in the scourge, employed to drive out evil. But better these than hornets (Ex 23:28).

There always will be remonstrance.--

The Pharisees challenged his right to act thus, and demanded a sign. His answer foreshadowed his violent death and the perfecting of his body through resurrection. These allusions were dark sayings even to his disciples, till after they were fulfilled. His words were angrily referred by the Jews to the fabric of the temple, and were never forgotten. At his trial, and at his cross, they

were repeatedly flung against Him as a taunt. But they have been abundantly verified. In destroying his body so far as death could do it, they in effect destroyed their temple, and struck the death-knell of their system, whilst his risen body is now seated on the right hand of the throne of God.

But over all remonstrances the zeal of Christ must triumph.--Ah, that blessed zeal, which ate up his life in three short years; which quailed not at its task, and shrank not back though the path it trod led straight to the cross; which set against the opposition and malice of men the vision of the accomplished purpose of God; and which conquered by the fire of its own pure passion! It cleansed the temple courts, not once only, but again. And will it do less for us? We too are the house of God; and the zeal that led our Saviour to cleanse the temple, because it was his Father's, will lead Him for the same reason to do as much for each of us.

Present your being to Him. It matters not how strong the evil, how deeply, or how long entrenched. Only open the portal of your life for His entrance in mingled love and power. He will not fail nor be discouraged till the work is done. Only trust Him. Only abandon yourself utterly to Him. Only work out what He works in. Amid failure, and the rising of your corruption, and untold opposition, his zeal will give and work, until the whole temple is rendered worthy of its Divine Occupant. "He is the Saviour of the Body."

10. A PSALM OF LIFE

"That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit."--John 3:6.

BORN! That is true of us all. We were not asked if we would be born, or of whom we would be born. But we awoke gradually from months of almost unconsciousness to find that we had been born. And birth was the gate into life. Through birth we entered the blessed kingdom of life.

But what life? There are many kingdoms of life, rising one above another. Into which of these were we born? The lowest is the kingdom of vegetable life, with fungus and palm, with lichen and oak, with hyssop and cedar. But our kingdom is higher than this. The next is the kingdom of animal life, separated by an impassable gulf from that beneath it, embracing all living things, from the microscopic organisms of deep-sea dredgings, or the invisible kingdoms that exist in drops of water, to the noblest forms of creature-life around the throne of God. But our kingdom was higher than this. The next is the kingdom of mind and soul: in which there are the faculty of reason; the rudiments of conscience; the sparkle of wit; the aurora-glory of the fancy; memory as librarian; poetry as minstrel; hope, as fresco-painter; love (to use Spenser's exquisite simile) as mother of all. Into this kingdom we were born, when in our first birth we passed into the light of life. If we were to adopt the phraseology of the New Testament, we might call this the kingdom of the flesh; for the flesh is employed in a very wide and special sense, and includes the whole drift of human life, even to its thoughts, "That which is born of the flesh is flesh" (Ro 8:6, 7-note).

But above this kingdom there is another--the kingdom of the spiritual and eternal. This is the supreme realm of life, the element and home of God. Our Lord alludes to it twice in the same breath as "the kingdom of God" (John 3:3, 4, 5). The kingdom into which we are born as babes is filled with bright and beautiful things; but it is shut off from this by a gulf as vast as that which severs the vegetable from the animal, or the animal from the moral nature of man. As easily might the water-lily become the spaniel that dived for it, or the spaniel the poet Cowper, who sings his exploit, as that which is born flesh become spirit. As there is no entrance into the kingdom of the flesh-life save by natural birth; so there is no entrance into the kingdom of the spirit-life, save by spiritual birth. Only that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. And this made our Lord so emphatic in repeating his announcement, "Ye must be born again."

Nicodemus was an admirable type of the world of men outside the kingdom of the spirit-life. He believed in God, having no sympathy with the cold infidelity of the Sadducees. He was, probably, like another of the same school, blameless in all the righteousness of the law, and irreproachable in moral character. He would be classed among the high-churchmen of his time. Courteously, thoughtful, inquisitive; willing to consider the claims of any new system; prepared to acknowledge Christ as a teacher; perplexed at spiritual truth; thinking that it was only needful to know in order to be--how apt a type is he of the children of the flesh!

See him as he muffles his face in his cloak, and steals along in the shadows cast by the full Passover moon, startled by his own footfall, fearful lest the watchman on his beat should recognize the magnate of the Jewish Sanhedrim in the suppliant for entrance at the door of the humble lodging of Jesus of Nazareth. A nervous, timid old man this, defending his friends on general principles; not liking to identify himself too publicly with a dead enthusiast; fonder of asking questions than of arguing points (John 3:4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9; 6:50, 51; 19:38, 39).

To such a man Christ said, "Ye must be born again." When Christ says must, it is time for us to wake up. He is so gentle, winsome, tender. He is always persuading, inviting, entreating. He so seldom uses the imperative mood. When, therefore, He speaks thus, it becomes us to inquire into the matter on which He insists so earnestly.

I. THE NATURE OF THIS LIFE.

It is "eternal life." This is the epithet perpetually applied to it throughout this chapter and the writings of the beloved Evangelist. Our Lord was the first so to describe it (John 3:15). The Holy Ghost repeats the words as though to stamp them on our minds (John 3:16-36; 4:14, 36; 6:54; 10:28; 12:25; 1Jn 5:13). Surely they cannot simply mean everlastingness, the duration of a never-ending existence. To have that alone were to gain nothing by our second birth. Nay, it would repeat the mistake of the old Greek myth, in which the goddess obtained for her lover immortal life, but forgot to claim also immortal youth, so that his years became an insupportable anguish. "Eternal" refers rather to the quality than the quantity of that life, and tells us that it is altogether removed from the conditions of space and time, and partakes of the blessed, timeless, glorious, spiritual, nature of God.

This life is never shadowed by dread of condemnation (John 3:18); it suns itself in the very light of God's face (John 3:20); it does the truth (John 3:21); it finds its true nest and home in the very heart of God (John 3:13).

II. THE SOURCE OF THIS LIFE, GOD.

"The Father hath life in Himself" (John 5:26). To use the sublime language of the Psalmist, "In Thee is the fountain of life." All life finds its source and origin in the nature of God; as the verdure of an oasis in the desert, or of a valley among the hills, is entirely due to the presence of a perennial fountain, which makes music through the years. Drain away the fountain, and the glade slowly fades into the desert. Blot out God, and the universe becomes as devoid of life as the moon.

From the firefly that flashes through the forest glade to the firstborn sons of light--the seraphs, who burn in ceaseless adoration before the throne--all the life that exists throughout the universe is due, if I may say so, to the spray of the Divine fountain of life. And this is specially true of spiritual life. Underived, independent of supply, original and ever-flowing, all spirit-life has its centre, home, and fountain-head in God.

III. THE STORAGE OF THIS LIFE.

If we may use the words, the Father stored his life in the human nature of our Lord. It dwelt in Him in its fullness, and it pleased the Father that it should be so. By a deliberate act, He gave to the Son to have life in Himself. And so at last that life was manifested, and men saw it, and bore witness of that eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifested to them (Col 2:9-note; John 5:26; 1Jn 1:2).

Of course we know that, as the second person of the ever-blessed Trinity, our Lord Jesus shared from before all worlds in the inherent life of God; but when He became the Son of Man, it was the Father's special bestowment that stored up in his human nature all the marvellous life of which we speak. It was as if our God yearned to make us partakers of his Divine nature; but, since the fountain-head was in his own being, and He knew that it would be inaccessible to us, therefore, in tender pity and condescension, He brought it within our reach in the human nature of our blessed Lord. Who need be afraid of Jesus? What little child may not venture to his arms? what penitent not kiss his feet? what trembling one not lose all terror in his presence? Thank God that He has put his best gift on so low a shelf that the weakest and smallest of his children may go and take it for themselves!

But it was not enough simply to store the life in Jesus. It had to be made accessible to us through his death, resurrection, and ascension. There is, therefore, special significance in the repeated references of this chapter to the Son of Man being lifted up on the cross (Jn 3:14, 16). That precious death was the full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice and satisfaction for the sin of the whole world, through which alone our sins can be pardoned, or we accounted worthy to stand in the presence of the holy God. But, at the same time, it made Him able to pass on to others that life which was in Himself; and, as He passed through death into resurrection, He became the author of eternal life to all who are united to Him by faith.

He was filled, that out of his fullness we might be filled. He died that we might live. Having overcome the sharpness of death, He opened the kingdom of heaven to all believers.

IV. THE COMMUNICATION OF THIS LIFE.

"Born of water and of the Spirit." All the world of Judaea was ringing with talk of John's baptism. At this very time he was baptizing in Aenon, because there was much water there. This then was our Lord's point, when He spoke of water. He clearly referred to the work of his Forerunner, and all that it meant of repentance and confession of sin. It was through John that men were to come to Himself. The porter must open the gate of the true fold. And the Lord Jesus would not for a moment allow this man, ruler though he were, to escape the wholesome ordeal of taking his place with every other sinner on the Jordan banks, and of thus becoming one of the people prepared for the coming of the Lord. In every soul there has to be a process analogous to that signified by the baptism of John. First the baptism of water, then the baptism of fire. First repentance, then remission of sins. Born of water and of the Spirit.

But at the most this is only part, and, though necessary, the less part, of the process. We need not only to turn from the old life, but to become possessed of the new. And this is the express function of the Holy Spirit. He is significantly called "the Spirit of life in

Christ Jesus" (Ro 8:2-note).

Faith is receptiveness. Those that believe are those that receive (John 1:12). Now the one spot in all the universe where faith is most easily and constantly called into operation is at the cross of Jesus. When the soul beholds that mystery of love, the Son of Man dying for its sins, uplifted on the cross, as the serpent on the pole, it yearns after Him with a passion which is God-begotten; it cannot refrain from faith; it opens towards Him the deepest recesses of its being; and that is the blessed moment of the impartation of the germ of the new life through the agency of the Holy Spirit. We may not say which precedes the other. They are simultaneous, as the simultaneous movement of the spokes of a wheel, or as a child's first cry with its first bath.

We may not have been conscious of this gracious overshadowing of the Holy Spirit, our hearts may have been too much occupied with love and penitence and ecstasy to think of aught else than of the death which atoned for sin and made us nigh to God; but in after years we must look back to that moment as the birthday of our eternal life, the hour when we passed from death unto life, and became alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord. Ah, august and glorious experience, never to be forgotten, never to be excelled in all that may transpire through untrodden ages, by which we were translated from death into life, from the power of darkness into the kingdom of God's dear Son!

V. THE LAWS OF THAT LIFE.

(John 3:1) Mystery.

As the wind (John 3:8). Whilst our Lord was speaking with this inquirer, "trusting Himself to him," as He did not to the majority of those who sought Him (John 2:24), the night-breeze may have passed over the city, stirring the vine-leaves as they drooped over the casement, and breathing through the open window. "Mark this wind," said our Lord; "how mysterious it is! You cannot see it, though you can feel it. You know not from what scenes it comes, or to what it hurries; its laws and ministries; why it is now a hurricane, and again a zephyr, now laden with the softness of the western sea, and again hot and feverish with the fire of the desert waste--of all this you are ignorant; and do you think that you will be more able to understand the nature or laws of that new life of which I speak?"

It must be always so. No kingdom can understand another kingdom. You must be born into life to know life. It is only by what you experience of life in yourself that you can judge of it in others. This is the contention which the Apostle enforces in words that burn with undimmed flame, though almost two thousand years have elapsed since they were first penned: "The things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God" (1Co 2:11, 12, 13, 14, 15 16).

Those, therefore, who hear us talk of the new birth may well marvel, as did Nicodemus; and it is almost useless to try to make these mysteries plain. As well ride on the wind, or follow the rush of the tide as it drives its foaming steeds up the estuary. But we who have it know it. We are conscious of its throb, its pulse, its ecstasy. We have traced its parentage to the nature of God. We hear its music as it rises up like a fountain towards eternity.

Thank God that, with all its mystery, the wind is all-pervasive. No lung so consumptive, no mine so deep, no orifice so small, no court so fetid, but it will enter to purify and heal. So, unless we seal ourselves hermetically against Him, the Divine Spirit will enter our natures, ridding them of the miasma which has gathered there, sowing the germs of life, and inspiring us with the very nature of God.

(John 3:2) Knowledge.

Though we do not come to the Lord Jesus primarily as Teacher, yet we cannot receive the new life without turning naturally to Him as its Teacher and Guide. Come to Him as Teacher, and you only marvel. Come to Him as Saviour, and, being saved, you learn, whilst sitting at his feet, not earthly things only, but heavenly (John 3:12).

It is passing wonderful how soon the new-born babe begins to understand things which baffle the wise and prudent. That which the intellect cannot receive is welcomed by the loving humble spirit. We receive the Spirit of God, and we come to know the things that are freely given to us of God. They are revealed by the Spirit, who searches the deep things of the Divine nature. Oh for more time to spend bending over these translucent but infinite depths, beneath the teaching of such a Master!

(John 3:3) Growth.

As the Baptist said of the Lord, using the third must of this chapter, "He must increase, I must decrease." This also is true of the Christ-life within. It is destined to grow and increase, from strength to strength, from grace to grace, till Christ is perfectly formed within us.

The growth of the Divine life is in exact proportion to the denial of the self-life. Bear about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus. Learn what it means to be crucified with Christ in daily acts of unselfish love and pity. Mortify the deeds of the body in the power of

the Eternal Spirit; and as the mould is broken, the true ideal will emerge in the perfect beauty of eternal life.