

Gospel of John-F.B.Meyer-3

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

F. B. Meyer

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1 THE PENITENT'S GOSPEL

"And Jesus said unto her, Neither do I condemn thee: go, and sin no more."--John 8:11.

THIS PASSAGE has been the subject of more eager debate than any other in the Gospels. It is omitted by many ancient MSS.; it is rejected by several of the Fathers; it bears in its fabric, in the original, traces of the tremendous storm through which it has passed. And yet there is no possibility of accounting for its existence, save on the supposition that the incident really took place. It reveals in our Saviour's character a wisdom so profound, a tenderness to sinners so delicate, a hatred of sin so intense, an insight into human hearts so searching, that it is impossible to suppose the mind of man could have conceived, or the hand of man invented, this most pathetic story.

Our Lord, who had spent the night on the Mount of Olives, re-crossed the Kedron, and entered the Temple, probably as one of the first worshippers. When a sufficient number had gathered, He withdrew to a seat against the Treasury wall; and sitting down, began to teach the expectant people.

He had not proceeded far in his discourse, when a band of scribes and Pharisees, adorned with their customary badges of sanctity, and bringing in their midst one who had been guilty of flagrant sin, was seen approaching across the Temple square. Making their way through the opening crowd, they placed their trembling, shrinking prisoner before Him, and intimated that they had come there early for his opinion.

Immorality at that time had reached such a pitch, that the laws of Moses had fallen into disuse, for the very reason that it is impossible to legislate in advance of public opinion. If He confirmed the Mosaic sentence, and insisted on its execution, they would accuse Him to the people as a relentless censor, desirous of reviving the penalties of primitive Judaism. If He refused to confirm it, they could put Him to death, as an assailant of God's law. It seemed impossible for Him to show that tender pity to sinners, which had marked his whole career, and which had placed a publican among his chosen friends, whilst at the same time He maintained the sanctity of the ancient code. It was a shameful plot; and some have thought that He stooped down to write on the ground to conceal the burning shame and holy indignation that leaped to his face.

The accusers stood there unabashed, holding the woman in their midst, and pressing their brutal question. They may have thought, indeed, that his very silence proved Him to be caught in an inextricable dilemma. But their triumph did not last long, for the Saviour raised Himself up, and spake a word which fell in their midst like a bolt from a clear sky: "Let him that is without sin among you cast the first stone at her." In a moment memory and conscience began to work, and at length the oldest man drew back in the crowd and vanished; then the next, and the next, one by one, till the last was gone. And Jesus was left alone with the woman; not alone in the sense of there being no one else present, but that there was no one save the woman left of all who had broken in on his blessed presence. "Woman," said He, turning on her those searching, tender eyes, "hath no man condemned thee?" She said unto Him, "No man, Lord." Then said Jesus, "Neither do I condemn thee; go, and sin no more." There are three ways of dealing with sin.

I. THE SINNER'S WAY OF TREATING SIN.

It is a terrible thing for a sinner to fall into the hands of his fellow sinners. Sin blinds them to their own faults, but sharpens them to

detect the faults of others. They cover themselves beneath the glistening robes of fair excuses, but ruthlessly strip them away from the offenders whom they drag into the light of day.

What a terrible spectacle is here! There is not one of these men who can plead his freedom from this very sin. As they drag this woman forward, each one remembers scenes in the past in which he played a leading part, and which strangely resemble this, with the single exception of not having been found out, or of having been condoned. But they have no burning shame in the presence of their sin; no pity for the sinner; no jealousy for the honour of God; no apparent desire to bring back the wanderer. To them the incident is simply a test-case, suggesting curious speculations, and affording a convenient net for entrapping the steps of Him whom they hated as darkness ever hates the day. They take a prurient pleasure in enumerating all the details--"in the very act." They hold the sinner up as a public spectacle--"setting her in the midst." They leave her to her fate.

There is little hope for the sinner at hands like these. They may send him to the judge and the officer; to the gaol or the reformatory. They may make the case one for light gossip and casuistical distinctions, studying it as an anatomical deformity. They may proudly gather up the robes of their virtuous horror as they sweep past. But there is no attempt to measure the anguish of the sin-stained heart, or the suffering which burns the heart of the Saviour. And the sinner is presently dropped as a curious specimen, when its special peculiarities have been duly examined and entered in a book. Ah, how many there are around us who had never come to what they are, had they not been driven to it by the way in which the religious people around them dealt with their first deviation from the paths of strict integrity! The first wandering steps were eagerly watched, not with the view of following and reclaiming the erring one, but for purposes of gossip or faultfinding. The special features of the sin were eagerly noted and discussed, whilst any palliating excuses were repressed. The sudden silence, the averted looks, the chilling, cutting manner, branded the sin as unpardonable; shut the door upon repentance; and plunged the sinner into deeper and more abundant transgression.

Would that each of us would lock the story of another's guilt in some deep chamber of the heart, until floods of tears had been shed and abundant, prayers offered; and, if mentioned ever to others, only told with the view of securing their co-operation in winning back the stray sheep to the green pastures and still waters of the fold. The world is full of sinners who are plunging into deeper sin, because they have been taught by their more religious fellows that there is no hope for such as they are. But they might be saved if they could only be freed from the religious world and left alone with Jesus.

II. THE LAW'S WAY OF TREATING SIN.

"Moses said that such an one should be stoned." It is with the moral, as with natural law--the least violation of its provisions is immediately and terribly avenged. It may be the first offence, or a very slight one, or one the commission of which was followed by floods of tears and an agony of remorse; but the law at once lifts its heavy arm to smite. Its executioner is commissioned to do his work; and the offender falls beneath its curse and penalty.

The function of the law is twofold. First it has to reveal our need of salvation; to hold up the looking-glass that we may go for soap; to convince us of our disease that we may hasten for the physician; to make us feel the badness of our best till we are shut up to Christ. Next, it has to smite, and scourge, and punish us, when we go aside from the narrow thread-like path of perfect goodness. The sinner, therefore, has no hope as he stands beneath Mount Sinai. He cannot climb those cliffs. Nay, he is smitten down by the pieces of the broken tables as they leap downwards from crag to crag. And Moses, with one blow of his fist, so Bunyan tells us, completes the work.

III. THE SAVIOUR'S WAY OF TREATING SIN.

In that bowed head and hidden face we get a slight indication of how much it costs Him. Sin cannot change his royal heart, or staunch his pity, or freeze the fountains of his compassion. Nay, it makes Him more careful to show his tender, pitying, pleading love. Was it not to Peter that He sent a special message from the open grave, on the resurrection morning? But though sin cannot alter Him, it makes Him suffer keenly, bitterly.

Have you not seen a woman dying by inches beneath the dissolute conduct of her son? She does not murmur, or chide, or blaze abroad his sins. No other hand than hers shall open that front door to him, as he comes home drunk night after night. And he never hears an upbraiding word from those gentle lips. But God alone can measure what those acts of sin are costing her. Her figure becomes more bent, her hair more white, her steps slower, her heart feebler. And shall woman's love suffer thus, and shall not the Saviour suffer as much more, as his love is more than hers? It is easy for us to come to Him for forgiveness, and to go our ways knowing that the words of complete absolution have been uttered; but do we think enough how much that sin, so soon confessed and put away, cost Him on the cross, costs Him now, and will cost Him, as the scar of it is borne by Him, "crucified afresh"?

The early Church was inclined to suppress this story, lest it might lead to sin. They did not realize how that averted face would make men bow their heads in shame, and beat upon their breasts; not for themselves alone, and not because of any thought of penalty, but because they had torn open his wounds, and woven again thorns for his brow. We go forth from that vision, by his

grace, to sin no more.

He sometimes seems to wait ere He utters the words of peace. But this is from no tardiness in his love. He wants those ruthless accusers to drop away, and the soul to have time to realize its sin in his holy presence. And when all hope beside is abandoned, and the hour of self-despair has struck; when He can detect signs of genuine repentance and wistful yearning; when the soul turns from its sin to Him in a very agony of desire--He says, "There is now no condemnation; neither do I condemn thee; go, and sin no more."

Oh, souls conscious of sin, do not wait to be brought into his holy presence! haste thither of your own free will. It is the only place in all the universe where you will be safe. Accusing voices are hushed there, and accusing forms are banished. Wait! He will condemn thy sin, but not thee. And his condemnation will be more in what He looks and is than in his words. Yea, thou wilt accuse thyself a thousand times more than He will. And finally, by right of the propitiation of the cross, He will forgive thee, and send thee forth to tell others the story of a love which fails not, nor is discouraged, in its conflict with human sin; but sets itself to substitute for the reign of sin the reign of grace through righteousness unto eternal life.

2 THE LIGHT OF LIFE

"I am the Light of the world: he that followeth Me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life."--John 8:12.

ON EITHER side of the temple court stood a huge golden candelabra. On the first and on each succeeding night of the week of the Feast of Tabernacles, these were lit, and became two immense globes of flame, pouring a brilliant flood of light over temple and city and the deep shadows of Olivet. And it was probably to these that our Lord alluded, when He spoke of Himself as the Light of the world.

Of course it would be quite legitimate to compare Him to the glorious orb of day, "of this great universe the eye and soul." What the sun is to the world of nature, Jesus is in the world of the invisible and spiritual. By Him all things consist in harmonious rhythm and order. From Him come all tides of life and beauty, which go to make us truly blessed. And his influence is exerted so noiselessly and quietly, that we can only compare it to those waves of transparent beauty, which break in their untainted loveliness on the world around; but no ear catches the music of their ripple or the throb of their tides. However, it will be better to turn away from this seductive comparison, in order to apprehend exactly what was in his heart when He said, "I am the Light of the world."

The Feast of Tabernacles commemorated the march of the pilgrim hosts through the desert, fed by manna for their food; supplied with water from the smitten rock for their thirst; guided by a pillar of cloud which had at its heart a torch of fire, though this was only apparent when night had veiled the glaring light of the sun, and it brooded tranquilly over the camp. Our Lord compared Himself to the first of these symbols in the sixth chapter; to the second in the seventh: and to the third in this. He declares that to all the pilgrim hosts of men, He is what the cloud with its heart of fire was to that race of desert wanderers.

Let us form a clear conception of that wondrous symbol, which God took not away from his people; the pillar of cloud, in which He went before them by day to lead them in the way, and the pillar of fire to give them light, to go by day and night (Ex 13:21; Num. 9:15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23).

I. AS TO ITS NATURE.

In appearance it was probably like one of those white cumulus clouds which sail majestically and slowly through the blue of a summer sky; like some aerial snow mountain, which is to the heavens what the iceberg is to the seas. We have seen such in the process of being manufactured from the mists that lie low at morning in Alpine valleys; and at night we have watched them as they came to anchor, or were stranded on some rocky peak. The one point of difference lay in the Shekinah fire that shone in the heart of the pillar of cloud. It was always there, though only visible when daylight was gone. But that fire in the heart of the cloud was prophetic of our Lord's Deity, enfolded and enshrined in his humanity. The Word was made flesh and tabernacled among men, who knew not what He was, save when on the night of the Transfiguration the glory that dwelt in Him became evident, bathing his form in waves of light and fire.

And it was his consciousness of this marvellous union of the Divine and human elements, though the Divine was so carefully and constantly veiled from ordinary eyes, that enabled our Lord to speak of Himself as the source of spiritual illumination to all the inhabitants of this million-peopled world. There was no egotism, or self-assumption in his claim. It was the literal truth. He bare record of Himself, because He could say nothing less; and He knew whence He came and whither He went.

And there is a consistency between his claims and his powers which has stopped the mouth of objectors and critics. Though this assertion has stood upon the page of Scripture for eighteen hundred years, in a world quick to detect conceit and expose its hollow

pretensions; yet no infidel has ever thought of assailing Him in this, which is the weakest and absurdest assertion ever made, if it be not the deepest, truest, and most sacred. Is there not a secret conviction in the heart of men that Jesus is well able to be this which He professes to be? Does not his universal influence--which is confined to no one type of man, but touches equally European and Asiatic, the shivering Esqui-maux, and the enervated South Sea Islander--prove that He is more than man, and that in his human nature there burns the fire of Deity? Nay, as the darkness has grown thicker over the world, and one light after another has died out, leaving Him shining in brilliant and glorious loneliness, has there not been abundant witness borne to the fire which is in the heart of the cloud?

"Yes, Jesus is God; in Him the fullness of the Godhead dwells bodily, and it is because of this that He is able to fight and guide the generations of mankind. The Life has ever been the Light of men. Not to believe that degrades the character of Christ below contempt, and leaves us face to face with an insoluble problem of how to account for his influence upon the world.

II. AS TO ITS FUNCTIONS.

The work of the fire-cloud was threefold --to lead, to shield, and to illumine.

It led.

The wilderness was a trackless waste to the hosts of Israel, and they were absolutely dependent on the cloud to show their path, and to find out a resting-place each night. On this point the Divine commands admitted of no doubt or question. When the cloud gathered itself up from the Tabernacle on which it brooded, the hosts must strike their tents and follow. However desirable the site of the camp, they must leave it. However difficult the desert paths, they must traverse them. However uninviting the spot where it stopped, they must halt there, and remain just so long as it tarried.

It might be a Marah, without palms, or wells, or shelter; but thither they must go, and there they must remain, though many days should elapse. It might be an Elim, with palms and wells of water, and everything that could render a residence desirable to the tired travellers; but they must be gone from it when the cloud started, though they had enjoyed it for but a brief spell. The cloud might be taken up by day or by night; but there was no choice, except to follow, or to wander in a trackless waste and die. For the manna fell and the water flowed, and the Divine protection was enjoyed, only where the cloud rested.

It shielded.

For, probably, when the people had pitched their tents on some exposed and scorched plain, it unfolded itself like a vast canopy, its base resting on the Tabernacle which stood in the midst of the camp, whilst its fleecy folds were spread out so as to screen the furthest extremities of the camp from the overpowering heat of the noontide sun.

It gave light.

Whilst the camp was hushed in deep slumber it watched over it like the eye of God. The people had no need of the sun by day, or of the moon by night; for the Lord had become their everlasting Light, and the days of their mourning might have been ended. There was a sense in which there was no night there, and they needed not candle or beacon-fire or torch; for the Lord God gave them light. Following the cloud, they had no need to abide in darkness; they already possessed the light of life.

All this the Lord Jesus is willing to be to us. In Him all the fullness dwells. In his many-sided nature God has made all grace to abound, that we, having all-sufficiency in all things, should be abundantly filled and satisfied out of Him. In days of doubt He will be our Guide; in days of trial our Covert and Shade; in days of darkness our Light. Nay more, as in the Pullman carriage the electric light comes on before the tunnel is entered and lingers after it is left, so special manifestations of the presence of Jesus will precede and follow times of special trial.

The peace and blessedness of our earthly pilgrimage will be in direct proportion as we appropriate Jesus in these various aspects of his character and work. Too many of us reserve Him for special times and purposes, as we keep our capital sacredly sealed from use in the bank; too few of us use Him as the spending money which we carry in our pockets and employ for every trifling need.

The needs and trials of life are probably intended by God to compel us to search for and discover the fullness of Jesus. It is probable that men would never have discovered the treasures of the natural world had it not been for the pressure of hunger and want; and it is certain that many of us had never known what the Lord Jesus can be to the human soul but for the failure of everything beside, which drove us to Him. Our Father sometimes gives us a glimpse of perfect bliss through some earthly channel; and then as suddenly closes it up, that we may be forced to take the freshly realized thirst to the only fountain which can really appease it.

When we first enter the kingdom, God gives us a whole Christ for the supply of our infinite requirements; but at first we catch only a glimpse of the lower shelves of his Divine sufficiency, and perhaps suppose that they are all. But as we help ourselves to these and

grow, the veil slowly uplifts, and we see other and higher shelves; and gradually our faith becomes stronger, and taller, and more able to help itself to the added wealth which it perceives to be its own in Christ Jesus.

There is no need for us then to spend our lives in this world, desolate and forlorn, lacking the blessedness and power which others so evidently possess, and bemoaning the barrenness of our lot; there, right before us, is Jesus in all his glorious fullness, waiting to take the shape of our need, as water of the pitcher that carries it. It is for us to claim Him, and make ours by faith any special side of his being which our circumstances specially demand as necessary. When we have learnt this lesson, we can look with equanimity on frost and thaw, on autumn and winter, on the dying Cherith and the blighted grain; our sources of supply lie far away in the nature of God, who is the perennial fountain, the unwaning day, the unending summer of love. The differences which obtain among Christian men are very largely due to the different ratio in which they have learnt to appropriate Christ--not by a rush of emotion, but by a naked faith. Rutherford said truly, "There are curtains to be drawn aside in Christ that we never saw, of new foldings of love in Him; I despair that ever I shall win to the far end of that love, there are so many pines in it."

III. AS TO THE CONDITIONS.

"He that followeth Me."

We must put Christ first. He must hold the position of Leader and Guide, Primate and King. Our one question must ever be, Which way is He taking? and we may generally ascertain this as we endeavour to answer one of the following questions :

(1) What is the law of Christ?

(2) What is the will of Christ?

(3) What would Christ do under these circumstances?

If we are not sure, we must wait till we are; but knowing, we must follow at all costs. Oh to keep just behind Him--not running on in front, or lagging behind! They say that lambs are taught to follow at the heels of a shepherd, by his dropping for them savoury morsels, such as they like; and we may well follow hard after Him whom we love, and who loves us, upheld by his right hand, because of the inestimable benefits which will accrue.

We cannot follow Jesus except we leave all--our own judgment and wisdom, our schemes and preferences, our predilections and fancies; but if we dare to forsake them, and step right away from the boat, we shall win an abundant compensation. Was Paul a loser, who suffered the loss of all things that he might win Christ?

Follow Jesus, Christian! keep Him always well before thee in every path of duty; in every sphere of service; in every attack, like Jonathan's, on the stronghold of the foe. Tread no track where his footprints do not appear. But when thou descriest them, plant in them thy feet, defying aught to separate thee from Him.

Shall not walk in darkness.

Not in the darkness of ignorance and error; not in the darkness of perplexity and confusion; not in the darkness of joylessness and depression. If any man dares to follow Christ so far as he knows, deliberately sacrificing his own will and way to his, it is simply marvellous how the mists will roll up, the night clouds disperse, and the perplexities which had beset the soul give way as brushwood before the tread of the sportsman. Endeavour to please Christ absolutely; and you will know almost immediately what He wants to be done, and how. You may not be able to see more than a step in advance; but dare to take that step, and you will see the next and the next. "If thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light."

But shall have the light of life.

Light is essential to life. Without light flowers would be colourless, even if they grew; animate and inanimate creation would fail; and the world would hasten back to primeval chaos, out of which light came. And equally necessary is it for the inner life to be sustained and nourished by communion with, and obedience to, the Lord Jesus. Apart from Him it is doomed to wither. In Him, through Him, and by Him alone, can it thrive. There is no doubt about this. Begin even now to believe in and follow Him, though it may involve death and the grave; yet, as surely as the soul follows Him, acting up to all its present convictions of duty, it will emerge into a clearness of vision and a vigour of life which shall vindicate its choice for ever. Let Jesus be your pillar of cloud and fire!

3 CHRIST'S ABSORPTION IN HIS FATHER

"When ye have lifted up the Son of Man, then shall ye know that I am He, and that I do nothing of Myself; but as my Father hath taught Me, I speak these things."--John 8:28.

A BELOVED friend of mine told me that on one occasion he met an aged lady, a member of the Society of Friends, who in earlier life had known Stephen Grellet; and he asked her if that notable evangelist were as good and noble as he is depicted in his biography. This was her reply: "We have many excellent Friends, but no Friend like Stephen Grellet; when he came into a room you felt that he brought God in with him."

And is not this the distinguishing characteristic of some men, who are perhaps notable for nothing else? Of others we say, How splendid! How noble! How good! Of these we say, How much there is of God in such an one! That was a great saying of the Apostle, "They magnified God in me." And we should not be content with anything less than the ideal set before us by our Lord: "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven."

And this was one of our Lord's most striking characteristics. His whole being was absorbed in acquiring glory for his Father, and in pleasing Him. At the age of twelve He started to do his Father's business. At the Jordan He submitted to baptism that He might fulfil his Father's plan. At the well of Sychar He confessed that to do his Father's will was both meat and drink. He called all those his kinsfolk who set themselves to do the will of his Father. The only witness He cared for was that which his Father bore to Him (John 5:32; 8:18). The name in which He came was the Father's (John 5:43). He professed that all the attraction wrought by Him upon men was due to his Father's agency (John 6:44). He was sent by the Father; He lived by the Father; He could do nothing of Himself; the life He had was given, so also was the authority with which He executed judgment (John 5:26, 27; John 6:57). He spoke only as the Father taught Him (John 8:28). He could dispense with all human help, because the Father never left Him alone (John 8:16-29). To honour Him, to please Him, to work his works, to live in his love, to perform his commandments, to show good works from Him, to glorify his name, to divert the attention of men to Him--such was the passion of his life (John 8:29, 49; 9:4; 10:17, 32; 12:49-50; 13:31). He ascribed both words and works to the indwelling of the Father (John 14:10). He avowed his intention to answer prayer that the Father might be glorified (John 14:13). And, as his hour approached when He must pass through death to glory, from the lowest of the one to the highest of the other, He only wished for glory that He might shed it back again on Him; "Father," said He, "glorify thy Son, that thy Son also may glorify Thee" (John 17:1). And in the ages yet to be we are told that He will deliver up the kingdom to God, even the Father, that God may be all in all (1Cor. 15:24).

There is much for us to learn here. We choose for ourselves aims and ends too subsidiary, too low. The conversion of the unsaved, the building up of the Church, the extension of the kingdom of God, are in themselves worthy and glorious objects; but they are not the very highest. They do not include it, though it includes them; as the planet does not include the sun, but the sun it. Aim at the planet, you miss the sun; aim at the sun, and you include the planet. There is a purpose, foreshadowed in the life of Jesus, the sweep of which is so wide, the march of which is so majestic, the depth of which is so infinite, as to comprehend all other motives, and to be worthy of an endeavour which, though we approach towards it through infinite ages, must yet for ever be far beyond us. And this is the intention, that God may be pleased and glorified and magnified in our bodies, whether by life or death (Phil. 1:20). There are three steps to this.

I. WE MUST MAKE OURSELVES OF NO REPUTATION.

This is what our Master did. He carefully avoided needless publicity, and never courted notice. Indeed, He chose obscurity for Himself, that men might be compelled to ascribe the marvellous results, which were patent to all eyes, to God.

The leper was to tell no man (Matt. 8:4); the blind men were straitly charged not to make Him known (John 9:30); whilst the paralysed man was yet feeling the raptures of new-found health, Jesus stole away from the eyes of the crowd (John 5:13); when the people were about to make Him king, He escaped from them, and went away alone (John 6:15). His brethren were well aware of this trait in his character, and urged Him to abandon it; but, in spite of all, He went to the feast, not openly but as it were on secret (John 7:10). It was enough for Him to fall into the ground and die, and to accept any title of opprobrium with which his foes chose to brand Him (Matt. 10:25; Luke 7:34).

It is a hard lesson; but one well worth our while to set ourselves to acquire. Let us, too, choose rather the shady than the sunny side of the street. Let us be content to be accounted nothing. Let us lay our reputation down beneath his feet, as of old they put their garments beneath the hoofs of the ass that bore Him. So only shall we cease to intercept from Christ any ray or glory which may accrue to Him to garner for his Father.

The last thing that some of us are willing to forgo is our reputation. Not that it is wrong to be anxious to maintain our good name, so far as our doing so may adorn his holy Gospel; but that we are often anxious to maintain it as an end in itself, and altogether apart from the glory of Jesus, and the claims of entire surrender. It is not easy to look up into the face of the Master, and say, "If it be thy dear will, I am willing that my name should be cast out by men as evil, and my reputation trampled in the dust, whilst I am counted as the off-scouring of all things, despised and rejected of men."

But it is men like these who, during their life, were accounted vile and worthless--men like Joseph Alleine, and John Bunyan, and Charles Simeon--who shine now with undimmed beauty in the firmament; whilst their persecutors' names have been written in the

dust, or are preserved only in connection with the sufferings they inflicted on God's saints.

II. WE MUST TAKE UPON OURSELVES THE FORM OF THE SERVANT.

The household slave who does the most menial service, and washes the feet of the guests, was the chosen type to which our Lord conformed Himself, in the upper chamber on the eve preceding his death. Some are proud of their humility, and will stoop to lowly offices to excite admiration. But there was nothing affected here. The men that beheld the lowly deed felt that it was the natural outcome of the holy heart that throbbed in his breast.

It is probable that none of us can stoop to such a depth as He did. He that has ascended far above all heavens to reign could descend to lower depths than all beside to serve. Still it well becomes us to imitate this lowly office; a task, however, which will be impossible for us to fulfil unless we are so utterly absorbed in our devotion to God in Christ, that we come to feel no office too mean, no service too servile, no ministry too trifling, to render to Him or his. Service like this is a fruit which can only be plucked from trees which have been planted and are tended by the Spirit of God.

III. WE MUST BECOME OBEDIENT UNTO DEATH.

Until our eyes are anointed with the eye-salve of the Holy Spirit, we have no conception of how full the New Testament is of exhortations to death. On three different occasions our Lord insisted on the necessity of a man losing his life. Frequently He spoke of his cross as inevitable for Himself and his disciples; whilst the Apostle of the Gentiles discovered that he must be ever bearing about in his body the dying of Jesus, and filling up that which was behind-hand of the sufferings of the Lord.

It is a searching question for most of us, Have you died? Of course we died the death of our Lord, so far as the purpose and intention of God are concerned; but have we, by the eternal Spirit, ever really and practically drunk of his cup, and been baptized with his baptism, had fellowship in his sufferings, and been made conformable unto his death? Death is no child's-play. It is impossible not to be aware of it, when it has become the experience of the soul. There has to be a moment of choice, when one elects to take the hand of Jesus and step down with Him into the valley of the shadow; trembling as to the flesh, but glad in the inmost heart. We then yield to death our intellectual conceptions of truth, our warm and vivid emotions, our keen ambitions, our members that are upon the earth; not making ourselves die, but accepting death wrought in us by the life of the risen Jesus through the grace of the Holy Spirit; not vaunting our death, but dying, which is a very different matter; not inventing methods of self-crucifixion, but accepting the stem discipline of his cross in all the providential circumstances of our lot and according to his inworking. So only can we bring glory to God.

What a touching picture is that of the intercourse between John Tauler, the celebrated preacher, and the humble peasant, Nicolas, of Basle. "Know," said the simple-hearted friend of God, "that you must needs walk in the path of which our Lord spake to the young man;--you must take up your cross and follow our Lord Jesus Christ in utter sincerity, humility, and patience; you shall set before you the sufferings of our Lord, and contemplate your own life in the mirror of his. And so doing, without doubt, the eternal Prince will look down on you with the eye of his good pleasure, and will not leave his work undone in you, but will purge you still further as gold in the fire." Is it to be wondered at that after two years of lonely converse with God in this attitude, Tauler entered on a ministry which has never ceased in bringing glory to God?

It is a great mystery, of which each one of us may say, "Not as though I had already attained, or were already perfect, but I follow after to apprehend." May the Lord Jesus Himself teach us what this means, that, as we have been together in his death, we may be together in his resurrection, not only hereafter, but now; that having ventured, not merely to look into his grave, but to tarry there for three days and nights, we may pass through it and upwards into a life which shall be absorbed in no other aim than the glory of God, and shall bring forth abundant fruit to Him whose way is through the sea, and his path in the great waters, and whose footsteps are not known--save by those who dare to follow Him through the dark night, led by his hand down the shelving beach, whilst the waters stand on either side, and thunderstorms roll heavily above. This is the shortest passage to abundant life, and to glory to God in the highest.

4 MADE FREE BY THE SON OF GOD

"If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed: and ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free ... If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed." John 8:31, 32, 36.

A NEW invention has lately been announced to the world, by which it is possible to cleanse the smoke of our great cities, impregnated not only with carbon, but with other deleterious products. In the shaft of some great chimney, or in connection with the funnel of a railway engine, a cistern half full of water is arranged, into which the smoke is drawn through a narrow valve. The smoke being sucked into the cistern is compelled to pass through the water, and leaves there not only the black soot, but also the other

products which are destructive of life. And after the process is complete, it escapes back into the chimney purified, colourless, odourless, and, to a large extent, innocuous. But the water is almost fetid, charged as it is with ink and poison. One may dare to imagine how glad the smoke itself must be to be freed from that which made it harmful to men, to pursue its glad way now into the upper air. And here surely is an illustration of how sinful souls, laden with crime and with the deleterious products of evil, may be made free by the Son of God, "loosed from their sins" (as the R.V. puts it, Re 1:5) "in his blood."

We have nothing to do with the origin of sin. That lies far beyond our ken. Nor can we tell the ultimate out-working of sin in those ages which are yet to be; except that we know that its course will be determined by the limits raised by the infinite justice, the infinite holiness, and the infinite love of God. But we find ourselves and all mankind tainted, blighted, and condemned; accosted, from our very cradle, with tears and pain and the sweat of toil, and the certainty of death, which has passed upon all men, for that all men have sinned. Oh, blessed announcement that God our Father has taken our part against our sin, and, in the person of his Son, has come to make us free, that we may be free indeed!

Sin blinds us.

Never did men utter a more barefaced lie than when those Jews exclaimed: "We were never in bondage to any man." Never in bondage! Had they forgotten the long and bitter bondage of Egypt, commemorated annually by the Passover? Or the dreary captivity of seventy years in Babylon, the memory of which lingered in the most plaintive odes of the Psalter? From that very Temple court, could they not see the Roman standard floating over the ancient palace of their kings, and hear the bugle-call regulating the movements of the victorious Roman soldiery, whilst Roman officials met them at every turn? They could not have forgotten all this; but, in their pride, they wilfully shut their eyes to distasteful truths. Thus prejudice blinds men. "The eyes of their understanding are darkened." And just as some virulent disease attacks the eyes, by which alone its ravages upon the human frame can be discerned, so does sin rob us of the power of self-knowledge. The ungodly man needs to be convinced of sin. The young Christian permits many things which, in the growing light of coming years, he will be the first to condemn. They who pursue most eagerly the upward path, in proportion as they behold the glory and the purity of God, abhor themselves and repent. But for all that, it is certain that we should never have formed a true conception of what sin is, with our enfeebled vision, and in the murky atmosphere of this world, had it not been that God had shown us its true character in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. That agony and bloody sweat, that cross and passion, constitute the only true gauge of the enormity and exceeding sinfulness of sin.

Sin enslaves us.

Here is one of the profoundest sentences ever spoken by our Lord. Men had not been wont to count themselves slaves. They were in the habit of thinking that they could take up sin, or lay it down, at their will--that they were its masters. Christ, however, has shown us that it is not so; but that, every time we yield to sin, we increase its hold over us, and become more deeply enthralled under its tyrannous power, so that we are compelled to obey its behests, however cruel or malignant they may be. "He that committeth sin is the servant of sin."

But sin is not a necessary part of our being.

This comes out so clearly in these remarkable words: "The servant bideth not in the house for ever." This, of course, is an obvious truth. There is a great difference between the relation of your child and your servant. Your child is an integral part of the household. He has been born in it, has become part of it, and, however far he travels, he is one with it by a tie which defies the gnawing tooth of time and the growing distance of long journeying. It is different with a servant. Especially under the provisions of the Levitical law, it was impossible for the servant to abide in the house for ever. His slavery was limited in its duration to the amount of debt he had to work off. The trumpet of jubilee, ringing out its welcome notes, bade the slave go free. In like manner, however long a man may have served sin, and however tightly he may be held in its meshes, yet it has no necessary right over him; he need not abide for ever, he is but a slave in a tyrant's household, who, at any moment, may go free.

How this truth must thrill the hearts of some who read these words! For long they have been sighing under bondage, compared with which that of Egypt was light; they have bitterly cried, "Who shall deliver us?" they have thought that there was no release from their bitter bondage; and their tyrant-master has whispered, mockingly, "Mine for ever!" But let these know that sin is an intruder, a usurper, an alien influence other than God meant in his original making of men. The prison walls need not be perpetual. The chain need not be eternal. The house may be left for ever, never to be darkened again by those who have groaned within its precincts.

Freedom from the tyranny of sin must come to us from without.

The slave cannot free himself. He cannot scale those walls, pick those locks, elude that tyrant. Resolutions cannot do it, nor prayers, nor tears. Every struggle only tightens the noose. The slave must be made free. Hence the mission of the Son of God. Himself free, He came into our prison-house, put his Divine Person under the conditions induced by our sins--as Theseus sailed in the ship with the yearly tribute of Athenian youth to the dread monster of Crete whom he was destined to destroy--and, by death,

destroyed him that had the power of death, that is the devil; and delivered them who, through fear of death, have all their life-time been subject to bondage." He shared our lot, though He did not share our sinfulness. Mighty as God, yet weak and frail as man; able, on the one hand, to wield and use infinite power, and, on the other, to suit Himself to the weakest and feeblest of his brethren. "Such a High Priest became us."

I. THE NATURE OF THIS FREEDOM.

It is not freedom to do as we like. That were not liberty, but licence. To be emancipated from all rule and law would be impossible in a well-ordered world, and incompatible with the well-being of others. But the Son sets us free from the unnatural conditions into which sin has brought us; so that we, "being delivered from the fear of our enemies, may serve Him without fear in holiness and righteousness all the days of our life."

We are free from the imputation of Adam's sin; because He as the second Adam has borne it away. Free from the lash of a broken law; because He has paid the penalty, and met its last demands. Free from the weary gnawing of remorse; because He has forgiven us our sins, and blotted them out of his book, and cast them behind his back for ever. Free from the hopeless endeavour to weave for ourselves a robe of stainless righteousness; because He gives us his own, as Jonathan exchanged his apparel with David. Free from the bondage of corruption; the chains of which have been struck off by his mighty hand. Free from the very love of sin; so that its least breath or approach is instantly shrivelled before those habits of woven fibre with which He arrays the soul. Free from the dread of death; because He has died. Free from the whole entail of evil; except those limitations and failures which must ever weaken the strength of our purpose and lower the temperature of our motives, compelling us to apply constantly for daily cleansing and acceptance through his flawless righteousness.

We do not want more than this. The swallow, with a broken wing, seeks not liberty to feed on carrion; but only to be able to mount again into the sunny air, which is its native sphere. And the soul which is athirst for God and holiness asks for no other freedom than that it should be able to pursue its divine quest unhindered by the restraints of sin.

II. THE MEANS OF THIS FREEDOM.

"The truth shall make you free."

The only-begotten Son speaks of truth because He was full of truth, and truth came by Him (John 1:14, 15, 16, 17). And from this point the light of the world repeats often this great word--truth (John 8:32, 40, 44, 45, 46; 14:6; 16:13; 17:19; 18:37). When He speaks of truth, He means the inner heart of things; their essence and kernel; that panorama of the unseen and eternal which lay before his eye in open vision.

Truth always frees.

The villager will no longer dread to pass some haunted spot when he learns the truth that there are no such things as lays or goblins. The slave girl will no longer remain in the house of her cruel oppressor when she discovers that he has no longer any claim on her; because some time ago the Act of Emancipation was passed, though the tidings of it have been carefully concealed. The timid soul will no longer question whether it may not have committed the unpardonable sin, when it is taught that that very fear is proof positive that it has never entered this awful state. The dying will be free from all fear, if they realize the truth that the wasp has lost its sting, the viper its fangs, the roaring lion its teeth; and that the iron gate will open of its own accord.

So, when the Lord Jesus reveals the truth of all that He has done for us--that in Him we are accepted and triumphant; that through Him we sit in heavenly places with Satan beneath our feet; that from Him we are equipped with power to tread on serpents, and scorpions, and all the power of the enemy--then the whole aspect of our life alters; we see our position, and we take it; we learn our power, and we use it; we realize that we are free, and as such we begin to act. Knowing that we have the right to walk the waves, we step out on them in faith, and find them as rock beneath our tread. Acting by faith in the truth revealed to us, we discover that it is so. Things are not what they seem. We think we are powerless and helpless, and destined to be overcome; but, if we would venture out on Christ's revealed truth, and dare to live by faith, and not by sight, we should discover that all the world is new, and life is ours, with victory and sweetness and power, such as we have never known or dreamt of.

III. THE RESULTS OF THIS FREEDOM.

It is the prerogative of the son; and if you rise up from the chains of the prison to the freedom and joy of the Father's house, if you are no longer entangled with the yoke of bondage, it is a sign that you, too, are no longer a servant, but a son; that, by a blessed act of regeneration, you have passed from the one to the other, from death to life. The moment of soul-emancipation witnesses to the moment of regeneration and adoption. And this again attests that there shall be no going out any more for ever.

"The Son abideth ever in the house"; and the sons abide there for ever, too. Hagar and Ishmael are cast out; but Isaac, the divinely-given Laughter, stays in the home for ever. The child can never cease to be a child. It may sin, and grow cold, and cause pangs of

anguish to hearts which would give themselves to save it, but it is a child still, to be brought back through seas of sorrow and fires of pain; it may wander into the far country and waste its years, but it will certainly return home, never to go forth again.

There are many among us who are really in a much better position than they have any conception of. They are children; but they do not know it. They shall never perish; but they fail to realize it. They are in the place of power; but their eyes are blinded and they cannot see it. Oh that such would cry for the heavenly eyesalve, that the eyes of their heart may be enlightened to know "the hope of his calling, the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints, and the exceeding greatness of his power toward them that believe"! And, as the Spirit of Truth shall lead them into all the truth, their freedom shall increase with their knowledge in ever-widening circles.

5 THE GLORY OF CHRIST

"I seek not mine own glory."--John 8:50.

FROM THIS point our Lord begins to speak of his glory, as if He already beheld its dawn, and pressed on with renewed speed to where it beckoned; although the dark ravine of death lay between Him and its sunny heights. The Shekinah that shone within the veil of his human nature was, for the most part, veiled from all besides; except that once on the mount of transfiguration it burst from all restraint, and saturated his human nature with torrents of light, so that the favoured three beheld his glory. But, speaking generally, it was veiled, and the curtains kept close drawn. The time was coming when He should be glorified; and it shall be our task reverently to consider the elements of which that glory was composed, and the conditions on which it rested.

In the olden time, Moses asked to see God's glory. It is difficult to understand what he precisely meant by his request. Did he think that some superb procession would sweep down the mountain rent, in which the loftiest archangels should take a part, as the body-guard of Deity? Did he expect some supernatural unfolding of the mysteries of light, or of fire, or of the spirit-world? We cannot tell. But we eagerly notice that, in his reply, God spake of none of these things; but said, "I will make all my goodness pass before thee." The prayer to behold God's glory was answered by a catalogue of the moral qualities of the Divine nature. In other words, we may accept the affirmation of Professor Drummond, and say that glory means character, or, rather, the revelation of character; so that those who behold it, keen in their appreciation of moral worth, may be constrained to admire and imitate. The glory of Jesus is, surely, the manifested beauty of his matchless character.

In speaking or thinking of the glory of the Lord Jesus, we must ever distinguish, as He did, between the glory which He had with the Father before the worlds were made, and that glory which accrued to Him as the result of his human life. The former was his by inherited right, as the fellow of Jehovah; the other was given to Him by his Father as the reward and guerdon for his obedience to death. The one is incommunicable, the unique property of his Deity; the other is transferable, for He graciously speaks of passing it on to his own. For the first, see John 17:5; for the second, see John 17:1, 22, 24.

That He might the better preserve his incognito (if we may reverently so term it), and become a merciful and faithful High Priest, by a through participation in our human life, He laid aside the evidences of his Divine glory. To use the expressive word of the Holy Ghost, "He emptied Himself." And so He set Himself to win that glory which should result from a perfected character, and from suffering even unto death. It is of this that He speaks, when He says, "I seek not mine own glory." Let it be clearly understood that it is of his glory, as the Son of Man and the obedient servant, that we are now speaking.

I. THE MOTIVE OF CHRIST'S DESIRE FOR GLORY.

That He desired glory is evident. Did He not directly ask for it?--"Father, glorify thy Son." Was there not an accent of satisfaction in his twice-repeated ejaculation--first, when He heard of the inquiry by the Greeks, and again when Judas went out to do the fatal deed of treachery--"Now is the Son of Man glorified!" Are we not warranted in believing that it was the anticipation of the glory into which He must pass through suffering that quickened his pace into the valley of the Shadow? (Luke 24:26).

And yet we cannot believe that our Master sought glory for any selfish end. This He could not do. He said explicitly, "I seek not mine own glory." There was not the shadow of personal ambition resting as a cloud over that pure and noble heart. But He desired glory, that He might shed it back again upon his Father.

It was the supreme passion of his being to glorify the Father. As He descended into the dark valley, this was his one cry, "Father, glorify thy name!" Deeper and deeper still He went; and this same entreaty, breaking from his agonized heart, comes back to us yet fainter, and ever fainter. "Now is my soul troubled; and what shall I say? Father, glorify thy name!" Perhaps even the love of the race and the desire to redeem had failed to support his fainting soul, unless his resolution had been empowered and maintained by this all-master-full desire. He was greedy, therefore, of every vestige of glory that He could win by suffering, even though it were unto death; that He might be able, though it were with but a feather-weight additional, to augment the revenue of glory which, through Him, should accrue to God. "Now is the Son of Man glorified, and God is glorified in Him." Glorify thy Son, that thy Son also

may glorify Thee."

What an example He has left us that we should follow in his steps! Human applause, and admiration, and reward, would not hurt us, if we gathered them all only as the vinedressers pluck the produce of the vines for presentation to the owner of the vineyard. It is a high ideal, and yet evidently the Apostle thought it attainable; else he would not have exhorted his converts to seek that glory even in their meals (1Cor. 10:31). But it is only so that we can come into the deepest fellowship with our Saviour, when we, too, have so drunk of his spirit that we become absorbed in the same supreme object, and seek for the prizes of our high calling that we may cast them at the feet of God. That God may be better understood, and admired, and loved through our life; that men may turn from us to Him as from the jewel to the sunlight in which it sparkles; that more hearts may be brought beneath his sway--be this our aim, at all costs to ourselves.

II. THE DIRECTIONS IN WHICH HIS DESIRE WAS REALIZED.

The Apostle Peter says, "God gave Him glory" (1Pet. 1:21). In what did that glory consist?

(1) In the indwelling of God in his human nature.-

The glory of the desert acacia-bush was in the fire that burnt there; of the tabernacle in the Shekinah glow; of Zion that God had chosen to dwell there. And the glory of our Lord, as to his human nature, was that in Him the Divine and human blended in perfect union; that the Father dwelt in Him, spake and wrought in Him; and that He was the perfect vehicle for the expression of the incorruptible life, which was, and is, and is to come. This was the glory which the Apostles beheld expressed on the Holy Mount.

(2) In his perfect endurance of the severest tests.

The whole brunt of evil broke on Him, as the roll of the Atlantic breaker on some weather-beaten rock. It is impossible to imagine tests more searching and complete than those through which He passed; in journeyings often; in conflicts with the Pharisees and Sadducees; in conflicts with his own brethren; in conflict with the devils that possessed the afflicted; in conflict above all with the prince of this world in that last terrible duel of the cross; in weariness and painfulness; in watchings often; in hunger and thirst; in fastings often; in bloody sweat and nakedness; in the anguish of God-forsakenness and of dissolution. But, so far from being overcome, He rose out of each successive test, having set forth in perfect beauty the appropriate grace which it demanded, and absorbed the whole force of the trial with which He was confronted; so that it passed into Him, and became an addition to his moral strength, as the savage warriors think that the strength of each foe they slay in battle becomes incorporated into themselves.

(3) In the benefits which He has conferred on men.

There is no glory so dear to the noble heart as that accruing from helpfulness to others. When it comes we cannot be inflated with pride, because we are already so thankful to know of the blessing which we have been the means of bestowing. And, ah, what glory was it to the blessed Lord, that He has delivered us from the consequences of Adam's sin; that He has borne away the sins of the world; that He has opened the kingdom to all believers; that He has made it possible for sinful creatures to receive and be impelled by the very Spirit of God; that He has obtained for us a life which is death-proof, sin-proof, devil-proof, the essence and crown of blessedness! To be loved as Saviour, to be trusted as Priest, to be enthroned as King, to receive the unutterable devotion of myriads, and to be able to help them to the uttermost--this surely is one prime element in his glory.

(4) In the exaltation of his nature.

"The God of our fathers," said Peter, "hath glorified his Son Jesus." And in his mouth, fresh from the scenes of the Ascension and of Pentecost, these words referred to the glory of his exaltation (Acts 2:32, 33; 3:13). We are told that, as a guerdon for his tears and obedience, the Father gave Him a name above every name, and set Him at his own right hand far above all creature life. But this was only possible because his nature was already supreme in its quality. It was no arbitrary act of enthronement; it was the recognition of superlative worth. And as He that descended ascends far above all heavens, that He might fill all things with floods of light, there is given an evidence of the glory of his being, of which the princes of this world were ignorant, but which now shines forth to illuminate all worlds.

These are but the guesses and babblings of a child; yet do they seem tracks that lead our feet towards the heart of this marvellous subject. But who shall tell of the love of the heart of God towards his Son, or of its expression? Here are depths which must be hidden from our scrutiny. As it was the passion of Christ to glorify the Father, so it was the passion of "the Father of glory" to glorify the Son. Yes, and as yet that glorification is only in its beginnings; the first stages alone of the coronation and enthronement of Jesus "in all his glory" have taken place: the full outburst of his meridian splendour is yet future. Ah, we are yet to behold some wondrous scenes, which will ravish our eyes and fill our hearts with an exceeding weight of glory! "God shall also glorify Him in Himself, and shall straightway glorify Him." And we shall behold his glory, nay, better, share it for ever and ever (John 13:31, 32; 17:22, 23, 24).

III. THE COST AT WHICH HIS DESIRE WAS REALIZED.

The glory glistens in our view, but we are not always ready to consider its cost. The only path to the glory is that which lies through the tangled thorn-brake of sorrow. The corn of wheat must fall into the ground and die, lying alone and forsaken through the winter with its pitiless blasts and frost. He must descend ere He can ascend. Pain must inflict the wounds in which the pearls of untold glory shall glisten.

Nor can it be otherwise with ourselves. We must be witnesses of the sufferings, if we would be partakers of the glory to be revealed; only as we suffer can we reign with Him; there must be fellowship with his sufferings if there shall be attainment to his resurrection; we must drink of his cup and be baptized with his baptism, if we would sit right and left of his throne.

But let us not invent death for ourselves; let us put our hands into his, and ask Him to lead us down one step at a time whither He will. It must be right to go where He takes us. It cannot be dreadful when He is there. He will not give us more than we can bear, because his own experience of pain will be a safe guide in his dealings with us. And, as we go down with Him into darkness and death, let us sing with assured hope, as He did, "Thou wilt not leave my soul in hell; neither wilt Thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption. Thou wilt show Me the path of life: in thy presence is fullness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore."

6 THE WORKS OF GOD

"I must work the works of Him that sent Me while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work."--John 9:4.

THE UTTER restfulness which filled the heart of the Lord Jesus is beautifully manifested in the introductory verses of this chapter. At the close of the preceding one He is seen amid the heated altercation of his foes, enduring the contradiction of sinners against Himself, and compelled to use some of the severest epithets that ever fell from his gracious lips. The climax of the argument was reached on his claiming to have existed before Abraham was. He appropriated the incommunicable name of Jehovah, and said, "Before Abraham was, I AM." And in a frenzy of indignation the Jews caught up the stones lying about for the repair of the temple to inflict forthwith the doom of the blasphemer.

But there was a force at work which they little understood, rendering them powerless to harm him. Was it the spell of his majestic presence? Was it the aureole of his spotless character? Was it the protecting power of his Father? Whatever it was, He passed unscathed through the midst of them; and so left the temple, and began to descend the great flight of steps, and to pass through the successive courts. On the way his attention was attracted by a blind beggar, who for years had been a familiar object as he sat and begged. And albeit that there was every need to put as far a distance as possible between Himself and the missiles of his foes, He stopped, made clay, and leisurely healed him. Is it not evident that He realized his absolute safety until his hour arrived; and that if there were an opportunity and a prompting to do God's work, there was the strongest ground also to count upon perfect immunity till the work was done?

His enemies might chafe and storm around Him; but they could not hurt Him, or penetrate with word and stone the encasing envelope of the presence of God. Secure of that protection, He was able to go and come, fearless and unharmed, serene and quiet, restful and peaceful, blessing and blessed. Oh for the quiet heart which looks from itself to God, and considers neither difficulty nor peril, because it is so absorbed in doing his work! Here the blessed Spirit broods undisturbed, amid the wild fury of earth's tumult, whispering intimations of God's will, and nerving the soul with sufficient power to perform.

I. THE CONDITIONS IN WHICH GOD'S WORKS ARE DONE.

The phrase "works of God," is a familiar one throughout this Gospel. To do them was to feed the Redeemer's soul (John 4:34); they were in an ever-ascending scale (John 5:20); they were of a certain definite number, given Him to finish (John 5:36); they were the signs and seals of his mission (John 10:38); they were not his own, but wrought through Him by the Father (John 14:10); they were unique in the history of the world (John 15:24); they were definitely finished ere He left (John 17:4). But it becomes us to learn the conditions under which they were wrought, that we may be able to do those greater works of which He spoke.

(1) His heart was at rest in God.

When suddenly aroused amid the tumult of the storm, or pursued by infuriated crowds, or amid the anguish of the grave of Lazarus, or in the garden of his arrest, there was ever the same deep inner calm, which spread an awe on nature, and cast its spell on men. And it is impossible to expect any great thing to be done in the world through a man whose inner life is ever in a state of ferment.

Nature herself teaches the need of repose for the putting forth of her mightiest efforts. It is in the closet, the study, the cave, the woodland retreat, that problems have been solved, resolves formed, and schemes matured. And the river of life itself will lose its most precious properties, if it flows through the muddy and perturbed waters of restless hearts.

It is not possible for us all to have a life of outward calm. In such a world as this, with the opposition of men and the intrusion of sorrow on our most sacred moments, there is perpetual interruption. But beneath all the heart may keep its Sabbath. Trusting in God, resting on Him, rolling off to his charge its anxieties and cares before they have time to soak down poison into its springs, the inner life may thus retain its tranquility, reflecting God's heaven above, and recipient of the least impulse of God's will.

(2) He was specially endued with the Holy Spirit.

Our Lord had his Pentecost before Pentecost. In the same hour He was baptized as to his body with the waters of the Jordan, and as to his spirit with the Holy Ghost. In his address to Cornelius and his friends, the Apostle Peter lays distinct stress on this as the condition on which Jesus of Nazareth went about doing good: "He was anointed with the Holy Ghost and with power" (Acts 10:38).

It should be a serious question with each of us, Have I claimed my share in Pentecost? On his ascension, our Lord received from the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost in its fullest plenitude, that through Him the whole Church might get it. It is ours in Him; we have not to go up to Heaven or down to Hades to win it; we have not to endeavour to merit it, but only to claim it by faith. If on comparing ourselves with the symptoms of Spirit-filling given in the Acts of the Apostles, we are conscious of a grievous deficiency, let us by believing prayer dare to ask for all that is ours in the risen living Saviour.

(3) He was willing that the Father should work through Him

On the day of Pentecost, the preacher clearly emphasized this: "Jesus of Nazareth was approved of God among you by miracles, and wonders, and signs, which God did by Him in the midst of you" (Acts 2:22). And this statement bears out the affirmation of the Lord Himself, "the Father that dwelleth in Me, He doeth the works" (John 14:10).

Blessed are we when we learn that secret, no longer to work for God, but to let God work through us; to be brooks of Siloam, pent in given beds, instead of wandering at our own sweet will; to be clay kneaded into any shape; to be earthenware pipes, if needs be, hidden under ground, and trampled beneath the hurrying feet of men, with one end open to the reservoir, and the other to the empty cistern of human need, so that the torrent may come in with even flow on the one side, and pour out on the other with a regularity which escapes notice because it is so unbroken. It was thus that the great Apostle lived who said, "Christ hath wrought through me in word and deed to make the Gentiles obedient" (Ro 15:18, literal rendering). So are we bidden to yield ourselves to God, and our members as instruments of righteousness, that He may work in us that which is well pleasing in his sight (Ro 6:13; Heb. 13:21). "We must work," the R.V. says.

II. THE NEED FOR THESE WORKS.

"A man blind from his birth." We have observed before that the miracles of this Gospel were evidently selected in each case with a special purpose of becoming foils to bring into prominence some characteristic feature in the ministry or teaching of Jesus Christ. Nor is this one an exception to the rule. What emblem could better set forth the condition of mankind than a born-blind beggar? That men are blind, that they are born so, and that they are destitute and bankrupt, needing gold and white linen, and eyesalve, needs no proving. But amid all, He comes who is the Light of the world, and is able to give sight to the blind, and to the poor a share in his measureless wealth.

The Jews had but two hypotheses on which to account for human suffering. "Either this man sinned" (in some previous state of existence), "or his parents, that he was born blind"; with them, special suffering was always the sign of special sin (Luke 13:1, 2, 3, 4).

There are many who argue thus in the present day. The occurrence of special disaster leads them to search for the sin which must have led to it; forgetting that it does not always follow, and that it has been the problem of the ages that so many of the worst of men have had comparative immunity from suffering--"there have been no bands in their death"--whilst for the godly the waters of a full cup are wrung out. It is true that sin brings suffering; but there is some suffering which is not the evidence of special wrongdoing.

This is therefore a third and broader hypothesis, which our Lord suggests here. "Neither hath this man sinned, nor his parents; but that the works of God may be made manifest in Him." Suffering is permitted for wise and good reasons, which we shall one day comprehend, and amongst them is this : that it may provide a platform on which the grace and power of God may manifest themselves, each new phase of evil leading to some new forth-putting of the heart of God. To how many suffering ones my the Lord Jesus send the message: "This sickness is not unto death; but for the glory of God, that the Son of God may be glorified thereby"!

If only the sufferers who may read these words would bracket together these two texts, this spoken of the blind beggar, and that of the sickness of Lazarus, surely it would be easier to bear the long nights of weariness and the days of pain--not in punishment, not by neglect or mischance, not as the inevitable results of the mistakes or misdeeds of others, but--to give an opportunity for the

works and glory of God. What works? What glory? Surely the works of humility, and patience, and gentleness, which his Spirit instills; and the glory of that lovely spirit which his Spirit begets.

But how necessary is it that, as there is the need, we who have the supply be not wanting. If there is need for the works of God to be manifested, we must be at hand, and willing at all costs to manifest them. If there is the opportunity for the glorifying of Christ, we must not be slow to seize it. Make haste! --the night is coming, in which no man can work. Life at the longest is but a day; and before we are aware the shadows have stealthily crept far across the grass, the air has become chill, and the silver crescent of the moon is rocking in the dimming light. What works await us yonder we cannot tell. But the unique work of healing blindness and enriching beggary is confined to earth; and we must hasten to do all of this allotted to us before the nightfall. He lives intensely whose eye is fixed on the fingers of the dial; as the poor sempstress works swiftly whose last small wick of candle is rapidly burning down in its socket.

III. THE SUBJECT OF THESE WORKS.

What a contrast between the opening and the close of the chapter! The blind sees, the beggar is rich. The abject is an apologist. The intruder on the temple steps is a worshipper within the true shrine. The soul ignorant of Christ owns Him as Son of God. And all this because of the individual interest our Lord took in him.

(1) He detected what was working in his mind.

Beneath that unpromising exterior were the elements of a noble character. The power which might have run to waste, being dammed up, wrought deeper into his soul. He heard the converse of the crowds as they passed, caught the voices of the Levites chanting their majestic psalms, detected the benedictions of the priests; and awoke in him indefinable yearnings after God. Unknown to any besides, these arrested the attention of Jesus, who, unconscious of personal danger, bent over him with eager interest, as a child over the first primrose of spring.

(2) He developed the latent power of faith.

It was there, but it had nothing to evoke it; and yet it must be evoked ere Christ could give him sight. He could feel, though he could not see. So the Lord put clay on the eye-socket, awaking wonder, hope, expectation; and such was the ladder put down for his faith to climb up into the light. And then in the command to go and wash there was a still further test to his faith, to conform and strengthen it. Is it not thus that the blessed Lord still deals with us; watching the smallest spark of faith, and fanning it into a flame, giving it some very small and obvious thing to do, that it may from a thread become a cable?

(3) He found him when cast out by all besides.

His parents disowned him, and the Pharisees cast him out of their synagogue, depriving him of a highly-prized privilege; but Jesus found him. He had been cast out Himself, and knew the weariness and pain of excommunication; and thus acquired the desire and the clue to help another, suffering beneath the intolerance of the religious world. Does not Jesus always steal to our side when we are cast out, or deserted by our friends?

(4) He answered his hunger for faith.

"Dost thou believe on the Son of God?" The question startled him; and yet it explained one of the deepest instincts of his nature, though he may have been little conscious of it, and perhaps felt only an utter dissatisfaction with all else, and an insatiable yearning after God. If we live up to what we know, at all costs, we shall most certainly be led into further discoveries of truth. If we dare to go to the pool of Siloam and wash, we shall be gladdened by great revelations and unfoldings of God in Christ. We think we are going to plough a field; and we suddenly come on a box of treasure, struck by our plough, which makes us independent of work for the rest of our lives."

And so obedience passes into worship, and we see that He who has made our life his care, tending us when we knew Him not, is the Christ of God, in whom are hid all the riches of time, all the treasures of eternity: and we worship Him.

7 THE BLESSED LIFE OF TRUST

"When He putteth forth his own sheep, He goeth before them, and the sheep follow Him; for they know his voice."--John 10:4.

FEW IMAGES could better express the relationship between our Lord and his people than that of Shepherd and sheep, so often applied to God in the Old Testament, and appropriated by Christ Himself in the New. He had already shown that references to Himself underlay the manna, the water, and the fire-cloud. And now He shows that beneath the sweet pastoral imagery of the

prophets He was ever the glorious substance and reality.

The Eastern sheepfold is a mere enclosure surrounded by a palisade. The sheep are brought into it in the evening, several flocks being committed to the care of the common keeper or porter for the night. In the morning the shepherds return and knock at the closely barred door of the enclosure, which the porter opens from within. Each separates his own sheep by calling to them; and the sheep respond, disentangling themselves from the rest, and when thus collected they follow their own shepherd, wherever he may lead.

The shepherd alone enters by the door. The robber may break in by force, the thief by stratagem; but their object is plunder and slaughter, and the sheep will neither respond to their voice, nor follow them. "A stranger will they not follow, but will flee from him; for they know not the voice of strangers." Huddled into a corner of their pen, stricken with alarm, they dread the rough hand of the intruder.

That sheepfold is the Jewish people. The irruption into the fold of the sheep stealer represents the audacity and hypocrisy of the Pharisees and Scribes, who had no purposes but plunder in their heart. They fleeced the flock for their own advantage (Ezek. 34:3).

In opposition to them, the Saviour comes as the true Shepherd. He has no need to scale the wall, or to establish his authority by force or guile. In Him the porter, who is well represented by John the Baptist, recognised the true Shepherd of Israel: and He was now prepared to lead forth his own to green pastures, and beside waters of rest.

I. THE PUTTING FORTH OF THE SHEEP.

Up to the end of the last chapter it might have appeared that the whole of Israel might be included in his flock. But recent events had proved that this could not be. The Messiah, as Zechariah had foretold, had taken to Himself his two staves, "Beauty" and "Bands," and had fed the flock for one month, but had finally been compelled to renounce the task as hopeless (Zech. 11:10-14). The expulsion of the blind man; the decree of excommunication which had struck at Himself and his followers; the violent hostility that dogged his steps--all pointed to the impossibility of gathering the whole nation into his care.

There was but one alternative. He must bring his own from out the Jewish fold--separating them, not by force, but by his gentle voice; calling them by name and leading them out. Is not Jesus always leading us out? He calls the souls of men from the fishing-net and the tollbooth; from scenes of worldly pleasure and haunts of sin; from associations with the flock of slaughter. And the one test of their being his own is that they hear his voice and follow. Not to believe, or obey that voice, or follow it, proves that the soul is none of his.

But a stronger word is used: "He putteth forth his own sheep." The phrase is a very strong one. He casts or thrusts them out; as when He constrained his disciples to get into the ship. So was Israel thrust out of the luxurious fare of Egypt to the simplicities of the desert; so are the young eaglets thrust out by the mother bird when she stirs up her nest, and forces them to learn the joys of flight.

He put us forth by his providences.--We may have been living in some sheltered home, where love screened us from very contact with a strange and unkindly world; but suddenly the encircling arms are withdrawn, and we are driven forth to stand alone, and to act for ourselves, so far as any human help is concerned. Or we are compelled to leave the dear country village, or the ancestral home, or the land of our birth, to fare forth we hardly know whither. All that is sure is that there is no return; that we have no alternative; that the angel with flaming sword drives us out and keeps the gate behind us.

He puts us forth by the constraints of his Spirit.--We may have been living a self-contained, self-contented life, shut up in some narrow circle of religious thought and life, when suddenly there break on us the voices which summon to another and truer life. We become aware of possibilities of Christian living that had never been suggested to our hearts. From some loftier peak than usual we catch sight of a wider range of truth. We yearn with eager desire for the new power, and joy, and blessedness, which look in at the windows of our soul, and beckon us to go with them; as children who ramble for a long summer day through wood and hill. It is not so much then the outward constraint as the irresistible impulse from within which thrusts us out.

He puts us forth by his direct call.--To how many a young life, all unexpectedly, there has come the summons of the Master, "I am about to evangelize such and such a district, and I want you to accompany Me." To students in the great seminaries of America, to bowed heads and hearts in conventions at home, to souls worshipping in the loneliness of the shrine, there have come voices, bidding them arise and depart, because they are to be sent far hence to the heathen. What heart-searching, what tremour, what mingling of fear and hope, of expectancy and anguish, sweep over the heart when first it hears its name spoken by the Master's lips, and rises up to follow where He leads the way!

If you are his own, it is certain that in some one of these ways you will hear his voice, and feel his crook, putting you forth. The fold

is warm and sheltered, and you are accustomed to it, and shrink from the unknown; but it bare of grass, and lacks the fresh breeze and dew of the mountain-side; there can be no true peace and satisfaction within its walls; beyond its precincts the true life awaits you; and to that the Good Shepherd puts you forth.

II. THE SHEPHERD'S LEAD.

"He goeth before them." This is the place ever assigned to Him in the Old Testament. "He leadeth me by the still waters." "Thou leadest thy people like a flock." He permits none of his own to go along a path which He has not trodden, and in which He has not had previous experience. There is only one exception to this--the experience of sin. With this single exception, "He was tempted in all points like as we are." Take heart, O trembling believer! However strange and hard your path seems to you, if you look closely at it you will detect in its dust the footprints of the Shepherd; and where He has preceded you, you need not fear to follow.

And it is not only true that He passed through all possible experiences of human life during those wonderful years of his sojourn on our earth, drinking every cup, exposing Himself to every grief, tried by every woe, that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest; but in addition, He accompanies and precedes by only a step each timid child that steps forth from the warm fold to follow Him. To the eye of faith He is always a little in front--removing the stones; selecting the least difficult paths; bending back the briers; driving before Him the wild beasts or robbers that threaten us; and conducting us as safely and quickly as He can to the sweetest, truest life.

It would seem as if the Shepherd is never so real as when we are being put forth from the fold. We could better exist without Him when we are there; but directly we emerge on the life of faith, away from the familiar and friendly, we need Him, and our heart entwines itself around Him with a tenacity which grows stronger as every new trial is met, and mastered, and left behind in the onward journey.

It may be that you cannot discern Him; but this makes no real difference. Dare to believe that if you are in his place--that is, if you are treading a path which is clearly marked out for you by inevitable circumstances and by unmistakable inward promptings, although you cannot see Him, and the way seems lonely, yet--that He is just before you; the darkness veils, but does not obliterate Him; the Lord is going before you, and the Holy One is your reward.

III. THE FOLLOWING OF THE SHEEP.

"The sheep follow Him." The utter dependence of the sheep on the Eastern shepherd is a beautiful emblem of our attitude towards our Lord. In those vast pasture-lands, rolling over mountain slopes, and dipping into darksome glens, brooded over by a silence that can almost be felt, there arises a very close intimacy between the shepherd and his flock. He forgets the distance between them, and becomes their friend. He is as intimately acquainted with their history, faces, and dispositions, as with those of his own children. He has a name for each, which is sufficient to bring it to his side. And common peril or privation, shared together, but cements the friendship closer.

Nor is the affection only on his side. Stupid as they appear to us, they develop under such conditions an amazing power of attachment, which they manifest in touching trust. They follow the shepherd anywhere.

Let us so trust our Lord. It often grieves the Christian teacher to find souls writing hard things against themselves, because they are attempting to acquire a certain lesson; to reach a certain experience; to attain and keep a certain attitude--altogether apart from Him: as if they had to do all this before they could count on his love and help. They are always trying to know or do something before they get to Him. Whereas the opposite is the only true and safe way; first to keep by his side and at his heel, and then to let Him lead the soul into all it must learn and achieve. Do not attempt the Christian life as a means to closer acquaintance with Jesus; but let your closer acquaintance with Him lead you to pass onward through the land in the length and breadth of it.

If He call you to know some new aspect of truth, throw on Him the responsibility of adding line to line, precept to precept, till it is clear. If He desire you to live a life of daily appropriation and dependence, trust Him to make it possible and congenial. If He bid you separate yourself from some unhallowed alliance, or to quit some unhealthy companionship, or to confess your new-found rapture, let Him understand how absolutely you look to Him to show you just how He would have you act.

Let Jesus Christ stand between you and everything--between you and circumstances; between you and dreaded trials; between you and temptation; between you and your attainments in the blessed life; between you and your projects of Christian usefulness. Follow Him, i.e., let Him go first. If He does not go forward, wait for Him. Every step taken apart from Him, or in front of Him, will have to be retraced with bitter tears.

The attitude of the sheep is submission. From the first its attitude is one of utter obedience to the will of another. It has no will of its own; or if it have, it is instantly repressed. So there must be the entire and utter surrender of our will to the will of Christ. This is the hardest lesson we have to learn; but everything of blessedness depends on our coming to a point at which we say, "From this

moment and for evermore, in the smallest details, in the routine of daily life as well as in its great crises, I choose the will of God." Never again to do what we wish because we wish it; never again to consult our own preferences or choice; never again to have a way or will of our own; but to follow absolutely and always the path marked out by another: this is the secret of blessedness.

The attitude of the sheep is dependence. It would be impossible to submit, if we could not also commit. But it becomes easy to do the former when we can do the latter. To have an absolute confidence in Him, to lean on Him, to look to Him for direction and help as each moment needs; to trust Him on the rocky mountain path equally as on the green sward; to believe in Him against appearances and our own hearts; to refuse to take a thread or a shoe-latchet from any other hand; to abstain, as David did, from taking advantage even of a means of deliverance, which may seem ready to hand, but which would be inconsistent with his revealed will; to wait only on the Lord till He shall pluck the feet out of the net, and give the heart's desires--this too is the secret of blessedness.

Let us quiet ourselves as weaned babes. The world is unfriendly, and life's paths are perplexing; but He is leading us on who cannot make a mistake, who will give us just as much of a rest and refreshment as we require, and who is more than sufficient to deliver us from the lion and the bear. The memory of his agony and death shall ever be with us, nerving us to believe that He loves us too much, that we have cost Him too much, for it ever to be possible that we should be forsaken or neglected. And so at last we shall be folded with all the flock beside in those sweet pasture lands, in which the Lamb leads his flock unto living fountains of water, and God wipes away all tears from our eyes.

8 THE IDEAL SHEPHERD

"I am the Good Shepherd: the Good Shepherd giveth his life for the sheep."--John 10:11.

THIS CHAPTER is a pastoral idyll, composed and spoken by the Chief Shepherd Himself. It resembles some masterpiece of art, which one visits for days together, only finding on each successive occasion some new beauty. It naturally falls into the three divisions of morning, noon, and evening.

It is morning. The dew lies heavy on the upland wolds; the fresh morning breeze is airing the fevered world; the sun's pavilion glows with gorgeous colours, as he prepares to emerge on his daily pilgrimage; and the shepherds stand knocking at the barred gates of the fold, calling to the porter to let them have their flocks. When the door opens, each calls to his own sheep, and leads them forth, and they follow him to pastures green and waters still. They would flee from a strange voice; but they know their shepherds.

Is not this a true picture of the response which Christ's own give to his voice? Many are the voices which fall on the ears of men in the early morning of their life, summoning them to follow; and in the majority of cases with only too much success. In the hubbub the voice of the true Shepherd is undetected or unheeded, except by a few. But these hear its soft gentle tones, and obey, and follow; and to do so is certain evidence that they are his own. The desire to hear and follow Jesus proves that you are his sheep (John 10:4, 8, 27).

Again, It is noon. The downs are baking in the scorching glare, and every stone burns like fire; but in that oppressive hour the shepherd remembers a little green glen, where a tranquil lake reflects the azure sky, or a brooklet babbles musically over the pebbles. The grass is green and the boulders cast black shadows. Perhaps an old fold is there, with open doorway, so that the sheep may go in for shelter or out for pasture, till the shadows begin to climb stealthily up the hills.

Thus our Beloved makes his flock rest at noon. He is not Shepherd alone, but fold. In Him as in a safe enclosure we lie down secure. He is the secret place of the Most High, in whom our life is hidden. Nor is He the fold only, He is also the door; there is no ingress to rest, or egress to pasture, except through Him. We can get pasture, abundant life, and salvation only by the Lord Jesus.

Lastly, It is evening. The sun is setting, the air is becoming chill, the valleys are deep in gloom. The shepherd hastens downward with his flock to the fold. They are descending together the last dark gorge, densely shadowed by foliage. Suddenly the ominous snarl and scream tell that a wolf has sprung from the thicket, and seized on one of the hindmost ewes or tender lambs; and then the shepherd rushes to the rear, prepared to lay down his life, if needs be, to save. And who can view the struggle which ensues between the shepherd and the wolf, without being reminded of the fourfold allusion of our Lord to the fact that He was about to lay down his life for the sheep (John 10:11, 15, 17, 18).

I. THE DOUBLE CONTRAST TO THE GOOD SHEPHERD.

Good does not mean benevolent and kind; but genuine and true. And its significance is pointed by the contrast with the thief and the hireling; by which it appears that the Good Shepherd is One who is imbued with the true spirit of his work, and is an enthusiast in it, not for pay or reward, but by the compulsion of the noble instincts of his soul.

Robbers may turn shepherds, climbing the walls of the fold, or swooping down on the flock and driving it off, as Nabal's were

seized on Mount Carmel. But their purpose is for the flesh and fleece, to kill and to destroy. They have no more the true shepherd's heart than a bandit has a soldier's or a pirate a sailor's.

Many such nominal shepherds had the Jews in their national history: kings ruling for their own aggrandisement; teachers who prophesied false and smooth things for place and pelf; Pharisees who lined their nests with what they appropriated wrongfully. Such were the thieves and robbers who came before the Good Shepherd, stealing from God his glory, from men their souls and goods. What a contrast was the Saviour, who expected no reward but hatred and a crown of thorns, a cross and a borrowed tomb, and whose supreme object was to give life, and to give it more abundantly--abundant as the flowers of May; exhaustless as the perennial fountains of his own being; infinite as the nature of God!

The hireling, too, may turn shepherd, and, to a certain point, may do "his work with credit. He will not desert the flock for frost, or hail, or a thunder shower. His pay will be more than an equivalent for hardship in these respects. But when it comes to the supreme test of sacrificing the life, he breaks down. Love alone can nerve a man voluntarily to lay down his life. Of what use is hire to a dead man? "He that is an hireling, and not the shepherd, whose own the sheep are not, seeth the wolf coming, and leaveth the sheep and fleeth; and the wolf cometh and scattereth them."

There are good men about the world, in the Church and out of it, who have come to sheep-tending as an occupation, because it affords a means of livelihood; men who become pastors because there is a family living to be filled, or the position is an honourable one. Such do their work fairly well, so long as there is no particular danger to be faced. But when the winds of persecution are let loose, and the fires are lit, and the dragoons scour the moors, they renounce their office, and even endeavour to efface the vestiges of their calling (Zec. 13:5, 6, 7).

Very different to this has been the spirit of the true shepherd, revealed in hundreds of cases of Church history, and above all in our blessed Lord. He has received a great reward, which dazzled his gaze throughout his earthly life. "For the joy set before Him He endured the cross." But there was nothing selfish in it. And it was not for this alone that He fulfilled his self-set task. He loved us. He had taken us to be his own. He had set his heart upon us. And when the question arose of delivering us from peril, He never hesitated to lay down his life. It was his own act and deed. "I lay it down of Myself."

For the most part his life was not his own, but his Father's in Him; yet special power was given Him that He should be able to take individual and personal action in this matter. "He had power to lay it down, and power to take it again." And as the voluntariness of his sacrifice unto death is insisted on, there comes out more evidently the mighty passion of his love for us who hear his voice, and may therefore claim to be his own. Why has He loved us thus? We cannot tell. It is a mystery which will for ever baffle us; but love knows no reason, no law. Surely the Son of God might have discovered, or made, beings more worthy of his attachment. But it was not to be so. He has loved us with the greatest love of all, the love that reckons not the cost of life; and there is nothing now of good which He will withhold from his own, his loved, his chosen and purchased flock.

II. THE WORK OF THE GOOD SHEPHERD.

(1) His knowledge of his sheep.

The Revised Version brings out the exquisite meaning of John 10:14-15, which was somewhat obscured in the older version: "I know mine own, and mine own know Me; even as the Father knoweth Me, and I know the Father."

The Eastern shepherd knows all the particulars of each of his sheep; its genealogy, defects, temper, and tastes, and embodies some one of these in the name he gives it. Thus did the Father know all about that one Lamb which stood in so peculiar a relationship to Himself. There was nothing in Jesus hidden from the Father. His eyes beheld his substance, when it was yet imperfect; and in his book were all his members written, when as yet there was none of them, whether of his mystical or of his physical body. Who shall explore or adequately elaborate the perfect knowledge subsisting between the Father and the Son before the worlds were made?

And it is just in this way, with a Divine, comprehensive, and perfect knowledge, that the Lord Jesus knows each of us. He is of a quick understanding to take in our past, with its sad and bitter failures, and our present with its unrealized longings. He knows our down-sitting and up-rising; our motives so often misunderstood; our anxieties, which cast their shadows over our lives; our dread; our hopes and fears. He intermeddles with the bitterness of our hearts, known only to us and Him. He scrutinizes each guest as it enters, and needs no census to tell Him the inmates of our hearts. "There is not a word on our tongue, but Thou, O Lord, knowest it altogether." It is very blessed to be known thus; so that we do not need to assume a disguise, or enter into laboured explanations. He cannot be surprised, or taken unawares by anything we may tell Him.

Let us, on our part, seek to know Him as He knew the Father; the eyes of our heart being enlightened; the Soul illumined by the knowledge which is born of sympathy, fellowship, and purity.

(2) His seeking love.

Again the Revised Version, in ver. 16, gives the true intention of our Saviour's words. "Other sheep I have which are not of this fold; them also I must bring (lead), and they shall hear my voice, and they shall become one flock, one Shepherd."

There may be, and there will be, many folds. By the very constitution of our minds we are sure to have different views of truth, of church government, and of the best methods of expressing our love and worship. And there are many who would have us believe that if we do not belong to their special fold, we have no right to assume that we belong to the flock. But it is not so. Our Master never said there would be one fold. There may be many folds, yet one flock; even as there is one Shepherd. The more one climbs up the mountain side, the less one thinks of the hurdles that pen the sheep below in the valley, and the more one rejoices in the essential unity of the flock. Whatever may be your special fold, the one question is : Do you hear and obey the Shepherd's voice? If so, you belong to the one flock, part of which is on that, and part on this side of a narrow parting brook.

These other sheep must be the Gentiles--ourselves. Though He belonged by birth to the most exclusive race that has ever existed, our Lord's sympathies overflowed the narrow limits of national prejudice. He was the Son of Man; and in these words He not only showed that his heart was set on us, but He sketched the work which was to occupy Him through the ages. Ever since that moment He has been bringing in these other sheep, and folding them. Perhaps the work is almost done, and the flock complete; and soon, as He leads his blood-bought ones forth to the pasture-lands of eternity, their unity shall be manifest, and the world shall admire and believe (John 17:21).

(3) His words to His own.

"He calls them by name." We often speak to the dumb animals of our homes, telling them words they can hardly understand, and to which they can certainly give no response. But there is a dialogue ever in process between the Good Shepherd and his own. He not only calls them by name as He leads them forth, but He talks to them, encouraging, soothing, communing with them about his purposes, explaining his reasons, indicting his commands.

Holy souls become aware of impressions which are made on them from time to time, promptings, inspirations, largely through the words of Scripture, and sometimes otherwise, which they recognize as the Shepherd's voice. That voice ever calls to self-sacrifice, fellowship, purity, and is different to all other voices. And there grows up a response, the more specially so when the path is lonely, and the sheep keeps close to its Shepherd's heel. Those who follow very nearly behind Him will bear witness to the perpetual converse by which the human friend is able to keep in touch with the Divine.

(4) His care of his own.

"I give unto them eternal life, and they shall never perish." Time wears out all things else. It crumbles the mountains, dims the sunshine, loosens the machinery of the universe; but it cannot touch or impair the life of the blessed God, whether it be in Himself, or imparted through Jesus Christ to the hearts of those who love Him. When once that life has come to indwell the believer's heart it must remain. Beneath worldliness, carelessness, and frivolity, burning feebly perhaps, almost quenched in the heavy atmosphere, it is there an incorruptible seed.

Christ's sheep shall never perish. They may wander far from Him, lose all joy and comfort, fall under the rebuke of men, and seem to be living under a cloud; but, if they are really his, his honour is pledged to seek them out in the cloudy and dark day, and bring them back to Himself. His body cannot be dismembered; He cannot forfeit that which it has cost Him so much to purchase. He would rather lose his throne than one of his sheep; for the lion of the pit would glory over Him, and it would be a fatal blemish on his escutcheon that He had attempted but had failed to perform.

You may be a very lame and timid and worthless sheep; but you were purchased by the Shepherd's blood, because He loved you so. There is not a wild beast in all hell that He has not vanquished and put beneath his feet; there is no fear, therefore, of his ability, as there is none of his love. He will deliver you from the lion and the bear, and bring you in triumph to the fold, with all the rest.

9 THE WORK OF AN UNGIFTED WORKER

"And He went away again beyond Jordan into the place where John at first baptized: and there He abode. And many resorted unto Him, and said, John did no miracle; but all things that John spake of this man were true. And many believed on Him there."--John 10:40, 41, 42.

BEYOND the Jordan! To a Jew that was banishment indeed. For that district, called Perea, was comparatively desert. The hills, seamed by impetuous torrents hurling themselves headlong into the Jordan valley, were marked by a few patches of cultivated soil and scattered hamlets; but for the most part they were bleak and cold, and none came there from the country west of the Jordan, except driven by stress of persecution or to escape the arm of the law.

Why, then, did the Son of Man betake Himself thither? At the close of his inimitable parable of the shepherd and his flock, He had gathered all his force to assure his trembling followers that they had nothing to fear from man or devil. On the one hand, they could never perish, because they had within them an indestructible life, identical with his own; and on the other, they were within his hand, whence none should be able to pluck them. But, in case that was not enough to assure timid hearts, He went on to declare that his own hand, with its contents, lay within the strong, all-encompassing hand of his Father; so that there was a double assurance, and none would be able to pluck them out of the Father's hand. How safe are they who hear his voice and follow Him!

But this assertion as to the identification of the Father with Himself in the blessed work of preserving the flock, led Him to affirm the deep underlying truth of the essential oneness of the Father with Himself. He would have us think of the Father and Himself as being one in the deepest and most holy unity. One in essence, in purpose, in operation; so that neither thinks, nor wills, nor acts without the other; and each is altogether present where the other is manifested. The assertion implicated the Deity of the speaker, and startled the Jews to take up stones, so as to inflict at once the doom of the blasphemer.

Nor was this all. He went on to insist that He was the Son of God in a unique sense, and that his life was the outworking of the indwelling of the Father. "The Father is in Me, and I in Him." From all this it is clear that, whatever may be the speculations of modern thinkers, there was no doubt in the human consciousness of Jesus as to his unique relationship with the Father. He used the strongest terms that could set it forth. It is true that He quotes an Old Testament Scripture, which speaks of men who exercise judicial functions as gods, when, by reason of their office, they wield special prerogatives and exercise functions which are Divine in their quality; but He does not for a moment compare these with Himself; and only adduces the passage to show how unreasonable was the attempt to punish Him for a phrase which in the most awful times of Mosaic authority had been allowed to pass without challenge. But their vindictive hate would brook no parley; and, as his hour was not yet come, He deemed it better to go away beyond Jordan, into hiding, until the hand should reach the exact figure on the dial.

There was a special reason why He was attracted to the region beyond Jordan. "It was the place where John at first baptized." Those solemn hills and valleys had been black with the crowds that had gathered from all the land at the cry of that trumpet voice. Those waters had been the scene of countless baptisms. And the people living around had many a story to tell of the grand and fearless prophet who had met with so tragic a death in the dungeon of the neighbouring castle of Machaerus. And as the disciples, all of whom had been first moved by the Baptist's influence and preaching, passed over the ground in company with Jesus, what recollections must have been stirred within them; and how sadly must they have contrasted those sunny days with the overcast heavens beneath which at that moment they were passing!

"Many resorted unto Him."

Those who had felt the marvellous fascination of the person of Jesus were glad to follow Him anywhere; and as they too came on the familiar scenes, they could not but talk much of the great preacher. "Here he used to sleep. There he used to preach. Yonder he would stand knee deep in the waters to baptize. Do you not remember him calling the Pharisees a set of vipers; and telling the deputation from the Sanhedrim that he was only a voice; and pointing to the Master as the Lamb of God? ... And yet what a contrast was his life to our Master's," might another rejoin; "he did no miracles, there was not a single scintillation of this miraculous Divine power." "No," said a chorus of voices; "John did no miracle, but all things that John spake of this man were true."

John said that this Man should be from heaven, and above all: and it was true.

John said that He should be the Bridegroom of all faithful souls: and it was true.

John said that the Father would not give the Spirit by measure unto Him: and it was true.

John said that his fan would be in his hand, and He would thoroughly purge his floor: and it was true.

John said that He would bear away the sin of the world: and it was true.

And many, as they compared the predictions of the forerunner with their verification in Jesus, "believed in Him there."

I. MIRACLES ARE NOT NECESSARY FOR A GREAT LIFE.

"Among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist," said our Lord; but John did no miracle, was the verdict of the crowd. Evidently, then, there may be a great life without miracles.

In the judgment of the world, birth, wealth, genius, deeds of valour, and statesmanship, are deemed essential for the living of a great life; and many an one that can lay claim to none of these has relapsed into apathy and discontent. But how little do such understand the nature of true greatness! The fairest flowers of our race have bloomed from hidden roots. Those who have most enriched the world have said with the Apostles, "Silver and gold have we none." Genius has been overtaken and passed by plodding patience. Great wars have generally been great mistakes and greater crimes. Whereas true greatness consists in doing

the appointed work of life from the platform of a great motive; and in nurturing all that is divinest and noblest in the character.

John never thought whether or not he was living a great life. It was his one aim to obey the promptings of the Spirit of God, and to fulfil his course. When all the world was ringing with his fame, in an outburst of genuine humility he said that he was only a voice borne on the desert breeze. It was no care to him that he was unable to work a miracle. He who sent him had not put miracles in the program of his life; and he was perfectly satisfied with the arrangement. As the herald, it was his business to raise his voice in repeated proclamation of the King; why, then, should he be sad because he had not the special qualifications of others in his Master's retinue? To fulfil the task for which he had been qualified and sent, and to do it so as to please his King--that was his one ambition and aim; and to do it undaunted by the threats, and unfascinated by the blandishments, of the world --that made him great.

The lesson is for us all. Many who will read these lines are powerless to work miracles. They cannot dazzle or bewilder by the splendour of their intellectual gifts or the brilliance of their endowments. For them, the path in the valley, the monotony of the commonplace, the grey sky of uneventful routine, seem to be the predestined lot. And the very expectation of doing aught worth living for seems to have died out of them. But let such take heart! The real greatness of life is within their reach, if they will only claim it by the grace of God,

Do not try to do a great thing : you may waste all your life waiting for the opportunity which may never come. But since little things are always claiming your attention, do them as they come, from a great motive, for the glory of God, to win his smile of approval, and to do good to men. It is harder to plod in obscurity, acting thus, than to stand on the high places of the field, within the view of all, and to do deeds of valour, at which rival armies stand still to gaze. And no holy act, however trivial, goes without the swift recognition and the ultimate recompense of Christ.

To fulfil faithfully the duties of your station; to use to the uttermost the gifts of your ministry; to bear chafing annoyances and trivial irritations, as martyr bore the pillory and stake; to find the one noble trait in people who try and molest you; to put the kindest construction on unkind acts and words; to give of your best to the least; to love with the love of God even the unthankful and evil; to be content to be a fountain in the midst of a wild valley of stones, nourishing a few lichens and wild flowers, or now and again a thirsty sheep; and to do this always, not for the praise of man, but for the sake of God--this makes a great life.

II. THEME OF OUR MINISTRY.

"John spake of this Man."

The Baptist did little else than speak of the coming One. But this was the sufficient object of his ministry. That was all that he was required to do; and to do this well was to fulfil the purpose for which he was sent. And it is not otherwise now. The splendid miracles that shone as jewels on the brow of the first age of the Church have long since passed away; and it may be truly said of her, "She can do no miracles": but her noblest function still remains untouched. She can speak true things of her Lord.

Do it privately.--John spake of Jesus to two disciples, as they stood beside Him; and each became a convert and an apostle. It was so that Christianity spread in the first age, until the whole world was penetrated with its power. And probably fewer souls have been won by great preachers than by private individuals, speaking to children, friends, and neighbours, and saying, "Know the Lord."

Do it experimentally.--"I saw and bare record." There is nothing like personal testimony in this age of speculation and doubt. There is no voice so captivating as that which says, "Come and hear, all ye that fear God; and I will declare what He has done for my soul." Who can resist the men, that pointing to their own history as evidence, say, "We know that the Son of God is come, and has given us an understanding that we may know Him that is true; and we are in Him that is true, even in his Son Jesus Christ"? This is an age which asks eagerly for evidence; let us give the evidence of our spiritual senses, which is every bit as good as that of our natural senses, or our intellectual faculties. The spiritual eye is as certain a guide as the physical. "The eyes of our heart have been enlightened, and we have seen the Lord."

Do it unostentatiously.--Let it be as natural as the laughter which bubbles up from the glad heart; or the song of the little child that knows no care, whilst it roams amid the flowers of spring. Do not divert men to yourself. Count yourself to have failed when they speak of you. Be content to be a voice, a messenger, a mirror, flashing the light on to the face of Christ from which it came. And that it may be so, keep the heart full of Jesus. The mouth must speak the things which it has made touching the King, when the heart is bubbling over with good matter.

The one thing which closes the lips of so many is the feeling that critical eyes would detect a flaw between the words and the life of the speaker. But, if there be ground for this fear, why not put the finger of faith on 1 Thess. 5:23-24, and claim that He who has called to his work, and has inbreathed a yearning for the blameless life, should make it possible, and do exceeding abundantly, far more than He has even taught us to ask or think.

The mouth is one of those members which must be yielded to Jesus for his use; and, if only it is taken away from the service of sin and self to which it has too often been devoted, and handed over to be kept and used by the Master Himself, it is marvellous how all difficulties will disappear, and how easy and blessed it will become to speak of Him. When He wants you to speak, He will show you the audience; He will give you the message; He will supply you with the power.

III. AN ILLUSTRATION OF POSTHUMOUS MINISTRY.

Though John had been dead for two years, his words were fresh in the people's memories; and, as they were compared with their fulfilment, they led many into the faith.

We are doing more good than we know. We are setting streams flowing that shall go on refreshing and blessing men long after we have passed away. We are planting orchards whose shades shall protect, and fruit refresh, generations that shall be born long after our heads are laid low in death. We are giving men thoughts about Christ which now seem utterly wasted and inoperative, but to which they will refer some day as the means of their conversion. And, as they stand over our graves, or meet in the old places where they were wont to gather with us, they will say: "Well! well! he was a good man; he did no miracles, he was not brilliant, he had no genius; but all things he spake of Jesus were true."

What better epitaph could any of us wish? It seems a magnificent recompense for a life of arduous and brilliant service to be buried in the mausoleum of the fatherland, amid the boom of cannon and the peal of muffled bells, whilst the great and good mingle their tears with the lamentations of unknown millions; but for my part I should be satisfied, if I could be sure that, when I am gone, some should gather, in after years, on the simple hillock headed by the stone that records my name, and assent to the truth of this epitaph, as they witness to it from the depths of their own glad experience, "He did no miracle; but all things that he spake of Jesus were true."

10 LOVE'S DELAYS

"When He had heard therefore that Lazarus was sick, He abode two days still in the same place where He was."--John 11:6.

THE LAPSE of years made it possible for the beloved evangelist to draw aside the veil which curtained the happy intercourse of our Lord with the home at Bethany. We are thus furnished with a conception of the one green oasis in the rugged wilderness through which He passed to his cross; and are able to think of the pure and holy love that broke in upon his loneliness and with true affection softened the bitterness of his last days, so far at least as human love could.

There were marked diversities in that home. Martha, practical, business-like, and thoughtful of all that could affect the comfort and well-being of those she loved; Mary, clinging, spiritual, gifted with all a woman's delicacy of insight and tender sympathy; Lazarus, a man of few words, quiet and unobtrusive. But Jesus loved them each. In the forefront of this marvellous chapter stands the affirmation, "Jesus loved Martha, and her sister, and Lazarus"; as if to teach us that at the very heart and foundation of all God's dealings with us, however dark and mysterious they may be, we must dare to believe in and assert the infinite, unmerited, and unchanging love of God. Whom the Lord loves He rebukes; the sons whom He receives He chastens; the boughs that are capable of bearing fruit are rigorously pruned. This is not joyous, but grievous; nevertheless, in the golden Afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness to them that are exercised thereby.

I. LOVE PERMITS PAIN.

To that hidden retreat in Perea there came one day a breathless messenger with the tidings of the illness of Christ's friend. The sisters never doubted that He would speed at all hazards to his side, and stay him from death. And if He had done as they expected, He would not only have saved his life, but have spared the sisters the anguish of long suspense, the flickering out of hope, the agony of the death scene, the grave, and the desolate, darkened home. How different were his love and their thoughts of it! "When He had heard therefore that he was sick, He abode two days still in the same place where He was."

What a startling therefore! He abstained from going, not because He did not love them, but because He did love them. His love alone kept Him back from hasting at once to the dear and stricken home. Anything less than an infinite love must have rushed instantly to the relief of those loved and troubled hearts, to stay their grief, and to have the luxury (which only love can appreciate) of wiping and stanching their tears and causing their sorrow and sighing to flee away. Divine love could alone hold back the impetuosity of the Saviour's tender-heartedness until the Angel of Pain had done her work.

Who can estimate how much we owe to suffering and pain? But for them we should have little scope for many of the chief virtues of the Christian life. Where were faith, without trial to test it; or patience, with nothing to bear; or experience, without tribulation to develop it? These qualities could not be perfected in our Lord without suffering. "He learned obedience by the things that He suffered." And we can only secure the fruit of the autumn by paying the price of wintry frosts and equinoctial hurricanes. Suffering

robs us of proud self-reliance, and casts us in an agony at the feet of God. Suffering prunes away the leaves in which we rejoiced, that the sap may find its way into fruit. Suffering isolates the soul, shutting it away from all creature aid, and surrounding it by a wall of fire. The leaves of the aromatic plant must be crushed ere they will emit their fragrance; the ore must be plunged in the furnace ere the gold is set free; the pebble must be polished on the lapidary's wheel ere its brilliant colours are apparent.

This leaf, this stone--it is thy heart: It must be crushed by pain and smart, It must be cleansed by sorrow's art, Ere it will yield a fragrance sweet; Ere it will shine a jewel meet To lay before the Saviour's feet.

How soon does pain drive us to the Saviour? Whilst Lazarus was in health, no messenger hastened to bring the Saviour to Bethany. But when death hovered over the little group, they summoned Him with all speed. This is an illustration of how pain, like a surge of the ocean, lifts us up and flings us down at the feet of the Saviour. The dark moaning waters drive the dove to the Ark; the dreary winter sends the swallows south; the sharp pruning knife compels the sap into the leafy crown or ripening branch; tempest roar makes the timid nurslings nestle close to their mother's side. Pain makes God a necessity. It is in the valley that we exchange the word "He" for "Thou." "Thou art with me."

Pain often reveals some unrealized side of our Saviour's character. The sisters had never known Him as the Resurrection and the Life, if Lazarus had not died. David had never known God as his Rock, and Fortress, and Deliverer, if he had not been hunted on the hills of Engedi. Israel had never known God as a Man of War if the nation had not endured the horrors of Egyptian captivity. Thus our very necessities read us lessons of the variety and fullness of the resources of our God. Every stormy wind in its rush whispers some new name for Christ. Every wave that dashes at our feet flings these some message from the ocean fullness of his nature. Every crucifixion rends some impenetrable veil that had hung before his heart.

And pain is often suggestive of the noblest acts of sacrifice and self-devotion. It was after Lazarus had suffered that Mary broke her alabaster box over the head of Christ, not only viewing Him as the Resurrection, but preparing his incorruptible body for its brief sojourn in the grave. Many of the masterpieces of literature and art owe their existence to the strange touch of pain, giving a fire, a passion, and an intensity to the brain and heart of genius. If the Master is about to use thee largely in ministering to others, do not be surprised if He puts thee to serve an apprenticeship in the school of pain. Poets learn in suffering what they teach in song. Blood and water flowed from a pierced side. Pearls must be dived for by those whose feet are heavily weighted to make them sink.

And there is this further thought. The Lord permitted those sisters to suffer because of the benefit which would accrue to others. Speaking to his disciples shortly afterwards, He said: "I am glad for your sakes that I was not there." The sisters suffered because their pain offered a platform on which Jesus could erect one of his greatest miracles, to stand as a beacon to weary hearts of all ages. This idea is not foreign to even heathen philosophers. "Accept," says the Emperor Marcus Aurelius, "everything that happens to thee, even if it seem disagreeable, because it leads to the health of the universe; for God would not lay on any man that which he suffers, if it were not useful for the continuance and perfection of the whole." It is probable that no one suffers nobly without in some degree ministering to the glory of God in the well-being of others. Let those who live to suffer, who lie all day in pain, and all night in utter weariness, take heart! In some way that passes our thought they too are fulfilling a useful and blessed office to the entire family of man.

Such are some of the results of Pain; and as we count them over we cannot wonder that God's love allows us to suffer, and is even eager to stand aside to let her do her work. For the time in which Pain can perfect her work is short. She needs to make haste, because the morning cometh in which she will not be able to work.

II. GOD'S LOVE SOMETIMES LEAVES OUR PRAYERS UNANSWERED.

What has become of so many thousands of our prayers? They were not deficient in earnestness; we uttered them with strong crying and tears. They were not deficient in perseverance; we offered them three times a day for years. They were not deficient in faith; for they have originated in hearts that have never for a moment doubted that God was, and that He was the rewarder of them that diligently sought Him. Still no answer has come. The argosies went forth to sea; but, like some ill-fated vessel, have never been heard of since. There was no voice, nor any to answer, nor, apparently, any to regard.

What is the history of these unanswered prayers? Some may say that they sought things which were not good--and this may explain some of the perplexity; but a better clue is given here: this was a prayer touchingly pathetic and earnest, for something which was prompted by natural affection; for something which it was in the scope of God's love to give, for it was given; and yet the prayer was apparently unanswered. The answer was postponed and delayed.

When prayer is unanswered it may be that it has been mistaken in its object, and the mistake will be indicated by inability to continue praying, and by the dying down of the desire in the soul. In other cases, especially when desire and faith remain buoyant and elastic, and still the answer comes not, God's intention is that in the delay the soul may be led to take up a position which it had never assumed before, but from which it will never be again dislodged. No praying breath is ever spent in vain. If you can believe for the blessings you ask, they are certainly yours. The goods are consigned, though not delivered; the blessing is labelled

with your name, but not sent. The vision is yet for an appointed time; it will come and will not tarry. The black head may have become white, the bright eye dim, the loving heart impaired in its beating; but the answer must come at length. God will give it at the earliest moment consistent with the true well-being of the one He loves.

III. GOD'S LOVE COMES AT LENGTH.

To the sisters He must have appeared neglectful; but He was not really so. Notice, that after two days, though no fresh message had reached Him, "He said to his disciples, Lazarus is dead." How carefully He must have watched all that transpired in that much-loved home! He saw the messenger's return; the momentary joy his tidings gave; the gradual waning of life; the anguish of the watchers as they beheld the slackening of the silver cords of life. He had followed in thought the funeral train to the rocky tomb. The whole situation was constantly present to Him, till He saw that He could interpose with the best possible result.

So is it ever. His step may linger; but his watchful interest never falters. There is not a sigh, a pang, a tear, that escapes his notice. There is not a fluttering pulse which He does not feel, noticing its tremulous anxiety. He sits as a refiner of silver. He knows our sorrows. He is acquainted with our grief. He slumbers not, nor sleeps, And when He comes He does more than we asked or thought. He raises not the sick, but the dead. He makes the darkness of the tomb the background against which to set forth the lustre of Resurrection glory. He does much more than the wildest fancy could have dreamed. Prayer is seen to be answered in a sweeter, deeper, diviner form than could have been hoped for. The benefit gained by the long delay is evident; and the wisdom of the Divine patience is acknowledged. "Oh the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God; how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!"

In after days the three would not have wished it otherwise. They would review it all, as we shall review things from the hill-summits of glory. And as the whole marvellous story passed before them in after years, they would anticipate the cry with which the Redeemed Church shall hail the unfolding of the Divine purposes in relation to our race, "Amen! Hallelujah! Amen! so be it!"--the reverent assent of the understanding, the acquiescence of the soul. "Hallelujah!"--the glad, long outburst of adoration and praise, of worship and love.

11 ANOINTED FOR HIS BURIAL

"Then took Mary a pound of ointment of spikenard, very costly, and anointed the feet of Jesus, and wiped his feet with her hair: and the house was filled with the odour of the ointment."--John 12:3.

BETWEEN the last verse of the foregoing chapter and the first of this, an interval of many weeks took place, during which our Lord was in retirement from the hate of the priests, until his hour had come. At first He took refuge in Ephraim, sixteen miles N.E. from Jerusalem, amid the wild, uncultivated hill country which fences middle Palestine from the Jordan valley. Then He crossed to Perea, further from Jerusalem, and more secure. The few weeks spent thus teemed with incidents omitted by our Evangelist but fully recorded by the other three.

At the beginning of the last week of his life our Lord found Himself again in Bethany, and in the beloved home where He desired to spend as much time as possible before He suffered. It was easy to go across to Jerusalem in the early morning, and to return in the cool of the afternoon. On one of the precious evenings a simple entertainment in honour of their Friend was planned by the sisters, and held in the house of Simon the leper, perhaps because it would contain larger numbers.

It is not difficult to imagine the scene. The village in the hollow of Olivet, nestling amid its olive-trees and oleanders. The long-drawn shadows flung by the sun now sinking on the further side of the hill. The rustic, roomy house, perhaps not more than one-storey in height, and covered by creepers. The spacious apartment, with its low tables, surrounded by the couches on which reclined the guests. The simple provision of bread and wine and herbs and freshly-picked fruit. The company, variously composed--Jews from Jerusalem, some reclining, others standing as spectators; while peasants crowd around the door. The Master sits among his apostles. John, with love and fire; Peter, dove and rock; James, the just; Nathanael, the guileless; Judas, the man of Kerioth; Simon, whose flesh had come like that of a little child; Lazarus, fresh from the world of spirits; Martha, intent on hospitable cares; Mary, absorbed with her self-sacrificing love; and above all, the Lord Himself in the place of honour, with the shadow of the cross already gathering over his noble face.

As the meal drew to a close, Mary passed to the back of the Saviour's couch, carrying an alabaster vase of costly ointment; this she poured upon his feet, and then, according to Matthew and Mark, upon his head. Judas scowled as he saw the act of love, and talked of waste; but Jesus smiled, and spoke of everlasting remembrance.

I. MARY.

The love of Christ falling on her heart was reflected back to Him; as the light of the sun shines back on itself from the moon. Not

that she ever allowed herself to think about her love to Him; she lived out of sight of what she felt in the all-absorbing thought of what He was. Of this, at least, she was sure, that ever since she had sat at his feet, the Scriptures, the feasts, and the world, were all new to her. And could she ever forget that He had summoned her brother from the grave? There was no doubt the strong pure love of her heart to Jesus, the man; but shining through this, as light through air, was the devout reverence of the believer to the Saviour, of the servant to the Lord.

Twice during his early life our Lord was anointed by a woman. In the first instance, by one who had trodden dark and evil paths; in the second, by this pure saint. How quick of growth is love, whenever it takes root! How ingenious in its inventiveness! How regardless of cost! Such love must show itself. It pines for expression. It must go forth in offices of love for the beloved. Love approves itself by deeds. Not by feelings--they are like bubbles which children blow. Not by words--they are like down which floats away on the wind. But, as the Lord said, "He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth Me."

The best love gives its best.

In the words of Jesus, quoted by the evangelist Mark, it does what it can. It ransacks the house of its choicest stores, and hastens to bestow them on the object of its attachment. It is not content with giving what it must--the fixed tribute, the specific proportion; it rejoices to give special love-tokens of all that is in possession. And it is on this principle that the Lord accepts our gifts. Whatever is given, He at once turns to what is left, and apprises the offering, rather by what remains behind, than by itself. He hardly notices the munificent gift of gold, because He knows the small proportion it bears to the abundance from which it is taken. He welcomes the farthing, because He knows that it is the widow's all.

I remember once, at the close of an unusually impressive missionary meeting, that I was led to propose to the gathered crowds of Christian people that we should present our Lord with some special article on which we set great store; not with any thought of merit, but altogether as a token of the deep personal love we bore Him. It is the custom of friends to make presents to each other: how much more should we sometimes take the opportunity of giving our Lord that which we prize, and which it will cost us something to renounce; though we forget the sacrifice in the glad love which finds at last an adequate expression. In response to this appeal many there and then gave jewels and ornaments and costly articles, which realized a handsome sum for the Master's cause. We called them alabaster boxes of very precious ointment; and it was sweet to give them. And amongst the letters received afterwards was one from a widow, who said that she had long withheld her assent to her daughter becoming a missionary, because she felt that she could not part with her; but that under the constraint of the love of Christ she would stand out no longer, but gave her to Him as her priceless offering.

Love justifies itself in the eye of love.

Some that sat at table, and one of them especially, thought that Mary would have shown her love better if she had sold the alabaster-box for three-hundred pence, and given the proceeds to the poor. But the Master said it was a good work, good because of the love which prompted it. It is, of course, right to help the poor, to build churches, to subsidise missionary societies. We must compensate for our lack of personal service by giving the results of our labours. But we have no right to criticize a love that expresses itself in some other form--in a psalm, a picture, an act of strange devotion. To our utilitarian brains ours may seem the best method of expressing our love. There is something to show for it. But the love of the other may be deeper and more delicate, because eager to give the beloved one all the rapture of personal enjoyment; and there is an element of unselfish devotion too, purged from the alloy of the desire to see one's gift embodied in some lasting expression.

I have met somewhere with this parable. There were two men, Christians, the one of whom expressed his love for the Master in acts that left little permanent record among men, but which glowed with the fire of enthusiastic devotion. Amongst other things, he built a church in a lonely place in which he spent vast sums on architecture, music, beauty of decoration. But his friend rebuked him. "What," said he, "will you sing psalms when the poor of Christ's flock are perishing? and build churches when oppression has to be exposed, evil attacked, foul dwellings cleansed? will you devote yourself to questions of taste when there is so much to be done amid the squalid quarters of the poor? If you really love Christ do something practical." And the other meekly answered that he did all for the love of Christ; but, feeling rebuked, he went forth to labour amongst the poor; however, he had no gift for it, and failed. And the Master called both to his side, saying to the one that had rebuked his brother, "Rebuke him not; he loves Me not less than thou; and it is sweet to Me to have love expressed in such a way as that it must be meant for Me alone, altogether apart from any benefit it may confer on others."

There are so many mixed motives which enter into our beneficence. We like to feel that we have done something; that we have built a little bit into the fabric of God's kingdom; that we have contributed to the well-being of our fellows. And these are all laudable and worthy aims. But by how much they are prominent in our minds, by so much do they detract from the simplicity and purity of our expressions towards Christ. Let us not leave these undone; but let us supplement them by taking opportunities as they occur of presenting Christ with that which only He knows about, and is the direct personal gift of our affection. It is possible to combine love to Jesus with beneficence to the poor. But if a choice must be made the personal love that does all it can for Him is better than the

love that is divided between the Master and the beneficent results of its gifts.

The love of contemplation will sometimes break out in the most heroic acts.

Martha was apt to chide her sister for doing so little in the house. She could not understand a love which seemed so utterly unpractical. She did not realize that her sister was being led to apprehend truths of which she had no idea; and that probably she was the only one in the world who had really entered into the heart of the Lord's teaching about his approaching death. The busy housewife little dreamt that her younger sister would presently perform a deed of rare and deep significance; which should refresh that beloved heart amid the agonies of crucifixion, even as it left a fragrance on the sacred body, of which all the coarse handling of the next few days could not deprive it.

As she heard the Master speak of his approaching end Mary grasped the whole situation. She saw that she could not be there to perform the last offices of a woman's love. She bethought herself of this ingenious method of anticipating his burying. She resolved that, whatever the indignities offered to that dear form, it should have as royal an anointing as a king's. And Jesus read the meaning of the deed, and put into words the unexpressed eloquence of her soul: "Let her alone; against the day of my burying hath she kept this."

And love kindles love.

Not even Judas would have called this act waste, could he have seen the love it has kindled and the acts to which it has led. It has been spoken of in all the world for a memorial of her. The Lord's prevision has been exactly verified. His Gospel has been preached in all the world, and this woman's deed has been proclaimed with it, stirring the hearts of men and women beneath every sky, No noble act is ever lost. It carries in it the seeds of self-propagation. It sows itself, as wind-wafted seeds will find a lodgment in crannies of the rocks, and interstices of walls. It is found after many days in the heroic purpose and generous act of those who have been inspired by its spirit. Yield yourself to God; let the Spirit of God suggest your method of service : it may be quite different from anything to which others are called; it may even draw down adverse criticism and censure; but if it is for Him, whether it be an act or a gift, it is enough--do it. He will shield you, and reward you with a smile, and put the precious treasure among His choice possessions. Shall an earthly sovereign have a cabinet filled with choice gifts from her subjects, and shall not Christ treasure the love-tokens of his closer friends? The poor you have always with you; do not through familiarity neglect Him, but do Him good.

II. JUDAS.

What a contrast between his face and Mary's! Hers--open, pure, tender, now and again flushed with an exquisite glow from the soul behind. His--dark, hard, forbidding. As the sun draws forth the foetid miasma of the pool, so did this act of Mary's excite his angriest feelings of hatred, though he cleverly cloaked them under solicitude for the poor. That very night, he who now haggled over three-hundred pence, would be selling his Lord for thirty pieces of silver! But his true character was not yet discovered.

We can well imagine that Mary felt an instinctive shudder pass through her whenever Judas came near. Women are shrewd judges of character. The dove knows when the hawk is hovering over her. We can imagine that after Jesus and his disciples had gone forth on any morning from that home, how Mary would say: "I cannot endure that Judas; I do not know what it is, but he never comes near me without making me shudder; and I am sure that he dislikes me in his heart as much as I do him." "Hush," Martha would answer, "you know the Master trusts him with the bag, and he is held in high honour among them for his goodness to the poor." "Well," would the younger sister reply, "it may be so; but I am certain that he is not what he seems."

Ah, how often will a man adopt sanctimonious phraseology to hide his real self, and will talk of the poor, and Christ, and religion, not that he cares for any of these things, but because he desires to add to his own estate or position! Not that he cares might be written on the life of many a hypocrite. He comes to church; not that he cares, but to secure admittance to good society. He professes to be a Christian; not that he cares, but to blind people to his deeds. He gives away money; not that he cares, but to win name and fame. And the man who does not care is hardening himself by every act of hypocrisy, until he can sell his Lord.

III. THE MASTER.

He shielded her.

"Let her alone. Why trouble ye her?" I see her timid look to Him, when those rough words were spoken. Will He sympathize with them? And He cast over her the mantle of his instant protection. Whenever you are molested or assailed, look to Him, shelter in Him, hide in his cleft side; and you will hear Him say, "Touch not mine anointed."

He approved her work.

He called it good. It is very wonderful that He should think of aught which is wrought by human hands as good; but He looks beneath to the love that inspires and prompts. If He shall speak so of any of our poor work, what a heaven it will be! It has been full

of failure; the promised crops have failed; our hopes have been dashed with repeated disappointment; and men have either not noticed or turned away with disdain. But if his verdict is good, we shall be more repaid.

He interpreted her inner purpose.

No one would have guessed what she meant by that gracious act; but He knew, and vindicated her. Yes, and so it must ever be. He reads our motives; He sees what we put into any act; He understands what we hardly dare to say; and before the universe He will some day give us credit for it all.

What a Master is ours! Oh for crowns for his brow, for alabaster boxes for his person, for tongues to tell his love! Let us anew dedicate ourselves, our lives, our substance, our all to Him; so that the perfume of the sacrifice may fill the homes where we dwell, and the shrines where we worship and work, and the hearts and lives of others.

12 FALLING INTO THE GROUND TO DIE

"Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone; but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit."--John 12:24.

THE FAR EAST sent representatives to the cradle of the Son of Man; the far West sent them to his cross. Both hemispheres and all races of men find their centre and meeting-place in Jesus Christ. It is important to bear in mind that these seekers for Christ, whose pathetic entreaty, "Sir, we would see Jesus!" so deeply stirred the Master's heart, were not simply Greek-speaking Jews; but were genuine Greeks, children of the race which, next to the Roman and the Hebrew, has left the deepest impression on our modern life.

They were probably in the habit of frequenting the Jewish feasts; either for purposes of trade, or because they found in the literature and worship of the chosen people some truer satisfaction for the instinctive cravings of their religious natures than could be supplied in the land of their birth. And as the land was ringing with the name and deeds of Jesus, it was natural that they should want to see Him for themselves.

They made their application in the first instance to Philip; perhaps because, as his name indicates, he had Grecian connections, or was even of Grecian origin. Philip called in the counsel and advice of his friend and companion, Andrew; and the two together told the Master of the interesting inquiry, eliciting, in answer, one of the profoundest statements that ever fell from those gracious lips. It is as if the Lord saw in their application a foreshadowing of the advent of a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, who should be led to seek Him; though He realized also the tremendous cost to Himself, by which alone He would be able to attract them, and hold them, and satisfy the infinite cravings of their hearts. It is of that cost that we are now chiefly to think.

I. DEATH THE WAY TO GLORIFICATION.

"The hour is come that the Son of Man should be glorified." How much this glorification meant to the Master! It was not for Himself; but that He might be the better able to bring a revenue of glory to his Father. Thus He prayed: "Father, glorify thy Son, that thy Son also may glorify Thee."

What majestic stages there are in the glorification of the Holy Trinity! In the first instance, the Father raises the Son from the dead, and gives Him glory; and then raises Him to his own right hand, investing Him in his human nature with the glory He had with Him before the foundation of the world. Then, when Jesus is glorified, the Holy Spirit is given; and He glorifies the Lord by taking of those things which are his, and revealing them to his own. Moreover, in addition to this, He repeats them in their hearts, so that the Lord is glorified in them. And thus, as the Son is glorified--in the first place by the Father, and in the second by the Spirit, and in the third by the unity and spirituality of his Church--He gathers up the triple ray and flashes it, in one strong and direct beam, back on his Father; and thus the passion of his heart is realized (John 17:5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10; 7:39; 16:14; 17:1).

But at the threshold of all stands the glorification of Jesus through death. It was his constant habit to connect the two. The Christ must suffer ere He could enter into his glory. As Judas went out to do the fatal deed of treachery, the Master said: "The hour is come that the Son of Man should be glorified." And so here the search of the Greeks reminds Him of his approaching end, and this of his glory.

The death of Jesus could not add to his intrinsic glory. What could be added to that character in which Man and God met in perfect balance, as the pure air of the mountains is penetrated and saturated by the clear and blessed light of morning? But the death of Jesus could and did promote his glorification--that is, it opened up to the view of men and angels qualities of his character and attributes of his being which had else remained for ever concealed. The prism cannot add to the glory of the sun by a single ray;

but it can glorify each beam of light, which it breaks into a sevenfold band of colour, revealing its hidden glory in a mystery of beauty. The death of the seed in the ground does not add a single property of fruitfulness or beauty which was not there before; but it liberates them, and gives them room to break into manifestation.

And perhaps there is a sense in which each of us must learn to die daily, that the true intrinsic excellence of the character of Jesus may be revealed in us. It is there in germ and essence; but it awaits death to set free its hidden powers. Let us not be surprised, therefore, if we have to pass through death, and in dying are compelled to manifest traits and qualities which else had been hidden and concealed. The death of December must precede the colours of May and the fruits of October.

II. DEATH THE CURE OF LONELINESS.

"Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone." It would seem as if the very heart of God yearned for society. In perfect blessedness He had been all-sufficient for Himself; but there was within Him a love which could find no expression or satisfaction apart from beings on which it could rest. Love is almost inconceivable unless there be objects on which to expend and for which to sacrifice itself. Did not this underlie that Divine resolve, "Let us make man"?

But it was not enough simply to make objects for love. They must be attached to the Infinite Lover by strong and enduring bands--they must be led to love; there must be reciprocity in affection, and blessedness in mutual tenderness. If a man and woman do not love, there will be unutterable loneliness in the marriage-bond itself. It were not enough, then, for God to create; He must attract, and attach, and bind, to Himself. But to do this involves something more than an act of power; it will demand self-sacrifice, self-giving, self-abandonment, on his part--all that is set forth in the metaphor of falling into the ground to die. God can only cease to be alone when He not only loves, but is loved. And He can only be loved with the one love that can satisfy Him, because it yields all, when He has first given all. Therefore, He gave his only-begotten Son; and in giving Himself Jesus has made it impossible that God should ever be alone again; because self-giving, such as his, will ever excite the love, and gratitude, and devotion, of human hearts through all ages.

There are many lonely people about the world who complain of desolate and solitary lives. They account for their condition by supposing it due to the failure of relatives through death or intervening distance; but, indeed, it is rather attributable to the fact that they have never fallen into the ground to die, that they have always consulted their own ease and well-being, and have never learnt that the cure of loneliness comes through the sowing of oneself in a grave of daily self-sacrifice. The corn of wheat must fall into the ground and die, and it will abide no longer alone.

III. DEATH THE WAY TO FRUITFULNESS.

"But if it die, it beareth much fruit."

What vision was that which rose before the mind of Christ when He heard of those Gentiles and spoke of fruit? As to the first man in Paradise the fruit of the tree was pleasant to the eyes, so to the second Man the fruit of the tree of the cross was, above all things, fair and seductive.

It included the bride, his wife; it included the great multitude which no man can number; it included all those deeds of heroism and graces of self-denial to which the story of his cross has given rise as it has sped from land to land; it included harvests of saved souls which shall golden the furrows of eternal ages. All this was possible only because He dared to die. "Without shedding of blood there is no remission." His death was needed to put away sin; to reveal the love of God; to abolish the curse; and to open the kingdom of Heaven to all believers.

There are many who sigh for fruitfulness, that have never yet learnt the deep lesson of the cross of Christ. We can never die in quite the sense in which He died; not by us can there be submission, or sacrifice, or expiation; and yet there is a sense in which we must drink deeply into the meaning of his death if we would be really fruitful. If we would save others, we cannot save ourselves. If we would help men, we must be content to be helpless. If we would receive grafts of the wild olive, we must be content to bear the gash of the pruning knife. If we would fill the world with a sweet savour of the precious ointment, we must be content to be broken boxes. The most fruitful boughs are those from which the foliage and shoots are cut away with unsparing hand, that the sap may accumulate in the swelling clusters.

IV. DEATH THE GATE TO LIFE.

"He that loveth his life shall lose it, and he that hateth his life shall keep it unto life eternal."

Our Lord deliberately chose death, because He knew, first, that He could not be holden by it; and, secondly, that it was only through the grave that He could reach the resurrection life and the ascension glory. Therefore it was that He went down into the valley of death, singing as He went, "Thou wilt not leave my soul in Hades, neither wilt Thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption."

There is also a deep truth for us all in these marvellous words which He repeated on three occasions, as if He would work them into the very texture of our hearts. Not that we are to make death for ourselves, or constantly fling ourselves away into deep, dark furrows at the impulse of our own choice; but that we should be on the alert not to avoid, but to take any opportunity that God gives us, of going into the land of Moriah, to any of the mountains of which He may tell us. Dare to look up into the face of God, O ye who long for the richer, deeper life; and tell Him that you will not choose your path, but that you are willing to follow Him through death, if that is the only portal of life; and then wait for Him to teach you each step that must be taken through the deepening shadows which lie between you and the more abundant life, which is your true heritage!

Death can never be pleasant to the flesh. The knife is sharp, the fire burns, the cup is bitter, heart and flesh fail; and it sometimes seems as if we must relinquish the effort to keep the girded loin and the undaunted attitude. We learn how Abraham felt as for those three weary days he knew that each step was carrying him deeper into the gloom. We cry, "Let this cup pass from me." Falling into the ground to die is no pastime to the little corns of wheat.

But He who has gone through death Himself knows every turn of the valley and every ford in the river. He cannot make a mistake; nor will He take us by a rougher path than needs be. See how his footprints, nail-pierced, have trodden and retrodden the way with the many that He has brought hither and brought through. He would not have brought you by this path unless He had known that you were strong enough to bear it; or that He was strong enough to carry you, if the worst should come to the worst. And so, since He is there, do not fail to say his name a hundred times a day, if need be, repeating it as the antidote to pain : "Jesus! Jesus! Jesus!"

There are times in such experiences when his voice is very distinctly heard, reassuring the soul of a promise. At other times it seems impossible to detect his voice. But then He infuses strength into our nature in a subtler, tenderer way; and instead of strengthening us by his words, He becomes Himself the strength of our heart and our portion for ever.

Our true attitude is the uncompromising surrender of our will to his will; not trying to effect any great changes in our emotional or mental life, but willing his will, completely and always, and asking Him to work in us, to will and to do of his own good pleasure. Let us not court death, or seek to inflict death, or worry as to whether we are dying properly. Let us roll the whole responsibility on Him, and trust Him up to the hilt. His will is our weal.

All along the line of life we must be prepared to erect altars on which we may yield to God in sacrifice, habits, associations, fascinations, which He has revealed as alien to our true well-being. The soul that dares to live this life will find streams flowing from every smitten rock; honey in the carcass of every slain lion; fair winds (as in the old Greek story) following on the offering of every Iphigenia. I saw a beautiful device once--a hollow cross, filled with flowers which fell out as the cross was carried. Shoulder your cross, child of God! After the first step there will be a shower of flowers.

So it must be ever. Day out of night; spring out of winter; flowers out of frost; joy out of sorrow; fruitfulness out of pruning; Olivet out of Gethsemane; the Ascension out of Calvary; life out of death; and the Christ that is to be out of the pangs of a travailing creation.