

Maclaren on Joshua

RELATED RESOURCES

- Joshua Commentaries
- Joshua Devotionals - from Back to the Bible
- Joshua Devotionals II - from F B Meyer, Moody Bible Institute
- Joshua Sermons by C H Spurgeon
- Joshua Sermons by Alexander Maclaren

Joshua Sermons by Alexander Maclaren

Joshua 1:1-11

The New Leader's Commission

The closest connection exists between Deuteronomy and Joshua. The narrative may be read as running on without a break. It turns away from the lonely grave up on the mountain to the bustling camp and the new leader. No man is indispensable. God's work goes on uninterrupted. The instruments are changed, but the Master-hand is the same, and lays one tool aside and takes another out of the tool-chest as He will. Moses is dead,—what then? Does his death paralyze the march of the tribes? No; it is but the ground for the ringing command, 'Therefore arise, go over this Jordan.' The immediate installation of his successor, and the uninterrupted continuance of the advance, do not mean that Moses is not honoured or is forgotten, for the narrative lovingly links his honorific title, 'the servant of the Lord,' with the mention of his death; and God Himself does the same, for he is thrice referred to in the divine command to Joshua, as the recipient of the promise of the conquest, as the example of the highest experience of God's all-sufficing companionship, and as the medium by which Israel received the law. Joshua steps into the empty place, receives the same great promise, is assured of the same Presence, and is to obey the same law. The change of leaders is great, but nothing else is changed; and even it is not so great as faint hearts in their sorrow are apt to think, for the real Leader lives, and Moses and Joshua alike are but the transmitters of His orders and His aids to Israel.

The first command given to Joshua was a trial of his faith, for 'Jordan was in flood' (Joshua 3:15),—and how was that crowd to get across, when fords were impassable and ferry-boats were wanting, to say nothing of the watchful eyes that were upon them from the other bank? To cross a stream in the face of the enemy is a ticklish operation, even for modern armies; what must it have been, then, for Joshua and his horde? Not a hint is given him as to the means by which the crossing is to be made possible. He has Jehovah's command to do it, and Jehovah's promise to be with him, and that is to be enough. We too have sometimes to face undertakings which we cannot see how to carry through; but if we do see that the path is one appointed by God, and will boldly tread it, we may be quite sure that, when we come to what at present seems like a mountain wall across it, we shall find that the glen opens as we advance, and that there is a way,—narrow, perhaps, and dangerous, but practicable. 'One step enough for me' should be our motto. We may trust God not to command impossibilities, nor to lead us into a cul de sac .

The promise to Moses (Deut. 2:24) is repeated almost verbally in verse 4.

The boundaries of the land are summarily given as from 'the wilderness' in the south to 'this Lebanon' in the north, and from the Euphrates in the east to the Mediterranean in the west. 'The land of the Hittites' is not found in the original passage in Deuteronomy, and it seems to be a designation of the territory between Lebanon and the Euphrates, which we now know to have been the seat of the northern Hittites, while the southern branch was planted round Hebron and the surrounding district. But these wide boundaries were not attained till late in the history, and were not long retained. Did the promise, then, fail? No, for it, like all the promises, was contingent on conditions, and Israel's unfaithfulness cut short its extent of territory. We, too, fail to possess all the land destined for us. Our charter is much wider than our actual wealth. God gives more than we take, and we are content to occupy but a corner of the broad land which He has given us. In like manner Joshua did not realise to the full the following promise of uniform victory, but was defeated at Ai and elsewhere. The reason was the same,—the faithlessness of the people. Unbelief and sin turn a Samson into a weakling, and make Israel flee before the ranks of the Philistines.

The great encouragement given to Joshua in entering on his hard and perilous enterprise is twice repeated here: 'As I was with Moses, so will I be with thee.' Did Joshua remember how, nearly forty years since, he had fronted the mob of cowards with the very

same assurance, and how the answer had been a shower of stones? The cowards are all dead,—will their sons believe the assurance now? If we do believe that God is with us, we shall be ready to cross Jordan in flood, and to meet the enemies that are waiting on the other bank. If we do not, we shall not dare greatly, nor succeed in what we attempt. The small successes of material wealth and gratified ambition may be ours, but for all the higher duties and nobler conflicts that become a man, the condition of achievement and victory is steadfast faith in God's presence and help.

That assurance—which we may all have if we cling to Jesus, in whom God comes to be with every believing soul—is the only basis on which the command to Joshua, thrice repeated, can wisely or securely be rested. It is mockery to say to a man conscious of weakness, and knowing that there are evils which must surely come, and evils which may possibly come, against which he is powerless, 'Don't be afraid' unless you can show him good reason why he need not be. And there is only one reason which can still reasonable dread in a human heart that has to front 'all the ills that flesh is heir to,' and sees behind them all the grim form of death. He ought to be afraid, unless—unless what? Unless he has heard and taken into his inmost soul the Voice that said to Joshua, 'I will not fail thee, nor forsake thee: be strong and of a good courage,' or, still more sweet and peace-bringing, the Voice that said to the frightened crew of the fishing-boat in the storm and the darkness, 'It is I; be not afraid.' If we know that Christ is with us, it is wise to be strong and courageous; if we are meeting the tempest alone, the best thing we can do is to fear, for the fear may drive us to seek for His help, and He ever stretches out His hand to him who is afraid, as he ought to be, when he feels the cold water rising above his knees, and by his very fear is driven to faith, and cries, 'Lord, save; I perish!'

Courage that does not rest on Christ's presence is audacity rather than courage, and is sure to collapse, like a pricked bladder, when the sharp point of a real peril comes in contact with it. If we sit down and reckon the forces that we have to oppose to the foes that we are sure to meet, we shall find ourselves unequal to the fight, and, if we are wise, shall 'send the ambassage' of a humble desire to the great King, who will come to our help with His all-conquering powers. Then, and only then, shall we be safe in saying, 'I will not fear what man can do unto me, or devils either,' when we have said, 'In God have I put my trust,' and have heard Him answering, 'I will not fail thee, nor forsake thee.'

Joshua 1:7-8

The Charge to the Soldier of the LORD

'Only be then strong and very courageous, that thou mayest observe to do according to all the law which Moses My servant commanded thee... that thou mayest prosper wheresoever thou goest. 8. This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shall meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein: for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success.'— JOSHUA i. 7, 8 .

This is the central portion of the charge given to the successor of Moses. Joshua was a very small man in comparison with his predecessor. He was no prophet nor constructive genius; he was not capable of the heights of communion and revelation which the lofty spirit of Moses was able to mount. He was only a plain, fiery soldier, with energy, swift decision, promptitude, self-command, and all the military virtues in the highest degree. The one thing that he needed was to be 'strong and courageous'; and over and over again in this chapter you will find that injunction pealed into his ears. He is the type of the militant servant of the Lord, and the charge to him embodies the duties of all such.

I. We have here the duty of courageous strength.

Christianity has altered the perspective of human virtues, has thrown the gentler ones into prominence altogether unknown before, and has dimmed the brilliancy of the old heroic type of character; but it has not struck those virtues out of its list. Whilst the perspective is altered, there is as much need in the lowliest Christian life for the loftiest heroism as ever there was. For in no mere metaphor, but in grim earnest, all Christian progress is conflict, and we have to fight, not only with the evils that are within, but, if we would be true to the obligations of our profession and loyal to the commands of our Master, we have to take our part in the great campaign which He has inaugurated and is ever carrying on against every abuse and oppression, iniquity and sin, that grinds down the world and makes our brethren miserable and servile. So, then, in these words we have directions in regard to a side of the Christian character, indispensable to-day as ever, and the lack of which cannot be made up for by any amount of sweet and contemplative graces.

Jesus Christ is the type of both.

The Conqueror of Canaan and the Redeemer of the world bear the same name. The Jesus whom we trust was a Joshua. And let us learn the lesson that neither the conqueror of the typical and material land of promise nor the Redeemer who has won the

everlasting heaven for our portion could do their work without the heroic side of human excellence being manifestly developed. Do you remember 'He steadfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem'? Do you remember that the Apostle whom a hasty misconception has thought of as the gentlest of the Twelve, because he had most to say about love, is the Apostle that more emphatically than any other rings into our ears over and over again the thought of the Christ, militant and victorious, the Hero as well as the patient Sufferer, the 'Captain of our salvation'? And so let us recognise how both the gentler and the stronger graces, the pacific and the warlike side of human excellence, have their highest development in Jesus Christ, and learn that the firmest strength must be accompanied with the tenderest love and swathed in meekest gentleness. As another Apostle has it in his pregnant, brief injunctions, ringing and laconic like a general's word of command, 'Quit you like men I be strong! let all your deeds be done in love!' Braid the two things together, for the mightiest strength is the love that conquers hate, and the only love that is worthy of a man is the love that is strong to contend and to overcome.

'Be strong.'

Then strength is a duty; then weakness is a sin. Then the amount of strength that we possess and wield is regulated by ourselves. We have our hands on the sluice. We may open it to let the whole full tide run in, or we may close it till a mere dribble reaches us. For the strength which is strength, and not merely weakness in a fever, is a strength derived, and ours because derived. The Apostle gives the complete version of the exhortation when he says: 'Finally, my brethren,' that Omega of command which is the Alpha of performance, 'be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might.' Let Christ's strength in. Open the heart wide that it may come. Keep yourself in continual touch with God, the fountain of all power. Trust is strength, because trust touches the Rock of Ages.

For this reason the commandment to be strong and of good courage is in the text based upon this: 'As I was with Moses, so I will be with thee. I will not fail thee nor forsake thee.' Our strength depends on ourselves, because our strength is the fruit of our faith. And if we live with Him, grasping His hand and, in the realising consciousness of our own weakness, looking beyond ourselves, then power will come to us above our desire and equal to our need. The old victories of faith will be reproduced in us when we say with the ancient king, 'Lord! We know not what to do, but our eyes are up unto Thee.' Then He will come to us, to make us 'strong in the Lord and in the power of His might.' 'Wait on the Lord and He will strengthen thine heart; wait, I say, on the Lord.'

But courage is duty, too, as well as strength. Power and the consciousness of power do not always go together. In regard to the strength of nature, courage and might are quite separable. There may be a strong coward and a weak hero. But in the spiritual region, strength and courage do go together. The consciousness of the divine power with us, and that alone, will make us bold with a boldness that has no taint of levity and presumption mingled with it, and never will overestimate its own strength. The charge to Joshua, then, not only insists upon the duty of strength, but on the duty of conscious strength, and on the duty of measuring the strength that is at my back with the weakness that is against me, and of being bold because I know that more and 'greater is He that is with me than are they that be with them.'

II. So much, then, for the first of the exhortations here. Now look next at the duty of implicit obedience to the word of command.

That is another soldierly virtue, the exercise of which sheds a nobility over the repulsive horrors of the battlefield. Joshua had to be fitted to command by learning to obey, and, like that other soldier whose rough trade had led him to some inkling of Christ's authority by its familiarizing him with the idea of the strange power of the word of command, had to realise that he himself was 'under authority' before he could issue his orders.

Courage and strength come first, and on them follows the command to do all according to the law, to keep it without deflection to right or left, and to meditate on it day and night. These two virtues make the perfect soldier-courage and obedience. Daring and discipline must go together, and to know how to follow orders is as essential as to know how to despise dangers.

But the connection between these two, as set forth in this charge, is not merely that they must co-exist, but that courage and strength are needed for, and are to find their noblest field of exercise in, absolute acceptance of, and unhesitating, swift, complete, uncomplaining obedience to, everything that is discerned to be God's will and our duty.

For the Christian soldier, then, God's law is his marching orders. The written word, and especially the Incarnate Word, are our law of conduct. The whole science of our warfare and plan of campaign are there. We have not to take our orders from men's lips, but we must often disregard them, that we may listen to the 'Captain of our salvation.' The soldier stands where his officer has posted him, and does what he was bid, no matter what may happen. Only one voice can relieve him. Though a thousand should bid him flee, and his heart should echo their advices, he is recreant if he deserts his post at the command of any but him who set him there. Obedience to others is mutiny. Nor does the Christian need another law to supplement that which Christ has given him in His pattern and teaching. Men have appended huge comments to it, and have softened some of its plain precepts which bear hard on popular sins. But the Lawgiver's law is one thing, and the lawyers' explanations which explain it away or darken what was clear enough, however unwelcome, are quite another. Christ has given us Himself, and therein has given a sufficient directory for conduct and

conflict which fits close to all our needs, and will prove definite and practical enough if we honestly try to apply it.

The application of Christ's law to daily life takes some courage, and is the proper field for the exercise of Christian strength. 'Be very courageous that thou mayest observe.' If you are not a bold Christian you will very soon get frightened out of obedience to your Master's commandments. Courage, springing from the realisation of God's helping strength, is indispensable to make any man, in any age, live out thoroughly and consistently the principles of the law of Jesus Christ. No man in this generation will work out a punctual obedience to what he knows to be the will of God, without finding out that all the 'Canaanites' are not dead yet; but that there are enough of them left to make a very thorny life for the persistent follower of Jesus Christ.

And not only is there courage needed for the application of the principles of conduct which God has given us, but you will never have them handy for swift application unless, in many a quiet hour of silent, solitary, patient meditation you have become familiar with them. The recruit that has to learn on the battle-field how to use his rifle has a good chance of being dead before he has mastered the mysteries of firing. And Christian people that have their Christian principles to dig out of the Bible when the necessity comes, will likely find that the necessity is past before they have completed the excavation. The actual battle-field is no place to learn drill. If a soldier does not know how his sword hangs, and cannot get at it in a moment, he will probably draw it too late.

I am afraid that the practice of such meditation as is meant here has come to be, like the art of making ecclesiastical stained glass, almost extinct in modern times. You have all so many newspapers and magazines to read that the Bible has a chance of being shoved out of sight, except on Sundays and in chapels. The 'meditating' that is enjoined in my text is no mere intellectual study of Scripture, either from an antiquarian or a literary or a theological point of view, but it is the mastering of the principles of conduct as laid down there, and the appropriating of all the power for guidance and for sustaining which that word of the Lord gives. Meditation, the familiarising ourselves with the ethics of Scripture, and with the hopes and powers that are treasured in Jesus Christ, so that our minds are made up upon a great many thorny questions as to what we ought to do, and that when crises or dangers come, as they have a knack of coming, very suddenly, and are sprung upon us unexpectedly, we shall be able, without much difficulty, or much time spent in perplexed searching, to fall back upon the principles that decide our conduct—that is essential to all successful and victorious Christian life.

And it is the secret of all blessed Christian life. For there is a lovely echo of these vigorous words of command to Joshua in a very much more peaceful form in the 1st Psalm: 'Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, ... but his delight is in the law of the Lord, and in His law doth he meditate day and night'—the very words that are employed in the text to describe the duty of the soldier—therefore 'all that he doeth shall prosper.'

III. That leads to the last thought here—the sure victory of such bold obedience.

'Thou mayest prosper whithersoever thou goest'; 'Thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then shalt thou have good success,' or, as the last word might be rendered, 'then shalt thou act wisely.' You may not get victory from an earthly point of view, for many a man that lives strong and courageous and joyfully obeying God's law, as far as he knows it and because he loves the Lawgiver, goes through life, and finds that, as far as the world's estimate is concerned, there is nothing but failure as his portion. Ah I but the world's way is not the true way of estimating victory. 'Be of good cheer, I have overcome the world,' said Jesus Christ when within arm's-length of the Cross. And His way is the way in which we must conquer the world, if we conquer it at all. The success which my text means is the carrying out of conscientious convictions of God's will into practice. That is the only success that is worth talking about or looking for. The man that succeeds in obeying and translating God's will into conduct is the victor, whatever be the outward fruits of his life. He may go out of the field beaten, according to the estimate of men that can see no higher than their own height, and little further than their own finger tips can reach; he may himself feel that the world has gone past him, and that he has not made much of it; he may have to lie down at last unknown, poor, with all his bright hopes that danced before him in childhood gone, and sore beaten by the enemies; but if he is able to say in the strength that Christ gives, 'I have finished my course; I have kept the faith,' his 'way has prospered,' and he has had 'good success.' 'We are more than conquerors through Him that loved us.'

Joshua 3:4

The Untrodden Path and the Guiding Ark

'Come not near unto the ark, that ye may know the way by which ye must go; for ye have not passed this way heretofore.'— JOSHUA iii. 4 .

It was eminently true of Israel that they had 'not passed this way heretofore,' inasmuch as the path which was opening before them, through the oozy bed of the river, had never been seen by human eye, nor trodden by man's foot. Their old leader was dead. There were only two of the whole host that had ever been out of the desert in their lives. They had a hard task before them. Jericho lay

there, gleaming across the plain, among the palm-trees, backed by the savage cliffs, up the passes in which they would have to fight their way. So that we need not wonder that, over and over again, in these early chapters of this book, the advice is reiterated, 'Be of good courage. Be strong and fear not!' They needed special guidance, and they received very special guidance, and my text tells us what they had to do, in order to realise the full blessing and guidance that was given them. 'Let there be a space of 2000 cubits by measure between you and the ark'—three-quarters of a mile or thereabouts—'do not press close upon the heels of the bearers, for you will not be able to see where they are going if you crowd on them. Be patient. Let the course of the ark disclose itself before you try to follow it, that ye may know the way by which ye must go, for ye have not passed this way heretofore.'

I. Note the untrodden path.

I suppose that most of us have to travel a very well-worn road, and that our course, in the cases of all except those in early life, is liker that of a millhorse than an untrodden path. Most of us are continually treading again in the prints of our own footsteps. A long, weary stretch of monotonous duties, and the repetition of the same things to-day that we did yesterday is the destiny of most of us.

Some of us, perhaps, may be standing upon the verge of some new scenes in our lives. Some of you young people may have come up to a great city for the first time to carve out a position for yourselves, and are for the first time encompassed by the temptations of being unknown in a crowd. Some of you may be in new domestic circumstances, some with new sorrows, or tasks, or difficulties pressing upon you, calling for wisdom and patience. It is quite likely that there may be some who, in the most prosaic and literal sense of the words, are entering on a path altogether new and untrodden. But they will be in the minority, and for the most of us the days that were full of new possibilities are at an end, and we have to expect little more than the monotonous repetition of the habitual, humdrum duties of mature life. We have climbed the winding paths up the hill, and most of us are upon the long plateau that stretches unvaried, until it begins to dip at the further edge. And some of us are going down that other side of the hill.

But whatever may be the variety in regard to the mere externals of our lives, how true it is about us all that even the most familiar duties of to-day are not quite like the same duties when they had to be done yesterday; and that the path for each of us—though, as we go along, we find in it nothing new—is yet an untrodden path! For we are not quite the same as we were yesterday, though our work may be the same, and the difference in us makes it in some measure different.

But what mainly makes even the most well-beaten paths new at the thousandth time of traversing them is our ignorance of what may be waiting round the next turn of the road. The veil that hangs before and hides the future is a blessing, though we sometimes grumble at it, and sometimes petulantly try to make pinholes through it, and peep in to see a little of what is behind it. It brings freshness into our lives, and a possibility of anticipation, and even of wonder and expectation, that prevents us from stagnating. Even in the most habitual repetition of the same tasks 'ye have not passed this way heretofore.' And life for every one of us is still full of possibilities so great and so terrible that we may well feel that the mist that covers the future is a blessing and a source of strength for us all.

Our march through time is like that of men in a mist, in which things loom in strangely distorted shapes, unlike their real selves, until we get close up to them, and only then do we discover them.

So for us all the path is new and unknown by reason of the sudden surprises that may be sprung upon us, by reason of the sudden temptations that may start up at any moment in our course, by reason of the earthquakes that may shatter the most solid-seeming lives, by reason of the sudden calamities that may fall upon us. The sorrows that we anticipate seldom come, and those that do come are seldom anticipated. The most fatal bolts are generally from the blue. One flash, all unlooked for, is enough to blast the tree in all its leafy pride. Many of us, I have no doubt, can look back to times in our lives when, without anticipation on our parts, or warning from anything outside of us, a smiting hand fell upon some of our blessings. The morning dawned upon the gourd in full vigour of growth, and in the evening it was stretched yellow and wilted upon the turf. Dear brethren, anything may come out of that dark cloud through which our life's course has to pass, and there are some things concerning which all that we know is that they must come.

These are very old threadbare thoughts; I dare say you think it was not worth your while to come to hear them, nor mine to speak them; but if we would lay them to heart, and realise how true it is about every step of our earthly course that 'ye have not passed this way heretofore,' we should complain less than we do of the weariness and prosaic character of our commonplace lives, and feel that all was mystical and great and awful; and yet most blessed in its possibilities and its uncertainties.

II. Note, again, the guiding ark.

It was a new thing that the ark should become the guide of the people. All through the wilderness, according to the history, it had been carried in the centre of the march, and had had no share in the direction of the course. That had been done by the pillar of cloud. But, just as the manna ceased when the tribes got across the Jordan and could eat the bread of the land, the miracle ending and they being left to trust to ordinary means of supply at the earliest possible moment, so there ensued an approximation to ordinary guidance, which is none the less real because it is granted without miracle. The pillar of cloud ceased to move before the

people in the crossing of the Jordan, and its place was taken by the material symbol of the presence of God, which contained the tables of the law as the basis of the covenant. And that ark moved at the commandment of the leader Joshua, for he was the mouthpiece of the divine will in the matter. And so when the ark moved at the bidding of the leader, and became the guide of the people, there was a kind of a drop down from the pure supernatural of the guiding pillar.

For us a similar thing is true. Jesus Christ is the true Ark of God. For what was the ark? the symbol of the divine Presence; and Christ is the reality of the divine Presence with men. The whole content of that ark was the 'law of the Lord,' and Jesus Christ is the embodied law of the present God. The ark was the sign that God had entered into this covenant with these people, and that they had a right to say to Him, 'Thou art our God, and we are Thy people,' and the same double assurance of reciprocal possession and mutual delight in possession is granted to us in and through Jesus Christ our Lord.

So He becomes the guiding Ark, the Shepherd of Israel. His presence and will are our directors. The law, which is contained and incorporated in Him, is that by which we are to walk. The covenant which He has established in His own blood between God and man contains in itself not only the direction for conduct, but also the motives which will impel us to walk where and as He enjoins.

And so, every way we may say, by His providences which He appoints, by His example which He sets us, by His gracious word in which He sums up all human duties in the one sweet obligation, 'Follow Me,' and even more by His Spirit that dwells in us, and whispers in our ears, 'This is the way; walk ye in it,' and enlightens every perplexity, and strengthens all feebleness, and directs our footsteps into the way of peace; that living and personal Ark of the covenant of the Lord of the whole earth is still the guide of waiting and docile hearts. Jesus Christ's one word to us is, 'If any man serve Me, let him follow Me. And where I am'—of course, seeing he is a follower—'there shall also My servant be.'

The one Pattern for us, the one Example that we need to follow, the one Strength in our perplexities, the true Director of our feet, is that dear Lord, if we will only listen to Him. And that direction will be given to us in regard to the trifles, as in regard to the great things of our lives.

III. And so the last thought that is here is the watchful following.

'Come not near unto it, that ye may know the way by which ye ought to go.' In a shipwreck, the chances are that the boats will be swamped by the people scrambling into them in too great a hurry. In the Christian life most of the mistakes that people make arise from their not letting the ark go far enough ahead of them before they gather up their belongings and follow it. An impatience of the half-declared divine will, a running before we are sent, an acting before we are quite sure that God wills us to do so-and-so, are at the root of most of the failures of Christian effort, and of a large number of the miseries of Christian men. If we would only have patience! Three-quarters of a mile the ark went ahead before a man lifted a foot to follow it, and there was no mistake possible then.

Now do not be in a hurry to act. 'Raw haste' is 'half-sister to delay.' We are all impatient of uncertainty, either in opinion or in conduct; but if you are not quite sure what God wants you to do, you may be quite sure that He does not at present want you to do anything. Wait till you see what He does wish you to do. Better, better far, to spend hours in silent—although people that know nothing about what we are doing may call it indolent—waiting for the clear declaration of God's will, than to hurry on paths which, after we have gone on them far enough to make it a mortification and a weariness to turn back, we shall find out to have been not His at all, but only our own mistakes as to where the ark would have us go.

And that there may be this patience the one thing needful-as, indeed, it is the one thing needful for all strength of all kinds in the Christian life—is the rigid suppression of our own wills. That is the secret of goodness, and its opposite is the secret of evil. To live by my own will is to die. Nothing but blunders, nothing but miseries, nothing but failures, nothing but remorse, will be the fruit of such a life. And a great many of us who call ourselves Christians are not Christians in the sense of having Christ's will for our absolute law, and keeping our own will entirely in subordination thereto. As is the will, so is the man, and whoever does not bow himself absolutely, and hush all the babble of his own inclinations and tastes and decisions, in order that that great Voice may speak, has small chance of ever walking in the paths of righteousness, or finding that his ways please the Lord.

Suppress your own wills, dwell near God, that you may hear His lightest whisper. 'I will guide thee with Mine eye.' What is the use of the glance of an eye if the man for whom it is meant is half a mile off, and staring about him at everything except the eye that would guide? And that is what some of us that call ourselves Christian people are. God might look guidance at us for a week, and we should never know that He was doing it; we have so many other things to look after. And we are so far away from Him that it would need a telescope for us to see His face. 'I will guide thee with Mine eye.' Keep near Him, and you will not lack direction.

And so, dear brethren, if we stay ourselves on, and wait patiently for, Him, and are content to do what He wishes, and never to run without a clear commission, nor to act without a full conviction of duty, then the old story of my text will repeat itself in our daily life, as well as in the noblest form in the last act of life, which is death. The Lord will move before us and open a safe, dry path for us between the heaped waters; and where the feet of our great High Priest, bearing the Ark of the Covenant of the Lord, stood, amidst

the slime and the mud, we may plant our firm feet on the stones that He has left there. And so the stream of life, like the river of death, will be parted for Christ's followers, and they will pass over on dry ground, 'until all the people are passed clean over Jordan.'

Joshua 3:5-17

The Waters Saw Thee - They Were Afraid

The arrangement of the narrative of the passage of Jordan, which occupies chapters iii. and iv. , is remarkable, and has led to suggestions of interpolation and blending of two accounts, which are quite unnecessary. It is divided into four sections,—the preparations (Joshua 3:1-6), the passage (Joshua 3:7-17), the lifting of the memorial stones from the river's bed and the fixing of one set of them in it (Joshua 4:1-14), the return of the waters, and the erection of the second set of memorial stones at Gilgal (Joshua 4:15-24).

Each section closes with a summary of the whole transaction, after the common manner of Old Testament history, which gives to a hasty reader the impression of confusion and repetition; but a little attention shows a very symmetrical arrangement, negating the possibility of interpolation. The last three sections are all built on the same lines. In each there is a triple division,—God's command to Joshua, Joshua's communication of it to the people, and the actual fact, fulfilling these. So each stage passes thrice before the view, and the impressiveness of the history is heightened by our seeing it first in the mirror of the divine Word, and then in the orders of the commander, before we see it as a thing actually happening.

Joshua 3:5 and 6 of the chapter belong to the section which deals with the preparation. General instructions had been already issued that the host was to follow the ark, leaving two thousand cubits between them and it; but nothing had been said as to how Jordan was to be crossed. No doubt many a question and doubt had been muttered by the watch-fires, as the people looked at the muddy, turbid stream, swirling in flood. The spies probably managed to swim it, but that was a feat worthy to be named in the epitaph of heroes (1 Chron. xii. 15), and impossible for the crowd of all ages and both sexes which followed Joshua. There was the rushing stream, swollen as it always is in harvest. How were they to get over? And if the people of Jericho, right over against them, chose to fall upon them as they were struggling across, what could hinder utter defeat? No doubt, all that was canvassed, in all sorts of tones; but no inkling of the miracle seems to have been given.

God often opens His hand by one finger at a time, and leaves us face to face with some plain but difficult duty, without letting us see the helps to its performance, till we need to use them. If we go right on the road which He has traced out, it will never lead us into a blind alley. The mountains will part before us as we come near what looked their impassable wall; and some narrow gorge or other, wide enough to run a track through, but not wide enough to be noticed before we are close on it, will be sure to open. The attitude of expectation of God's help, while its nature is unrevealed, is kept up in Joshua's last instruction. The people are bidden to 'sanctify themselves, because to-morrow the Lord will do wonders' among them. That sanctifying was not external, but included the hallowing of spirit by docile waiting for His intervention, and by obedience while the manner of it was hidden. The secret of to-morrow is partly made known, and the faith of the people is nourished by the mystery remaining, as well as by the light given. The best security for to-morrow's wonders is to-day's sanctifying.

The command to the priests discloses to them a little more, in bidding them pass over before the people, but the additional disclosure would only be an additional trial of faith; for the silence as to how so impossible a command was to be made possible is absolute. The swollen river had obliterated all fords; and how were priests, staggering under the weight of the ark on their shoulders, to 'pass over'? The question is not answered till the ark is on their shoulders. To-day often sees to-morrow's duty without seeing how it is to be done. But the bearers of the ark need never fear but that the God to whom it belongs will take care of it and of them. The last sentence of verse 6 is the anticipatory summary which closes each section.

In Joshua 3:7-17 we have the narrative of the actual crossing, in its three divisions of God's command (Joshua 3:7-8), Joshua's repetition of it (Joshua 3:9-13), and the historical fact (Joshua 3:14-17). The final instructions were only given on the morning of the day of crossing. The report of God's commands given in Joshua 3:7-8 is condensed, as is evident from the fuller statement of them in Joshua's address to the people, which immediately follows. In it Joshua is fully aware of the manner of the miracle and of the details of the crossing, but we have no record of his having received them. The summary of that eventful morning's instructions to him emphasizes first the bearing of the miracle on his reputation. The passage of the Red Sea had authenticated the mission of Moses to the past generation, who, in consequence of it, 'believed God and His servant Moses.' The new generation are to have a parallel authentication of Joshua's commission. It is noteworthy that this is not the purpose of the miracle which the leader announces to the people in Joshua 3:10 . It was a message from God to himself, a kind of gracious whisper meant for his own encouragement. What a thought to fill a man's heart with humble devotion, that God would work such a wonder in order to demonstrate that He was with him! And what a glimpse of more to follow lay in that promise, 'This day will I begin to magnify thee I.'

The command to the priests in verse 8 is also obviously condensed; for Joshua's version of it, which follows, is much more detailed, and contains particular instructions, which must have been derived from the divine word to him on that morning.

We may pass on, then, to the second division of the narrative; namely, Joshua's communication of God's commands to the people. Observe the form which the purpose of the miracle assumes there. It is the confirmation of the divine Presence, not with the leader, but with the people and their consequent victory. Joshua grasped the inmost meaning of God's Word to himself, and showed noble self-suppression, when he thus turned the direction of the miracle. The true servant of God knows that God is with him, not for his personal glorification, but for the welfare of God's people, and cares little for the estimation in which men hold him, if they will only believe that the conquering God is with them. We too often make great leaders and teachers in the church opaque barriers to hide God from us, instead of transparent windows through which He shines upon His people. We are a great deal more ready to say, 'God is with him,' than to add, 'and therefore God is with us, in our Joshuas, and without them.'

Observe the grand emphasis of that name, 'the living God,' tacitly contrasted with the dead idols of the enemies, and sealing the assurance of His swift and all-conquering might. Observe, too, the triumphant contempt in the enumeration of the many tribes of the foe with their barbarous names. Five of them had been enough, when named by the spies' trembling lips, to terrify the congregation, but here the list of the whole seven but strengthens confidence. Faith delights to look steadily at its enemies, knowing that the one Helper is more than they all. This catalogue breathes the same spirit as Paul's rapturous list of the foes impotent to separate from the love of God. Mark, too, the long-drawn-out designation of the ark, with its accumulation of nouns, which grammatical purists have found difficult,—'the ark of the covenant of the Lord of all the earth'; where it leads they need not fear to follow. It was the pledge of His presence, it contained the Ten Words on which His covenant was concluded. That covenant enlisted on their side Him who was Lord of the swollen river as of all the fierce clans beyond; and with His ark in front, their victory was sure. If ever the contemplation of His power and covenant relation was in place, it was on that morning, as Israel stood ranked for the march that was to lead them through Jordan, and to plant their feet on the soil of Canaan. Nor must we omit the peculiar appropriateness of this solemn designation, on the occasion of the ark's first becoming the leader of the march. Hitherto it had been carried in the centre; now it was moved to the van, and took the place of the pillar, which blazed no more. But the guidance was no less divine. The simple coffer which Bezaleel had made was as august and reliable a symbol of God's presence as the pillar; and the tables of the law, shut in it, were henceforth to be the best directors of the nation.

Then follows the command to elect twelve representatives of the tribes, for a purpose not yet explained; and then, at the last moment, the manner of crossing is disclosed, to the silencing of wise doubters and the confirmation of ignorant faith. The brief anticipatory announcement of the miracle puts stress on the arrest of the waters at the instant when the priests' feet touched them, and tells what is to befall the arrested torrent above the point where the ark stood, saying nothing about the lower stretch of the river, and just hinting by one word 'heap' the parallel between this miracle and that of the passing of the Red Sea: 'The floods stood upright as an heap' (Ex 15:8).

Joshua 3:14-17 narrate the actual crossing. One long sentence, like the roll of an Atlantic wave, or a long-drawn shout of triumph, masses together the stages of the march; the breaking up of the encampment; the solemn advance of the ark, watched by the motionless crowd; its approach to the foaming stream, running bank-full, as is its wont in the early harvest months; the decisive moment when the naked feet of the priests were dipped in the water. What a hush of almost painful expectation would fall on the gazers! Then, with a rush of triumph, the long sentence pours on, like a river escaping from some rocky gorge, and tells the details of the transcendent fact. Looking up stream, the water 'stood'; and, as the flow above went on, it was dammed up, and, as would appear, swept back to a point not now known, but apparently some miles up. Looking down the course, the water flowed naturally to the Dead Sea; and, in effect, the whole bed southwards was quickly left bare, giving room for the advance of the people with wide-extended front, while the priests, with the ark on their shoulders, stood silent in the midst of the bed, between the heaped waters and the hasting host. Verse 17 gives the usual summary sentence, which partly anticipates what is still to follow, but here comes in with special force, as gathering up the whole wonderful scene, and recounting once more, and not without a ring of astonished triumph, how the priests stood firm on dry ground in that strange place, 'until all the nation were passed clean over Jordan.'

From Joshua 3:7-10 we learn the purpose of this miracle as being twofold. It was intended to stamp the seal of God's approbation on Joshua, and to hearten the people by the assurance of God's fighting for them. The leader was thereby put on the level of Moses, the people, on that of the generation before whom the Red Sea had been divided. The parallel with that event is obvious and significant. The miracle which led Israel into the wilderness is repeated as they pass from it. The first stage of their deliverance and the second are begun with analogous displays of divine power. The same arm which cleft the sea is stretched out, after all sins, for the new generation, and 'is not shortened that it cannot save.' God does not disdain to duplicate His wonders, even for very unworthy servants. The unchanging, long-suffering patience, and the unwearied strength to which all generations in succession can turn with confidence, are wonderfully set forth by these two miracles. And though we have passed into the higher stage, where miracles have ceased, the principle which dictated the parallelism still holds good, and we too can look back to all these ancient wonders, and be sure that they are done over and over again according to our needs. 'As we have heard, so have we seen,' might

have been Israel's song that day, as it may be ours every day.

The beautiful application made of the parted waters of Jordan in Christian literature, which sees in them the prophecy of conquered death, is perhaps scarcely in accordance with truth, for the divided Jordan was the introduction, not to peace, but to warfare. But it is too deeply impressed on the heart to be lightly put aside, and we may well allow faith and hope to discern in the stream, whose swollen waters shrink backwards as soon as the ark is borne into their turbid and swift current, an emblem of that dark flood that rolled between the host of God and their home, and was dried up as soon as the pierced foot of the Christ touched its cold waters.

'What ailest thee, thou sea, that thou fleest; thou Jordan, that thou turnest back?' Christ has gone up before us. He has shaken His hand over the river, and caused men to go over dry shod.

Joshua 4:10-24

Stones Crying Out

This chapter is divided into two sections. The first (from Joshua 4:1 to 14) has as its main subject the bringing up of the twelve memorial stones from the bed of Jordan; the second (verse 15 to the end) gives the conclusion of the whole incident. The plan of arrangement, already pointed out in a former chapter, is very plain in this. Each section has God's commands to Joshua, Joshua's to the people, and the execution of these. To each is appended a summary, which anticipates the more detailed particulars that follow. Our text begins in the middle of the first section, but we must glance at the preceding verses. These tell how, when the people were all across, Joshua, who had apparently remained on the eastern bank with the twelve representatives of the tribes, received God's command to tell these the purpose for which they had been chosen, and to set them to execute it. This additional instruction is the explanation of the apparent discrepancy between Joshua iii. 12 and iv. 2 . Verses 4-8 tell Joshua's communication of the instructions to the men; verse 8 narrates the execution of them by each man's wrenching up from the river's bed a great stone, with which he toiled through the muddy ooze to the western shore, and thence over the hot plain to Gilgal, where the host camped; verse 9 tells that twelve other stones were set up where the priests had stood, and were visible at some time after date, when it was written; but when that was, or whether the verse is part of the original or a later note, we cannot say. At any rate, there were two memorials, one on the bank, one in the stream—'a grand jury of great stones,' as Thomas Fuller calls them. There is no difficulty in supposing that the monument in the river was firm enough to resist its current, and high enough to be visible either above the surface or beneath the ordinarily shallow water.

I. The first picture here brought before us is that of the motionless ark in the midst of what had been Jordan.

There is an obvious intention to contrast the stillness of the priests, bearing it on their shoulders, and standing rooted in that strange place all these long hours, with the hurry around. 'The priests stood ... and the people hasted.' However broad the front and swift the march, the crossing must have taken many hours. The haste was not from fear, but eagerness. It was 'an industrious speed and mannerly quickness, as not willing to make God wait upon them, in continuing a miracle longer than necessity did require.' When all were over, then came the twelve and Joshua, who would spend some time in gathering the stones and rearing the memorial in the river-bed. Through all the stir the ark was still. Over all the march it watched. So long as one Israelite was in the channel it remained, a silent presence, to ensure his safety. It let their rate of speed determine the length of its standing there. It waited for the slowest foot and the weariest laggard. God makes His 'very present help' of the same length as our necessities, and lets us beat the time to which He conforms. Not till the last loiterer has struggled to the farther shore does He cease by His presence to keep His people safe on the strange road which by His presence He has opened for them.

The silent presence of the ark is enough to dam up the stream. There is vehement action around, but the cause of it all is in absolute repose. God moves all things, Himself unmoved. He 'worketh hitherto,' and no intensity of energy breaks the depth of His perfect rest. His activity implies no effort, and is followed by no exhaustion. The ark is still, while it holds back a swollen river for hours. The centre of the swiftest revolution is a point of rest.

The form of the miracle was a condescension to weak faith, to which help was ministered by giving sense something to grasp. It was easier to believe that the torrent would not rush down on them when they could look at the priests standing there motionless, with the visible symbol of God's presence on their shoulders. The ark was no more the cause of the miracle than were its carriers; but, just as Jesus helped one blind man by laying moistened earth on his eyes, and another by sending him to Siloam to wash, so God did here. Children learn best when they have something to look at. Sight is sometimes the servant of faith.

We need not dwell on the summary, beginning with Joshua 4:11, which anticipates the subject of the next section, and adds that the fighting men of the tribes who had already received their inheritance on the east bank of Jordan, loyally kept their promise, and marched with their brethren to the campaign.

II. Joshua 4:15-18 finish the story with the return of the waters to their bed.

The triple division appears again. First God commands Joshua, who then transmits the command to the people, who, in turn, then obey. And thus at each stage the divine causality, Joshua's delegated but absolute authority, and the people's prompt obedience, are signalled; and the whole incident, in all its parts, is set forth as on the one hand a conspicuous instance of God's interposition, and, on the other, of Israel's willing service.

We can fancy how the people who had reached the western shore lined the bank, gazing on the group in the channel, who still stood waiting God's command to relieve them at their post. The word comes at last, and is immediately obeyed. May we not learn the lesson to stand fixed and patient wherever God sets us, as long as He does not call us thence? God's priests should be like the legionary on guard in Pompeii, who stuck to his post while the ashes were falling thick, and was smothered by them, rather than leave his charge without his commander's orders. One graphic word pictures the priests lifting, or, as it might be translated, 'plucking,' the soles of their feet from the slimy bottom into which they had settled down by reason of long standing still. They reach the bank, marching as steadily with their sacred burden as might be over so rough and slippery a road. The first to enter were the last to leave the river's bed. God's ark 'goes before us,' and 'is our rearward.' He besets us behind and before, and all dangerous service is safe if begun and ended in Him. The one point made prominent is the instantaneous rush back of the impatient torrent as soon as the curb was taken off. Like some horse rejoicing to be free, the tawny flood pours down, and soon everything looks 'as aforetime,' except for the new rock, piled by human hands, round which the waters chafed. The dullest would understand what had wrought the miracle when they saw the immediate consequence of the ark's leaving its place. Cause and effect seldom come thus close together in God's dealings; but sometimes He lets us see them as near each other as the lightning and the thunder, that we may learn to trace them in faith, when centuries part them. How the people would gaze as the hurrying stream covered up their path, and would look across to the further shore, almost doubting if they had really stood there that morning ! They were indeed 'Hebrews'—men from the other side-now, and would set themselves to the dangerous task before them with courage. 'Well begun is half done'; and God would not divide the river for them to thrust them into a tiger's den, where they would be torn to pieces. Retreat was impossible now. A new page in their history was turned. The desert was as unreachable as Egypt, The passage of the Jordan rounded off the epoch which the passage of the Bed Sea introduced, and began a new era.

That parallelism of the two crossings is suggested by the notice of date in Joshua 4:19 . 'The tenth day of the first month' was just forty years to a day since the first Paschal lamb had been chosen, and four days short of the Passover, which was solemnised at Gilgal (Joshua 5:10) where they encamped that night. It was a short march from the point of crossing, and a still shorter from Jericho. It would have been easy to fall upon the invaders as they straggled across the river, but no attempt was made to dispute the passage, though, no doubt, many a keen pair of eyes watched it from the neighbouring hills. In the beginning of the next chapter we are told why there was this singular supineness. 'Their heart melted, neither was there spirit in them any more,' or, in more modern language, panic laid hold of the enemy, and they could not pluck up courage to oppose the advance of Israel. If we add this result to those mentioned in chapter in., we find sufficient motive for the miracle to take it out of the class of purposeless, legendary wonders. Given the importance of Israel as the depositaries of revelation, there is nothing unreasonable in a miracle which so powerfully contributed to their conquest of Canaan, and we have yet to learn that there is anything unreasonable in the belief that they were the depositaries of revelation. The fundamental postulate of the Old Testament is a supernatural revelation, and that opens the door for any miracle needful for its accomplishment. It is folly to seek to conciliate by minimizing the miraculous element. However much may be thrown out to the wolves, they will not cease to pursue and show their teeth. We should be very slow to pronounce on what is worthy of God; but any man who believes in a divine revelation, given to the world through Israel, may well believe in such a miracle as this at such a moment of their history.

III. The memorial stones (Joshua 4:20-24).

Gilgal, the first encampment, lay defenseless in the open plain, and the first thing to be done would be to throw up some earthwork round the camp. It seems to have been the resting-place of the ark and probably of the non-combatants, during the conquest, and to have derived thence a sacredness which long clung to it, and finally led, singularly enough, to its becoming a centre of idolatrous worship. The rude circle of unhewn stones without inscription was, no doubt, exactly like the many prehistoric monuments found all over the world, which forgotten races have raised to keep in everlasting remembrance forgotten fights and heroes. It was a comparatively small thing; for each stone was but a load for one man, and it would seem mean enough by the side of Stonehenge or Carnac, just as Israel's history is on a small scale, as compared with the world-embracing empires of old. Size is not greatness; and Joshua's little circle told a more wonderful story than its taller kindred, or Egyptian obelisks or colossi.

These grey stones preached at once the duty of remembering, and the danger of forgetting, the past mercies of God. When they were reared, they would seem needless; but the deepest impressions get filled up by degrees, as the river of time deposits its sands on them. We do not forget pain so quickly as joy, and most men have a longer and keener remembrance of their injurers than of their benefactors, human or divine. The stones were set up because Israel remembered, but also lest Israel should forget. We often

think of the Jews as monsters of ingratitude; but we should more truly learn the lesson of their history, if we regarded them as fair, average men, and asked ourselves whether our recollection of God's goodness to us is much more vivid than theirs. Unless we make distinct and frequent efforts to recall, we shall certainly forget 'all His benefits.' The cultivation of thankful remembrance is a very large part of practical religion; and it is not by accident that the Psalmist puts it in the middle, between hope and obedience, when he says 'that they might set their hope in God, and not forget the works of God, but keep His commandments' (Psalm lxxviii. 7).

The memorial stones further proclaimed the duty of parental instruction in God's mercies. They speak of a time when tradition was the vehicle of history; when books were rare, and monuments were relied upon to awaken curiosity which a father's words would satisfy. Notwithstanding all differences in means of obtaining knowledge, the old law remains in full force, that the parent is the natural and most powerful instructor in the ways of God. The Jewish father was not to send his child to some Levite or other to get his question answered, but was to answer it himself. I am afraid that a good many English parents, who call themselves Christians, are too apt to say, 'Ask your Sunday-school teacher,' when such questions are put to them. The decay of parental religious teaching is working enormous mischief in Christian households; and the happiest results would follow if Joshua's homely advice were attended to, 'Ye shall let your children know.'

The same principle which led to the erection of this simple monument reaches its highest and sacred instance in the institution of the Lord's Supper, in which Jesus, with wonderful lowliness, condescends to avail Himself of material symbols in order to secure a firmer place in treacherous memories. He might well have expected that such stupendous love could never be forgotten; but He 'knoweth our frame,' and trusts some share in keeping His death vividly in the hearts of His people to the humble ministry of bread and wine, Strange that we should need to be reminded of the death which it is life to remember! Blessed that, needing it, we have the need so tenderly met, and that He does not disdain to accept loving memories which slumber till stirred by such poor reminders of His unspeakable love!

Joshua 5:14

The Captain of the Lord's Host

'And he said, Nay, but as captain of the host of the Lord am I now come.'— JOSHUA v. 14 .

The army of Israel was just beginning a hard conflict under an untried leader. Behind them the Jordan barred their retreat, in front of them Jericho forbade their advance. Most of them had never seen a fortified city, and had no experience nor engines for a siege. So we may well suppose that many doubts and fears shook the courage of the host, as it drew around the doomed city. Their chief had his own heavy burden. He seems to have gone apart to meditate on what his next step was to be. Absorbed in thought, he lifts up his eyes mechanically, as brooding men will, not expecting to see anything, and is startled by the silent figure of 'a man with a sword drawn' in his hand, close beside him. There is nothing supernatural in his appearance; and the immediate thought of the leader is, 'Is this one of the enemy that has stolen upon my solitude?' So, promptly and boldly, he strides up to him with the quick challenge: 'Whose side are you on? Are you one of us, or from the enemy's camp?' And then the silent lips open. 'Upon neither the one nor the other. I am not on your side, you are on mine, for as Captain of the Lord's host, am I come up.' And then Joshua falls on his face, recognizes his Commander-in-Chief, owns himself a subordinate, and asks for orders. 'What saith my Lord unto his servant?'

Now let us try to gather the meaning and the lessons of this striking incident.

I. I see in it a transient revelation of an eternal truth.

I believe, as the vast majority of careful students of the course of Old Testament revelation and its relation to the New Testament completion believe, that we have here not a record of the appearance of a superhuman person, but that of a preliminary manifestation of the Eternal Word of God, who, in the fulness of time, 'became flesh and dwelt among us.'

You will observe that there run throughout the whole of the Old Testament notices of the occasional manifestation of a mysterious person who is named 'the Angel,' **'Angel of the LORD.'**

For instance, in the great scene in the wilderness, where the bush burned and was not consumed, he who appeared is named 'the Angel of the Lord'; and his lips declare 'I am that I am.' In like manner, soon after, the divine voice speaks to Moses of 'the Angel in whom is My name.'

When Balaam had his path blocked amongst the vineyards, it was a replica of the figure of my text that stayed his way, a man with a drawn sword in his hand, who spoke in autocratic and divine fashion. When the parents of Samson were apprised of the coming birth of the hero, it was 'the Angel of the Lord' that appeared to them, accepted their sacrifice, declared the divine will, and

disappeared in a flame of fire from the altar. A psalm speaks of 'the Angel of the LORD' as encamping round about them that fear him, and delivering them. Isaiah tells us of the 'Angel of his face,' who was 'afflicted in all Israel's afflictions, and saved them.' And the last prophetic utterance of the Old Testament is most distinct and remarkable in its strange identification and separation of Jehovah and the Angel, when it says, 'the Lord shall suddenly come to His Temple, even the Angel of the Covenant.' Now, if we put all these passages—and they are but select instances—if we put all these passages together, I think we cannot help seeing that there runs, as I said, throughout the whole of the Old Testament a singular strain of revelation in regard to a Person who, in a remarkable manner, is distinguished from the created hosts of angel beings, and also is distinguished from, and yet in name, attributes, and worship all but identified with, the Lord Himself.

If we turn to the narrative before us, we find there similar phenomena marked out. For this mysterious 'man with the sword drawn' in his hand, quotes the very words which were spoken at the bush, when he says, 'Loose thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy.' And by fair implication, He would have us to identify the persons in these two great theophanies. He ascribes to Himself, in the further conversation in the next chapter, directly divine attributes, and is named by the sacred name; 'The Lord said unto Joshua, see, I have given into thy hand Jericho and its king.'

If we turn to the New Testament, we find that there under another image the same strain of thought is presented. The Word of God, who from everlasting 'was with God, and was God,' is represented as being the Agent of Creation, the Source of all human illumination, the Director of Providence, the Lord of the Universe. 'By him were all things, and in him all things consists.' So, surely, these two halves make a whole; and the Angel of the Lord, separate and yet so strangely identified with Jehovah, who at the crises of the nation's history, and stages of the development of the process of Revelation, is manifested, and the Eternal Word of God, whom the New Testament reveals to us, are one and the same.

This truth was transiently manifested in our text. The vision passed, the ground that was hallowed by His foot is undistinguished now in the sweltering plain round the mound that once was Jericho. But the fact remains, the humanity, that was only in appearance, and for a few minutes, assumed then, has now been taken up into everlasting union with the divine nature, and a Man reigns on the Throne, and is Commander of all who battle for the truth and the right. The eternal order of the universe is before us here.

It only remains to say a word in reference to the sweep of the command which our vision assigns to the Angel of the Lord. 'Captain of the Lord's host' means a great deal more than the true General of Israel's little army. It does mean that, or the words and the vision would cease to have relevance and bearing on the moment's circumstances and need. But it includes also, as the usage of Scripture would sufficiently show, if it were needful to adduce instances of it, all the ordered ranks of loftier intelligent beings, and all the powers and forces of the universe. These are conceived of as an embattled host, comparable to an army in the strictness of their discipline and their obedience to a single will. It is the modern thought that the universe is a Cosmos and not a Chaos, an ordered unit, with the addition of the truth beyond the reach and range of science, that its unity is the expression of a personal will. It is the same thought which the centurion had, to Christ's wonder, when he compared his own power as an officer in a legion, where his will was implicitly obeyed, to the power of Christ over diseases and sorrows and miseries and death, and recognised that all these were His servants, to whom, if His autocratic lips chose to say 'Go,' they went, and if He said, 'Do this,' they did it.

So the Lord of the universe and its ordered ranks is Jesus Christ. That is the truth which was flashed from the unknown, like a vanishing meteor in the midnight, before the face of Joshua, and which stands like the noonday sun, unsetting and irradiating for us who live under the Gospel.

II. I see here the Leader of all the warfare against the world's evil.

'The Captain of the Lord's host.' He Himself takes part in the fight. He is not like a general who, on some safe knoll behind the army, sends his soldiers to death, and keeps his own skin whole. But He has fought, and He is fighting. Do you remember that wonderful picture in two halves, at the end of one of the Gospels, 'the Lord went up into Heaven and sat at the right hand of God, ... they went forth everywhere preaching the Word'? Strange contrast between the repose of the seated Christ and the toils of His peripatetic servants! Yes, strange contrast; but the next words harmonise the two halves of it; 'the Lord also working with them, and confirming the word with signs following.' The Leader does not so rest as that He does not fight; and the servants do not need so to fight, as that they cannot rest. Thus the old legends of many a land and tongue have a glorious truth in them to the eye of faith, and at the head of all the armies that are charging against any form of the world's misery and sin, there moves the form of the Son of Man, whose aid we have to invoke, even from His crowned repose at the right hand of God. 'Gird thy sword upon Thy thigh, O Most Mighty, and in Thy majesty ride forth prosperously, and Thy right hand shall teach Thee terrible things.'

If this, then, be for us, as truly as for Joshua and his host, a revelation of who is our true leader, surely all of us in our various degrees, and especially any of us who have any 'Quixotic crusade' for the world's good on our consciences and on our hands, may take the lessons and the encouragements that are here. Own your Leader; that is one plain duty. And recognise this fact, that by no other power than by His, and with no other weapons than those which He puts into our hands, in His Cross and meekness, can a world's evils be overcome, and the victory be won for the right and the truth. I have no faith in crusades which are not under the

Captain of our salvation. And I would that the earnest men, and there are many of them, the laborious and the self-sacrificing men in many departments of philanthropy and benevolence and social reformation—who labour unaware of who is their Leader, and not dependent upon His help, nor trusting in His strength—would take to heart this vision of my text, and see beside them the ‘man with the drawn sword in his hand,’ the Christ with the ‘sharp two-edged sword going out of his mouth,’ by whom, and by whom alone, the world’s evil can be overcome and slain.

Own your General; submit to His authority; pick the weapons that He can bless; trust absolutely in His help. We may have, we shall have, in all enterprises for God and man that are worth doing, ‘need of patience,’ just as the army of Israel had to parade for six weary days round Jericho blowing their useless trumpets, whilst the impregnable walls stood firm, and the defenders flouted and jeered their aimless procession. But the seventh day will come, and at the trumpet blast down will go the loftiest ramparts of the cities that are ‘walled up to heaven’ with a rush and a crash, and through the dust and over the ruined rubbish Christ’s soldiers will march and take possession. So trust in your Leader, and be sure of the victory, and have patience and keep on at your work.

Do not make Joshua’s mistake. ‘Art Thou for us?’—‘Nay! Thou art for me.’ That is a very different thing. We have the right to be sure that God is on our side, when we have made sure that we are on God’s. So take care of self-will and self-regard, and human passions, and all the other parasitical insects that creep round philanthropic religious work, lest they spoil your service. There is a great deal that calls itself after Jehu’s fashion, ‘My zeal for the Lord,’ which is nothing better than zeal for my own notions and their preponderance. Therefore we must strip ourselves of all that, and not fancy that the cause is ours, and then graciously admit Christ to help us, but recognise that it is His, and lowly submit ourselves to His direction, and what we do, do, and when we fight, fight, in His name and for His sake.

III. Here is the Ally in all our warfare with ourselves.

That is the worst fight. Far worse than all these Hittites and Hivites, and the other tribes with their barbarous names, far worse than all external foes, are the foes that each man carries about in his own heart. In that slow hand-to-hand and foot-to-foot struggle I do not believe that there is any conquering power available for a man that can for a moment be compared with the power that comes through submission to Christ’s command and acceptance of Christ’s help. He has fought every foot of the ground before us. We have to ‘run the race’—to take another metaphor—‘that is set before us, looking unto Jesus,’ the great Leader, and in His own self the Perfecter of the faith which conquers. In Him, His example, the actual communication of His divine Spirit, and in the motives for brave and persistent conflict which flow from His Cross and Passion, we shall find that which alone will make us the victors in this internecine warfare. There can be no better directory given to any man than to tread in Christ’s footsteps, and learn how to fight, from Him who in the wilderness repelled the triple assault with the single ‘It is written’; thus recognising the word and will of God as the only directory and defence.

Thus, brethren, if we humbly take service in His ranks, and ask Him to show us where our foes within are, and to give us the grace to grapple with them, and cast them out, anything is possible rather than ultimate defeat, and however long and sore the struggle may be, its length and its severity are precious parts of the discipline that makes us strong, and we shall at last be more than conquerors through Him that loveth us.

IV. Lastly, I see here the Power which it is madness to resist.

Think of this vision. Think of the deep truths, partially shadowed and symbolized by it. Think of Christ, what He is, and what resources He has at His back, of what are His claims for our service, and our loyal, militant obedience. Think of the certain victory of all who follow Him amongst ‘the armies of Heaven, clad in fine linen, clean and white.’ Think of the crown and the throne for him that ‘overcomes.’

Remember the destructive powers that sleep in Him: the ‘drawn sword in His hand,’ the ‘two-edged sword out of His mouth’ the ‘wrath of the Lamb.’ Think of the ultimate certain defeat of all antagonisms; of that last campaign when He goes forth with the ‘name written on His vesture and on His thigh “King of kings and Lord of lords.”’ Think of how He ‘strikes through kings in the day of His wrath, and fills the place with the bodies of the dead’; and how His ‘enemies become His footstool.’

Ponder His own solemn word, ‘He that is not with Me, is against Me.’ There is no neutrality in this warfare. Either we are for Him or we are for His adversary. ‘Under which King? speak or die!’ As sensible men, not indifferent to your highest and lasting well-being, ask yourselves, ‘Can I, with my ten thousand, meet Him with His twenty thousand?’ Put yourselves under His orders, and He will be on your side. He will teach your hands to war, and your fingers to fight; will cover your heads in the day of battle, and bring you at last, palm-bearing and laurel-crowned, to that blissful state where there will still be service, and He still be the ‘Captain of the Lord’s host,’ but where ‘swords will be beaten into ploughshares’ and the victors shall need to ‘learn war no more.’

Joshua 6:10,11

The Siege of Jericho

And Joshua had commanded the people, saying, Ye shall not shout, nor make any noise with your voice, ... until the day I bid you shout; then shall ye shout. 11. So the ark of the Lord compassed the city, going about it once: and they came into the camp, and lodged in the camp.’— JOSHUA vi. 10, 11 .

The cheerful uniform obedience of Israel to Joshua stands in very remarkable contrast with their perpetual murmurings and rebellions under Moses. Many reasons probably concurred in bringing about this change of tone. For one thing the long period of suspense was over; and to average sense-bound people there is no greater trial of faith and submission than waiting, inactive, for something that is to come. Now they are face to face with their enemies, and it is a great deal easier to fight than to expect; and their courage mounts higher as dangers come nearer. Then there were great miracles which left their impression upon the people, such as the passage of the Jordan, and so on.

So that the Epistle to the Hebrews is right when it says, ‘By faith the walls of Jericho fell down after they were compassed about seven days.’ And that faith was as manifest in the six days’ march round the city, as on the seventh day of victorious entrance. For, if you will read the narrative carefully, you will see that it says that the Israelites were not told what was to be the end of that apparently useless and aimless promenade. It was only on the morning of the day of the miracle that it was announced. So there are two stages in this instance of faith. There is the protracted trial of it, in doing an apparently useless thing; and there is the victory, which explains and vindicates it. Let us look at these two points now.

I. Consider that strange protracted trial of faith.

The command comes to the people, through Joshua’s lips, unaccompanied by any explanation or reasons. If Moses had called for a like obedience from the people in their wilderness mood, there would have been no end of grumbling. But whatever some of them may have thought, there is nothing recorded now but prompt submission. Notice, too, the order of the procession. First come the armed men, then seven white-robed priests, blowing, probably, discordant music upon their ram’s horn trumpets; then the Ark, the symbol and token of God’s presence; and then the rereward. So the Ark is the centre; and it is not only Israel that is marching round the city, but rather it is God who is circling the walls. Very impressive would be the grim silence of it all. Tramp, tramp, tramp, round and round, six days on end, without a word spoken (though no doubt taunts in plenty were being showered down from the walls), they marched, and went back to the camp, and subsided into inactivity for another four-and-twenty hours, until they ‘turned out’ for the procession once more.

Now, what did all that mean? The blast of the trumpet was, in the Jewish feasts, the solemn proclamation of the presence of God. And hence the purpose of that singular march circumambulating Jericho was to declare ‘Here is the Lord of the whole earth, weaving His invisible cordon and network around the doomed city.’ In fact the meaning of the procession, emphasised by the silence of the soldiers, was that God Himself was saying, in the long-drawn blasts of the priestly trumpet, ‘Lift up your heads, O ye gates! even lift them up, ye everlasting doors; and the King of Glory shall come in.’ Now, whatever Jericho and its people thought about that, Israel, according to the commentary of the New Testament, had to some extent, at all events, learnt the lesson, and knew, of course very rudimentarily and with a great deal of mere human passion mingled with it, but still knew, that this was God’s summons, and the manifestation of God’s presence. And so round the city they went, and day by day they did the thing in which their faith apprehended its true meaning, and which, by reason of their faith, they were willing to do. Let us take some lessons from that.

Here is a confidence in the divine presence, manifested by unquestioning obedience to a divine command.

**‘Theirs not to make reply,
Theirs not to reason why.’**

Joshua had spoken; God had spoken through him. And so here goes! up with the Ark and the trumpets, and out on to the hot sand for the march! It would have been a great deal easier to have stopped in the tents. It was disheartening work marching round thus. The skeptical spirit in the host—the folk of whom there are many great-grandchildren living to-day, who always have objections to urge when disagreeable duties are crammed up against their faces—would have enough to say on that occasion, but the bulk of the people were true, and obeyed. Now, we do not need to put out the eyes of our understanding in order to practise the obedience of faith. And we have to exercise common-sense about the things that seem to us to be duties.

But this is plain, that if once we see a thing to be, in Christian language, the will of our Father in heaven, then everything is settled; and there is only one course for us, and that is, unquestioning submission, active submission, or, what is as hard, passive submission.

Then here again is faith manifesting itself by an obedience which was altogether ignorant of what was coming. I think that is quite plain in the story, if you will read it carefully, though I think that it is not quite what people generally understand as its meaning. But it makes the incident more in accordance with God's uniform way of dealing with us that the host should be told on the morning of the first day of the week that they were to march round the city, and told the same on the second day, and on the third the same, and so on until the sixth; and that not until the morning of the seventh, were they told what was to be the end of it all. That is the way in which God generally deals with us. In the passage of the Jordan, too, you will find, if you will look at the narrative carefully, that although Joshua was told what was coming, the people were not told till the morning of the day, when the priests' feet were dipped in the brink of the water. We, too, have to do our day's march, knowing very little about tomorrow; and we have to carry on all through life 'doing the duty that lies nearest us,' entirely ignorant of the strange issues to which it may conduct. Life is like a voyage down some winding stream, shut in by hills, sometimes sunny and vine-clad, like the Rhine, sometimes grim and black, like an American canon. As the traveller looks ahead he wonders how the stream will find a passage beyond the next bend; and as he looks back, he cannot trace the course by which he has come. It is only when he rounds the last shoulder that he sees a narrow opening flashing in the sunshine, and making a way for his keel. So, seeing that we know nothing about the issues, let us make sure of the motives; and seeing that we do not know what to-morrow may bring forth, nor even what the next moment may bring, let us see that we fill the present instant as full as it will hold with active obedience to God, based upon simple faith in Him. He does not open His whole hand at once; He opens a finger at a time, as you do sometimes with your children when you are trying to coax them to take something out of the palm. He gives us enough light for the moment, He says, 'March round Jericho; and be sure that I mean something. What I do mean I will tell you some day.' And so we have to put all into His hands.

Then here, again, is faith manifesting itself by persistency. A week was not long, but it was a long while during which to do that one apparently useless thing and nothing else. It would take about an hour or so to march round the city, and there were twenty-three hours of idleness. Little progress in reducing Jericho was made by the progress round it, and it must have got rather wearisome about the sixth day. Familiarity would breed monotony, but notwithstanding the deadly influences of habit, the obedient host turned out for their daily round. 'Let us not be weary in well-doing,' for there is a time for everything. There is a time for sowing and for reaping, and in the season of the reaping 'we shall reap, if we faint not.' Dear brethren! we all get weary of our work. Custom presses upon us, 'with a weight heavy as frost, and deep almost as life.' It is easy to do things with a spurt, but it is the keeping on at the monotonous, trivial, and sometimes unintelligible duties that is the test of a man's grit, and of his goodness too. So, although it is a very, very threadbare lesson—one that you may think it was not worth while for me to bring you all here to receive—I am sure that there are few things needed more by us all, and especially by those of us who are on the wrong side of middle life, as people call it—though I think it is the right side in many respects—than that old familiar lesson. Keep on as you have begun, and for the six weary days turn out, however hot the sun, however comfortable the carpets in the tent, however burning the sand, however wearisome and flat it may seem to be perpetually tramping round the same walls of the same old city; keep on, for in due season the trumpet will sound and the walls will fall.

II. So that brings me to the second stage—viz., the sudden victory which vindicates and explains the protracted trial of faith.

I do not need to tell the story of how, on the seventh day, the host encompassed the city seven times, and at last they were allowed to break the long silence with a shout. You will observe the prominence given to the sacred seven, both in the number of days, of circuits made, and the number of the priests' trumpets. Probably the last day was a Sabbath, for there must have been one somewhere in the week, and it is improbable that it was one of the undistinguished days. That was a shout, we may be sure, by which the week's silence was avenged, and all the repressed emotions gained utterance at last. The fierce yell from many throats, which startled the wild creatures in the hills behind Jericho, blended discordantly with the trumpets' clang which proclaimed a present God; and at His summons the fortifications toppled into hideous ruin, and over the fallen stones the men of Israel clambered, each soldier, in all that terrible circle of avengers that surrounded the doomed city, marching straight forward, and so all converging on the centre.

Now, we can discover good reasons for this first incident in the campaign being marked by miracle. The fact that it was the first is a reason. It is a law of God's progressive revelation that each new epoch is inaugurated by miraculous works which do not continue throughout its course. For instance, it is observable that, in the Acts of the Apostles, the first example of each class of incidents recorded there, such as the first preaching, the first persecution, the first martyrdom, the first expansion of the Gospel beyond Jews, its first entrance into Europe, has usually the stamp of miracle impressed on it, and is narrated at great length, while subsequent events of the same class have neither of those marks of distinction. Take, for example, the account of Stephen, the first martyr. He saw 'the heavens opened' and the Son of Man 'standing at the right hand of God.' We do not read that the heavens opened when Herod struck off the head of James with the sword. But was Jesus any the less near to help His servant? Certainly not.

In like manner it was fitting that the first time that Israel crossed swords with these deadly and dreaded enemies should be marked by a miraculous intervention to hearten God's warriors. But let us take care that we understand the teaching of any miracle. Surely it

does not secularise and degrade the other incidents of a similar sort in which no miracle was experienced. The very opposite lesson is the true one to draw from a miracle. In its form it is extraordinary, and presents God's direct action on men or on nature, so obviously that all eyes can see it. But the conclusion to be drawn is not that God acts only in a supernatural manner, but that He is acting as really, though in a less obvious fashion, in the 'natural' order. In these turning-points, the inauguration of new stages in revelation or history, the cause which always produces all nearer effects and the ultimate effects, which are usually separated or united (as one may choose to regard it) by many intervening links, are brought together. But the originating power works as truly when it is transmitted through these many links as when it dispenses with them. Miracle shows us in abbreviated fashion, and therefore conspicuously, the divine will acting directly, that we may see it working when it acts indirectly. In miracle God makes bare His arm, that we may be sure of its operation when it is draped and partially hid, as by a vesture, by second causes.

We are not to argue that, because there is no miracle, God is not present or active. He was as truly with Israel when there was no Ark present, and no blast of the trumpet heard. He was as truly with Israel when they fought apparently unhelped, as He was when Jericho fell. The teaching of all the miracles in the Old and the New Testaments is that the order of the universe is maintained by the continual action of the will of God on men and things. So this story is a transient revelation of an eternal fact. God is as much with you and me in our fights as He was with the Israelites when they marched round Jericho, and as certainly will He help. If by faith we endure the days of often blind obedience, we shall share the rapture of the sudden victory.

Now, I have said that the last day of this incident was probably a Sabbath day. Does not that suggest the thought that we may take this story as a prophetic symbol? There is for us a week of work, and a seventh day of victory, when we shall enter, not into the city of confusion which has come to nought, but into the city which 'hath the foundations, whose builder and maker is God.' The old fathers of the Christian Church were not far wrong, when they saw in this story a type of the final coming of the Lord. Did you ever notice how St. Paul, in writing to the Thessalonians about that coming, seems to have his mind turned back to the incident before us? Remember that in this incident the two things which signalled the fall of the city were the trumpet and the shout. What does Paul say? 'The Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God.' Jericho over again! And then, 'Babylon is fallen, is fallen!' 'And I saw the new Jerusalem coming down out of heaven, like a bride adorned for her husband.'

Joshua 6:25 Rahab

'And Joanna paved Rahab the harlot alive... and she dwelleth in Israel even unto this day.'— JOSHUA vi. 25 .

This story comes in like an oasis in these terrible narratives of Canaanite extermination. There is much about it that is beautiful and striking, but the main thing is that it teaches the universality of God's mercy, and the great truth that trust in Him unites to Him and brings deliverance, how black soever may have been the previous life.

I need not tell over again the story, told with such inimitable picturesqueness here: how the two spies, swimming the Jordan in flood, set out on their dangerous mission and found themselves in the house of Rahab, a harlot; how the king sent to capture them, how she hid them among the flax-stalks bleaching on the flat roof, confessed faith in Israel's God and lied steadfastly to save them, how they escaped to the Quarantania hills, how she 'perished not' in the capture, entered into the community of Israel, was married, and took her place—hers!—in the line of David's and Christ's ancestresses.

The point of interest is her being, notwithstanding her previous position and history, one of the few instances in which heathen were brought into Israel. The Epistle to the Hebrews and James both refer to her. We now consider her story as embodying for us some important truths about faith in its nature, its origin, its power.

I. Faith in its constant essence and its varying objects.

Her creed was very short and simple. She abjured idols, and believed that Jehovah was the one God. She knew nothing of even the Mosaic revelation, nothing of its moral law or of its sacrifices. And yet the Epistle to the Hebrews has no scruple in ascribing faith to her. The object of that Epistle is to show that Christianity is Judaism perfected. It labours to establish that objectively there has been advance, not contradiction, and that subjectively there is absolute identity. It has always been faith that has bound men to God. That faith may co-exist with very different degrees of illumination. Not the creed, but the trust, is the all-important matter. This applies to all pre-Christian times and to all heathen lands. Our faith has a fuller gospel to lay hold of. Do not neglect it.

Beware lest people with less light and more love get in before you, 'who shall come from the east and the west.'

II. Faith in its origin in fear.

There are many roads to faith, and it matters little which we take, so long as we get to the goal. This is one, and some people seem to think that it is a very low and unworthy one, and one which we should never urge upon men. But there are a side of the divine nature and a mode of the divine government which properly evoke fear.

God's moral government, His justice and retribution, are facts.

Fear is an inevitable and natural consequence of feeling that His justice is antagonistic to us. The work of conscience is precisely to create such fear. Not to feel it is to fall below manhood or to be hardened by sin.

That fear is meant to lead us to God and love. Rahab fled to God. Peter 'girt his fisher's coat to him,' and lost his fear in the sunshine of Christ's face, as a rainbow trembles out of a thunder-cloud when touched by sunbeams.

We have all grounds enough to fear .

Urge these as a reason for trust .

III. Faith in its relation to the previous life.

It is a strange instance of blindness that attempts have been made to soften down the Bible's plain speaking about Rahab's character.

In her story we have an anticipation of New Testament teaching.

The 'woman that was a sinner.'

Mary Magdalene.

'Then drew near all the publicans and sinners for to hear Him.'

She shows us that there is no hopeless guilt. None is so in regard to the effects of sin on a soul. There is no heart so indurated as that its capacity for being stirred by the divine message is killed.

There is none hopeless in regard to God.

His love embraces all, however bad. The bond which unites to Him is not blamelessness of life but simple trust.

The grossest vice is not so thorough a barrier as self-satisfied self-righteousness.

A thin slice of crystal will bar the entrance of air more effectually than many folds of stuff.

IV. Faith in its practical effects.

Rahab's story shows how living faith, like a living stream, will cut a channel for itself, and must needs flow out into the life.

Hence James is right in using her as an example of how 'we are justified by works and not by faith only,' and the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews is equally right in enrolling her in his great muster-roll of heroes and heroines of faith, and asserting that 'by faith' she 'perished not among them who believed not.' The one writer fastens on a later stage in her experience than does the other. James points to the rich fruit, the Epistle to the Hebrews goes deeper and lays bare the root from which the life rose to the clusters.

The faith that saves is not a barren intellectual process, nor an idle trust in Christ's salvation, but a practical power. If genuine it will mould and impel the life.

So Rahab's faith led her, as ours, if real, will lead us, to break with old habits and associations contrary to itself. She ceased to be 'Rahab the harlot,' she forsook 'her own people and her father's house.' But her conquest of her old self was gradual. A lie was a strange kind of first-fruits of faith. Its true fruit takes time to flower and swell and come to ripeness and sweetness.

So we should not expect old heads on young shoulders, nor wonder if people, lifted from the dunghills of the world, have some stench and rags of their old vices hanging about them still. That thought should moderate our expectations of the characters of converts from heathenism, or from the degraded classes at home. And it should be present to ourselves, when we find in ourselves sad recurrences of faults and sins that we know should have been cast out, and that we hoped had been so.

This thought enhances our wondering gratitude for the divine long-suffering which bears with our slow progress. Our great Teacher never loses patience with His dull scholars.

V. Faith as the means of deliverance and safety.

From external evils it delivers us or not, as God may will. James was no less dear, and no less faithful, than John, though he was early 'slain with the sword,' and his brother died in extreme old age in Ephesus. Paul looked forward to being 'delivered from every evil work,' though he knew that the time of his being 'offered' was at hand, because the deliverance that he looked for was his being 'saved into His heavenly kingdom.'

That true deliverance is infallibly ours, if by faith we have made the Deliverer ours.

There is a more terrible fall of a worse city than Jericho, in that day when 'the city of the terrible ones shall be laid low,' and our Joshua brings it 'to the ground, even to the dust.' 'In that same day shall this song be sung in the land of Judah: we have a strong city, salvation will God appoint for walls and bulwarks,' and into that eternal home He will certainly lead all who are joined to Him, and separated from their foul old selves, and from 'the city of destruction,' by faith in Him.

Joshua 7:1-12

Achan's Sin, Israel's Defeat

This passage naturally parts itself into—

1. The hidden sin (Joshua 7:1);
2. The repulse by which it is punished (Joshua 7:2-5);
3. The prayer of remonstrance (Joshua 7:6-9); and
4. The answer revealing the cause (Joshua 7:10-12).

We may briefly note the salient points in these four divisions, and then consider the general lessons of the whole.

I. Observe, then, that the sin is laid at the doors of the whole nation, while yet it was the secret act of one man. That is a strange 'for' in verse 1—the people did it; 'for' Achan did it. Observe, too, with what bitter particularity his descent is counted back through three generations, as if to diffuse the shame and guilt over a wide area, and to blacken the ancestors of the culprit. Note also the description of the sin. Its details are not given, but its inmost nature is. The specification of the 'Babylonish garment,' the 'shekels of silver,' and the 'wedge of gold,' is reserved for the sinner's own confession; but the blackness of the deed is set forth in its principle in verse 1. It was a 'breach of trust,' for so the phrase 'committed a trespass' might be rendered. The expression is frequent in the Pentateuch to describe Israel's treacherous departure from God, and has this full meaning here. The sphere in which Achan's treason was evidenced was 'in the devoted thing.' The spoil of Jericho was set aside for Jehovah, and to appropriate any part of it was sacrilege. His sin, then, was double, being at once covetousness and robbing God. Achan, at the beginning of Israel's warfare for Canaan, and Ananias, at the beginning of the Church's conquest of the world, are brothers alike in guilt and in doom. Note the wide sweep of 'the anger of the Lord,' involving in its range not only the one transgressor, but the whole people.

II. All unconscious of the sin, and flushed with victory, Joshua let no grass grow under his feet, but was prepared to push his advantage to the utmost with soldierly promptitude.

The commander's faith and courage were contagious, and the spies came back from their perilous reconnaissance of Ai with the advice that a small detachment was enough for its reduction. They had not spied the mound in the middle of Achan's tent, or their note would have been changed. Three thousand, or three hundred, would have been enough, if God had been with them. The whole army would not have been enough since He was not. The site of Ai seems to have been satisfactorily identified on a small plateau among the intricate network of wild wadys and bare hills that rise behind Jericho. The valley to the north, the place where the ambush lay at the successful assault, and a great mound, still bearing the name 'Et Tel' (the heap), are all there. The attacking force does not seem to have been commanded by Joshua. The ark stayed at Gilgal, The contempt for the resistance likely to be met makes the panic which ensued the more remarkable. What turned the hearts of the confident assailants to water? There was no serious fighting, or the slaughter would have been more than thirty-six. 'There went up ... about three thousand and they'—did what? fought and conquered? Alas, no, but 'they fled before the men of Ai,' rushing in wild terror down the steep pass which they had so confidently breasted in the morning, till the pursuers caught them up at some 'quarries,' where, perhaps, the ground was difficult, and there slew the few who fell, while the remainder got away by swiftness of foot, and brought back their terror and their shame to the camp. As the disordered fugitives poured in, they infected the whole with their panic. Such unwieldy undisciplined hosts are peculiarly liable to such contagious terror, and we find many instances in Scripture and elsewhere of the utter disorganization which ensues. The whole conquest hung in the balance. A little more and the army would be a mob; and the mob would break into twos and threes, which would get short shrift from the Amorites.

III. Mark, then, Joshua's action in the crisis.

He does not try to encourage the people, but turns from them to God. The spectacle of the leader and the elders prone before the ark, with rent garments and dust-bestrewn hair, in sign of mourning, would not be likely to hearten the alarmed people; but the defeat had clearly shown that something had disturbed the relation to God, and the first necessity was to know what it was. Joshua's prayer is perplexed, and not free from a wistful, backward look, nor from regard to his own reputation; but the soul of it is an earnest desire to know the 'wherefore' of this disaster. It traces the defeat to God, and means really, 'Show me wherefore Thou contendest with me.' No doubt it runs perilously near to repeating the old complaints at Kadesh and elsewhere, which are almost verbally reproduced in its first words. But the same things said by different people are not the same; and Joshua's question is the voice of a faith struggling to find footing, and his backward look is not because he doubts God's power to help, or hankers after Egypt, but because he sees that, for some unknown reason, they have lost the divine protection. His reference to himself betrays the crushing weight of responsibility which he felt, and comes not from carefulness for his own good fame so much as from his dread of being unable to vindicate himself, if the people should turn on him as the author of their misfortunes. His fear of the news of the check at Ai emboldening not only the neighboring Amorites (highlanders) of the western Palestine, but the remoter Canaanites (lowlanders) of the coast, to make a combined attack, and sweep Israel out of existence, was a perfectly reasonable forecast of what would follow. The naive simplicity of the appeal to God, 'What wilt Thou do for Thy great name?' becomes the soldier, whose words went the shortest way to their aim, as his spear did. We cannot fancy this prayer coming from Moses; but, for all that, it has the ring of faith in it, and beneath its blunt, simple words throbs a true heart.

IV. The answer sounds strange at first.

God almost rebukes him for praying. He gives Joshua back his own 'wherefore' in the question that sounds so harsh, 'Wherefore art thou thus fallen upon thy face?' but the harshness is only apparent, and serves to point the lesson that follows, that the cause of the disaster is with Israel, not with God, and that therefore the remedy is not in prayer, but in active steps to cast out 'the unclean thing.' The prayer had asked two things,—the disclosure of the cause of God's having left them, and His return. The answer lays bare the cause, and therein shows the conditions of His return. Note the indignant accumulation of verbs in verse 11, describing the sin in all its aspects. The first three of the six point out its heinousness in reference to God, as sin, as a breach of covenant, and as an appropriation of what was specially His. The second three describe it in terms of ordinary morality, as theft, lying, and concealment; so many black sides has one sin when God's eye scrutinizes it. Note, too, the attribution of the sin to the whole people, the emphatic reduplication of the shameful picture of their defeat, the singular transference to them of the properties of 'the devoted thing' which Achan has taken, and the plain, stringent conditions of God's return. Joshua's prayer is answered. He knows now why little Ai has beaten them back. He asked, 'What shall I say?' He has got something of grave import to say. So far this passage carries us, leaving the pitiful last hour of the wretched troubler of Israel untouched. What lessons are taught here?

First, God's soldiers must be pure. The conditions of God's help are the same to-day as when that panic-stricken crowd ignominiously fled down the rocky pass, foiled before an insignificant fortress, because sin clave to them, and God was gone from them. The age of miracles may have ceased, but the law of the divine intervention which governed the miracles has not ceased. It is true to-day, and will always be true, that the victories of the Church are won by its holiness far more than by any gifts or powers of mind, culture, wealth, eloquence, or the like. Its conquests are the conquests of an indwelling God, and He cannot share His temples with idols. When God is with us, Jericho is not too strong to be captured; when He is driven from us by our own sin, Ai is not too weak to defeat us. A shattered wall keeps us out, if we fight in our own strength. Fortifications that reach to heaven fall flat before us when God is at our side. If Christian effort seems ever fruitless, the first thing to do is to look for the 'Babylonish garment' and the glittering shekels hidden in our tents. Nine times out of ten we shall find the cause in our own spiritual deficiencies. Our success depends on God's presence, and God's presence depends on our keeping His dwelling-place holy. When the Church is 'fair as the moon,' reflecting in silvery whiteness the ardours of the sun which gives her all her light, and without such spots as dim the moon's brightness, she will be 'terrible as an army with banners.' This page of Old Testament history has a living application to the many efforts and few victories of the churches of to-day, which seem scarce able to hold their own amid the natural increase of population in so-called Christian lands, and are so often apparently repulsed when they go up to attack the outlying heathenism.

**'His strength was as the strength of ten,
Because his heart was pure,'
is true of the Christian soldier.**

Again, we learn the power of one man to infect a whole community and to inflict disaster on it. One sick sheep taints a flock. The effects of the individual's sin are not confined to the doer. We have got a fine new modern word to express this solemn law, and we talk now of 'solidarity,' which sounds very learned and 'advanced.' But it means just what we see in this story; Achan was the sinner, all Israel suffered. We are knit together by a mystical but real bond, so that 'no man,' be he good or bad, 'liveth to himself,' and no man's sin terminates in himself. We see the working of that unity in families, communities, churches, nations. Men are not merely aggregated together like a pile of cannon balls, but are knit together like the myriad lives in a coral rock. Put a drop of poison

anywhere, and it runs by a thousand branching veins through the mass, and tints and taints it all. No man can tell how far the blight of his secret sins may reach, nor how wide the blessing of his modest goodness may extend. We should seek to cultivate the sense of being members of a great whole, and to ponder our individual responsibility for the moral and religious health of the church, the city, the nation. We are not without danger from an exaggerated individualism, and we need to realise more constantly and strongly that we are but threads in a great network, endowed with mysterious vitality and power of transmitting electric impulses, both of good and evil.

Again, we have one more illustration in this story of the well-worn lesson,—never too threadbare to be repeated, until it is habitually realised,—that God's eye sees the hidden sins. Nobody saw Achan carry the spoil to his tent, or dig the hole to hide it. His friends walked across the floor without suspicion of what was beneath. No doubt, he held his place in his tribe as an honourable man, and his conscience traced no connection between that recently disturbed patch on the floor and the helter-skelter flight from Ai; but when the lot began to be cast, he would have his own thought, and when the tribe of Judah was taken, some creeping fear would begin to coil round his heart, which tightened its folds, and hissed more loudly, as each step in the lot brought discovery nearer home; and when, at last, his own name fell from the vase, how terribly the thought would glare in on him,—'And God knew it all the while, and I fancied I had covered it all up so safely.' It is an awful thing to hear the bloodhounds following up the scent which leads them straight to our lurking-place. God's judgments may be long in being put on our tracks, but, once loose, they are sure of scent, and cannot be baffled. It is an old, old thought, 'Thou God seest me'; but kept well in mind, it would save from many a sin, and make sunshine in many a shady place.

Again, we have in Achan a lesson which the professing Christians of great commercial nations, like England, sorely need. I have already pointed out the singular parallel between him and Ananias and Sapphira. Covetousness was the sin of all three. It is the sin of the Church to-day. The whole atmosphere in which some of us live is charged with the subtle poison of it. Men are estimated by their wealth. The great aim of life is to get money, or to keep it, or to gain influence and notoriety by spending it. Did anybody ever hear of church discipline being exercised on men who committed Achan's sin? He was stoned to death, but we set our Achans in high places in the Church. Perhaps if we went and fell on our faces before the ark when we are beaten, we should be directed to some tent where a very 'influential member' of Israel lived, and should find that to put an end to his ecclesiastical life had a wonderful effect in bringing back courage to the army, and leading to more unmingled dependence on God. Covetousness was stoned to death in Israel, and struck with sudden destruction in the Apostolic Church. It has been reserved for the modern Church to tolerate and almost to canonise it; and yet we wonder how it comes that we are so often foiled before some little Ai, and so seldom see any walls falling by our assault. Let us listen to that stern sentence, 'I will not be with you any more, except ye destroy the devoted thing from among you.'

Joshua 10:12 The Sun Stayed

'Sun, stand thou still upon Gibeon.'— JOSHUA 10:12

'*The last time*,' what a sad sound that has! In all minds there is a shrinking from the last time of doing even some common act. The walk down a street that we have passed every day for twenty years, and never cared in the least about, and the very doorsteps and the children in the streets, have an interest for us, as pensively we leave the commonplace familiar scene.

On this last Sunday of another year, there comes a tone of sober meditation over us, as we think that it is the last. I would fain let the hour preach. I have little to say but to give voice to its lessons.

My text is only taken as a starting-point, and I shall say nothing about Joshua and his prayer. I do not discuss whether this was a miracle or not. It seems, at any rate, to be taken by the writer of the story as one. What a picture he draws of the fugitives rushing down the rocky pass, blind in their fear, behind them the flushed and eager conqueror, the burst of the sudden tempest and far in the west the crescent moon, the leader on the hilltop with his prayer for but one hour or two more of daylight to finish the wild work so well begun! And, says the story, his wish was granted, and no day has been 'like it before or since, in which the Lord hearkened unto the voice of a man.' Once, and only once, did time seem to stand still; from the beginning till now it has been going steadily on, and even then it only seemed to stand. That day seemed longer, but life was passing all the same.

And so the first thought forced upon us here by our narrative and by the season is the old one, so commonplace and yet so solemn.

I. Life inexorably slides away from us.

Once, and only once, it seemed to pause. How often since has Joshua's prayer been prayed again! By the fearful,—the wretch to be

hanged at eight o'clock to-morrow morning, the man whom the next train will part from all he loves. By the hopeful,—the child wearying for the holidays, the bridegroom,

'Gallop apace, ye fiery-footed steeds!'

By the suffering,—

'Would God it were evening!'

By the martyr amid the flames,

'Come quickly, Lord Jesus!'

But all in vain. We cannot expand the moments to hours, nor compress the hours to moments. Leaden or winged, the hours are hours. The cold-blooded pendulum ticks on, equable and unaltered, and after sixty minutes, no sooner and no later, the hour strikes. 'There is a time for every purpose.'

How solemn is the thought of that constant process! It goes on for ever, like the sea fog creeping up from the wide ocean and burying life and sunshine in its fatal folds, or like the ever-flowing river, or like the fall plunging over the edge of the cliff, or like the motions of the midnight sky. Each moment in its turn passes into the colourless stony past, and the shadow creeps up the hillside.

And how unnoticed it is! We only know motion by the jolts. The revolution of the earth and its rush along its orbit are unfelt by us. We are constantly startled to feel how long ago such and such a thing took place. The mother sees her little girl at her knee, and in a few days, as it seems, finds her a woman. How immense is our life in the prospect, how awfully it collapses in the retrospect! Only by seeing constellation after constellation set, do we know that the heavens are in motion. We have need of an effort of serious reflection to realise that it is of us and of our lives that all these old commonplaces are true.

That constant, unnoticed progress has an end. Our life is a definite period, having a bounded past behind it, a present, and a bounded future before it. We have a sandglass and it runs out. We are like men sliding down a rope or hauling a boat towards a fixed point. The sea is washing away our sandy island, and is creeping nearer and nearer to where we stand, and will wash over us soon. No cries, nor prayers, nor wishes will avail. It is vain for us to say, 'Sun! stand thou still!'

II. Therefore our chief care should be to finish our work in our day.

Joshua had his day lengthened; we can come to the same result by crowding ours with service. What is the purpose of life? Is it a shop? or a garden? a school? No. Our 'chief end' is to become like God and a little to help forward His cause. All is intended to develop character; all life is disciplinary.

God's purpose should be our desire. That desire should mould all our thoughts and acts. There should be no mere sentimental regrets for the past, but the spirit of consecration should affect our thoughts about it. There should be penitence, thankfulness, not vain mourning over what is gone. There should be no waste or selfish use of the present. What is it given us for but to use for God?

Strenuous work is the true way to lengthen each day. Time is infinitely elastic. The noblest work is to do 'the works of Him that sent me.' There should be no care for the future. It is in His hand. There will be room in it for doing all His will.

'Lord, it belongs not to my care,

Whether I die or live.'

III. If so, the passing day will have results that never pass.

Joshua's day was long enough for his work, and that work was a victory which told on future generations. So life, short as it is, will be long enough for all that we have to do and learn and be.

Christ's servant is immortal till his work is done.

God gives every man time enough for his salvation.

What may we bring out of life? Character, Christ-likeness, thankful memories, union with God, capacity for heaven. The transient leaves the abiding. The flood foams itself away, but deposits rich soil on the plain.

IV. Thus the passing away of what must pass may become a joy.

Why should we be sad? There are reasons enough, as many sad, lonely hearts among us know too well. To some men dark thoughts of death and judgment make the crumbling away of life too gloomy a fact to be contemplated, but it may and should be calm joy to us that the weary world ends and a blessed life begins. We may count the moments and see them pass, as a bride watches the hours rolling on to her marriage morning; not, indeed, without tremor and sadness at leaving her old home, but yet with meek hope and gentle joy.

It is possible for men to see that life is but 'as a shadow that declineth,' and yet to be glad. By faith in Christ, united to 'Him Who is for ever and ever,' our souls shall 'triumph over death and thee, O time.'

We need not cry, 'Sun! stand still!' but rather, 'Come quickly, Lord Jesus!'

Then Time shall be 'the lackey to eternity,' and Death be the porter of heaven's gate, and we shall pass from the land of setting suns and waning moons and change and sorrow, to that land where 'thy sun shall no more go down,' and 'there shall be no more time.'

Joshua 13:1-8

Unwon But Claimed

There remaineth yet very much land to be possessed, ... them will I drive out from before the children of Israel; only divide thou it by lot unto Israel for an inheritance'— Joshua 13:1-8

Joshua was now a very old man and had occupied seven years in the conquest. His work was over, and now he had only to take steps to secure the completion by others of the triumph which he would never see. This incident has many applications to the work of the Church in the world, but not less important ones to individual progress, and we consider these mainly now.

I. The clear recognition of present imperfection.

That is essential in all regions, 'Not as though'; the higher up, the more clearly we see the summit. The ideal grows loftier, as partially realised. The mountain seems comparatively low and easy till we begin to climb. We should be continually driven by a sense of our incompleteness, and drawn by the fair vision of unattained possibilities. In all regions, to be satisfied with the attained is to cease to grow.

This is eminently so in the Christian life, with its goal of absolute completeness.

How blessed this dissatisfaction is! It keeps life fresh: it is the secret of perpetual youth.

Joshua's work was incomplete, as every man's must be. We each have our limitations, the defects of our qualities, the barriers of our environment, the brevity of our day of toil, and we have to be content to carry the fiery cross a little way and then to give it up to other hands. There is only One who could say, 'It is done.' Let us see that we do our own fragment.

II. The confident reckoning on complete possession.

Joshua's conquest was very partial. He subdued part of the central mountain nucleus, but the low-lying stretch of country on the coast, Philistia and the maritime plain up to Tyre and Sidon and other outlying districts, remained unsubdued. Yet the whole land was now to be allotted out to the tribes. That allotment must have strengthened faith in their ultimate possession, and encouraged effort to make the ideal a reality, and to appropriate as their own in fact what was already theirs in God's purpose. So a great part of Christian duty, and a great secret of Christian progress, is to familiarise ourselves with the hope of complete victory. We should acquire the habit of contemplating as certainly meant by God to be ours, complete conformity to Christ's character, complete appropriation of Christ's gifts. God bade Jeremiah buy a 'field that was in Anathoth' at the time an invading army held the land. A Roman paid down money for the ground on which the besiegers of Rome were encamped. It does not become Christians to be less confident of victory. But we have to take heed that our confidence is grounded on the right foundation. God's commandment to Joshua to allot the land, even while the formidable foes enumerated in the context held it firmly, was based on the assurance (verse 6): 'Them will I drive out before the children of Israel.' Confidence based on self is presumption, and will end in defeat; confidence based on God will brace to noble effort, which is all the more vigorous and will surely lead to victory, because it distrusts self.

III. The vigorous effort animated by both the preceding.

How the habit of thinking the unconquered land theirs would encourage Israel. Efforts without hope are feeble; hope without effort is fallacious.

Israel's history is significant. The land was never actually all conquered. God's promises are all conditional, and if we do not work, or if we work in any other spirit than in faith, we shall not win our allotted part in the 'inheritance of the saints in light.' It is possible to lose 'thy crown.' 'Work out your own salvation.' 'Trust in the Lord and do good, so shalt thou dwell in the land.'

Joshua 14:6

Caleb - A Green Old Age

‘And Caleb... said unto him (Joshua), Thou knowest the thing that the Lord said unto Moses the man of God concerning me and thee in Kadesh-Barnea.’— Joshua 14:6

Five and forty years had passed since the Lord had ‘said this thing.’ It was the promise to these two, now old men, of the prolongation of their lives, and to Caleb of his inheritance in the land. Seven years of fighting have been got through, and the preparations are being made for the division of the land by lot. But, before that is done, it is fitting that Caleb, whose portion had been specially secured to him by that old promise, should have the promise specially recognised and endorsed by the action of the leader, and independent of the operation of the lot. So he appears before Joshua, accompanied by the head men of his tribe, whose presence expresses their official consent to the exceptional treatment of their tribesman, and urges his request in a little speech, full of pathos and beauty and unconscious portraiture of the speaker. I take it as a picture of an ideal old age, showing in an actual instance how happy, vigorous, full of buoyant energy and undiminished appetite for enterprise a devout old age may be. And my purpose now is not merely to comment on the few words of our text, but upon the whole of what falls from the lips of Caleb here.

I. I see then here, first, a life all built upon God’s promise.

Five times in the course of his short plea with Joshua does he use the expression ‘the Lord spake.’ On the first occasion of the five he unites Joshua with himself as a recipient of the promise, ‘Thou knowest the thing that the Lord said concerning me and thee.’ But in the other four he takes it all to himself; not because it concerned him only, but because his confidence, laying hold of the promise, forgot his brother in the earnestness of his personal appropriation of it. And so, whatsoever general words God speaks to the world, a true believer will make them his very own; and when Christ says, ‘God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on Him should not perish,’ faith translates it into ‘He loved me, and gave Himself for me.’ This is the first characteristic of a life built upon the promise of God, that it lays its hand upon that promise and claims it all for its very own.

Then notice, still further, how for all these forty-five years Caleb had ‘hid the word in his heart,’ had lived upon it and thought about it and believed it, and recognised the partial fulfilment of it, and cherished the secret fire unknown to any besides. And now at last, after so long an interval, he comes forward and stretches out a hand, unweakened by the long delay, to claim the perfect fulfilment at the end of his days. So ‘the vision may tarry,’ but a life based upon God’s promise has another estimate of swiftness and slowness than is current amongst men who have only the years of earthly life to reckon by; and that which to sense seems a long, weary delay, to faith seems but as ‘a watch in the night’. The world, which only measures time by its own revolutions, has to lament over what seem to the sufferers long years of pains and tears, but in the calendar of faith ‘weeping endures for a night, joy cometh in the morning.’ The weary days dwindle into a point when they are looked at with an eye that has been accustomed to gaze on the solemn eternities of a promising and a faithful God. To it, as to Him, ‘a thousand years are as one day’; and ‘one day,’ in the possibilities of divine favour and spiritual growth which it may enfold, ‘as a thousand years.’ To the men who measure time as God measures it, His help, howsoever long it may tarry, ever comes ‘right early.’

Further, note how this life, built upon faith in the divine promise, was nourished and nurtured by instalments of fulfilment all along the road. Two promises were given to Caleb—one, that his life should be prolonged, and the other, that he should possess the territory into which he had so bravely ventured. The daily fulfilment of the one fed the fire of his faith in the ultimate accomplishment of the other, and he gratefully recounts it now, as part of his plea with Joshua—‘Now, behold, the Lord hath kept me alive as He spake, these forty and five years, even since the Lord spake this word unto Moses. And now, lo! I am this day fourscore and five years old.’

Whosoever builds his life on the promise of God has in the present the guarantee of the better future. As we are journeying onwards to that great fountain-head of all sweetness and felicity, there are ever trickling brooks from it by the way, at which we may refresh our thirsty lips and invigorate our fainting strength. The present instalment carries with it the pledge of the full discharge of the obligation, and he whose heart and hope is fixed with a forward look on the divine inheritance, may, as he looks backward over all the years, see clearly in them one unbroken mass of preserving providences, and thankfully say, ‘The Lord hath kept me alive, as He spake.’

And, still further, the life that is built upon faith like this man’s, is a life of buoyant hopefulness till the very end. The hopes of age are few and tremulous. When the feast is nearly over, and the appetite is dulled, there is little more to be done, but to push back our chairs and go away. But God keeps ‘the good wine’ until the last. And when all earthly hopes are beginning to wear thin and to burn dim, then the great hope of ‘the mountain of the inheritance’ will rise brighter and clearer upon our horizon. It is something to have a hope so far in front of us that we never get up to it, to find it either less than our expectations or more than our desires; and this is not the least of the blessednesses of the living ‘hope that maketh not ashamed,’ that it lies before us till the very end, and beckons

and draws us across the gulf of darkness. 'The Lord hath kept me alive, as He said; now give me this mountain whereof the Lord spake.'

II. Further, I see here a life that bears to be looked back at.

Caleb becomes almost garrulous in telling over the old story of that never-to-be-forgotten day, when he and Joshua stood alone and tried to put some heart into the cowardly mob before them. There is no mock modesty about the man. He says that, amidst many temptations to be untrue, he gave his report with sincerity and veracity, 'speaking as it was in mine heart,' and then he quotes twice, with a permissible satisfaction, the eulogium that had come upon him from the divine lips, 'I wholly followed the Lord my God.' The private soldier's cheek may well flush and his eye glitter as he repeats over again his general's praise. And for Caleb, half a century has not dimmed the impression that was made on his heart when he received that praise, through the lips of Moses, from God.

Now, of course, such a tone of speaking about one's past savours of an earlier stage in revelation than that in which we live, and, if this were to be taken as a man's total account of his whole life, we could not free it from the charge of unpleasing self-complacency and self-righteousness. But for all that, it is not the same thing in the retrospect whether you and I have to look back upon years that have been given to self, and the world, and passion, and pride, and covetousness, and frivolities and trifles of all sorts, or upon years that in the main, and regard being had to their deepest desires and governing direction, have been given to God and to His service. Many a man looking back upon his life—I wonder if there are any such men listening to me now—can only see such a sight as Abraham did on that morning when he looked down on the plain of Sodom, and 'Lo! the smoke of the land went up as the smoke of a furnace.' Dear friends I the only thing that makes life in the retrospect tolerable is that it shall have been given to God, and that we can say, 'I wholly followed the Lord my God.'

III. Again, I see here a life which has discovered the secret of perpetual youth.

'I,' says the old man—'am as strong this day as I was in the day when Moses sent me. As my strength was then, even so is my strength now, for war, both to go out and to come in.' For fighting, and for all the intercourse and manifold activities of life, his sinews are as braced, his eyes as clear, his spirit and limbs as alert as they were in those old days. No doubt you will say that was due to miraculous intervention. No doubt it was; but is it not true that, in a very real sense, a man may keep himself young all his life, if he will go the right way to work? And the secret of perpetual youthfulness lies here, in giving our hearts to God and in living for Him. Christianity, with its self-restraint and its exhortations to all, and especially to the young, to be chaste and temperate and to subdue the animal passions, has a direct tendency to conserve physical vigour; and Christianity, by the inspiration that it imparts, the stimulus that it gives, and the hopes that it permits us to cherish, has a direct tendency to keep alive in old age all the best of the characteristics of youth. Its buoyancy, its undimmed interest, its cheeriness, its freedom from anxiety and care—all these things are directly ministered to, and preserved by, a life of simple faith that casts itself upon God, and dwells securely, in joy and in restfulness, and not without a great light of hope, even when the shadows of evening are falling.

One of the greatest and most blessed of the characteristics of youth is the consciousness that the most of life lies before us; and to a Christian man, in any stage of his earthly life, that consciousness is possible. When he stands on the verge of the last sinking sandbank of time, and the water is up to his ankles, he may well feel that the best and the most of life is yet to be.

**'The last of life, for which the first was made:
Our times are in His hand
Who saith, "A whole I planned.
Youth shows but half; trust God: see all, nor be afraid.'"**

'They shall still bring forth fruit in old age, they shall be full of sap and green.' A gnarled old tree may be green in all its branches, and blossom and fruit may hang together there. The ideal of life is, that into each stage we shall carry the best of the preceding, harmonised with the best of the new, and that is possible to a Christian soul. The fountain of perpetual youth, of which the ancients fabled, is no fable, but a fact; and it rises, where the prophet in his vision saw the stream coming out, from beneath the threshold of the Temple door.

IV. So, lastly, I see here a beautiful example of a life which to the last is ready for danger and enterprise.

Caleb's words as to his undiminished strength were not meant for a boast. They express thankfulness and praise, and they are put as the ground of the request that he has to make. He gives a chivalrous reason for his petition when he says, 'Now, therefore, give me this mountain, for the Anakims (the giants) are there; and the cities great and fenced.'

Caleb's readiness for one more fight was fed by his reliance on God's help in it. When he says, 'It may be the Lord will be with me,' the perhaps is that of humility, not of doubt. The old warrior's eye flashes, and his voice sounds strong and full, as he ends his words with 'I shall drive them out, as the Lord spake.' That has the true ring. What were the three Anak chiefs, with their barbarous names, Sheshai, and Ahiman, and Talmi, and their giant stature, to the onset of a warrior faith like that? Of course, 'Caleb drove out thence

the three sons of Anak,' and Hebron became his inheritance. Nothing can stand against us, if we seek for our portion, not where advantages are greatest, but where difficulties and dangers are most rife, and cast ourselves into the conflict, sure that God is with us, though humbly wondering that we should be worthy of His all-conquering presence, and sure, therefore, that victory marches by our sides.

Old age is generally much more disposed to talk about its past victories than to fight new ones; to rest upon its arms, or upon its laurels, than to undertake fresh conflicts. Now and then we see a man, statesman or other, who, bearing the burden of threescore years and ten lightly, is still as alert of spirit, as eager for work, as bold for enterprise, as he was years before. And in nine cases out of ten such a man is a Christian; and his brilliant energy of service is due, not only, nor so much, to natural vigour of constitution as to religion, which has preserved his vigour because it has preserved his purity, and been to him a stimulus and an inspiration.

Danger is an attraction to the generous mind. It is the coward and the selfish man who are always looking for an easy place, where somebody else will do the work. This man felt that this miraculously prolonged life of his bound him to special service, and the fact that up in Hebron there were a fenced city and tall giants behind the battlements, was an additional reason for picking out that bit of the field as the place where he ought to be. Thank God, that spirit is not dead yet! It has lived all through the Christian Church, and flamed up in times of martyrdom. On missionary fields to-day, if one man falls two are ready to step into his place. It is the true spirit of the Christian soldier. 'A great door and effectual is opened,' says Paul, 'and there are many adversaries.' He knew the door was opened because the adversaries were many. And because there were so many of them, would he run away? Some of us would have said: 'I must abandon that work, it bristles with difficulties; I cannot stop in that post, the bullets are whistling too fast.' Nay! says Paul; 'I abide till Pentecost'—a good long while— because the post is dangerous, and promises to be fruitful.

So, dear friends, if we would have lives on which we can look back, lives in which early freshness will last beyond the 'morning dew,' lives in which there shall come, day by day and moment by moment, abundant foretastes to stay our hunger until we sit at Christ's table in His kingdom, we must 'follow the Lord alway,' with no half-hearted surrender, nor partial devotion, but give ourselves to Him utterly, to be guided and sent where He will. And then, like Caleb, we shall be able to say, with a 'perhaps,' not of doubt, but of wonder, that it should be so, to us unworthy, 'It may be the Lord will be with me, and I shall drive them out.' In all these things 'we are more than conquerors through Him that loved us.'

Joshua 20:1-9

The Cities of Refuge

Our Lord has taught us that parts of the Mosaic legislation were given because of the 'hardness' of the people's hearts. The moral and religious condition of the recipients of revelation determines and is taken into account in the form and contents of revelation. That is strikingly obvious in this institution of the 'cities of refuge.' They have no typical meaning, though they may illustrate Christian truth. But their true significance is that they are instances of revelation permitting, and, while permitting, checking, a custom for the abolition of which Israel was not ready.

I. Cities of refuge were needed, because the 'avenger of blood' was recognised as performing an imperative duty.

'Blood for blood' was the law for the then stage of civilisation. The weaker the central authority, the more need for supplementing it with the wild justice of personal avenging. Neither Israel nor surrounding nations were fit for the higher commandment of the Sermon on the Mount. 'An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth,' corresponded to their stage of progress; and to have hurried them forward to 'I say unto you, Resist not evil,' would only have led to weakening the restraint on evil, and would have had no response in the hearers' consciences. It is a commonplace that legislation which is too far ahead of public opinion is useless, except to make hypocrites. And the divine law was shaped in accordance with that truth. Therefore the goel, or kinsman-avenger of blood, was not only permitted but enjoined by Moses.

But the evils inherent in his existence were great. Blood feuds were handed down through generations, involving an ever-increasing number of innocent people, and finally leading to more murders than they prevented. But the thing could not be abolished. Therefore it was checked by this institution. The lessons taught by it are the gracious forbearance of God with the imperfections attaching to each stage of His people's moral and religious progress; the uselessness of violent changes forced on people who are not ready for them; the presence of a temporary element in the Old Testament law and ethics.

No doubt many things in the present institutions of so-called Christian nations and in the churches are destined to drop away, as the principles of Christianity become more clearly discerned and more honestly applied to social and national life. But the good shepherd does not overdrive his flock, but, like Jacob, 'leads on softly, according to the pace of the cattle that is before' him. We must be content to bring the world gradually to the Christian ideal. To abolish or to impose institutions or customs by force is

useless. Revolutions made by violence never last. To fell the upas-tree maybe very heroic, but what is the use of doing it, if the soil is full of seeds of others, and the climate and conditions favourable to their growth? Change the elevation of the land, and the `flora' will change itself. Institutions are the outcome of the whole mental and moral state of a nation, and when that changes, and not till then, do they change. The New Testament in its treatment of slavery and war shows us the Christian way of destroying evils; namely, by establishing the principles which will make them impossible. It is better to girdle the tree and leave it to die than to fell it.

II. Another striking lesson from the cities of refuge is the now well-worn truth that the same act, when done from different motives, is not the same.

The kinsman-avenger took no heed of the motive of the slaying. His duty was to slay, whatever the slayer's intention had been. The asylum of the city of refuge was open for the unintentional homicide, and for him only, Deliberate murder had no escape thither. So the lesson was taught that motive is of supreme importance in determining the nature of an act. In God's sight, a deed is done when it is determined on, and it is not done, though done, when it was not meant by the doer. 'Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer,' and he that killeth his brother unawares is none. We suppose ourselves to have learned that so thoroughly that it is trivial to repeat the lesson.

What, then, of our thoughts and desires which never come to light in acts? Do we recognise our criminality in regard to these as vividly as we should? Do we regulate the hidden man of the heart accordingly? A man may break all the commandments sitting in an easy-chair and doing nothing. Von Moltke fought the Austro-Prussian war in his cabinet in Berlin, bending over maps. The soldiers on the field were but pawns in the dreadful game. So our battles are waged, and we are beaten or conquerors, on the field of our inner desires and purposes. 'Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life.'

III. The elaborately careful specification of cases which gave the fugitive a right to shelter in the city is set forth at length in Numbers xxxv. 15-24 , and Deuteronomy xix. 4-13 . The broad principle is there laid down that the cities were open for one who slew a man 'unwittingly.' But the plea of not intending to slay was held to be negatived, not only if intention could be otherwise shown but if the weapon used was such as would probably kill; such, for instance, as 'an instrument of iron,' or a stone, or a 'weapon of wood, whereby a man may die.' If we do what is likely to have a given result, we are responsible for that result, should it come about, even though we did not consciously seek to bring it. That is plain common sense. 'I never thought the house would catch fire' is no defence from the guilt of burning it down, if we fired a revolver into a powder barrel. Further, if the fatal blow was struck in 'hatred,' or if the slayer had lain in ambush to catch his victim, he was not allowed shelter. These careful definitions freed the cities from becoming nests of desperate criminals, as the 'sanctuaries' of the Middle Ages in Europe became. They were not harbours for the guilty, but asylums for the innocent.

IV. The procedure by which the fugitive secured protection is described at length in the passages cited, with which the briefer account here should be compared.

It is not quite free from obscurity, but probably the process was as follows. Suppose the poor hunted man arrived panting at the limits of the city, perhaps with the avenger's sword within half a foot of his neck; he was safe for the time. But before he could enter the city, a preliminary inquiry was held 'at the gate' by the city elders. That could only be of a rough-and-ready kind; most frequently there would be no evidence available but the man's own word. It, however, secured interim protection. A fuller investigation followed, and, as would appear, was held in another place,—perhaps at the scene of the accident. 'The congregation' was the judge in this second examination, where the whole facts would be fully gone into, probably in the presence of the avenger. If the plea of non-intention was sustained, the fugitive was 'restored to his city of refuge,' and there remained safely till the death of the high-priest, when he was at liberty to return to his home, and to stay there without fear.

Attempts have been made to find a spiritual significance in this last provision of the law, and to make out a lame parallel between the death of the high-priest, which cancelled the crime of the fugitive, and the death of Christ, which takes away our sins. But—to say nothing of the fact that the fugitive was where he was just because he had done no crime—the parallel breaks down at other points. It is more probable that the death of one high-priest and the accession of another were regarded simply as closing one epoch and beginning another, just as a king's accession is often attended with an amnesty. It was natural to begin a new era with a clean sheet, as it were.

V. The selection of the cities brings out a difference between the Jewish right of asylum and the somewhat similar right in heathen and mediaeval times.

The temples or churches were usually the sanctuaries in these. But not the Tabernacle or Temple, but the priestly cities, were chosen here. Their inhabitants represented God to Israel, and as such were the fit persons to cast a shield over the fugitives; while yet their cities were less sacred than the Temple, and in them the innocent man-slayer could live for long years. The sanctity of the Temple was preserved intact, the necessary provision for possibly protracted stay was made, evils attendant on the use of the place of worship as a refuge were avoided.

Another reason—namely, accessibility swiftly from all parts of the land—dictated the choice of the cities, and also their number and locality. There were three on each side of Jordan, though the population was scantier on the east than on the west side, for the extent of country was about the same. They stood, roughly speaking, opposite each other,—Kedesh and Golan in the north, Shechem and Ramoth central, Hebron and Bezer in the south. So, wherever a fugitive was, he had no long distance between himself and safety.

We too have a 'strong city' to which we may 'continually resort.' The Israelite had right to enter only if his act had been inadvertent, but we have the right to hide ourselves in Christ just because we have sinned wilfully. The hurried, eager flight of the man who heard the tread of the avenger behind him, and dreaded every moment to be struck to the heart by his sword, may well set forth what should be the earnestness of our flight to 'lay hold on the hope set before us in the gospel.' His safety, as soon as he was within the gate, and could turn round and look calmly at the pursuer shaking his useless spear and grinding his teeth in disappointment, is but a feeble shadow of the security of those who rest in Christ's love, and are sheltered by His work for sinners. 'I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, and no one shall pluck them out of My hand.'

Joshua 21:43-45, 22:1-9

The End of the War

'The old order changeth, giving place to new.' In this passage we have the breaking up of the congregation and the disbanding of the victorious army. The seven years of fighting had come to an end. The swords were to be 'beaten into plowshares,' and the comrades who had marched shoulder to shoulder, and shared the fierce excitement of many a bloody field, were to be scattered, each becoming a peaceful farmer or shepherd. A picturesque historian, of the modern 'special correspondent' sort, would have overlaid the narrative with sentiment and description; but how quietly the writer tells it, so that we have to bethink ourselves before we apprehend that we are reading the account of an epoch-making event! He fixes attention on two things,— the complete fulfilment of God's promises (xxi. 43-45) and the dismissal to their homes of the contingent from the trans-Jordanic tribes, whose departure was the signal that the war was ended (xxii. 1-8). We may consider the lessons from these two separately.

I. The triumphant record of God's faithfulness (Joshua 21:43-45).

These three verses are the trophy reared on the battlefield, like the lion of Marathon, which the Greeks set on its sacred soil. But the only name inscribed on this monument is Jehovah's. Other memorials of victories have borne the pompous titles of commanders who arrogated the glory to themselves; but the Bible knows of only one conqueror, and that is God. 'The help that is done on earth, He doeth it all Himself.' The military genius and heroic constancy of Joshua, the eagerness for perilous honour that flamed, undimmed by age, in Caleb, the daring and strong arms of many a humble private in the ranks, have their due recognition and reward; but when the history that tells of these comes to sum up the whole, and to put the 'philosophy' of the conquest into a sentence, it has only one name to speak as cause of Israel's victory.

That is the true point of view from which to look at the history of the world and of the church in the world. The difference between the 'miraculous' conquest of Canaan and the 'ordinary' facts of history is not that God did the one and men do the other; both are equally, though in different methods, His acts. In the field of human affairs, as in the realm of nature, God is immanent, though in the former His working is complicated by the mysterious power of man's will to set itself in antagonism to His; while yet, in manner insoluble to us, His will is supreme. The very powers which are arrayed against Him are His gift, and the issues which they finally subserve are His appointment. It does not need that we should be able to pierce to the bottom of the bottomless in order to attain and hold fast by the great conviction that 'there is no power but of God,' and that 'from Him are all things, and to Him are all things.'

Especially does this trophy on the battlefield teach a needful lesson to us in the Christian warfare. We are ever apt to think too much of our visible weapons and leaders, and to forget our unseen and ever-present Commander, from whom comes all our power. We 'burn incense to our own net, and sacrifice to our own drag,' and, like the heathen conqueror of whom Habakkuk speaks, make our swords our gods (Hab 1:11, 16). The Church has always been prone to hero-worship, and to the idolatry of its organization, its methods, or its theology. Augustine did so and so; Luther smote the 'whited wall' (the Pope) a blow that made him reel; the Pilgrim Fathers carried a slip of the plant of religious liberty in a tiny pot across the Atlantic, and watered it with tears till it has grown a great tree; the Wesleys revived a formal Church,—let us sing hallelujahs to these great names! By all means; but do not let us forget whence they drew their power; and let us listen to Paul's question, 'Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but servants through whom ye believed, even as the Lord gave to every man?'

And let us carve, deep-cut and indelible, in solitary conspicuousness, on the trophy that we rear on each well-fought field, the name of no man save 'Jesus only.' We read that on a pyramid in Egypt the name and sounding titles of the king in whose reign it was

erected were blazoned on the plaster facing, but beneath that transitory inscription the name of the architect was hewn, imperishable, in the granite, and stood out when the plaster dropped away. So, when all the short-lived records which ascribe the events of the Church's progress to her great men have perished, the one name of the true builder will shine out, and 'at the name of Jesus every knee shall bow.' Let us not rely on our own skill, courage, talents, orthodoxy, or methods, nor try to 'build tabernacles' for the witnessing servants beside the central one for the supreme Lord, but ever seek to deepen our conviction that Christ, and Christ only, gives all their powers to all, and that to Him, and Him only, is all victory to be ascribed. That is an elementary and simple truth; but if we really lived in its power we should go into the battle with more confidence, and come out of it with less self-congratulation.

We may note, too, in these verses, the threefold repetition of one thought, that of God's punctual and perfect fulfilment of His word. He 'gave unto Israel all the land which He swore to give'; 'He gave them rest, ... according to all that He swore'; 'there failed not aught of any good thing which the Lord had spoken.' It is the joy of thankful hearts to compare the promise with the reality, to lay the one upon the other, as it were, and to declare how precisely their outlines correspond. The finished building is exactly according to the plans drawn long before. God gives us the power of checking His work, and we are unworthy to receive His gifts if we do not take delight in marking and proclaiming how completely He has fulfilled His contract. It is no small part of Christian duty, and a still greater part of Christian blessedness, to do this. Many a fulfilment passes unnoticed, and many a joy, which might be sacred and sweet as a token of love from His own hand, remains common and unhallowed, because we fail to see that it is a fulfilled promise. The eye that is trained to watch for God's being as good as His word will never have long to wait for proofs that He is so. 'Whoso is wise, and will observe these things, even he shall understand the loving kindness of the Lord.' And to such a one faith will become easier, being sustained by experience; and a present thus manifestly studded with indications of God's faithfulness will merge into a future still fuller of these. For it does not need that we should wait for the end of the war to have many a token that His every word is true. The struggling soldier can say, 'No good thing has failed of all that the Lord has spoken.' We look, indeed, for complete fulfilment when the fighting is done; but there are 'brooks by the way' for the warriors in the thick of the fight, of which they drink, and, refreshed, 'lift up the head.' We need not postpone this glad acknowledgment till we can look back and down from the land of peace on the completed campaign, but may rear this trophy on many a field, whilst still we look for another conflict to-morrow.

II. The disbanding of the contingent from the tribes across Jordan (Joshua 22:1-8).

Forty thousand fighting men, of the tribes of Reuben, Gad, and the half of Manasseh, had willingly helped in the conquest, leaving their own newly-won homes on the eastern side of Jordan, and for seven long years taking their share in the hardships and dangers of their brethren. It was no small tax which they had thus cheerfully paid for the sake of brotherly unity. Their aid had not only been valuable as strengthening Joshua's force, but still more so as a witness of the unbroken oneness of the nation, and of the sympathy which the tribes already settled bore to the others. Politically, it was wise to associate the whole people in the whole conquest; for nothing welds a nation together like the glories of common victories and the remembrance of common dangers survived. The separation of the trans-Jordanic tribes by the rapid river, and by their pastoral life, was a possible source of weakness, and would, no doubt, have led to more complete severance, if it had not been for the uniting power of the campaign. If the forty thousand had been quietly feeding sheep on the uplands while their brethren were fighting among the stony hills of Canaan, a great gulf would have opened between them. Even as it was, the eastern tribes drifted somewhat away from the western; but the disintegration would have been still more complete if no memories of the war, when all Israel stood side by side, had lived on among them. Their share in the conquest was not only a piece of policy,—it was the natural expression of the national brotherhood. Even if Joshua had not ordered their presence, it would have been impossible for them to stop in their peacefulness and let their brethren bear the brunt of battle.

The law for us is the same as for these warriors. In the family, the city, the nation, the Church, and the world, union with others binds us to help them in their conflicts, and that especially if we are blessed with secure possessions, while they have to struggle for theirs. We are tempted to selfish lives of indulgence in our quiet peace, and sometimes think it hard that we should be expected to buckle on our armour, and leave our leisurely repose, because our brethren ask the help of our arms. If we did as Reuben and Gad did, would there be so many rich men who never stir a finger to relieve poverty, so many Christians whose religion is much more selfish than beneficent? Would so many souls be left to toil without help, to struggle without allies, to weep without comforters, to wander in the dark without a guide? All God's gifts in providence and in the Gospel are given that we may have somewhat wherewith to bless our less happy brethren. 'The service of man' is not the substitute for, but the expression of, Christianity. Are we not kept here, on this side Jordan, away for a time from our inheritance, for the very same reason that these men were separated from theirs,—that we may strike some strokes for God and our fellows in the great war? Dives, who lolls on his soft cushions, and has less pity for Lazarus than the dogs have, is Cain come to life again; and every Christian is either his brother's keeper or his murderer. Would that the Church of to-day, with infinitely deeper and sacred ties knitting it to suffering, struggling humanity, had a tithe of the willing relinquishment of legitimate possessions and patient participation in the long campaign for God which kept these rude soldiers faithful to their flag and forgetful of home and ease, till their general gave them their discharge!

Note the commander's parting charge. They were about to depart for a life of comparative separation from the mass of the nation.

Their remoteness and their occupations drew them away from the current of the national life, and gave them a kind of quasi-independence. They would necessarily be less directly under Joshua's control than the other tribes were. He sends them away with one commandment, the Imperative stringency of which is expressed by the accumulation of expressions in verse 5 . They are to give diligent heed to the law of Moses. Their obedience is to be based on love to God, who is their God no less than the God of the other tribes. It is to be comprehensive—they are 'to walk in all His ways'; it is to be resolute—they are 'to cleave to Him'; it is to be wholehearted and whole-souled service, that will be the true bond between the separated parts of the whole. Independence so limited will be harmless; and, however wide apart their paths may lie, Israel will be one. In like manner the bond that knits all divisions of God's people together, however different their modes of life and thought, however unlike their homes and their work, is the similarity of relation to God. They are one in a common faith, a common love, a common obedience. Wider waters than Jordan part them. Graver differences of tasks and outlooks than separated these two sections of Israel part them. But all are one who love and obey the one Lord. The closer we cleave to Him, the nearer we shall be to all His tribes.

We need only note in a word how these departing soldiers, leaving the battlefield with their commander's praise and benediction, laden with much wealth, the spoil of their enemies, and fording the stream to reach the peaceful homes, which had long stood ready for them, may be taken, by a permissible play of fancy, as symbols of the faithful servants and soldiers of the true Joshua, at the end of their long warfare passing to the 'kingdom prepared for them before the foundation of the world,' bearing in their hands the wealth which, by God's grace, they had conquered from out of things here. They are not sent away by their Commander, but summoned by Him to the great peace of His own presence; and while His lips give them the praise which is praise indeed, they inscribe on the perpetual memorial which they rear no name but His, who first wrought all their works in them, and now has ordained eternal peace for them.

Joshua 24:19-28

The National Oath at Shechem

We reach in this passage the close of an epoch. It narrates the last public act of Joshua and the last of the assembled people before they scatter 'every man unto his inheritance.' It was fitting that the transition from the nomad stage to that of settled abode in the land should be marked by the solemn renewal of the covenant, which is thus declared to be the willingly accepted law for the future national life. We have here the closing scene of that solemn assembly set before us.

The narrative carries us to Shechem, the lovely valley in the heart of the land, already consecrated by many patriarchal associations, and by that picturesque scene (Joshua 8:30-35), when the gathered nation, ranged on the slopes of Ebal and Gerizim, listened to Joshua reading 'all that Moses commanded.' There, too, the coffin of Joseph, which had been reverently carried all through the desert and the war, was laid in the ground that Jacob had bought five hundred years ago, and which now had fallen to Joseph's descendants, the tribe of Ephraim. There was another reason for the selection of Shechem for this renewal of the covenant. The gathered representatives of Israel stood, at Shechem, on the very soil where, long ago, Abram had made his first resting-place as a stranger in the land, and had received the first divine pledge, 'unto thy seed will I give this land,' and had piled beneath the oak of Moreh his first altar (of which the weathered stones might still be there) to 'the Lord, who appeared unto him.' It was fitting that this cradle of the nation should witness their vow, as it witnessed the fulfilment of God's promise. What Plymouth Rock is to one side of the Atlantic, or Hastings Field to the other, Shechem was to Israel. Vows sworn there had sanctity added by the place. Nor did these remembrances exhaust the appropriateness of the site. The oak, which had waved green above Abram's altar, had looked down on another significant incident in the life of Jacob, when, in preparation for his journey to Bethel, he had made a clean sweep of the idols of his household, and buried them 'under the oak which was by Shechem' (Ge 35:2-4). His very words are quoted by Joshua in his command, in Joshua 24:23 , and it is impossible to overlook the intention to parallel the two events. The spot which had seen the earlier act of purification from idolatry was for that very reason chosen for the later. It is possible that the same tree at whose roots the idols from beyond the river, which Leah and Rachel had brought, had been buried, was that under which Joshua set up his memorial stone; and it is possible that the very stone had been part of Abram's altar. But, in any case, the place was sacred by these past manifestations of God and devotions of the fathers, so that we need not wonder that Joshua selected it rather than Shiloh, where the ark was, for the scene of this national oath of obedience. Patriotism and devotion would both burn brighter in such an atmosphere. These considerations explain also the designation of the place as 'the sanctuary of the Lord,'—a phrase which has led some to think of the Tabernacle, and apparently occasioned the Septuagint reading of 'Shiloh' instead of 'Shechem' in verses 1 and 25 . The precise rendering of the preposition in verse 26 (which the Revised Version has put in the margin) shows that the Tabernacle is not meant; for how could the oak-tree be 'in' the Tabernacle? Clearly, the open space, hallowed by so many remembrances, and by the appearance to Abram, was regarded as a sanctuary.

The earlier part of this chapter shows that the people, by their representatives, responded with alacrity—which to Joshua seemed

too eager—to his charge, and enumerated with too facile tongues God's deliverances and benefits. His ear must have caught some tones of levity, if not of insincerity, in the lightly-made vow. So he meets it with a douche of cold water in Joshua 24:19, 20, because he wishes to condense vaporous resolutions into something more tangible and permanent. Cold, judiciously applied, solidifies. Discouragements, rightly put, encourage. The best way to deepen and confirm good resolutions which have been too swiftly and inconsiderately formed, is to state very plainly all the difficulty of keeping them. The hand that seems to repel, often most powerfully attracts. There is no better way of turning a somewhat careless 'we will' into a persistent 'nay, but we will' than to interpose a 'ye cannot.' Many a boy has been made a sailor by the stories of hardships which his parents have meant as dissuasives. Joshua here is doing exactly what Jesus Christ often did. He refused glib vows because He desired whole hearts. His very longing that men should follow Him made Him send them back to bethink themselves when they promised to do it. 'Master, I will follow Thee whithersoever Thou goest!' was answered by no recognition of the speaker's enthusiasm, and by no word of pleasure or invitation, but by the apparently cold repulse: 'Foxes have holes, birds of the air roosting-places; but the Son of Man has not where to lay His head. That is what you are offering to share. Do you stand to your words?' So, when once 'great multitudes' came to Him He turned on them, with no invitation in His words, and told them the hard conditions of discipleship as being entire self-renunciation. He will have no soldiers enlisted under false pretences. They shall know the full difficulties and trials which they must meet; and if, knowing these, they still are willing to take His yoke upon them, then how exuberant and warm the welcome which He gives!

There is a real danger that this side of the evangelist's work should be overlooked in the earnestness with which the other side is done. We cannot be too emphatic in our reiteration of Christ's call to all the 'weary and heavy-laden' to come unto Him, nor too confident in our assurance that whosoever comes will not be 'cast out'; but we may be, and, I fear, often are, defective in our repetition of Christ's demand for entire surrender, and of His warning to intending disciples of what they are taking upon them. We shall repel no true seeker by duly emphasizing the difficulties of the Christian course. Perhaps, if there were more plain speaking about these at the beginning, there would be fewer backsliders and dead professors with 'a name to live.' Christ ran the risk of the rich ruler's going away sorrowful, and so should His messengers do. The sorrow tells of real desire, and the departure will sooner or later be exchanged for return with a deeper and more thorough purpose, if the earlier wish had any substance in it. If it had not, better that the consciousness of its hollowness should be forced upon the man, than that he should outwardly become what he is not really,—a Christian; for, in the one case, he may be led to reflection which may issue in thorough surrender; and in the other he will be a self-deceived deceiver, and probably an apostate.

Note the special form of Joshua's warning. It turns mainly on two points,—the extent of the obligations which they were so lightly incurring, and the heavy penalties of their infraction. As to the former, the vow to 'serve the Lord' had been made, as he fears, with small consideration of what it meant. In heathenism, the 'service' of a god is a mere matter of outward acts of so-called worship. There is absolutely no connection between religion and morality in idolatrous systems. The notion that the service of a god implies any duties in common life beyond ceremonial ones is wholly foreign to paganism in all its forms. The establishment of the opposite idea is wholly the consequence of revelation. So we need not wonder if the pagan conception of service was here in the minds of the vowing assembly. If we look at their vow, as recorded in verses 16-18, we see nothing in it which necessarily implies a loftier idea. Jehovah is their national God, who has fought and conquered for them, therefore they will 'serve Him.' If we substitute Baal, or Chemosh, or Nebo, or Ra, for Jehovah, this is exactly what we read on Moabite stones and Assyrian tablets and Egyptian tombs. The reasons for the service, and the service itself, are both suspiciously external. We are not judging the people more harshly than Joshua did; for he clearly was not satisfied with them, and the tone of his answer sufficiently shows what he thought wrong in them. Observe that he does not call Jehovah 'your God.' He does so afterwards; but in this grave reply to their exuberant enthusiasm he speaks of Him only as 'the Lord,' as if he would put stress on the monotheistic conception, which, at all events, does not appear in the people's words, and was probably dim in their thoughts. Then observe that he broadly asserts the impossibility of their serving the Lord; that is, of course, so long as they continued in their then tone of feeling about Him and His service.

Then observe the points in the character of God on which he dwells, as indicating the points which were left out of view by the people, and as fitted to rectify their notions of service. First, 'He is an holy God.' The scriptural idea of the holiness of God has a wider sweep than we often recognise. It fundamentally means His supreme and inaccessible elevation above the creature; which, of course, is manifested in His perfect separation from all sin, but has not regard to this only. Joshua here urges the infinite distance between man and God, and especially the infinite moral distance, in order to enforce a profounder conception of what goes to God's service. A holy God cannot have unholy worshippers. His service can be no mere ceremonial, but must be the bowing of the whole man before His majesty, the aspiration of the whole man after His loftiness, the transformation of the whole man into the reflection of His purity, the approach of the unholy to the Holy through a sacrifice which puts away sin.

Further, He is 'a jealous God.' 'Jealous' is an ugly word, with repulsive associations, and its application to God has sometimes been explained in ugly fashion, and has actually repelled men. But, rightly looked at, what does it mean but that God desires our whole hearts for His own, and loves us so much, and is so desirous to pour His love into us, that He will have no rivals in our love? The metaphor of marriage, which puts His love to men in the tenderest form, underlies this word, so harsh on the surface, but so gracious at the core.

There is still abundant need for Joshua's warning. We rejoice that it takes so little to be a Christian that the feeblest and simplest act of faith knits the soul to the all-forgiving Christ. But let us not forget that, on the other hand, it is hard to be a Christian indeed; for it means 'forsaking all that we have,' and loving God with all our powers. The measure of His love is the measure of His 'jealousy,' and He loves us no less than He did Israel. Unless our conceptions of His service are based upon our recognition of His holiness and demand for our all, we, too, 'cannot serve the Lord.'

The other half of Joshua's warnings refers to the penalties of the broken vows. These are put with extraordinary force. The declaration that the sins of the servants of God would not be forgiven is not, of course, to be taken so as to contradict the whole teaching of Scripture, but as meaning that the sins of His people cannot be left unpunished. The closer relation between God and them made retribution certain. The law of Israel's existence, which its history ever since has exemplified, was here laid down, that their prosperity depended on their allegiance, and that their nearness to Him ensured His chastisement for their sin. 'You only have I known of all the families of the earth: therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities.'

The remainder of the incident must be briefly disposed of. These warnings produced the desired effect; for Joshua did not seek to prevent, but to make more intelligent and firm, the people's allegiance. The resolve, repeated after fuller knowledge, is the best reward, as it is the earnest hope, of the faithful teacher, whose apparent discouragements are meant to purify and deepen, not to repress, the faintest wish to serve God. Having tested their sincerity, he calls them to witness that their resolution is perfectly voluntary; and, on their endorsing it as their free choice, he requires the putting away of their 'strange gods,' and the surrender of their inward selves to Him who, by this their action as well as by His benefits, becomes in truth 'the God of Israel.' Attempts have been made to evade the implication that idolatry had crept in among the people; but there can be no doubt of the plain, sad meaning of the words. They are a quotation of Jacob's, at the same spot, on a similar occasion centuries before. If there were no idols buried now under the old oak, it was not because there were none in Israel, but because they had not been brought by the people from their homes. Joshua's commands are the practical outcome of his previous words. If God be 'holy' and 'jealous,' serving Him must demand the forsaking of all other gods, and the surrender of heart and self to Him. That is as true to-day as ever it was. The people accept the stringent requirement, and their repeated shout of obedience has a deeper tone than their first hasty utterance had. They have learned what service means,—that it includes more than ceremonies; and they are willing to obey His voice. Blessed those for whom the plain disclosure of all that they must give up to follow Him, only leads to the more assured and hearty response of willing surrender!

The simple but impressive ceremony which ratified the covenant thus renewed consisted of two parts,—the writing of the account of the transaction in 'the book of the law'; and the erection of a great stone, whose grey strength stood beneath the green oak, a silent witness that Israel, by his own choice, after full knowledge of all that the vow meant, had reiterated his vow to be the Lord's. Thus on the spot made sacred by so many ancient memories, the people ended their wandering and homeless life, and passed into the possession of the inheritance, through the portal of this fresh acceptance of the covenant, proclaiming thereby that they held the land on condition of serving God, and writing their own sentence in case of unfaithfulness. It was the last act of the assembled people, and the crown and close of Joshua's career.