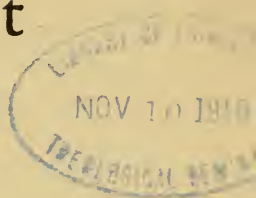


The Parables of the Old Testament



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The Parables of the Old Testament

*To my friends in the First Presby-
terian Church of Paterson, New Jersey,
and the Arch Street Presbyterian
Church, of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania*

Preface

SOME years ago I commenced a study of the Parables of the Old Testament with the purpose of making use of the Parables as material for sermons. I was not disappointed as to the suggestions afforded by such a study; indeed, it opened up for me a rich vein of moral and spiritual truth. But I was surprised to find how little there was in print that would be of help to me in conducting such a study. Book stalls and libraries abound in volumes on the Parables of the New Testament, but nowhere, either in America or Great Britain, could I come on a single book which dealt with the Parables of the Old Testament. Whatever, then, the offenses of this volume, it cannot be laid against it that it traverses a field whose fruits already have been harvested and garnered. As for these Parables, I think I can feel almost like those mariners of the sixteenth century who sailed upon seas that never before had been cleft by the keel of a ship.

I have no desire to draw out fine spun distinctions between the different forms of illustrative speech. We used to define them and refine them in our college days; but as a matter of fact, the partitions which divide metaphor from simile, and allegory from parable, and parable from fable, are exceedingly thin. The human spirit, when it de-

sires to express an idea, reaches out for some way of illustrating that idea. Eliphaz wished to express the beauty and usefulness of the old age of a good man; so he said, "Thou shalt come to thy grave in a full age, as a shock of corn cometh in his season." That is a direct comparison of two spheres, the ideal and the material, the human and the vegetable, the life of man and the life of the corn. This sort of illustration we call a simile. Or, in a more direct way, the formal comparison may be omitted and the thing to be illustrated identified for the moment with the object of comparison. Jesus wished to say that the Pharisees were like the sepulchres, white without but rotten within; but instead of saying, "Ye are like unto whited sepulchres" He said, "Woe unto you, whited sepulchres!" This we call a metaphor.

The word "parable" comes from two Greek words which mean to place side by side. In the parable, then, we lay one kind of actions in one kind of sphere alongside of another kind of actions in another kind of sphere, and illustrate the one by the other. Jesus said the Kingdom of Heaven was like unto a man going into a far country, or a shepherd who had a hundred sheep, or a fisherman casting his nets, or a merchant giving his servants money for investment, or a sower going forth to sow. In other words, He laid the spiritual kingdom side by side with the animal or vegetable or mineral, or the occupations of men in those kingdoms.

The difference between the Parables of Jesus and those of the Old Testament consists in the fact that nearly all the Parables of Jesus teach a spiritual truth that is timeless, and has no particular relation to or connection with the occasion or condition of utterance. The Parable of the Lost Sheep tells of the redeeming love of God and speaks to all ages and all conditions of men. But the Parable of the Ewe Lamb was spoken by Nathan for the purpose of arousing David to a sense of his sin against Uriah the Hittite. This is true of every Parable commented upon in this volume; they were messages for a special occasion. Nevertheless, they teem with suggestions of truth that is applicable for any age, and, in many instances, they may be made the vehicle of evangelical truth, as well as general or moral. The Fable of the Thistle and the Cedar was spoken to rebuke one king for his presumption in dealing with another king. The two kings are long dead, but the Fable still may be used to point the lesson that pride goeth before destruction and the haughty spirit before a fall. The Parable of the Vineyard in Isaiah was spoken with reference to the imminent overthrow of Judah and the dispersion of her citizens. But who does not see in it a noble and beautiful sermon on the full provision of God's love and the peril involved in the rejection of Jesus Christ? And as for the Atonement, what better passage could one have from which to explain that great doctrine than the Parable of the Wise Woman of Tekoah?

Although this volume is entitled "The Parables of the Old Testament," there are included in it two fables, and the only fables in the Bible, that of the Trees and that of the Thistle and the Cedar. The fable differs from the parable in that in the fable the subjects of the mineral or vegetable or animal kingdom "feign to speak and act with human interest and passion." But the general purpose of the fable and the parable are the same, to illustrate moral and spiritual truth by comparison with what actually transpires, or is imagined to transpire, in the life of man or in the world of nature.

The minister who chooses to preach from the Parables of the Old Testament will find that most of the stories are new and fresh to his auditors, and he himself will not fail to share in the consequent interest and alertness which such preaching awakens in a congregation. The teacher or popular speaker will find much in these Parables which may be employed with telling effect to illustrate morals. The Parables dealt with in this volume represent the garnered wisdom of prophets, chroniclers, and seers, some of them known and some of them unknown, but all worthy of a better acquaintance. These addresses have been delivered and this book is now sent forth in the Name of Him who taught the people in Parables, and without a Parable spake He not unto them.

C. E. M.

Philadelphia, Pa.

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I

The Parable of the Trees

Judges ix. 7-20

THIS is a rough and tumble world that we enter when we open our Bibles to the Book of Judges. Men are a law unto themselves, and the result is lawlessness and unrighteousness. Everything is on the heroic scale—mirth, sorrow, revenge, hate, murder, anger, love of country. Silhouetted against this dark background are strange and unforgettable characters who move across the stage of Israel to the music of strong passions: Shamgar, Gideon, Samson, Deborah, Jael, Jephthah, Jotham. Jotham speaks and is gone, but his message remains.

The bright day of Gideon's work for God and Israel had set in darkness and in gloom. The hero of the victory over the hosts of the Midianites had fallen a victim to the glory of that victory. Out of the golden earrings, pendants, crescents, chains, wristlets and anklets taken from the fallen foe, Gideon made an ephod which was worshipped by Israel as an idol. "And Gideon made an ephod even in Ophrah." "Even in Ophrah!"—as if the sacred chronicler would tell of his grief and surprise at the last end of Gideon. Where was Ophrah? It was beneath the oak at Ophrah that Gideon was beating out the

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grain to hide it from the Midianites, his heart burning with anger against the invaders, when the angel of the Lord appeared unto him and cried, "The Lord is with thee, thou mighty man of valour." It was in Ophrah that God called him. There the fire came forth to devour the offering on the rocks, and there Gideon pressed the fleece of wool together and wrung out the dew, a bowlful of water. "Even in Ophrah!" You would think that if Gideon were going to forget God and worship idols, he would have set up that idol anywhere save in Ophrah, with the great and holy memories of his youth. Yet is not this what we often see in life, idols built in Ophrah? Take the man who has long ceased to name the name of God back to the church of his youth, back to the old family pew, and let him sit there and call up the days and the faces that are gone; let him think of the youth, the child, that once sat there with a heart that knew no bitterness, and a life that was free from the stain of sin; and let him compare that child, as pure as the morning dew, with the sated sinner worshipping the idols of this world. Take the husband and wife whose hearts have grown cold, alienated, separated, divorced, back to that morning of love, when to seek each other's happiness was life's chief joy, when with hand clasped in hand, their faces bright with the holy oil of joy and their souls arrayed in the garments of praise, they repeated the vows they once thought naught could sever:—"I do promise and covenant, before God

and man, to be thy loving and faithful wife, husband, in plenty and in want, in joy and in sorrow, in sickness and in health, until death us do part." Take the man who has failed in the race of life, or if successful, wears honours that are tainted, and does, as a matter of habit, things that once he would have scorned to do ; take that man back to the morning of his consecration, to the day when he left the doors of the college with the fires of high resolution and lofty ambition burning in his heart, and let him contrast his present, disenchanted, disillusioned, easy-principled self with that youth of long ago, when the fleece was filled with dew and the God spake on every wind that blew. Oh, these abandoned, forgotten, sinned against Ophrahs of the past ! Now the fleece is dry ; no flame goes up from the altar ; no voice of God makes the heart beat quick and the eye look up.

That was the fate of Gideon. But he had enough character left to refuse the proffered crown. When they said, "Rule thou over us," he answered, "I will not rule over you ; neither will my son rule over you. The Lord shall rule you." But when Gideon was dead and buried in the sepulchre of Joash, his father, the family quarrels began. A nation's memory is short, and Gideon's service was soon forgotten in the service of Baal. Among the sons of Gideon was Abimelech, a base, contemptible man, illegitimate in birth and lawless in heart. But if he possessed less virtue than the other sons, he had more ambition than all. His being the son

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of the concubine shut him out from a chance for the crown, should Israel decide to have a king. He therefore went among his mother's friends at Shechem and persuaded them to assist him in the slaughter of the seventy sons of Gideon on one stone at Ophrah. Then they went out to crown him king by the oak that was in Shechem. But the bloody knife of Abimelech had not quite finished its work. The youngest son, Jotham, escaped. That is always the way with evil and evil deeds. Truth and righteousness are never left without an heir to their throne. Some youngest son escapes the sword and comes back to judge. Evil builds its tower, grim and strong walled; but it leaves some chink or crevice through which flies the arrow of judgment. Truth and justice may seem to be suppressed and none left to speak on their behalf, when, from some unexpected quarter, comes the voice to assure and to judge.

Just as the men of Shechem were crying "God save the king!" Jotham appeared to tell them what kind of king they had chosen. From his station on the top of Mount Gerizim he told his fable of the trees. "The trees went forth on a time to anoint a king over them; and they said unto the olive tree, 'Reign thou over us.' But the olive tree said unto them, 'Should I leave my fatness, wherewith by me they honour man and God, and go to wave to and fro over the trees?' And the trees said to the fig tree, 'Come thou and reign over us.' But the fig tree said unto them, 'Should

I leave my sweetness and my good fruit, and go to wave to and fro over the trees?' And the trees said unto the vine, 'Come thou and reign over us.' And the vine said unto them, 'Should I leave my new wine, which cheereth God and man, and go to wave to and fro over the trees?' Then said all the trees unto the bramble, 'Come thou and reign over us.' And the bramble said unto the trees, 'If in truth ye anoint me king over you, then come and take refuge in my shade; and if not, let fire come out of the bramble and devour the cedars of Lebanon.' "

The astounded Abimelech and his confederates saw all too plainly the point of the parable. The people had rejected the sons of Gideon who might have ruled them with justice and equity, and had chosen the basest and the wickedest of the sons, a man among men as the bramble among the trees. They must now serve Abimelech with slavish fear, or he would burn them in his wrath. This proved to be so. Jotham was not only a satirist, but a prophet. In three years the men of Shechem got tired of their bargain, and rebelled against their bramble king. Abimelech came with his army, took their city by storm, and slew the people and beat down the walls and sowed the place with salt. If any of the men of Shechem were left to tell the tale, they remembered the word of Jotham, "Fire shall come out of the bramble and devour the cedar of Lebanon."

The trees by their own vote elected a bramble

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over them. Their forest government was what they made it, nothing more, nothing less. They elected and crowned a bramble, and the bramble ruled them like a bramble. Life is what you make it. You choose your own king and government. At first you may feel tempted to challenge this proposition that life is what you make it. You answer that life is made for you. You came into the world by no wish or plan of your own; you found yourself born into a home where a certain kind of example and thought and life prevailed; as soon as you commenced to breathe, you were formed, moulded, coloured, by that thought; on your shoulder was laid the mysterious hand of heredity, guiding you along paths that your fathers trod before you; you can no more throw off your past than you can blot out your present; you find yourself in a given intellectual, or moral, or religious scale of life by no desire and by no protest of your own; you travel your threescore and ten along this path of life, here and there a rough place where the stones bruised you; here and there a dark, deep place where the floods overwhelmed you, and here and there a pleasant meadow-land where the fields were peaceful and bright with flowers, and here and there high, exalted, spiritual places where the winds were fresh and the air was clear, and you thought you could see the land to which you were travelling. Now, as you grope your way down the path that leads you into silent, mist-wrapped valleys, looking back over the long journey

where you met with joys that were so real and so divine, sorrows that were so real and so penetrating, gains so indefinable and losses so irreparable, are you not tempted to say that life was not so much what you made it as what you found it and were compelled to take?

“ Ah, love ! could you and I conspire
To grasp this sorry scheme of things entire,
Would we not shatter it to bits,
And mould it nearer to the heart's desire ? ”

Things that we might have done differently ; things that we would change in life if we could turn back the years, and other things that we could never change—all this comes to mind when we think at all seriously about our life. But when we get above the incidents of existence, and come to the finer issues of the soul, regardless of the station into which we were born, regardless of the place which we now hold, it remains true that life is what we make it.

Clad in all her beauty and mystery, life stands before us as the Lord stood before Solomon when he dreamed his dream on the holy hill of Gibeon, and speaks to us saying, “ Ask what I shall give thee.”

“ I am the Master of my fate ;
I am the Captain of my soul.”

There are all kinds of trees in the forest, and there are all kinds of desires and emotions and considerations, vices and graces, possible for the hu-

man soul. Only in a fable, only in imagination, can the trees choose a king ; but man is above the trees of the field ; he can and does choose his king. You have chosen your king for to-day. When this Sabbath day with its privileges and duties is past, some will go to their beds tired in body, but not in heart, for they have scattered the seeds of light and love about them ; they have thought of others, they have toiled for others ; they have spoken the word in season, instructed many and upholden the fallen, wiped away tears from the eyes of those who wept, and as a ship at sea leaves a track of white foam behind it, they have left behind them a path that is bright with love and honour. But others, with the same opportunities, and the same temptations, will go to their beds weary and ill at ease, dissatisfied, fretful, unhappy, because they gave themselves over to the dominion of their own desires, aims, appetites, worshipping their own dislikes, prejudices, enmities. Instead of the fig, the olive, the vine, they have made the bramble king, and the bramble has ruled them like a bramble. Be miserable, wretched, contemptible, if you want to be, but don't blame it on God, or your lot in life. You make your own king ! Oh, how often, with a folly not unlike that of the fabled trees, we are the deliberate electors and architects of our own unhappiness and distress !

There was a young English poet, born to station and wealth and education, and gifted with the great gift of song. He scorned much that was

high and holy in life, tasted much of life's bitterness, had his share of its flattery and praise, and went to his grave at thirty-seven. Of life this is what he had to say :

“ Fame, wisdom, love and power were mine,
And health and youth possessed me ;
My goblets blush'd from every vine,
And lovely forms caressed me :
I sunn'd my heart in beauty's eyes,
And felt my soul grow tender ;
All earth can give or mortal prize,
Was mine of regal splendour.

“ I strive to number o'er what days
Remembrance can discover,
Which all that life or earth displays
Would lure me to live over.
There rose no day, there roll'd no hour
Of pleasure unembitter'd ;
And not a trapping deck'd my power
That gall'd not while it glitter'd.”

Towards the end of the same century another young poet and writer finished his journey. He, too, was born to refinement, knowledge, ambition. His life was gentle and his song was pure. When he came to die in his island home amid the surges of the Pacific, after his long battle with the thorn in the flesh, he said :

“ Under the wide and starry sky,
Dig the grave and let me lie.
Glad did I live and gladly die,
And I laid me down with a will.

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This be the verse you grave for me,
Here he lies where he longed to be,
Home is the sailor—home from the sea,
And the hunter—home from the hill.”

One lived so that when he came to die life was nothing but a desert of regrets and bitter recollections. The other lived so that when he came to die he could say that he had “gladly lived” and therefore he could gladly die. Life was what they made it.

When Pilate brought out Jesus before the people, he cried to them, “Behold your king!” They answered, “Away with him, away with him! Crucify him, crucify him!” Pilate said, “Shall I crucify your king?” They cried, “We have no king but Cæsar!” That was their choice, and as their choice so was their doom. Seventy years after Christ died on Calvary beneath the superscription, in Greek, Hebrew, and Latin, “Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews,” Titus came with his army, and after a siege of three years’ duration and of unparalleled suffering and ferocity, the walls of Jerusalem were battered down. A legionary, standing on the shoulders of one of his fellows, put a torch to one of the golden windows of the temple. The Jews rushed in to save their shrine, and died by the thousands until their blood ran down the steps of the holy place like a river. No king but Cæsar! On that day Jewish history came to an end. Ashes, blood, carnage, heaps of slaughtered, fallen walls, desecrated shrines. “No king but

Cæsar!" And fire came out of the bramble. "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them that are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not! Behold your house is left unto you desolate."

"And ye would not!" Over how many cities, over how many souls must Christ utter that lament? They refuse His olive branch of blood-bought peace and the shelter of His vine, and take the bramble of unforgiving, unregenerate, implacable self for king. "If thou hadst known who it is that saith unto thee, 'Give me to drink,' thou wouldst have asked of him," said Jesus to the woman at the well. If you and I knew the difference between the reign of Christ in our lives and the reign of our own bramble selves, knew it, not only in exhortation, the appeal of the sermon, but in actual history, we should not long hesitate in our choice. But no man is granted that kind of wisdom. Yet in another sense we do know the difference. If we do not have the knowledge of experience, we have at least the knowledge of conviction. The question is, Will knowledge be turned into power? Shall we take Christ for king, committing all our interests and all our destinies to Him? Or, shall we take our own selves for king? Must Christ say for you as He said of the city that He loved, "If thou hadst but known the things that belong to thy peace! But now they are hid from thee!"

II

The Parable of the Thistle and the Cedar

2 Kings xiv. 8-14

AMAZIAH, king of Judah, had gained a victory over Edom in the Valley of Salt, where he slew ten thousand men and took the town of Selah. This victory over the desert tribes unduly elated him, and moved him to challenge the king of Israel to combat. Because he had slain a few thousands in the Valley of Salt, he thought he could cross swords with the kingdom of Israel, then at the height of its godless splendour and military power. He sent messengers to the king of Israel, Joash, saying: "Come, let us look one another in the face." In other words, "Let us meet in battle and see who is stronger." Joash scorned the impudent challenge. Half amused, half angry at the insult, he answered with the parable of The Thistle and the Cedar. "The thistle that was in Lebanon sent to the cedar that was in Lebanon, saying, 'Give thy daughter to my son to wife' and there passed by a wild beast that was in Lebanon and trode down the thistle." The cedar did not deign to notice the arrogant proposal of the thistle. But a wild beast, a prowling denizen of the forest, seeking after his prey, passed that

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way and set his great paw upon the impudent thistle, and the place that once knew it knew it no more forever. The viewless winds caught up the seed and fibre of the thistle and carried them hither and yon. But the tall cedar, not even beholding the end of the thistle, reigned on in solitary dignity and might.

This is one of the shortest fables on record, and one of the most effective. It was a crushing bit of irony. For Judah in that day to challenge Israel to combat was like the thistle proposing affinity with the cedar. But Amaziah did not profit by the lesson. He insisted upon a trial of strength. This was granted him in Beth-Shemesh. And Judah was put to the worse before Israel; and they fled every man to their tents.

"The thistle that was in Lebanon said to the cedar that was in Lebanon." Both cedar and thistle flourished in Lebanon. In the plan of God, noble and ignoble characters thrive side by side, worship in the same church, live in the same home, toil in the same shop, travel on the same train, and pass on the same street. Wherever you see a stately cedar lifting its head above the forest, you can find the thorn, the thistle, the bramble. There are men who are like the cedar; they have strength and the beauty of dignity. They have vision, overtopping the other trees. They tower above the dust, smoke, mist, and hold communion with the lonely stars. They are far removed from the pettiness and the meanness and sordidness which

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play so large a part in the lives of ordinary mortals, and when they fall they go down with a crash that makes the earth shake and leave a lonely place against the sky. Side by side with them live men of the order of the thistle—arrogant, presumptuous, mean, faultfinding, backbiting, contemptible, ludicrous to everybody save themselves.

This thistle lived in the shadow of the mighty cedar, but never recognized the difference, else it would not have made the arrogant proposal that its son should marry the cedar's daughter. Jesus said to Philip, "Have I been so long time with you, yet hast thou not known me, Philip?" How that strange dullness to heavenly presence and character has been handed down from age to age. To-morrow there comes some unusual event; a great joy, a great sorrow, a great trial; we ask for comfort, we seek for guidance, and we are surprised to find the healing fountain flowing in the very midst of our life and work. Some old father, or mother, kind teacher, faithful friend, has been God's representative upon earth, angels walking about in homely and common-day attire and disguise. Then speak they with a strange sadness and gentle rebuke, "Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me?"

In the nave of the old Abbey Kirk at Haddington one may read over the grave of Jane Welsh the first of many pathetic but regretful tributes paid to his wife by Thomas Carlyle:

The Parable of the Thistle and the Cedar 27

“In her bright existence she had more sorrows than are Common, but also a soft invincibility, a capacity of Discernment, and a noble loyalty of heart which are Rare. For 40 years she was the true and loving help-Mate of her husband, and by act and word unweariedly Forwarded him as none else could in all of worthy that He did or attempted. She died at London, 21st April 1866, suddenly snatched from him, and the light of his Life as if gone out.”

Poor, stumbling, lonely, remorseful Carlyle ! How often did he mourn over that grave and supplicate with unavailing words the dear shade of her whom in life he felt he had neglected ! Hear, careless soul, thou who art dealing with love as if it were merchandise, and with loved ones as if, like the poor, thou hadst them always with thee, this advice of the unhappy sage of Chelsea, “Cherish what is dearest while you have it near you, and wait not till it is far away. Blind and deaf that we are ; oh, think, if thou yet love anybody living, wait not till death sweep down the paltry little dust clouds and dissonances of the moment, and all be at last so mournfully clear and beautiful when it is too late !”

The great men of the world seldom have been so confessed by their contemporaries. Some of the men, it may be, that you speak lightly of to-day, your children’s children will speak of with honour, and ask their children to strive to be like them. The judgment and the discernment of the contemporary is usually the judgment of the thistle. It was said of Emerson that after he had been writing about the

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hero for a quarter of a century, he was able to recognize him when he appeared on the scene—John Brown of Harper's Ferry. But he was a solitary exception. John Brown became a great man after he was hanged; Lincoln after he was shot; Jesus after He was crucified. "Of whom the world was not worthy" is a legend that might be written on the tomb of every great man from Samuel to Abraham Lincoln.

The Epistle to the Hebrews speaks of entertaining angels unawares. This is the common experience of life. After they are gone, faded away on the horizon of life's flat desert, and we are left standing like Abraham beneath the quiet oaks of meditation and recollection, then we perceive that angels have passed our way. The earthen vessel stands unhonoured and unappreciated in our homes; but one day death lifts its grim mallet and breaks the vase, and we find that it was an alabaster box of ointment; precious, very costly. We carry our burdens and trudge our dusty roads to the Emmaus of our desires and purposes, and never know that he who has companied with us by the way was one who would have been welcomed in the elect company of the children of God.

" Be merciful, O our God !
Forgive the meanness of our human hearts,
That never, till a noble soul departs,
See half the worth, or hear the angel's wings
Till they go rustling heavenward as he springs
Up from the mounded sod."

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"Tell me, I pray thee, where the Seer's house is," said stalwart Saul to an old man on the streets of Zuph. And the old man said, "I am the Seer." Closer at hand than he had dreamed was the Seer who could tell Saul all. So seeking for our lost, lost hopes, lost joys, lost treasures, lost enthusiasms, lost innocence, lost love, we hurry through the streets of life to find some new person and some new direction, when all the time the Seer of God is just at hand. But alas! we know him not. Your old Bible, your old church, your old bedside prayer, your old friend, companion, wife, husband, father, mother—real, discerning, far-seeing, wisdom-bringing Seers of God are they!

The thistle in proposing marriage with the family of the cedar is just like man when he flaunts his self-righteousness in the face of Almighty God. The thistle was ignorant of the difference between its prickles and the mighty cedar. Man's ignorance of himself betrays him into arrogance and presumptuous sin. "Let us look one another in the face," said the upstart king, for he thought himself equal to Israel's king. Various excuses and explanations are given by those who deliberately reject the Christian revelation. Some would be Christians were it not for miracles; some were it not for Genesis; some were it not for countless divisions of the church; some were it not for the inconsistent persons in the churches; some were it not for the doctrine of future retribution; some were it not for the doctrine of the atonement; some

were it not for the doctrine of the resurrection; some were it not for difficulties and anachronisms in the Bible; and some because they don't feel ready. But go down beneath these surface excuses and explanations, and there you will find hiding in its dark cellar the real reason why this man or that man rejects the Christian revelation—his own miserable and contemptible pride and self-sufficiency. They say this and they say that, but down in their inmost heart they say, "I need no Saviour. I need no atonement. I need no forgiveness." The thistle of human nature measures itself by the side of the cedar of God's truth and God's Son and goes away content and satisfied. There is a generation that is pure in their own eyes and yet is not washed from their own filthiness. Christ said, "He that willeth to do the will of my Father in heaven shall know the doctrine." There He touched the pulse of the religious problem. The question for me is, Am I going to will to do the will of God? Am I going to own His Sovereignty and bow to it and accept His help? Or am I going to match my will against His will?

Take the great and distinctive doctrines of Christianity and you will see how the only reason for rejecting them lies in man's self-sufficiency and pride. Christianity declares itself to be a revelation of the will and mind of God. Does man need that? If he doesn't need it, then we have made the whole Christian system unnecessary and absurd. But does man need a revelation? Has he all the

knowledge and truth and light that he would like to have? In a world that is curtained with mystery, that throbs with the mighty pulsations of love and affection, that is vocal with the strange music of human joy and human sorrow, your life coming you know not whence, and passing you know not whither, utterly unable to explain the least thing about yourself, to tell why the heart begins to beat, or why it rests forever, tenting for a little day on this brief island amid the two eternities, all about you the tokens of man's frailty, weakness and brevity, and everywhere, in the sun that lights your way by day, and in the stars that light your way by night, in this strange and intricate mechanism—tabernacle, tent, house—that we call the body, in the earth in which you live, in the sod where you lay your dead, in the heavens that drift above your head—everywhere the witness of a wisdom and a power that is greater and vaster than your own; are you, this lump of deformity and diseases in body and mind, going to stand up and say that you have no need of a revelation from God?

And when that revelation tells you that you are weak, that you are fallen, that you are sinful; do you find anything in your brief experience with yourself and with others that would lead you to deny this? And when that Christian revelation presents to you the Incarnate God, God in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, and holds up before you the Crucified Redeemer, and commands

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you to repent, believe and live; are you going to tell God that you don't need it? If so, that refusal and denial has no basis in reason, fact or experience. It rests upon human pride, upon the blindness and ignorance and arrogance of the thistle thinking its one-inch stem of thorns equal to the one-hundred-cubit cedar.

The lines that were most often upon the lips of the Sad Emancipator were those of William Knox:

“ Oh, why should the spirit of mortal be proud?
Like a fast-flitting meteor, a fast-flying cloud,
A flash of the lightning, a break of the wave,
He passes from life to his rest in the grave.”

No; no room for pride; but plenty of room for humility, for abasement, for praying the publican's prayer, for singing the sinner's song,—

“ When I survey the wondrous Cross
On which the Prince of Glory died,
My richest gain I count but loss,
And pour contempt on all my pride.”

III

The Parable of the Lost Prisoner

1 Kings xx. 35-43

ISRAEL had just won a great victory over her inveterate enemy, Benhadad, king of Syria. Because of the previous defeat in the hill country, the Syrians fancied that a battle in the valleys would bring them victory, for they said, "Their god is a god of the hills, therefore they were stronger than we." But the battle in the plain proved even more disastrous than that of the hills. An hundred thousand fell in the combat and the remaining twenty thousand perished in an earthquake. The very stars in their courses were fighting against Syria. The army had been beaten, but the heart and soul of that army was still alive. There are some causes and some armies which are never beaten till the leader who incarnates them is beaten. From his secret hiding-place, Benhadad sends messengers to Ahab. They find him in high feather over his victory. As he surveyed the field where so many Syrians had fallen and so few Israelites, he was tempted to a foolish magnanimity. Instead of destroying Benhadad, or at least taking precaution to prevent his further outbreaks, he gave him a ride in his chariot and sent

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him off to Syria with a treaty of peace which Ben-hadad at once proceeded to violate.

“But a certain man of the sons of the prophets!” One of God’s nameless ambassadors of conscience was at hand to rebuke the foolish king and pronounce his judgment. As in the parable of The Ewe Lamb, the plan is to have the king condemn himself by passing judgment on an imaginary case. In the disguise of a wounded soldier, the man of God sat lamenting by the roadside. As the chariot of the king rolled by, he sprang up with his tale of woe. “Thy servant went out into the midst of the battle; and, behold, a man turned aside and brought a man unto me, and said, ‘Keep this man: if by any means he be missing, then shall thy life be for his life.’ And as thy servant was busy here and there, behold, he was gone.” And the king of Israel said to him, “So shall thy judgment be; thyself hath decided it.” Then the man unwound the bandage about his head and the king of Israel discerned that he was of the prophets. With bowed head and heavy heart he listened to the word of doom: “Because thou hast let go out of thy hand the man whom I devoted to destruction, therefore thy life shall be for his life, and thy people for his people.” And the king of Israel went to his house heavy and displeased. Oh, these nameless monitors who sit ever by the roadside and wait for us as we return from the fields of desire! How they turn the sweets of victory into bitterness of gall! How they make the ivory palace of our pride seem stale,

flat and unprofitable! Who can penetrate the disguise? Who can avoid the hiding-place and waiting-place of conscience, God's unrelenting prophet? Whether it be a king who passes in his chariot fresh from victory in war, or a peasant with lowly tread, there conscience waits to tell us of our folly and name our judgment. It is not enough that the battle has been won and the army beaten. Conscience comes, not to praise us for what we have done, but to rebuke us for what we have left undone; to tell us that one hundred thousand slain foes will not compensate for one king of evil dismissed in peace; to tell us that a hundred prayers and gifts and deeds cannot atone for one act of disobedience, or stay the approaching hand of judgment.

Not the main lesson, but one of the by-products of this parable, is the manner in which it illustrates the danger of half-way measures with evil and sin. Three years after Ahab let Benhadad go free and sent him back to his own country, Ahab and Jehoshaphat are again at war with him before the walls of Ramoth Gilead. Remembering the words of the man of God, that the king whom he had let go would one day take his life, Ahab went into battle in the disguise of a common soldier. But a certain man drew a bow at a venture, and Ahab was slain. His life was for the life of the man he let go. The conduct of Ahab, in view of the past and the present and the future, was a stupendous piece of folly. If, after Waterloo, the Allies,

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thinking that an emperor whose legions had been crushed could never again menace the peace of Europe, had let Napoleon go free, or established him on the continent of Europe, their folly would have been of a piece with that of Ahab. It was sad to see him digging in the garden at Longwood, or standing on the naked cliff at Helena, musing over the past, feeling himself only a memory, a dead man not yet buried, bothered with petty officials and quarrelling with his companions in captivity. But it was good for the peace of Europe. It was an instance where severity was mercy. There are national problems which now and then confront the statesmen of a nation and the tendency will always be to half-way measures of compromise. In our Civil War the Valley of Virginia was the granary of Lee's army. Union forces marched through it and gained victories; but the crops grew again, the sheep and oxen and cattle waxed fat, and all the resources of that well-watered valley were propping up the Confederate Government. Finally Grant sent Hunter and then Sheridan into the valley and told them to burn it out; not to leave a mill-wheel that could turn, or a barn that could store the grain, or a crop that could feed the animals: to lay it waste, and desolate it so that even a crow flying over it would have to carry its own rations. A howl of rage went up, North and South, but the torch of Sheridan and Hunter did more to bring the war to a close and end the sufferings of North and South

than the explosion of the shell or the thrust of the bayonet.

When it becomes plain that a thing is devoted to destruction by God, then man had better line up on the side of God. In 1808 Congress forbade the further importation of slaves, thus recognizing that the thing was wrong and dangerous. But for fifty-three years the nation fooled and compromised and debated, and then slavery had to be washed out in a sea of blood. To right-thinking men and women it must be increasingly apparent that the liquor traffic is a thing devoted by God to destruction. If God's curse doesn't rest on it, then God never has and never will curse an evil thing. In the 'forties and 'fifties the danger was recognized in this country. Then it would have been an easy matter to destroy the business. But instead of that, States and Government began to regulate, license, limit, compromise, until now hell from beneath is stirred if you but put your little finger on the business. Busy here and there with canal-digging and road-making and financial reforms, the Nation has let this hideous prisoner, potential with so much damnation and woe, escape to its stronghold with sundry promises and regulations, only to come back at the return of the year with a bigger army and renewed vigour.

What is true of man collectively is true of man as the individual. The time to destroy sin and crush evil habits is when you have them in your power. If you have had some encounter with a

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besetting sin, or evil habit, don't be content to let it go with compromise. God told Saul to destroy Amalek. Saul thought he was wiser than God and let some of them escape. Years have passed by, and Saul, lying self-wounded on the field of Gilboa, called to a man, "Stand upon me and slay me." "So I stood upon him and slew him, and I took the crown that was on his head and the bracelet that was on his arm." And that man was an Amalekite. That is the natural history of sin when we spare it, and treat it lightly. One day it comes back to find us weak, and it stands upon us and takes the crown of manhood from our dishonoured brow. When you deal with sin, deal with it—not as an hypothesis of theology—but as a foe who will one day show you no quarter.

"As thy servant was busy here and there, behold he was gone." The precious prisoner escaped him while he was busy with other things. The great business of that man's day was to guard that prisoner. But he went here and there, to do this and that, and the prisoner escaped. Every period of life has its irrevocable and irreparable. The farmer who doesn't get his plough out in March and April and turn up the soil, and sow the seed, will starve when December comes. There is a time to plant, and a time to reap. There are things to be done in March that cannot be done in December. Youth is a prisoner committed to our keeping for only one day. If we neglect to do some things in youth, train the body, clothe the

mind, we must pay for it in after life. There is an angel who comes down to stir the pool of life in the days of youth. He who will not step down then, steps down never. In the early morning, after the sun is up, the roses on a June morning will sparkle with a thousand diamonds of beauty and glory. In a little moment the dew is gone, and gone the glory of it. At high noon you may take a pitcher of water and pour it over the rose-bush, but no matter how abundant the water, and how pure it may be, all your pouring will never bring back that golden glitter of the short-lived dew of sunrise. Rejoice, O young man, young woman, in thy youth! Remember thy Creator in the days of youth. Fit body, mind and soul in the days of thy youth. One day you will awake to find youth, that elusive prisoner, is gone, and gone forever.

“ Break, break, break, at the foot of thy crags,
O Sea !

But the tender grace of a day that is dead
Will never come back to me.”

Opportunity for doing good comes to all of us, but its day is brief. No one of us is so limited in sphere or so humble in place but he can shed heaven about him. Recall for the moment how it is the little kindnesses and courtesies and thoughtfulnesses which constitute the staple of human happiness. The power lies within the reach of us all, but it does not lie there forever, for the simple

reason that those to whom we might do good are not always at our hand, and we ourselves may suddenly be called to our account. Therefore, redeem the time. There is Jesus kneeling in agony in prayer in the moonlit shadows of Gethsemane, and the Three whom He had asked to watch with Him—Peter, James and John—asleep. “Could ye not watch with me one hour?” Just one hour! The opportunity of serving Jesus in that way lasted just one hour. They failed to awake and use the hour, and when it was past, Jesus came to them and finding them still sleeping, said sadly, “Sleep on now and take your rest! Whether you wake or sleep makes no difference to me. Your hour of holy service and fidelity is past. Sleep on now!” Do we not deal with our friends and beloved and fellow men as these disciples did with Jesus? We sleep as if we could have the same chance to-morrow. The one with whom you ought to watch, by whose side you ought to stand, at this very hour may be kneeling in his garden, distilling from his brow the drops of agony, and you asleep, careless, indifferent. You are busy here and there, and while you are busy the precious prisoner is gone, and all Eternity can never bring him back. Oh, do not live and do not work, and do not love as though you were fixed in your present state and relationship for Eternity, and not for a little segment of time between the two eternities. Whatsoever is in your heart and mind to do, and to say, and to be, do it, say it, be it NOW! To-morrow

you may take up the morning paper and find that he is gone and your chance is gone. To-morrow you may call and none will answer. To-morrow the still face, the vacant place, the unlifted book, the unfinished letter, will speak to you with a rebuke that your vexed soul will scarce be able to bear:—"Sleep on now! Sleep, sleep forever! You had it in your heart, you meant to do it, you meant to say it, But as thy servant was busy here and there, behold, he was gone!"

"I did not know how short your day would be!
I had you safe, and words could wait awhile—
E'en when your eyes begged tenderness of me,
Behind their smile.

"And now for you, so dark, so long, is night!
I speak, but on my knees, unheard, alone—
What words were these to make a short day bright

"—If I had known!
Ah, love—if I had known!"

One final application of this parable. This life is a probation for the next. Time is a trial for eternity. That is the teaching of Christianity. Neither you nor I can prove that it is so; but if it isn't so, then worship, prayers and sermons are all a farce. Christ must have known, and if you go through His teachings you will find that He always dwells on that, that this life is the probation for the next. If I could show you that your period of probation would come to an end this night at six

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o'clock, and when I came again to this pulpit for the evening service you would be in eternity, what now would be your thoughts? You, like all others, would think of things done that you would either do differently or not at all; of things not done that you would do; of friends from whom you are alienated and to whom you would seek to be reconciled; of little debts of love, of kindness that you would make haste to pay. But the greatest thing that could engage your mind would be this: How do I stand in regard to the offer of salvation and eternal life which God has made to me through Jesus Christ? Then you would not be too busy here and there to neglect to do what Christ said every wise man ought to do—Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness. Between now and six o'clock this evening is six hours. But whether it be six hours, or six days, or six years, nothing is more certain than that your probation will end, and the chance and trial of life will be over. Do I speak to some who have been busy here and there, careless of the great thing? Remember that between you and eternity there is nothing but time, which is of all things the frailest. Seek ye the Lord while He may be found. Call upon Him while He is near!

IV

The Parable of the Ewe Lamb

2 Samuel xii. 1-23

ALEXANDER of Macedon was painted with his hand resting on his face, as if in reverie. But the real purpose was to hide the ugly scar on his cheek. The German emperor is photographed and painted standing in a position so that his withered arm will not appear. But in the Bible men are painted just as they are. No scar, however hideous, no ugly deformity is omitted. When Nathan rebuked the king for his sin, he told him that what he had done would give occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme. It gave occasion then, and it gives occasion now. Like vultures over the carrion, the enemies of God have wheeled and screamed over the fallen king. But had it not been that God wanted to teach judgment and penitence and forgiveness, we should never have heard of the fall of David. He was a man after God's heart, and yet the thing that David had done displeased the Lord, and the Lord sent Nathan. For David's good, and our own, this parable is told.

“ Not in their brightness, but their earthly stains,
Are the true seed vouchsafed to earthly eyes,
And saints are lowered that the world may rise.”

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Although a sharp dart for a heinous sin, the parable has a tenderness and winsomeness in it which might make one think that He who taught in parables had spoken it Himself. The first chapter in David's fall was bad enough. He had taken the wife of the brave and loyal Uriah and that created conditions that made it expedient for him to go the next step and cover up his sin by taking the life of the faithful and unsuspecting soldier. Failing to make Uriah his tool by flattery and intoxication, he plots for his death. Sin is like some drugs—cumulative. Take them to-day, you must have them, and in larger quantity, to-morrow. One sin opens the gate and prepares the way for the next. Herod slew James, and when he saw that it pleased the people, he stretched forth his hand to kill Peter also. The plan of David reveals a strange state of mind. He was king of Israel and could have taken the life of Uriah at any moment he desired it. But the light of truth and conscience had not deserted him. He wanted Uriah to die, and yet realized that Uriah did not deserve to die. Therefore, he devised a plan that would end the life of Uriah and bring relief to David, and yet David would not have lifted his hand against him. In the siege of this Ammonite stronghold of Rabbah Joab was to set Uriah in the forefront of the hottest battle. At a pre-arranged signal, those fighting with him were to retire suddenly and leave him to his foes. Thus gallantly fighting for his king, never suspecting

the wicked and treacherous plot, Uriah died, and his wife became David's wife. O David, why didst thou not die, fall thyself in battle, before this dreadful night! The glory and the splendour of thy reign are past; now comes the eclipse and the night. If thou hadst died before this double crime, thy name would have come down to us unstained. But now, sufferings and misfortunes await thee. Never shall the sword depart from thy house. If thou hadst only died before thine eyes beheld Bathsheba, before thou didst write the letter that murdered Uriah, thou wouldst never have seen incest among thine own children; Tamar dishonoured and Amnon murdered; the bloody dagger of Absalom would never have passed like a curse before thine eyes; never wouldst thou have forsaken thy capital to hear the curses and execrations of Shimei, and never wouldst thou have cried out, there on thy face in the chamber over the gate, with the tears bathing thine aged cheeks,—“O Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! Would I had died for thee, O Absalom, my son, my son!”

But that's an afterthought. In order to say *when* it had been good for a man to die, you must know the whole history of his life. The impenetrable and not to be lifted veil hangs between me and to-morrow. What does that to-morrow have in store for me? What of pain? What of joy? What of fame? What of sin? What of shame? After that to-morrow has passed, will it have been such a day that will make me wish that

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I had died before it dawned? I waive the matter of pain and loss and sorrow and loneliness, for that can bring no bitter self-reproach. But what of life in its tragic possibilities for good and evil? Ought it not to soberize us to think that there are many who will live to-day and to-morrow so that the close of to-morrow will make them wish that life had ended for them this morning?

“David sent and took her home to his house and she became his wife.” But ——! “the thing that David had done displeased the Lord.” In vain are all your honours and achievements and pleasures, if at the end there must be attached this grim addendum, “But the thing displeased the Lord.” Did it displease David? It is foolish to suppose that David never had a moment of remorse or mis-giving. Too many Psalms written and too many hours spent with God for that. The savage and atrocious vengeance that he took upon the conquered Ammonite stronghold, causing the inhabitants to be dragged under harrows, and to be driven through the furnaces, shows an irritability fed by the fuel of an uneasy conscience. When people are mean and ugly and irritable, the causes are not always physical and gastronomical; they may lie far hidden in the recesses of a disturbed conscience.

But months passed by, and David showed no sign of repentance. In the cares of state it may be that he had pushed aside the first interrogations of conscience. But the Lord sent Nathan. He might have openly named the sin of David and

pronounced the judgment, but he chose the better way of describing it, and then letting David judge himself. He makes David pass sentence upon an imaginary case, and then shows him that it is his own case. "There were two men in the city, one rich and one poor. The rich man had exceeding many flocks and herds; but the poor man had nothing save one little ewe lamb, which he had bought and nourished up; and it grew up together with him and with his children; it did eat of his own morsel, and drank of his own cup, and lay in his bosom, and was unto him as a daughter." What a picture of helplessness, preciousness and innocence! "And there came a traveller unto the rich man, and he spared to take of his own flock, and of his own herd, to dress it for the wayfaring man that was come unto him, but took the poor man's lamb, and dressed it for the man that was come unto him." The tale would have moved a heart of ice, and David's generous nature kindled at the recital. His hand grasped his sword, and his eye flashed fire as he exclaimed, "The man that hath done this is worthy to die!" Then Nathan applied the parable—"Thou art the man!"

The most heinous sin is the sin of heartlessness. David's anger rises against this man, and God's anger rises against David, for the reason that David himself gives—"Because he had not pity!" David knew that he was a murderer and an adulterer. But he had never yet accused himself, or been accused, of being a man without pity. He

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had forgiven Saul and showed mercy unto his helpless household. But now Nathan lifted the disguise, and he saw himself a cruel, pitiless monster. With palaces and armies and wives and servants, he had taken all that Uriah had, what was to him all that the ewe lamb was to the poor man. In the most terrible description of judgment in the Bible, Dives in hell, the rich man is set forth as a man who is punished because he had no pity; he let the beggar lie unheeded at the gate. Sin is cruelty, it matters not in what garb it parades. There will be the bitterness of your remorse, and the fires of your judgment, in the recollection or the realization that in thought, or word, or deed you have had no pity. Pity is no idle passing sentimentalism. It is the surest path to love, and where love is there can be no injustice and no cruelty and no judgment. A moment's passing pity for the simple, brave soldier whose wife he proposed to take, and whose life he must now have, would have saved David from this black night of sin. Can you name a single sin, of any kind, of any form, that would not be left uncommitted, did the sinner but look at that sin through the eyes of pity? Would a man get drunk, would he lie, would he slander, would he speak harshly, would he judge unkindly, would he torture, would he defile the body, if he were guided by the hand of pity? How about stealing? Suppose your children are starving, and you rob the bank or the store to feed them? Is not that a case where pity

is the father to the deed? But the next day when your wife looks into your face, she looks into the face of a thief; when your children take you by the hand, they take the hand of a thief. Did you really pity them when you stole the money or the bread? O Christ, Master of all compassion, do Thou surround us with a wall of pity, so that no evil thing may come in to curse our lives with its blackness and its woe!

It is easy to condemn in others what we condone in ourselves. It is possible to condemn and hate sin in the abstract, and love and practice it in the concrete. It is possible to confess that you are a sinner and yet not confess your sin. David ✓ flamed with hot anger when he heard Nathan's tale of the cruel rich man. The man who had done it ought to die. But David had done the same thing, only he had taken a man's life instead of a sheep. When we look at others' faults, our eyes have a strange magnifying effect; but when we turn the glass on ourselves, it reduces and minimizes our sins. We see extenuating circumstances, and our self-love weaves a veil of embroidery which hides the corruption within. Men can wax eloquent over world wrongs, social wrongs, and never imagine that in their own homes they are tyrants and heartless despots. Just as some loathed disease is less tolerable when seen in another than in ourselves, so sin looks worse in my neighbour than it does in me. Men are like Swift's Yahoos who hated one another more than they did any

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different species of animals; "and the reason usually assigned was the odiousness of their own shapes, which all could see in the rest, but not in themselves." As Jesus put it, "Thou fool! first take the beam out of your own eye, and then pass judgment upon the mote in thy brother's eye."

" O wad some Power the giftie gie us
To see ourselves as ithers see us !
It wad frae mony a blunder free us,
An' foolish notion."

When, in that play within the play, the assassin poured the poison into the sleeper's ear, the guilty king rose up in terror, for he saw just what Hamlet intended he should see, his own crime. How was it possible for guilty David to have missed the point of the parable and not to have known who was meant by the rich man and the poor man and the ewe lamb? Not until the sword was a hairbreadth from the heart did he know that it was meant for him. If David had been a hardened sinner, we would not wonder. But he was a man whose heart had been right with God, alive to things that were good and evil. His case presents an example of how a man, familiar with the moral law, and accustomed to hear its blessing and penalties, may be blinded to his own faults. The Thirty-second Psalm, supposed to have been written after David received pardon, describes for us the hot and fevered restlessness of a man who tries to hide his sin. He knows no peace until pardon

comes after confession. But that is the recollection or musing of an awakened conscience. There was a time when his sin gave him no trouble. He was not tossing on a sleepless bed, nor stung by the whips and scorns of conscience. Sin can anesthetize conscience. One of the results of evil-doing is the deadening of one's sense of right and wrong. David's own conscience did not convict him. He could listen to the parable of Nathan without a tremor of self-condemnation. His conscience was in a deep sleep. Why does man need a revelation? Why does man need a church? Why does man need a Bible? Why does man need a Nathan, preacher, priest, messenger, to tell him what is in that Bible and that revelation? Because of the veil of blindness which sin has drawn over his eye; because of the stupor into which sin has cast his conscience. "I had not known sin except through the law" and I had not known the law except it had been given and declared unto me. You trust in your own conscience, but it may be as scarred as was the conscience of David. Search your conscience by the light of God's word. Let God's candle down into the hidden places of the heart. I wonder if it was after this experience with sins and conscience that David said, "Search me, O God, and try my thoughts. Know me, and try my heart, and see if there be any evil way in me. Who can discern his errors? Cleanse thou me from secret sins."

This would be a melancholy tale, fitted only to harrow the feelings and open old wounds to bleed

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again, were it not for the final issue. And David said, "I have sinned." And Nathan said, "The Lord hath put away thy sin." Now the storm has passed and the rainbow of mercy spans the heaven. If you say, "I have done a wrong thing, an evil thing. I have committed a crime," no answer comes from the mercy seat of God. But when you say, "I have sinned against the Lord," when you relate your offense to Him who is the source of all justice and mercy and righteousness, then quick as the hills give back their echoes, quick as the sun comes through an open window, God's forgiveness comes down to heal the soul. That forgiveness has been prepared for us from before the foundations of the world, for the Lamb was slain from the foundation of the world. Divine plans and agencies have announced it to men, and it will take the immeasurable stretches of Eternity to appreciate to the full its beauty and power; but quicker than the eye can flash, faster than the heart can beat, it comes to you when you seek it. "Because the quick chemistries of grace take our slow study a lifetime—nay, an Eternity—to understand, let us not forget that it takes God but a moment to work these beautiful combinations, and create the strange new life whose power is folded up within them." It is this that makes the Gospel good tidings. It is a morning note of joy. It sounds the reveille and resurrection of the soul. It chants the return of the prodigal. It breaks the bonds of the prisoner. There is joy in heaven over

one sinner that repenteth, and joy in the heart of him who is forgiven. Blessed is the man whose transgression is forgiven. If we confess our sins, He is just and faithful to forgive us. Christianity, after all, is a religion for sinners, and only those who are willing to confess themselves as such are permitted to enter into its joy. In his "Seven Great Statesmen" Andrew White tells of the death of Hugo Grotius. It is a recital that touches the deep places of the heart. On his way back from Sweden the ship on which Grotius was travelling was wrecked on the Pomeranian coast. Battered by the elements, he managed to get as far as Rostok, and there the famous scholar lay down to die. The beacon light that had illuminated the darkness of his age was soon to be quenched in the smoke of death. The pastor of the Lutheran church, learning of his presence, came in to see him. He made no effort to wrestle with the great statesman, but simply read to him our Saviour's Parable of the Publican and the Pharisee, ending with the words, "God be merciful to me, a sinner!" At that the dying sage opened his eyes and exclaimed, "That publican, Lord, am I!" Until we are ready to make a like confession Christianity is a closed book, a forbidden garden. Grotius, the poor Publican, wicked David, stainless Paul,—all made that prayer, and making it, passed into the City of Forgiveness and Peace. Without that prayer, Christianity may be a history, a philosophy, a code, but not a religion that saves.

V

The Parable of the Woman of Tekoah

2 Samuel xiv. 1-24

WE come now to the greatest of the parables of the Old Testament. I call it the greatest, not because it is superior in form and directness. It has not the winsomeness of the parable told by Nathan, nor the biting irony of Jotham's fable. But it stands first in the chief thought which it brings to our consideration—the way in which God has devised means to reconcile the world to Himself.

When David confessed his sin, the Lord forgave him. Nathan said to him, "The Lord hath put away thy sin. But the sword shall never depart from thy house." David's sin was forgiven, but he had to suffer for his sin. The results of sin were not cancelled. David could repent and confess, but there was one thing that he could not do; he could not stop the swords of suffering and woe that he had loosed from their scabbards. The first one to feel the anguish of those swords of retribution was the one in all the world the most innocent—the little child. "And the Lord smote the child." It was as if He had put the sword in David's own hand, and had said, "Smite the child!" That was

only the first drop in the cup of bitterness that David had brewed for himself. The two sins which had disgraced him were to reproduce themselves in his favourite sons, Amnon and Absalom. Those names were sad misnomers for David. Amnon means "faithful," and Absalom, "the peace of his father." Oh, bitter disappointment! When Amnon was born, David named him "Faithful," for he was filled with the joy of having a son who should be faithful and loyal to his father and to his father's God. He named the other "Peace of his Father," for he looked forward to the days when this son should be the peace of his declining days. See how his dreams came true. There is Amnon, a filthy wretch, faithless even to the ordinary standards of decency, cut down by his brother's sword. There is Absalom, anything but the peace of his father, born not to bring peace but a sword, now an outlaw beyond the Jordan, and when he comes home, it will be only to fill the last days of his father with humiliation and suffering. When all these troubles came upon him, David recalled the words of the prophet who brought him the promise of forgiveness, "But the sword shall never depart from thy house." There are things which even the forgiven man cannot undo, any more than you cast a stone into a pool, and then with your hand stay the ever-multiplying circles. We live in a world of laws that cannot be trifled with. "Whatsoever a man soweth, that also shall he reap." David sowed shame, appetite and mur-

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der, and one by one they come back on his head. We recognize this law and own its justice, but too often our lives are so ordered that we are as men that expect that our lives and our deeds will be exceptions to the general law. With God there is mercy and plenteous redemption. But the Sword !

“ Wounds of the soul, though healed, will ache,
The reddening scars remain
And make confession ;
Lost innocence returns no more,
We are not what we were
Before transgression.”

That sword was now piercing the unhappy king's heart as he walked to and fro on the walls of his palace at Jerusalem, and looked wistfully off towards the country that lay beyond the Jordan. Over there, dead or alive, was the most precious possession that David had. Absalom was there. It was three years since David had seen him. Because of the wrong done his sister Tamar, Absalom took the law in his own hands and murdered Amnon at a banquet. Now he was an exile and an outlaw in the land of the king of Geshur. His crime demanded some kind of punishment. David and all the court felt that. He was a criminal, a fratricide, but he was David's son, and that made all the difference in the world. All the pathos of human nature runs through this affection which David had for the brilliant blackguard, Absalom. He could no more be at ease with Absalom a

roaming fugitive, than he could be happy when Ahimaaz brought him the tidings that Absalom had been slain in battle. In his heart there is a conflict between the instinct for justice and natural affection. Judgment said, "Absalom, you have sinned ; you have slain your own brother ; pay the penalty. Remain in banishment." But love said, "Absalom, come home, come home ! Without thee the feast is cheerless ! Without thee the halls are silent ! Without thee how poor is the shining armour and mighty array of war ! Other sons are mine, but there is only one Absalom ! Absalom, with all thy faults and sins, thy pride and waywardness, come home !" "And the soul of king David longed to go forth unto Absalom."

With all his gruffness and abruptness of manner the captain of the guard, Joab, had a very delicate appreciation of the workings of a man's heart, especially the heart of David. He saw that David was sad and melancholy, forgetful of the affairs of state because of the absence of Absalom. He did not dare bluntly to tell the king to bring the exile home, for he knew that David had regard for the law of God and the realm. He must be appealed to in some other way. Therefore Joab sends for a wise woman of Tekoah.

There are some things that a woman can do much better than a man. If an appeal is to be made to the emotions, get a wise woman. Joab sent to Tekoah for a wise woman, not altogether a witch, but a clever sort of diviner, or soothsayer.

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It is one of the terms that has survived through all the periods of man's history, for in continental countries there is a sign which confronts one everywhere, "*sage femme*." The crafty Joab told her what she was to do and what she was to say. As in the parable of Nathan and also that of the Lost Prisoner, the plan is to have the king pass sentence on a fictitious case, and then show him that his own case is the same. But Nathan came to rouse the conscience of the king against his feelings; here the purpose is to rouse the feelings of the king against his conscience.

As a woman that had long mourned for the dead she appeared before the seat of David. The king asked her the cause of her sorrow, and she then told her parable and played her part. She was a widow with two sons. The sons had quarrelled together in the field and, since there was none to part them, one slew the other. Now the relatives were demanding that in keeping with law and custom the remaining son pay for his deed with his life. "So shall they quench my coal which is left, and shall not leave to my husband either name or remembrance on earth." David's answer was in keeping with his generous, impulsive nature. "As the Lord liveth, there shall not one hair of thy son fall to the ground!" Having led him to commit himself that far, the woman with wonderful tact and graciousness of manner proceeded to make the application of the parable. David had two sons just like her own. One had killed the

other, and justice demanded the exile or the punishment of the offender. If David could set aside the law in the case of her son, why could he not do it in the case of his own son, Absalom? She enforces her argument by an appeal to patriotism, the pathos of human life, and the mercy of God. In keeping Absalom away David did wrong to the people of God; life is so short: we must needs die and are as water poured forth, spilt on the ground. Severity of vengeance could not bring Amnon back to life, but it might keep Absalom forever from the face of his father. Even God did not deal with men as David was dealing with his son, for God devised means that His banished be not expelled from Him. Touched by the entreaty, and perhaps glad for some excuse, David sent for Joab and told him that Absalom might come home.

"We must needs die and are as water spilt on the ground which cannot be gathered up again." It's easy to spill water on the ground, but hard to gather it up again. What a figure that is of the transitoriness of human life! We accept it as a bit of poetry, a winged metaphor; but to order our lives in the light of its truth, that is a different matter. David could not forgive Absalom after he was dead. There could be no reconciliation in the tomb. It is well for us to look at our duties and consider our alienations in the knowledge of life's uncertainty. We are indeed like water spilled upon the ground. How little it takes to break the pitcher at the fountain of existence and spill the

mysterious thing that we call life. Once poured forth, you cannot gather it up again. It is too late for forgiveness or reconciliation then. In the name of Christ I ask you to look at your alienations, enmities, wrongs, hard feelings and resentments in this revealing and awe-inspiring light.

In one of the galleries of the Louvre there hangs a double painting, which appeals to far more eyes and hearts than many a famed Ascension or Transfiguration. In the first painting is seen an outraged father, with uplifted hand, ordering the wicked son to leave the paternal roof. In the background cower the weeping mother and frightened sisters and brothers. The second scene shows the same cottage and the same humble room and the same father and mother and children. But the father lies still upon the bed, the aloofness of death upon his face. At the side of the bed, with her face buried in her hands, kneels the mother and her children. The cottage door has just been flung open and the returning prodigal stands with his foot on the sill and his hand on the door, as if he had been smitten into stone. He had come too late. Both father and son had waited too long. Now there is no place for repentance and no place for forgiveness. The father's life had been poured forth; now it could not be gathered up again. Life's cord is silver, but it is frail, and when once cut, it cannot be tied together again: life's bowl and lamp is golden, but it is easily broken and shattered to pieces; life's pitcher is chastely wrought,

but when it falls, it is gone; life's wheel to-day draws joy and sorrow out of the hidden deeps of being, but when the wheel is broken at the cistern, never again will it bring the water up. Yet men go on from day to day, neglecting their opportunities, not remembering their Creator, harbouring their enmities and feeding the flames of their disagreements as if life's cord were a chain of iron instead of silver, or a lamp of heavy bronze not to be broken, or a pitcher of brass, or a wheel that could never be interrupted in its daily routine. Turn the wheel of duty, trim the lamp of love, fill the pitcher of reconciliation; for to-morrow you may be as water spilled on the ground, to be gathered up no more.

This brings me to a different kind of alienation, that which exists between God and man. This parable fits itself into the gospel of reconciliation if we think of God as the Father, instead of David, and man the wanderer and exile, instead of Absalom. Like Absalom, man is separated and alienated from his Father. You may make poetic sentences and write learned treatises about man as the child of the Infinite Father; but you do not tell the whole truth until you say that he is a child who has wandered from the Father's home, who has been separated and alienated from the life of God. No rose-water theory of human nature suits the dark facts of man's state. Talk with one man who reveres God and obeys His commandments and follows His Eternal Son, and then talk with another who makes

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his God, if any, an abstraction, and is full of malignity against Christ and Christianity. The only way you can explain it is this : one man has been reconciled to God, and the other alienated from God. The natural state of man is alienation.

But God does devise means that His banished be not forever banished. The soul of the Eternal God yearns to go out to the banished son. David missed Absalom, the shepherd missed the one sheep ; God feels your loss and exile. And because God is love, He has devised means. In this story of David the problem was solved by sinking judgment in mercy, by sacrificing the judicial to the paternal. But God could not do that. He could not bring back the exile, the guilty man, as if he were an innocent man. Those who treat man's condition lightly would have God deal with sin in that way. But God is too wise and too kind to do that. The Wood of Ephraim filled with twenty thousand corpses, and sorrow and gloom in every home in Israel, and David moaning, " Would God I had died for thee ! " was the result of a reconciliation which ignored justice. For over a century the *Edinburgh Review* has had on its cover the Latin epigram, "*Judex damnatur cum nocens absolvitur*"—"The judge is condemned when the guilty is freed." If God is to forgive man, He must forgive him like a God. If He is to justify, He must still remain just.

God has devised means. None but God could have provided such a plan. By giving His only

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Begotten Son to die for the sins of the world, God judges sin and yet forgives the sinner. He remains just, and yet the justifier of them that believe in Jesus. Christ, by the blood of His Cross, hath made peace. You hath He reconciled. To-day the messenger of God tells Absalom that he can come home, that God is in Christ reconciling the world to Himself. Have you dealt with sin? Have you dealt with your separation and alienation from the life of God? And if not, is it because life is any longer or any less frail than it was when this woman of Tekoah described it as "water spilt on the ground, which cannot be gathered up again"?

VI

The Parable of the Vineyard

Isaiah v. 1-23

IMAGINE, if you will, a priest or a minister of religion arising in the assemblies of the French nation to-day, announcing to the government and the legislators, and passing up and down the streets of Paris to cry aloud to all the people, this message of woe and calamity: "France is strong but not righteous; she is patriotic but does not fear God; she is rich, but not true. For all this she is to be punished. Her fair kingdom will be overrun and devastated by the enemy, for the anger of God is kindled against the nation." Imagine the storm of rage and protest that would break over his head, the cries of "traitor" and "patricide" that would go up, the scorn and obloquy which would attend him wherever he went, the danger his very life would be in from the rage of the mobs, and you will understand the position of Isaiah, a young prophet, an intense patriot, a lover of Jerusalem, when he informed her king, her counsellors and her people that the proud nation of Judah, still glittering in the glory of Uzziah's great reign, with one of the largest standing armies in the world, with a mighty array of new military inventions—

huge pieces of artillery which could batter down any fortifications—and withal, riches, wealth, splendour, prosperity, the show and panoply of power, was corrupt at heart and abounded in oppression and brutal tyrannies and all unrighteousness, and therefore God would deliver her over to her foes ; that He would call a great nation from the north to crush and humiliate her.

The stern and terrible content of his prophecy may perhaps account for the way in which Isaiah introduces himself and his message of approaching doom. When God sent Nathan to rebuke David for his sin, and pronounce doom upon him and his house, how the sword should never depart from it, Nathan commenced with a parable as gentle as if it had fallen from the lips of the Master of Parables Himself. He disarmed the apprehensions of the guilty king and skillfully led him on until he showed him that the sin he had so denounced was his very own. "Thou art the man !" Isaiah used a like method. He begins with a song, and the burden of the song is the story of a vineyard. "Let me sing for my beloved a song of my beloved touching his vineyard."

A friend of his had a vineyard in a very fruitful hill. The hillside was kissed each day by the southern sun, the soil was favourable for the vine, well watered, and, moreover, there were other vineyards in that same locality which were doing well, and yielding some thirty, some sixty, and some even an hundred fold. As soon as the land was

his, he sent his servants to dig it and turn up the earth and pick out the stones. Then he went to the nursery of the husbandmen and purchased the choicest vines, no ordinary vines, but the best that money could buy, the vines for which Eschol and Ephraim were noted, "grapes of Eschol" and "grapes of Ephraim," so highly rated that even the gleanings of the grapes of Ephraim, the poor ones left over after the husbandman had sent the best to the market, were considered better than the vintage of other vineyards. These were the choice vines that he set out in his vineyard. Then he hewed out a wine-press so that when the vines bore the purple fruit, he might be ready to press them into the cheering wine. He was not content with an ordinary booth beneath which the watchman could sit and guard the vineyard from the invasion of prowling beast or man, but he erected, at great expense, a permanent tower where he himself might come and sit when the sun had gone down on the mountains and look with satisfaction on the growing vines, and anticipate the day when they would bend beneath the heavy clusters of the ripened fruit. But when the time came for the vineyard to bear fruit, lo, it bore wild grapes—sour, bitter, useless. He had done all he could for the vineyard, and the net result of all his expense and care was wild grapes. There was nothing to do but abandon the place: the hedge that enclosed it was torn down, the tower was demolished, the vines were uprooted, and the vineyard was left to

the company of briers and thorns and brambles. No one could charge the owner of the vineyard with having left undone anything which the science of viniculture could suggest, and no one could blame him for abandoning the vineyard when it brought forth wild grapes.

Thus far, all has been unobjectionable, only a fair idyl of husbandry and field life. Then, suddenly, the prophet turns and drives the parable home. "For the vineyard of the Lord of Hosts is the House of Israel, and the men of Judah his pleasant plant; and he looked for justice, but behold, oppression; for righteousness, but behold, a cry!" He looked for the sweet grapes of justice and righteousness and charity and purity, but behold, the wild grapes of sin and iniquity! "Woe unto them that join house to house and field to field, that buy up all the land and all the houses in the country till the poor man is their slave! Woe unto them that drink and dance, but regard not the works of the Lord! Woe unto them that draw iniquity with cords of falsehood and sin with a cart rope! Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil! Woe unto them that justify the wicked for a bribe! Therefore hell hath enlarged its desire and opened its mouth without measure, and their glory and their pomp and their multitude descend into it. Therefore is the anger of God kindled against His people, and He will lift up an ensign to the nations from far, and will hiss for them from the end of the earth."

Against this destruction of the vineyard what protest could be made? The nation had been chosen and planted by the hand of God. Like stones from the soil, He had driven out their enemies. Signs, prophets, wonders, rain and dew, blessings and judgments, warnings and prayers, pleadings and entreaties, love and wrath, patience and labour, had been expended upon Israel, and yet her vineyard brings forth nought but the wild grapes of private dissoluteness and public oppression and tyranny.

“What more could have been done in my vineyard that I have not done in it?” The question that God through His prophet asks the about to be rejected nation is one that you and I do well to consider. The results of vice and ungodliness here in this world all can see to be truly fearful, and the judgments pronounced upon the ungodly and the impenitent in the world to come rumble like reverberations of thunder in the Bible, and flash like jagged forks of lightning on the horizon of the soul. In view of this, we have a perfect right to ask, “Has God done all that He might have done to keep me from sin and its consequences here and hereafter?” Open or unconfessed, the charge is sometimes brought against the Christian system, that while it sets itself forth as a revelation from God and of God’s plan and device for man’s salvation, nevertheless God, in view of the issues of eternal life and eternal death, in view of the proneness of human nature to vice and its repugnance

to virtue, might have done more than He has done.

The lines of an old hymn sang of the atonement,

“ He saw me ruined in the fall,
He flew to my relief.”

But thousands of years elapsed before Christ, the Eternal Son of God, became flesh, and the gospel of repentance and redemption was preached unto men. Why that long delay? If Christ was to redeem man, why did He not come after the first appearance of sin in the world? Why was this long history of sin and vice and cruelty and ignorance permitted to unfold itself? Could God not have done better than that? With man time is necessary if he is to work out a given plan or effect a given object. He must have time and he must contrive to bring about what he desires. I can see how if man were going to effect some plan of redemption, he would need time and he must use different means. But God is not man. Why with Him this long delay, this tedious process of development and instruction? In the letter to the Galatians Paul said that “when the fullness of the time came, God sent forth his Son, born of a woman, born under the law that he might redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons.” It is not difficult to see how there had been a fullness of times when Christ came into the world. Man learned that he could not save himself; the seed of evil was given

opportunity to bear its evil fruit; the law was a schoolmaster to bring the world to Christ; it kept before men's minds their sinful estate and the need of some kind of redemption; it goaded man's conscience, and thus prepared him for the preaching of the Gospel. In the heathen world also there was a preparation. God had not left Himself without a witness, and in spite of their follies and brutalities the heathen religions were what Paul calls "feeling after God." They had the longing for and the expectation of a better day. Thus, one has written of Stoicism that it was a "sigh after Christianity." When Christ came, the conquests of Alexander had spread the Greek language over the world and the apostles could either speak and write Greek themselves, or have translated into that common language their ideas. When Christ was born, the Roman empire had spread its discipline and its organization and its political systems over a great part of the world; the means of travel had been developed to a state unequalled again in the world until the nineteenth century. Therefore, when the disciples went forth to preach, they travelled over the splendid Roman roads and enjoyed the privileges of the ordered civilization which Rome had given to the world. Thus, both in the Jewish world and in the heathen world, it was a fullness of times. "Heathenism is the starry night, full of darkness and fear, but of mysterious presage also, and anxious waiting for the light of day; Judaism the dawn, full of the fresh hope and promise of the

rising sun ; both lose themselves in the sunlight of Christianity, and attest its claim to be the only true and perfect religion for mankind."

All this we can see when we look back over the ages ; but why that kind of preparation was necessary, why God chose to save by that long and historic process, that no man can answer ; and certainly no man can object to the plan, any more than the thing formed shall say to the hand that formed it, "Why hast thou formed me thus ?" God sees the beginning and God sees the end. We see only this little segment of time, and it would be rash for us to say that God might have done differently and might have done better, unless we ourselves have the advantageous position that God has. Our objections and exceptions to what God does for His vineyard, the human race, are due to the limitation of our powers. We want to judge God's work as if it were our work.

Suppose that I went down to the Navy Yard and found there a ship in the process of construction. I know nothing of the purpose for which the ship is being built, whether it is to be a vessel of war, or pleasure, or to carry passengers, or sail the seas with the wares of the world. What right would I have to say to the builder and designer, "Why did you not do it thus ?" or "Why was this put in this place instead of yonder ?" The builder would not need to answer my objections, but he could tell me to wait until the ship was finished and was launched to do the work for which

it had been built. Only God sees the consummation ; and until you and I see that consummation divine of God's glorious plan, the mystery hid from the foundations of the world, we can claim no right to find fault with what has been done.

Men are impatient and want things done with precipitation. But the Author of nature and the Author of grace chooses His own way and His own time. In the eloquent words of Guizot, "The ways of Providence are not confined within narrow limits ; He hurries not Himself to display to-day the consequences of the principle that He yesterday laid down ; He will draw it out in the lapse of ages, when the hour is come ; and, even according to our reasoning, logic is not the less sure because it is slow. Providence is unconcerned as to time ; His march (if I may be allowed the simile) is like that of the fabulous deities of Homer through space : He takes a step, and ages have elapsed."

Then, another looking at Christianity not in its historic unfolding, but in its dissemination over the earth, finds fault with the lack of universality in that dissemination. Some favoured nations received the Gospel ; many did not. Some to-day have all the advantages of the established church with its perpetual services and its call to repentance, but vast tracts of the world have not yet received the ambassador of the Cross. Is it conceivable, we are asked, that this heavenly treasure, the news of salvation and eternal life, should be given to one people and not to another, or that it should

be committed to earthen vessels, and that the repetition of it should be left to the varying zeal and piety and obedience of the Christians who had received the Gospel? Does it not seem most reasonable, most necessary, to suppose that such tidings as the Gospel declares itself to be should be preached everywhere, not given to a few, nor left for its repetition and propagation to the initiative and energy of those who were fortunate enough to receive it first?

This objection to the plan of God loses much of its force when we reflect that it is an objection which does not bear exclusively upon Christianity, but upon the whole order of the world. Nations grow up at a disadvantage with other nations. The Hottentots and the Tartary tribes and the inhabitants of the regions of ice and snow in the far north or far south are in less favourable circumstances than England, France, America. In the spread of civilization, in the spread of the Gospel, one nation has been chosen and the other left. The same is true of individuals: one is born blind, or maimed, or he is weak and sickly, unattractive in person; another is strong and healthy and rich and powerful. God sets one up and brings another down. The favours of this life are not equally distributed. Men are not created equal, nor in equality do they live out their earthly term. So far as we are able to see, Providence is capricious in the distribution of its favours and blessings. So that if it be advanced against Christianity that it

ought to have been given to all nations and all peoples, and through a common medium, and not having been given that way, therefore it cannot be true, we may say that the same difference and partiality may be observed in nature and in common experience. The Laplander does not get as much sunshine as I do, nor does the dweller in the African desert get as much rainfall as I do; but I would be a fool to refuse to enjoy the sunshine and the rainfall for that reason; and if Christianity is capable of blessing me and saving me, I would be foolish to reject it because it was not preached until nineteen centuries ago, or because to-day there are thousands in China and Africa who have not so much as heard the name of Christ.

But even were it not so that the gospel proclamation is lacking in universality, and instead of that being the case, it was to-day preached among every people and race and kindred, still you would not have rid yourself of this alleged difficulty, a lack of equality. You might choose a hundred men here in Philadelphia, and offer them the same Gospel in the same loving terms in which the disciples of Jesus proclaimed it and offered it freely unto men. But is there absolute equality? Are they all on the same footing? How different is their temperament, their mental make-up! One man sees difficulties which do not suggest themselves to another. One has a native keenness of things spiritual, and the other a native dullness. One's life and surroundings have been of a nature

favourable to the receiving of the Gospel ; another's, so far as we may judge, altogether unfavourable. I was born in a Christian home. I learned to name the name of Christ as soon as I could speak ; through Him the first fond prayers my lips of childhood framed were offered unto God. I had the influence and example of a godly home ; I heard Christianity sung and prayed and read and explained out of Bible and catechism and psalm book, and I saw it lived. I beheld it drawn out in living and unforgettable characters, and never for a single moment had occasion to doubt the sincerity of those who professed it, the reality, or its blessed influence upon their lives and the lives of others. Although not inevitable, for others similarly situated have not believed in Christ or become Christians, it was natural that I should have become a Christian and also a minister. But here is another man, and how different has been his experience. Where I heard hymns and prayer and psalms, and words of wisdom and of kindness, he heard only oaths and curses and words of strife and bitterness ; or where I saw the doctrine drawn out in living characters, he saw the doctrine he is now asked to believe perverted and debased and caricatured in hypocritical and worldly lives. Will you say that he and I are on an exact equality when you come to us and say, " Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ " ? But I will not give up my faith and throw away my Christianity merely because, while I was born in such a home and witnessed such an example of

the Christian faith, some other was born and reared in circumstances totally different and altogether less favourable. Christianity may be false, but you must furnish some other reason before I believe it to be false.

In all these objections, too, one thing is constantly lost sight of: God will not do an injustice. The Judge of all the earth must do right. Men will be judged according to their light and the circumstances of their present and their past will be considered in a way that we cannot understand. "According to that a man hath, and not according to that he hath not," that is the standard which must be taken into the account when we think of the differences between the man in a Christian land and the man in the heathen land, or even between two men in Christian lands and living in the same conditions of society and knowledge, yet, by reason of nature or birth or training, occupying a place of advantage and disadvantage as regards the acceptance of Christianity. We shall be judged according to the circumstances in which we have been placed, and not according to the circumstances in which we might have been placed.

But if so much depends upon our attitude towards Christ and the revelation of the Bible, would God not have written that revelation on the heavens so that all men would have read it and believed it? Would God not have broken through all these differences of race and epoch and age and training and temperament and forced the acceptance of that

revelation upon all men ? If He really desires that all should be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth, why does He, for He is God and can do what He wills, why does He not see that they are saved and that they do come to the knowledge of the truth ? Why does He let these differences stand in the way, or why does He leave the matter so much in the hands of men ? You might as well ask why did God permit man to fall at all ; why did He permit sin to come into man's life ; in short, why did He allow Himself and man, too, to be confronted with this whole mysterious problem of redemption ? To answer that you would need to be God yourself. But since man did fall, since the race is apostate, since sin does mar and ravage humanity, and since man is to be saved by Jesus Christ, it is not unthinkable, but altogether reasonable, that faith should not be forced upon him, but be the act of his own free will, coöperating with the sovereign will of God. So Hugo Grotius has written, "It is the will of God that those things which He would have us believe, so that faith should be accepted from us as obedience, should not be so very plain, as those things we perceive by our senses, and by demonstration ; but only so far as it is sufficient to procure belief, and persuade a man of the thing, who is not obstinately bent against it, so that the Gospel is, as it were, a touchstone to try men's honest dispositions by." The man who examines the Gospel with the hope of finding it not true will generally discover it to be so.

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In his famous analogy Butler uses the illustration of the servant and the master. If a master wants the servant to do a given thing, he takes pains to make it clear beyond all peradventure of a doubt what he wants him to do, and arranges also that there shall be no doubt as to the authority of the orders sent him. Why does not God give His wishes in such a way and accompanied by such marks of their origin and authority that man would never have any doubt? Or here is a general sending instructions to an officer in the midst of the battle. In the critical hours of the battle of Shiloh General Grant sent orders to General Lew Wallace to bring up his veteran division, and by a certain road. But that officer asseverated that it was not made clear to him by what road he was to advance, and in doubt, he chose the wrong road, and thus was absent from the field when his presence would have decided the issue. If there is any doubt as to the meaning of the master's orders, or any doubt as to the meaning of the general's orders, the master and the general commanding the army are to be held responsible, and not the servant or the officer. And so it is sometimes said that if all these momentous issues of life and death, of virtue and vice, hinge upon my acceptance or my rejection of Christianity, then surely God would have arranged it that there could have been no such thing as a shadow of a doubt as to the origin of Christianity or as to its meaning when it is proclaimed to men. But men do doubt; men are perplexed;

men have their moments of uncertainty, and many reject Christianity altogether.

But the comparison breaks down, for God does not deal with us as a master deals with a servant, or as a general deals with an officer. With the master and the general, the thing being done is the main thing; with God the doing of it, the way in which it is done. When the master commands the servant, he has his mind on the accomplishment of the task in the house or the field; when the general sends the order to the officer, he has in mind the disposition of that regiment or that division; the master cares nothing about the mind of the servant, and the general cares nothing about the mind of the officer, so long as the work is done, so long as the regiment is placed where it ought to be placed. But with God it is not so. I am His child. He considers not only the thing done, but the doing of it. He would have His will done, but in harmony with my will and my loving and trusting submission to His will. He does not compel me to act, but He asks me to believe. He does not order me to go, but He says, "Come unto me!" I thank God that it is so, that God has reserved a place for faith and trust in His world, and that, although there are many things that trouble me and perplex me, many things that I, in my limitations, could wish He had made clearer, yet He has given me abundant proof and evidence that He is worthy of my love and trust, and that I will try to give Him. I could ask for nothing more.

To go back to the figure of the parable, the husbandman had done all that he could do for the vine to make it yield fruit, to save it from the axe and the consuming flame. But has God done all that He could do to save man from the penalty of sin, the wages of sin, which is death? If these judgments to come were only made a little clearer—for even a minister, when he touches upon that solemn theme, must wish that there were a different kind of evidence both for his own sake and the sake of those to whom he preaches—then men would turn from their sins and repent and believe on Christ. Through your Bible and through your sermons there runs that ground swell of retribution and judgment to come. I do not say that it might not be so, or if so, would be anything but just; but if it is so, ought there not to be other evidences and proofs? Might we not be permitted to look into that world beyond and behold the redeemed in their white and blessed array, serving Him and hymning Him night and day, no tears, no doubts, no sin, no curse, no night, no death, and see the lost and condemned spirits suffering their fearful doom?

“ Ah, Christ ; that it were possible
For one brief hour to see
The souls we loved, that they might tell us
What and where they be.”

I am glad that I do not need to answer that objection to the Gospel, for Jesus Himself has solemnly and finally answered it. The beggar died

and was received into bliss. The rich man died and went to hell. And in hell, being in torments, he lifted up his eyes and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom. And he cried and said, "Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue, for I am tormented in this flame." But Abraham answered that this could not be done, that a gulf was fixed between him and Lazarus, and one could not pass to the other. He must suffer, but he deserved to suffer. Then Dives thought of his five brothers, living the same kind of life that he lived and bound for the same place of torment. "If Lazarus cannot help me, if it is too late for that, then send him to my father's house and let him warn my brothers. They won't pay any attention to the prophets and the law of Moses; no more than did I. But, Abraham, if one went unto them from the dead, I think they would repent." You can imagine the ghostly visitant, leaving the world of spirits and suddenly appearing in the hall where the five brothers of Dives, their grief for him quickly forgotten, sat arrayed in purple and fine linen, faring sumptuously. You can see them blanch at his sudden entrance to their midst, and the glasses fall from their nerveless grasp and are shattered on the pavement, as Lazarus says to them, "Your brother is in hell and in torments. He has sent me to warn you of his end and to tell you to repent." How terrible such a visitation! Who would not repent if he had such

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a warning as that ? But Jesus said, “No ; if they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they repent though one rose from the dead.”

We need no ghostly visitant from heaven or from hell, nor would heed one if he came. God has done all for us that He can do, all that is necessary, all that is kind and wise. He has sent us His messengers ; He has given us His oracles ; He has given us rain and sunshine ; meat and drink ; friends to love and be loved by, and all things richly to enjoy. He has given us His only begotten Son. Could He have given anything more valuable ? Could Christ have been more lovely than He was ? Could He have improved upon the Parable of the Lost Sheep or the Lost Son ? Could He have loved His disciples more tenderly than He did love them ? Could He have prayed more earnestly in the garden ? Could He have died a more shameful and painful death ? Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and the knowledge of God ! What more could God do ?

VII

The Parable of the Faithless Wives

Ezekiel xxiii.

THEY might have learned it in another way, but that was the way they had chosen—the way of sin and suffering and judgment. By one way or by another, by the way of obedience and faith and good works, or by the hard and bitter way of rebellion and sin and retribution, men and nations must learn that God is the Lord. That is life's greatest lesson.

Musing one October evening amid the ruins of the Capitol, while the barefooted friars were singing vespers in the temple of Jupiter, Edward Gibbon first conceived the design of writing the "Decline and the Fall of the Roman Empire." To Ezekiel, as he sat among the captives on the banks of the rivers of Babylon, the heavens were opened and he saw visions of God. In metaphors of flaming splendour, but almost impenetrable mystery, he tells us what he saw. After the vision came the Voice commissioning him to go and speak to the defeated and crushed, but still rebellious people of Israel. It was not his, like Isaiah, to hold up the hands of faltering kings and call the nation to

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repentance and heroic resistance. It was too late for that: the blow had fallen. The visible kingdom and empire of Israel had passed forever and its inhabitants had been carried into captivity. It was his to contemplate the ruin; to stand amid the smoke and ashes of Hebrew nationality, and hear God's verdict on the Decline and Fall of the Hebrew Monarchy, and repeat that verdict to the people.

With a multitude of signs and allegories and parables he delivers himself of his message. In this chapter he speaks to the nation in the parable of the faithless wives. There were two women, daughters of one mother and wives of one husband. The name of the one was Oholah and the name of the other Oholibah. By these names the prophet means the northern kingdom of Samaria and the kingdom of Judah. It was a favourite method of the prophets to set forth the relationship of God to His people under the similitude of the marriage bond. "I thy Maker am thy Husband." Both of these sisters proved false to their marriage vows. They played the harlot with Assyria and Egypt and Babylon. They were caught with the pomp and splendour of these powerful empires and forsook their Lord and the worship of Jehovah to fall down before the idols of the foreign nations. That bias towards idolatry which runs through the history of the chosen people since they came up out of Egypt finally issued in complete rejection of the worship of Jehovah and base acquiescence in

all the abominations of the kingdoms about them. The doom against which law and prophets had warned the nation since the day of the thunders of Sinai was not long delayed. These faithless sisters were delivered into the hands of their lovers. It was the irony of history that they were spoiled and ravaged by the very kingdoms that had seduced them to do evil. First the northern kingdom of Samaria was taken by Sargon and that goodly land became a dwelling-place of lions. Her sister, Judah, refused to be warned by her fate, and persisting in her iniquity, was devastated and overrun, first by Egypt, and then by Babylon. Now her walls were fallen, her glorious temple a heap of rubbish, her holy vessels ministered to the appetites of heathen kings, and her inhabitants were scattered over the face of the earth. "And ye shall know that I am the Lord."

The eloquent voice of Ezekiel has been hushed for centuries and the nations whose doom he took for his text, and the other nations which were the ministers of God's vengeance, are buried beneath their own ruins. But God still lives, and the history of the world at that time has been repeated in the ages intervening, is being repeated to-day, and will be repeated until God puts a period to the long sentence of time. The sin of Israel and Judah God spake of as infidelity. The grave-digger of nations, of churches, of immortal lives, is infidelity, faithlessness to God.

Let us look, first, at the infidelity of the nation.

To-day we distinguish between the Church and the nation. As a nation what are our vows, and to what standards of life are we pledged? And what are the signs of our fidelity thereto, or our faithlessness? As the man sometimes awakens to his responsibility under the stress of deep affection, or great sorrow, or pain, so the nation may come to itself only in the time of trial and suffering, and realize for the first time that it has a soul, that there are deep realities to which it may prove true or prove false. Above the tumult of the world-conflict, and above the cries of bodies in pain, and souls in agony, we hear very distinctly to-day the sob of the national soul, the nations conscious of themselves, and in pain and darkness struggling for existence and for victory. This nation awoke to self-consciousness, began to feel that it possessed a soul, in the dark days of the Civil War. It then became evident that there were ideas and principles, the defense of which, the vindication of which, were more important than national existence itself, and that it was better for the nation to die in defense of the right than to live in ignoble compromise with evil. But the danger is that in times of peace and prosperity the nation should forget that it has a soul, and seduced by wealth and pleasure and pomp, should prove faithless to the vow of its union.

The history of states may be summed up in those lines suggested by the survey of the ruins of Rome,—

“ There is the moral of all human tales ;
’Tis but the same rehearsal of the past,
First freedom, and then glory—when that fails—
Wealth, vice, corruption—barbarism at last.
And history, with all her volumes vast,
Hath but one page.”

Is there any reason to expect that the tale of our national life will prove an exception to this one page of all history? None whatever. Precisely the same symptoms may be discerned in our national life—a departure from an early simplicity, a loosening of the bonds of religion, the increase in luxury, the passion for entertainment and amusement, the passing of family religion, the pollution of the marriage tie and the desecration of the home, the worship of the body. One does not need to be a prophet to mark the change that spreads over our national life, for even the editor of the chief financial journal of the country has recently written, “What America needs more than railways extension, and western irrigation, and low tariff, and a bigger wheat crop, and a merchant marine and a new navy, is a revival of piety.” Experts may frame their constitutions and legislatures may multiply unto themselves laws, the suffrage may be made universal, but all will be in vain unless the foundation be secure. The foundation stone of national life is character, and the strength of character is the fear of God. The nations that forget God shall be cast into hell. That is not only

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prophecy and theology ; it is experience, it is history. "Except the Lord build the house they labour in vain that build it. Except the Lord keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain."

Down in Maryland to-day, not far from the Potomac, there flows under graceful stone arches and between hillsides where the autumn leaves lie thick, a stream which fifty years ago ran crimson to the great river, for on its banks men defended unto the death the ark of the nation. To-day, if you go there, you may see on the banks of that stream the bronze figure of a volunteer soldier. He was meant to represent, and he does well represent, the members of a regiment made up of men who loved their country and feared God. In the set of his shoulders, in the great hands that grasp the musket, in his firm set mouth, his clear, frank face untainted by vice, and in the earnest deep hollowed eyes, it is easy to behold a man of living faith in God, and whose faith issued in heroic deeds. By such men, in peace or in war, this nation has been kept inviolate. May God keep us faithful to Him, true to those principles of righteousness and justice which are the glory and the defense of the state.

"The tumult and the shouting dies ;
The captains and the kings depart :
Still stands Thine ancient sacrifice,
An humble and a contrite heart.
Lord God of Hosts, be with us yet,
Lest we forget, Lest we forget."

Let us turn now to the fidelity of the Church. The Church has taken the place of the nation. What God says to His people in the Old Testament is the message for His Church in the New. For this reason the figure of the parable is one that was adopted by the Christian apostles. They liked to conceive of the Church as the Bride of Christ. John spake of the Church as the Bride of the Lamb and saw the Holy City coming down from God like a bride adorned for her husband; and Paul told men to love their wives even as Christ loved the Church. The vital thing in civilization is the Church. And in the consideration of the Church, the paramount question is not her numbers, her wealth, her growing or her fading influence, or the ways and means of her propaganda—those questions that amuse conventions and clutter the magazines and current fiction—but this: Is the Church loyal to her Master? Is she faithful to her Husband?

One of the great epics of classic literature centers about a woman who was separated from her husband. He had gone off to a foreign war. Now the months have passed by; no word had come of the missing Ulysses tossed up and down on the waves of the ocean and tempted by sirens. The multitude of suitors pressed about Penelope as she sat surrounded by her maids "laying her hands to the spindle and holding the distaff," and urged their claims upon her, but she was faithful to her absent Lord.

“ True to a vision, steadfast to a dream,
Indissolubly married to remembrance.”

At length Ulysses himself in the guise of a beggar appeared one day among the suitors, took his own great bow and bent it, revealed himself as the lost husband, and the fidelity of Penelope was rewarded. To me that is a picture of the Church in the world. She is the blood-bought Bride of Christ and all about her is the multitude of tempters and suitors who would shake her loyalty to her Lord and master.

As Israel and Judah were tempted by the glitter and splendour of the nations about them, the Church has always been subjected to the alarms and allurements and rewards of some other than Christ. In Roman Catholicism that was manifest in the Church reaching out for the empire of the world; in Protestant Christianity in the Church reaching out for the wisdom of the world and substituting it for the wisdom and the plan of God. Voices, then, prophetic, apostolic, historic, cry to the Church, as once the Lord of the Church spake to the Church of Smyrna, “ Be thou faithful unto death ! ” If ever there was an age when the Church needed the summons of that challenge, this is the age. The heathen world and the unconverted Christian world, sometimes ignorantly and sometimes willfully, confuse the nation with the Church, the quarrels and disputes of kingdoms with the influence of religion. But, to quote the eloquent and noble sentences of Paley in his chapter on the influence of Christianity, “ The influence of religion

is not to be sought for in the councils of princes, in the debates or resolutions of popular assemblies, in the conduct of governments towards their subjects, or of states and sovereigns towards one another, of conquerors at the head of their armies, or of parties intriguing for power at home, but it must be perceived, if perceived at all, in the silent course of private and domestic life. The kingdom of heaven is within us. That which is the substance of religion, its hopes and consolations, its intermixture with the thought by day and by night, the devotion of the heart, the control of appetite, the steady direction of the will to the commands of God, is necessarily invisible. Religion operates most upon those of whom history knows the least. It cannot, therefore, be thought strange that this influence should elude the grasp and touch of public history ; for what is public history but a register of the successes and disappointments, the vices, the follies, and the quarrels of those who engage in contentions for power ? ”

To that separate and invisible kingdom of Christ the Church must bear its witness. While men talk about the failure of Christianity and worst of all, weak-minded Christians chatter about Christianity never having been tried, the true and faithful Church heeds but one voice speaking through the confused babel of sounds, “ March on ! Go ye into all the world and preach the Gospel unto every creature. Leave the failure of Christianity to me ! ”

The true Church must be faithful to the Cross of

Christ. It is the wisdom of God set over against the wisdom of the world. How many and how alluring are the substitutes which the Church has been tempted to accept for the great doctrine of the Cross. If there were lacking any evidence as to man's alienation from God, it would be supplied in his rejection of the teaching of the Cross, or, if he does receive it, in his efforts to make it mean something else than it does mean, to make it coincide with the wisdom through which the world never knew God. I went some time ago to visit a patient in a room in one of the Catholic hospitals. Looking up from the bed of the sufferer my eye fell on the crucifix. There was the Great Sufferer, wounded for our transgressions and bruised for our iniquities, pain's only relief, sin's only antidote, death's sole conqueror. Yes, in the straits of life, the Cross makes its ancient appeal. It tells the sufferer of One who suffered for him. It whispers peace to the soul that is tossed on the sea of remorse and guilt. When we go down into that dark valley where, no matter how large has been the company of our friends and lovers and relatives in life, we must each of us travel alone and unattended, and when all other lights have flashed and gone out, the Cross still sheds its beams upon our way. The world preaches its wisdom, and men who scorn the Cross seek after that wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified. The Cross is no respecter of persons. It commands the thief, the murderer, the pure sage and the chaste philosopher alike to prostrate themselves in the dust and cry

“God be merciful to me a sinner!” But it condemns only that it may save. It is possible to say a great many things that are true and beautiful concerning the Cross and yet leave unsaid the chief thing, the thing that engaged the thought and created the enthusiasm of the first heralds of the Cross, that on the Cross Christ gave Himself a ransom for the sins of many. Do you tell me of useful and honourable lives of men and women who do not receive the doctrine of the Cross? I say without the least hesitation that their morality is on a far lower level than that of those who do receive the doctrine of the Cross, for the favourite virtue of our Lord was humility, and none but the humble and contrite in spirit can accept the teaching of the Cross. Do you tell me of churches whose ministry is cultured and earnest, whose membership is to be commended, their prayers and their alms going up for a memorial before God, and yet these churches do not preach the Cross? I have no hesitation in saying that these churches exist only because there are churches which do preach the Cross. They shine in the reflected light of the churches which preach Christ crucified. Fling out that banner! lift it high over the temples of learning, over the marts of trade, over the fields of battle! It sanctifies the bane and the blessing, the pain and the pleasure of life, and towering over all the wrecks of time, and gathering round its head all the radiance of the sacred story, shines ever in the heavens to light the way of this lost and fallen world back to the Father’s House.

VIII

The Parable of the Two Eagles and the Vine

Ezekiel xvii.

“**A**ND all the trees of the field shall know that I the Lord have brought down the high tree, have exalted the low tree, have dried up the green tree, and have made the dry tree to flourish. I, the Lord, have spoken and have done it.”

What a magnificent epitome of human history ! The prophet Ezekiel had been taken down into Babylon when Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon, carried away into captivity the last king of Judah, Jehoiachin. The prophecy with which we have to do in this chapter was uttered during the seven years between that event and the final destruction of Jerusalem, and the crushing of Zedekiah's rash and perfidious rebellion. To his captive countrymen living on the banks of the Chebar, the harp of their national life hanging voiceless on the willows of captivity, Ezekiel is sent to speak the parable of the Two Eagles and the Vine. “Speak a parable unto the House of Israel and say, ‘Thus saith the Lord.’”

A great eagle, with great wings, and full of feathers, which had divers colours, came unto

Lebanon and cropped off the highest branch of the cedar and carried it into a land of traffic and set it in a city of merchants. He took also of the seed of the land and planted it in a fruitful field and placed it by great waters. And it grew and became a spreading vine of low stature, whose branches turned towards him. But there was another great eagle, with great wings and many feathers, and behold, this vine did bend her roots towards him. For that reason, its bending away from the first great eagle and towards the second, the vine is to be pulled up by the roots, its fruit cut off, and its leaves withered as by the scorching breath of the east wind.

The parable as Ezekiel delivered it was part history and part prophecy. His contemporaries would have no difficulty in understanding him and all his metaphors. Nor to any one familiar with the last scenes in the drama of Jewish history, as related in the Book of Kings, is there anything recondite or obscure, even if the prophet himself had not taken the pains to explain what he meant. The first great eagle with great wings and divers coloured feathers was the great king of Babylon, Nebuchadnezzar, whose kingdom was the dominant empire of the world, for it had succeeded to the sceptre of the Assyrians, and but a few years prior to this prophecy, on the field of Carcemish, had crushed the armies of Egypt. He had taken into captivity the highest branch of the cedar of Lebanon, the last of the royal line of Judah, Jehoiachin,

and had set him and his people in Babylon, the city of merchants and the land of traffic. But in the place of this last king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar set up Zedekiah, expecting that he would rule as his agent and do his will. This was the low, clambering vine of Zedekiah's kingdom as contrasted with the mighty cedar of true and former Jewish royalty. Then the second eagle appeared on the scene. This was the kingdom of Egypt, defeated in battle, but not altogether subdued. The vine, Zedekiah's kingdom, began to bend towards this eagle. The old device of Egyptian alliance was resorted to in order to throw off the yoke of the conqueror. Nebuchadnezzar could not tolerate such dangerous alliance. It would be like Ireland making to-day an alliance with Germany. With his armies he marched against Jerusalem. The Egyptian army sent north to succour the city was unable to save it, and Nebuchadnezzar took Jerusalem, ravished it and stripped it of its glories and its spoils, left the glorious temple of Solomon a heap of smoking ruins; and the treacherous Zedekiah, with his eyes burned out, he carried in an iron cage to grace his triumph in Babylon. But, lest the people should despair, Ezekiel closes his parable by a picture of the future glory of Judah, when she shall again be a mighty cedar in whose shade shall dwell all peoples of the earth. After the world empires had done their will and had served their day and their purpose, God will consummate history with His own everlasting king-

dom, the kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

The parable began with the history of the doings of the kings of the world empires, Babylon and Egypt, and the conquered king of Judah. It ends with a declaration that the whole earth shall know that God had done everything. Nebuchadnezzar and the king of Egypt and Jehoiachin and Zedekiah, the kings of Judah, thought that they were doing it; they knew not that they were doing the will of God, though they did but their own will. But God was merely using them as agents to carry out His own sovereign will. If the high tree of a world empire was brought crashing down into the dust by the sword of some new conqueror, it was the sword of the Lord that did it. And if a low and hitherto despised tree of national life was exalted into dignity and power, it was the hand of the Lord that had done it. If a tree that was green with its wealth and prosperity and splendour suddenly became dry and withered, it was the breath of the Lord that had smitten it; and if a dry and withered branch blossomed forth in the greenness of vigour and power, it was the will of God that had wrought the change.

This parable, uttered in the day when world empires, great eagles of prey, pinioned with material pomp and glory, were striving with one another and rising each on the ruins of the conquered and fallen, speaks to us to-day with unusual appositeness, for we witness just what Ezekiel and

his contemporaries were witnessing, a mighty conflict among the empires of the world for the mastery and the spoils of the world. We shudder at the slaughter; we grieve at the lack of mercy; we mourn for humanity; we tremble for the ark of the Church of Christ. But we forget that it has ever been so, the flood of man's pride and anger rushing to and fro over the earth, engulfing this kingdom, sweeping away that institution, ruthless, and to us meaningless and unguided. But God sitteth on the flood. He ruleth among the armies of heaven and doeth His will among the inhabitants of the earth.

It would seem, at first thought, that our belief in God would carry with it all these considerations, and so it does. But it is necessary for us to clear the atmosphere from time to time, and avail our troubled souls of those very considerations which go with a belief in God. In regard to this world in which we live, there are only two positions where we may take our stand. We must choose between a world with a God and a world without a God: between a world in which whatsoever comes to pass does so with the knowledge and the permission of God, and in some way finds a place in His purpose and plan, and a world where everything just happens so, with no governing will or plan or purpose back of it all. In the words of a recent writer, "Between freedom and fate, between a personal God and blind chance, between faith in prayer and trust to luck, we are bound to choose. Only the short-sighted and superficial

mind can find a resting-place between these two opinions." If we take the latter position, then life has no problems and no questions. We have come; we are here; we shall go hence; we shall have joy and we shall have pain. But how? or why? That we need never ask, for we eliminated all purpose and all intelligence by dismissing the thought of God; nor is the day to be saved by substituting for God a law of development that will lead on to higher things, for we cannot allow a law that works to intelligent ends without also allowing a lawgiver. But if we do believe in God as a moral being, as the moral governor of the universe, then it follows that we must believe that He rules and governs all His creatures and all their actions, and that His plan is beneficent and just.

The mere fact that men have had that belief and hope that intelligence and goodness guide and control the destinies of the world, and that through it all there runs the increasing purpose of God, is in itself a strong presumption in favour of such a plan and such an end. That the world moves on to the sun-girt heights of perfection has been the promise of all religions, the burden of all prophecy, and the spirit of all poetry. Whether it has been the Republic of Plato, the Atlantis of Bacon, or the Utopia of Moore, or the great dreams of Hebrew prophecy and New Testament revelation, the Holy City coming down from God out of heaven, or the angry protests which go up against the present state of the world, the spirit back of it all

has been the conviction that there is a great and noble consummation for humanity and that the world ought to move on, must move on, is ever moving on, to that consummation. In spite of hope ever deferred, in spite of the long processions of wars and cruelties and oppressions and abominations which pass under the title of history, mankind has refused to be stripped of the expectation for the future. The tears through which his eyes have beheld afar off the City of God, the reign of justice and mercy and love, have only served to make its towers and gates and turrets shine with a glory more resplendent

“ There is something here
 Unfathomed by the cynic's sneer,
 Something that gives our feeble light
 A high immunity from Night,
 Something that leaps life's narrow bars
 To claim its birthright with the hosts of heaven ;
 A seed of sunshine that can leaven
 Our earthly dullness with the beams of stars,
 And glorify our clay
 With light from fountains older than the day.

“ A conscience more divine than we,
 A gladness fed with secret tears,
 A vexing forward reaching sense
 Of some more noble permanence ;
 A light across the sea,
 Which haunts the soul and will not let it be,
 Still beaconing from the heights of undegenerate
 years.”

But not only is there the idea and the hope of a divine plan and happy end in the mind of man, but in history there is evidence of it. In his great vision this same prophet saw the four living creatures, attended by the four wheels, moving forwards, backwards, laterally, at once, because it was a wheel within a wheel. At first glance, the history of the world seems to be just a rush and roar and clash of wheels within wheels, getting nowhere, guided by no intelligence, accomplishing no end. But if we look at history in the light of our faith in God, we shall have little difficulty in discovering that the spirit of the living creature is in the wheel, that the wheels are full of the eyes of purpose and intelligence, and that the general movement of the chariot of Providence is straight on. The whole course of history seems to have been the voluntary effort of man, the ambitions of this world empire or that empire, the evil designs of this king or that adventurer, the pressure of economic forces, the conflict of race antipathies, the collision of plans of dominion. But just as God used the king of Babylon and the king of Egypt to carry out His purposes in Israel, so all the movements of history are not without His permission, and do not fail to register His will. As St. Paul put it in his eloquent speech to the philosophers on Mars Hill, "He hath made of one blood all nations for to dwell on the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bound of their habitation." Just how far Rome was to go,

just how far the British Empire is to extend, just how the map of Europe through the rivalries and ambitions of rulers and politicians to-day is to be changed. Unthinkable, you say? But if you think God, if you begin with Him, is anything else but that thinkable? Either of these two it must be, God doing what Paul says, determining beforehand the movements and the bounds of men and nations, or God just sitting aside and watching the world performance. It means a great deal to commence your creed with the declaration, "I believe in God the Father Almighty."

A further evidence of the will of God in history is shown by the way in which great issues have turned upon little happenings that seemed to be altogether fortuitous. So far as man's efforts and designs were concerned, the working out of the Divine plan was very often the result of chance. Pharaoh happened to dream one night, and the chief butler happened to remember Joseph, and the result was the setting in motion of the events which led to the Egyptian captivity. The daughter of Pharaoh happened to go down to bathe at the place where Moses lay hidden in the reeds in the Nile, and out of that came the preservation and the preparation of Moses for the leadership of his people. Ruth happened to go into the field of Boaz and thus became the wife of Boaz and the ancestress of our Lord. Ahasuerus, king of Persia, was unable to sleep one night and had his secretaries entertain him by reading the royal records,

and thus learned how Mordecai had saved his life, and that had its part in the saving of the life of the whole Jewish people. When Columbus was feeling his way over the unknown ocean, it was the flight of birds that made him turn his ships to the south, and to the southern continent. Roman Catholicism and Spanish civilization were turned to the isles of the sea and the southern continent, and the great continent to the north was reserved, in greater part at least, for English civilization and Protestantism. It rained the night before Waterloo, making the ground so soft that Napoleon could not get his guns into position until eleven o'clock. "A cloud traversing the heavens out of season sufficed to make a world crumble." These are but a few of those strange events, which, so insignificant in themselves, yet under Him who

" Views with equal eye, as God of all,
A hero perish, or a sparrow fall,"

are fateful to decide the issue of nations. "As fragments fit themselves into the finished mosaic, so what to us are chance and trivial events fit themselves into the Divine plan."

Once more we can trace the plan of God in the use He has made of men. In nature God works immediately; in human affairs, mediately, that is, through human agents. In the introduction to his "Pioneers of France in the New World" Francis Parkman writes: "The springs of American civilization, unlike those of the elder world, lie revealed

in the clear light of History. In appearance they are feeble; in reality, copious and full of force. Acting at the sources of life, instruments otherwise weak become mighty for good and evil, and men, lost elsewhere in the crowd, stand forth as the agents of destiny." Both good men and bad men, obscure and celebrated, have been the agents of destiny. Cyrus did not know God, yet God used him to overthrow Babylon and liberate the Jews. "He is my shepherd and shall perform all my pleasure. I have called thee by name: I have girded thee, though thou hast not known me." Men do not need to know God to be used as His agents in carrying out His will. We cannot read the lives of Moses, Elijah, Isaiah, Paul, Peter, John, Luther, Columbus, Calvin, Cromwell, Lincoln, without feeling that a Power higher than they was girding them and using them, and that they were only executing the decrees of God. Whether, as is to-day the case with the rulers in the European nations now at war, men claim that they are the agents of God, or whether, like Cyrus, they know nothing of God, or like the eagle kings of Babylon and Egypt, think their own will superior to, and independent of, any other will, if there is a God and God has a plan, all of them do but further His purpose and praise Him, whether with their wrath or with their devotion. "Great men are the inspired texts of the book of revelation, a chapter of which is completed from epoch to epoch, and by some called history."

Finally, in the judgment upon the nations, we see the evidence of God's plan and God's reign. He doeth terrible things in righteousness. What is the history of the world but the judgment of the world? "I will dig thy grave because thou art vile" was the sentence which God through His prophet delivered to Nineveh. In surveying the past, we are confronted by two facts: first, the fact of sin; the nations have all been vile; second, the fact of brevity; the kingdoms and empires of this world have followed one another in quick succession to the grave; the conqueror from without, the internal strife and the corruption from within—these have brought every kingdom low. Where are these eagle empires of Babylon and Egypt, wheeling and screaming over the carcasses of nations they have conquered and dismembered? Where are the winged lions of Nineveh? The chariots of the Hittites? The navies of Phœnicia and triremes of Carthage? The phalanx of Thebes and the hoplites of Greece? The legions of Rome? The treasures of Spain?

" In outlines dim and vast
 Their mighty shadows cast
 The giant forms of empires on their way
 To ruin: one by one
 They tower and are gone!"

Why did they go? Was it only a question of time, of age, of national decrepitude? Or did the matter of sin and of judgment enter into their fall?

Is it true, or is it not true, that all earthly government is brief and unstable, because it is vile? "What are all our histories," said Cromwell, "but God manifesting Himself that He hath shaken and tumbled down and trampled under foot whatsoever He hath not planted?" "The sins of this guilty nation will never be washed away save by blood," prophesied John Brown as they led him out to be hanged. And in less than five years Abraham Lincoln, in the sublime Second Inaugural, made intercession and confession for the whole people, when he said, "If we shall suppose that American slavery is one of those offenses which, in the Providence of God, must needs come, but which, having continued through His appointed time, He now wills to remove, and that He gives to both North and South this terrible war as the woe due to those by whom the offense came, shall we discern therein any departure from those divine attributes which the believers in a living God always ascribe to Him? Fondly do we hope, fervently do we pray, that this mighty scourge of war may speedily pass away. Yet if God wills that it continue until all the wealth piled by the bondman's two hundred and fifty years of unrequited toil shall be sunk, and until every drop of blood drawn by the lash shall be paid by another drawn with the sword, as was said three thousand years ago, so still it must be said, 'The judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether.'"

In his autobiography Andrew D. White tells of

a visit he made at Columbia, South Carolina, some few years after the war. Visiting the State Legislature, he saw the presiding officer, a mulatto, order a white gentleman, a gentleman of the Old South, to take his seat. "To this it had come at last. In the presence of this assembly, in the hall where disunion really had its birth, where secession first shone out in all its glory, a former slave ordered a former master to sit down and was obeyed. I began to feel a sympathy for the South, and this feeling was deepened by what I saw in Georgia and Florida; and yet, below it all, I seemed to see the hand of God in history, and in the midst of it all I seemed to hear a deep voice from the dead. To me, seeing these things, there came reverberating out of the last century that prediction of Thomas Jefferson, himself a slaveholder, who, after depicting the offenses of slavery, ended with these words worthy of Isaiah—divinely inspired if any ever were—'I tremble when I remember that God is just!'"

In the fullness of times God shall bring history to its climax and set up the everlasting kingdom of Jesus Christ. When that is done the whole earth shall know that "I the Lord have brought down the green tree and have exalted the low," that all the confused movements of time have been controlled by an eternal purpose. If you and I had gone to Mount Lebanon where the labourers were felling the trees and sawing the lumber for the temple, or to the quarries where they cut out the

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stone for walls and foundations, we should have seen only a tumult and heard only a confused murmur of industry. But if we had stood on Mount Moriah at Jerusalem, we should have seen the meaning of it all; we should have seen the massive timbers and the great blocks of stone, in holy silence, without the sound of hammer or axe or any tool of iron, each fitted into their place in the temple of God. To-day we see the tumult and hear the noise and the crashing of stately cedars, the sound of hammer and chisel and warlike tool of iron, lifted by godly or ungodly arm. God hides His temple and treasures up His designs in the unfathomable mines of His sovereign will. But at last the meaning and the plan and the purpose of it all, for the world, for your life, for my life, will be made clear. Silently and majestically all the timbers and the stones which have been prepared through time shall fit themselves into the finished temple, the Holy City of God, the Everlasting Kingdom of Jesus Christ!

IX

The Parable of the Ploughman

Isaiah xxviii. 23-29

THIS Parable of the Ploughman follows the prophecy of judgment and chastisement upon Israel. The vanity of their trust in foreign alliances instead of upon the Lord will be demonstrated when their covenant with death has been annulled and their agreement with hell has fallen. The bed of human devices will be found shorter than the recreant nation can stretch itself on, and the covering of human counsels too narrow for the nation to wrap itself in. Isaiah has heard the decree of destruction and pictures the overflowing scourge of judgment onrushing like a torrential river through the devoted land. He admits that this is a strange work for God to perform against His own people, and that the natural tendency of the nation will be to scoff against such a prophecy of destruction. The burden of their scoffing was not that the nation had no need for chastisement, nor that God had no power to judge, but that the destruction of the Holy City and the dispersion of the people would be in direct contradiction to His purpose and plan for the nation.

Had not God chosen the nation and planted it like a vine ?

“ Thou broughtest a vine out of Egypt ;
Thou didst drive out the nations, and plantedst it.
Thou preparedst room before it,
And it took deep root and filled the land.
The mountains were covered with the shadow of it,
And the boughs thereof were like cedars of God.
It sent out its branches unto the sea,
And its shoots unto the River.
Why hast Thou broken down its walls,
So that all they that pass by the way do pluck it ?
The boar out of the wood doth ravage it,
And the wild beasts of the field feed upon it.”

That complaint of the Psalmist, evidently written after the coming of the judgments which Isaiah foretold, shows how difficult it was for the Israelite to reconcile what had happened to the nation with God's plan and purpose for it as witnessed by His election of Israel in the beginning, and the repeated announcement of His gracious intention towards the Chosen People. If this was the state of mind after the destruction of the Holy City and the visitation of fearful judgments, we do not wonder that many scoffed at the proclamation of the coming of the whirlwind and tempest of retribution and woe. They would say to Isaiah, “Your decree of destruction is not in harmony with God's choice of Israel in the beginning and His care for the nation during all the centuries of its existence.”

It was in anticipation of this objection that

Isaiah speaks to them the Parable of the Ploughman. He makes bold to liken God in His dealing with men to the ploughman in his dealing with the soil, the seed and the grain: and the point of the comparison, though it yields other by-products of truth, is in this: that as the ploughman must carry out a diversity of operations—ploughing, harrowing, sowing, threshing, grinding—before the “wholesome grain and pure” appears, so the Wise and Eternal Husbandman, in fulfilling His purposes with nations and with individuals, carries on a diversity of operations: sometimes He breaks up the soil with the plough of preparation; and sometimes He harrows with the sharp teeth of suffering, or threshes with the relentless flail of affliction; and sometimes He scatters broadcast on the prepared soil the germinating principles of truth and righteousness; but always His operations, like those of the ploughman, have a definite end in view, the production of the pure grain of character. It would be foolish to judge of the ploughman’s purpose by watching him wound the protesting glebe with his ploughshare, or beat the sensitive grain with his flail; nor can we judge rightly of God—God in the history of nations, God in the history of redemption, God in that history which to you and me must ever be the most interesting and most important of all histories, the history of our own lives—unless we take into consideration the whole plan and method of God. He has diversities of operations, but the Spirit which

runs through them all is one and the same,—almighty, all-wise, all-beneficent.

“ Blind unbelief is sure to err,
And scan His works in vain.
God is His own interpreter
And He will make it plain.”

As introductory to this study of the wisdom and graciousness of God's dealings, we may take the reason which the prophet appends to his study of the operations of the ploughman: “for his God doth instruct him aright and doth teach him.” The lowliest of occupations, that of the ploughman, is carried on by the inspiration of God. Poetry has made the ploughman a figure of sentiment and mystery; democracy has made him a symbol of honourable and necessary toil, how even the king is servant to the field. But Isaiah's thought of the ploughman is not that of Thomas Gray as he saw him one evening near Stoke Poges, “homeward wend his weary way,” and, for all he knew, “a village Hampden, a mute inglorious Milton” lost and buried within him; nor is his thought of the ploughman that of the political orator who likes to tell how he once followed the plough, and thus followed in the footsteps of Elisha, Cincinnatus, Lincoln. When Isaiah speaks of the ploughman, he has before him the plain, unadorned, ordinary figure of the lowly husbandman on the hills of Judea, going through the different processes of agriculture.

Who taught him to plough? Who taught man to take a seed and cover it up in the earth that he had previously prepared by ploughing and harrowing, with the sure confidence that one day the tender shoot would appear, and that out of that cold, damp grave of the buried grain there would come a resurrection of new life? We marvel at the gift, the talent, the inspiration of the orator, the poet, the prophet and the apostle, the painter, the architect and the builder, the inventor and the statesman. Whence came their gift? Who taught them to roll out their psalms and speak their fiery oracles? Who instructed them how to paint, plan, build? Suppose I am ambitious to become an artist. I enroll myself as a student in the Academy of Fine Arts. I listen to the instruction of skilled teachers and I view the works of accomplished artists. After much toil and thought I might be able to draw what would be at least a fair likeness of this church beneath whose roof we now sit. If I happened to have unusual talent, I might in time produce something that would be worthy of your attention, perhaps of your admiration. You say my teachers taught me. Yes, but it had to be there before they could draw it out. And if they did teach me, who taught them? It makes no difference whether you stand in rapt wonder before a masterpiece of Turner, or Reynolds or Watts, or look at the daubing of the latest apprentice, you are confronted by that mystery of a gift that is in man, and that man himself can stir

up, can develop, can hand down from generation to generation, but never can originate.

What Isaiah, himself one of the most gifted of men—for who shall match what Robert Burns called his “wild, seraphic fire”?—says of the Judean ploughman, we might ask of any of the actors in the occupations of human life, high or low. Who taught the sailor to sail and to steer? The miner to dig? The mechanic to contrive? The goldsmith to refine? The miller to grind? All the occupations of life presuppose a gift and a Giver. The skilled workman and master mechanic of the tabernacle was Bezalel. Of him Moses said, “The Lord hath called Bezalel, the son of Uri, and he hath filled him with the Spirit of God, in wisdom, and in understanding and in knowledge, and in all manner of workmanship; and to devise skillful works, to work in gold and in silver, and in brass, and in cutting of stones.” But is not this true of all kinds of tabernacles and all kinds of workers? Civilization has its dark and fearful spots of corruption and wickedness, and too often, when we think about the world and its relationship to God, we see only those dark places. We see the great engine of war hurling tons of metal to destroy and maim and crush and wound, and we exclaim, “How dreadful is this! Surely if there were a God in heaven this cruel war could not be!” But we forget the wonder of the mind that devised the engine of destruction, the wisdom and the discretion which, although turned into a wrong

channel and devoted to sad ends, nevertheless bears eloquent testimony to the mind that is in man, a power which he oftentimes abuses, but which speaks ever of a God who has instructed man aright, and made him upright, though man, in the blindness of his fallen nature, has sought out many foolish and wicked devices. We shudder with horror when we read of a ship that sails under the seas, and stealing upon its unsuspecting and unprotected prey, delivers its death-blow, and hundreds find an ocean grave. But in our horror at man's inhumanity to man, from age to age making countless thousands mourn, let us not forget the wonder of the mind that could devise such a means of destruction and could execute its purpose with such fearful precision. The garment of civilization that man has been weaving through the centuries is fearfully and yet wonderfully made, and in every stitch and thread proclaims that man is dependent upon a Higher Power. Range, if you will, through all creation, and examine this marvellous fabric of life, and everywhere you will discover something not only worthy of a God, but something which demands a God and presupposes His instruction and His gift. It may be the ploughman guiding the shining share through the soil, or it may be the poet who sings in immortal melody about the ploughman, or the prophet who takes him for the theme of his parable, or it may be the conies, who, though a feeble folk, have their homes in high safety among the rocks, or the bird that builds her

nest so that it swings from the topmost bough and yet the fiercest wind cannot tear it from the branch nor unhouse its little occupants; but whether it be the poet's song or the prophet's parable, or the ploughman's toil, or the bird's airy architecture, it is the Lord God who doth instruct them to discretion and doth teach them.

But we have pursued this interesting by-path of the parable far enough. Let us now return to the highway of its teaching, namely, the plan and the wisdom of God's providential dealings with man. Our minds become so intent upon our own plans and enterprises that we forget that God too has a plan and that we live in the midst of the carrying out of a great drama which had its beginning when the world was created, and which shall have its ending with the dissolution of the world. God, says the prophet, is wonderful in counsel and excellent in wisdom. The one thing that made the people of Isaiah's day doubt that God had a plan was the revelation that He was to judge and punish them. So long as Israel was rich and prosperous they had no wish to question the wise and beneficent plan that was being worked out in their nation. But when they are told that a river of destruction is to flow over the land again and again, that the monuments of their national glory will be levelled to the dust, and that the people will be sent into captivity, they begin to ask if there is a God and if His plan is good and just.

That doubt of ancient Israel has its counterpart

in the lives of men to-day. Our faith is undisturbed when all is well with us, and health and prosperity and happiness wait at our gate. But when the wind shifts into the northeast, when we lose our money, when our best laid plans "gang aft alee," when sickness and loneliness, sorrow and pain come to visit us, then faith often ceases to be a psalm of praise, and becomes a problem. It is not difficult to persuade ourselves, after the unpleasant visitation has passed, of the good results of the visit, how we learn humility, patience, sympathy. The Psalmist said, "It was for my good that I was afflicted." The stricken Hezekiah said after he had recovered from his disease, "By these things men live." In some little degree, then, at least by way of retrospect, men are able to persuade themselves of the beneficence of the providences which a somewhat out of fashion piety used to call "sorrowful."

But just how and why it is that all things, even the worst, work together for our good in this life, and in the next for a far more exceeding weight of glory, that we must leave to the empire of faith. We must believe that God works towards an end not less faithfully than the ploughman who has been instructed by Him. Only the foolish man will ask to have this demonstrated to him. It does not belong to the category of things demonstrable. It eludes the grasp of the hand, but leaves its conviction to sustain and cheer the meek and the humble. When Mary saw the risen Lord

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on the morning of the Resurrection, she supposed Him to be the Gardener. And such indeed He is. Our Lord is a Gardener. Mary's supposition is the Christian's confidence. Digging, pruning, transplanting, watering, all that the plants and trees of the garden need that they bring forth fruit, that life does for man, and faith tells us that back of life is the Living God Himself. Awake, O north wind, and come thou south, and blow upon my garden that the spices thereof may flow forth!

As the prophet speaks of this ploughman, he reminds his hearers how differently he deals with different crops. The wheat, barley, fitches and cummin he plants in different ways and harvests and threshes in different ways. "The fitches are not threshed with a sharp threshing instrument, neither is a cart-wheel turned about upon the cummin; but the fitches are beaten out with a staff, and the cummin with a rod." If this is the careful method of the ploughman, are we to expect less of the ploughman's God? My neighbour to-day needs joy and I to-day need sorrow, and according to our needs God deals with us. He does not visit men as one indistinguishable mass of beings, but apportions His gifts to the individual needs. And that diversity of operations upon men should convince us of the wisdom and the goodness of God. It was the reflection of the Psalmist that He knoweth our frame and remembereth that we are dust. Before He sent you that load to bear,

that grief to carry, that work to perform, God considered your frame, just what you were able to bear and what sort of a burden was necessary for you. God tempers the wind to the shorn lamb.

In this study of husbandry all the divers operations of the farmer were carried out with one ruling motive, the garnering of the grain. He did not plough for the sake of ploughing, nor harrow for the sake of harrowing, nor plant for the sake of planting, nor thresh for the sake of threshing, but to store away the harvest in his barns. Has God a like purpose? Sometimes we faint beneath the burden of this heavy unintelligible world. For its rivers of sorrow and its fountains of woe, for its ebb and flow of the tide of righteousness, for its dense clouds of passion and ignorance, for its savage outbursts of bestiality and brutality, for its love of the darkness and its hatred of the light, for its pathetic groping through long centuries in the night of error in order to stumble upon the truth it so much needs, for its bloody and senseless Armageddons, for all this we are disquieted when we think upon God. What is the end towards which He doth work? What is the purpose which guides and controls His Hand? When we think of mankind and the history of the world, are we not often taking upon our lips the sigh of the stricken Job, "Oh, that I knew where I might find Him! Behold, I go forward, but He is not there; and backward, but I cannot perceive Him; on the left hand where He doth work, but I cannot

behold Him : He hideth Himself on the right hand that I cannot see Him ! ”

It is indeed possible for us to fortify ourselves by the study of the past and find the evidences of His ways in His dealings with men and nations of yesterday and in the general progress of mankind. But when it comes to a demand for an answer to the question, “To what end does God deal with the nations? To what end does He deal thus with me?” we have no recourse but that of faith. All that we can do is to trust Him for His goodness. “But He knoweth the way that I take: when He hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold.” The lesson that Isaiah draws from the work of the husbandman Job draws from the operations of the goldsmith. It is not that God ploughs and breaks and threshes that troubles me. But this: Does He do it for my good and for a happy end? It is not that I am tried in the fire that troubles me, but this: Shall I one day come forth as gold?

In his celebrated argument for the immortality of the soul and the resurrection of the body, Paul flung out this challenge: “If, after the manner of men I have fought with beasts at Ephesus, what advantageth it me, if the dead rise not?” The whole struggle of life, its never ceasing battle with the beasts of temptation and doubt and sorrow and pain, seemed to Paul terribly meaningless and empty, unless the struggler is to be crowned by a blessed immortality. If that is all—to be born, to struggle for a little in the arena of life, and then

die and go back to nothingness—life is a cruel tragedy. Farewell all honourable conduct and striving! Farewell the Christian virtues and the mind of Christ! Farewell the delights of the mind and the imaginations of the spirit! Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die! Paul there declares that he cannot hold to God and His goodness unless another life follows this life. The ploughman ploughs in vain unless we are to have those mansions of which Jesus spake. The refiner's furnace burns in vain unless after the furnace trials of this mortal existence we are to come forth as gold. The afflictions common to all men in this life are not to be reconciled with the fact of God unless they do indeed work for us an eternal weight of glory.

“ My own dim life should teach me this,
That life should live forevermore,
Else earth is darkness at the core,
And dust and ashes all that is.

“ This round of green, this orb of flame,
Fantastic beauty ; such as lurks
In some wild poet, when he works
Without a conscience or an aim.

“ What then were God to such as I ?
'Twas hardly worth my while to choose
Of things all mortal, or to use
A little patience ere I die.

“ 'Twere best at once to sink to peace,
Like birds the charming serpent draws,
To drop head-foremost in the jaws
Of vacant darkness and to cease.”

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These doubts and fears are laid by the voice of Christ. "Ye believe in God, believe also in me." Sometimes we seem to reverse that order and believe in God because we have believed in Christ. How often did He reassure us as to the good-will of our Father in Heaven! How often and how beautifully did He remind us of the value God placed upon a single soul! Yes, we are worth more than many sparrows, and because Christ has come and loved us and died for us, we believe that this that we see and experience here upon earth cannot be all, that the final explanation of life is that of the next stage of existence. What it is, eye hath not seen, ear hath not heard, and its mysteries and glories have not entered into the heart of man. But I wait upon the Lord. If it were not so, I believe that Christ would have told me. I shall be satisfied when I awake with His likeness.

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