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OUR MASTER

Thoughts for Salvationists about Their Lord

BY

General Bramwell Booth.

"_As man He suffered--as God He taught_"

TO

MY WIFE

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Preface

The present volume contains some of the papers bearing on the Birth and Death and Work of our Lord Jesus Christ which I have contributed from time to time to Salvation Army periodicals. I hope that in this form they may continue the service of souls which I am assured they began to render when, one by one, they were first published.

Much in them has, I do not doubt, come to me directly or indirectly by inspiration or suggestion of other writers and speakers, and I desire therefore to acknowledge my indebtedness to the living, both inside and outside our borders, as well as to the holy dead.

Bramwell Booth.

Barnet, _May_, 1908.

I.

The Man for the Century

I.

The Need.

The new Century has its special need.

The need of the twentieth century will be men. In every department of the world's life or labour, that is the great want. In religion, in politics, in science, in commerce, in philanthropy, in government, all other necessities are unimportant by comparison with this one.

Given men of a certain type, and the religious life of the world will thrive and throb with the love and will of God, and overcome all opposition. Given men of the right stamp, and politics will become another word for benevolence. Provided true men are available, science will take her place as the handmaid of revelation. If only men of power and principle are at hand, commerce will prosper as she has never yet prospered, rooted in the great law which Christ laid down for her: "Do unto others as ye would that they should do unto you." If the men are found to guide it, philanthropy will become a golden ladder of opportunity by which all in misfortune and misery may climb, not only to sufficiency and happiness here, but to purity and plenty for ever. And,

given the men of heart, head, and hand for the task, the government of the kingdoms of this world will yet become a fulfilment of the great prayer of Jesus: "Thy will be done on earth, as it is done in Heaven."

But all, or nearly all, depends on the men.

II.

The Man.

The new Century will demand men.

But if men, then certainly a _man_. Human nature has, after all, more influence over human nature than anything else. Abstract laws are of little moment to us until we see them in actual operation. The law of gravitation is but a matter of intelligent wonder while we view its influence in the movements of revolving planets or falling stars; but when we see a baby fall terror-stricken from its little cradle to the floor, "the attraction of large bodies for small ones" takes on a new and heart-felt meaning. The beauty of devotion to truth in the face of opposition hardly stirs an emotion in many of us, as we regard it from the safe distance of our own self-satisfied liberty; but when we see the lonely martyr walk with head erect through the raging mob, and kiss the stake to which he is soon to be bound; when we watch him burn until the kindly powder explodes about his neck, and sends him to exchange his shirt of flame for the robe he has washed in the Blood of the Lamb; then, the beauty, the sincerity, the greatness, the God-likeness of sacrifice, especially of sacrifice for the truth, comes home to us, and captures even the coldest hearts and dullest minds.

The revelation of Jesus in the flesh was a recognition of this principle. The purpose of His life and death was to manifest God in the flesh, that He might attract man to God. He took human nature that human nature might see the best of which it was capable. He became a man that men might know to what heights of power a man might rise. He became a man that men might know to what lengths and breadths of love and wisdom a man might attain. He became a man that men might know to what depths of love and service a man might reach.

The men we need, then, for the twentieth century will find the pattern Man ready to their hand. Be the demands of the coming years what they may, God is able to raise up men to meet them, men after His own likeness--men of right, men of light, men of might--men who will follow Him in the desperate fight with the hydra-headed monsters of evil of every kind, and who will, by His Name, deliver the souls of men from the slavery of sin and the Hell to which it leads.

III.

Standards.

The new Century will demand high standards, both of character and conduct.

Explain it how we may, the fact is evident that religion has greatly disappointed the world. The wretched distortion of Christ's teaching which appears in the lives and business of tens of thousands of professed Christians, the namby-pambyism of the mass of Christian teachers towards the evil of sin, and the unholy union, in nearly all the practical proceedings of life, between the world and the bulk of the Christian churches, no doubt largely account for this, so far as Christianity is concerned.

Mohammedanism is in a still worse plight, for though, alas! it increases even faster than Christianity, it is helpless at the heart. The mass of its devotees know that between its highest teaching and its best practice there is a great gulf, and they are slowly beginning to look elsewhere for rules by which to guide their lives.

And what is true of Mohammedanism is true also of Buddhism--the great religion of the East. Its teachers have largely ceased to be faithful to their own faith; and, as a consequence, that faith is a declining power. Beautiful as much of its teaching undoubtedly is, millions who are nominally Buddhist are estranged by its failures; and are, with increasing unrest, looking this way and that for help in the battle with evil, and for hope amidst the bitter consciousness of sin.

Such is a cursory view of the attitude of the opening century towards the great faiths of the world. Perhaps one word more than another sums it all up--especially as regards Christianity--and that word is NEGLECT--cold, stony neglect!

And yet men are still demanding standards of life and conduct. The open materialist, the timid agnostic, no less than the avowedly selfish, the vicious and the vile, are asking, with a hundred tongues and in a thousand ways, "Who will show us any good?" The universal conscience, unbribed, unstified as on the fateful day in Eden--conscience, the only thing in man left standing erect when all else fell--still cries out, "YOU OUGHT!" still rebels at evil, still compels the human heart to cry for rules of right and wrong, and still urges man to the one, and withholds him from the other.

And it is--for one reason--because Jesus can provide these high standards for men, that I say He is _The Man for the Century_. The laws He has laid down in the Gospels, and the example He furnished of obedience to those laws in the actual stress and turmoil of a human life, afford a standard capable of universal application.

The ruler, contending with unruly men; the workman, fighting for consideration from a greedy employer; the outcast, struggling like an Ishmaelite with Society for a crust of bread; the dark-skinned, sad-eyed

mother, sending forth her only babe to perish in the waters of the sacred river of India, thus "giving the fruit of her body for the sin of her soul"; the proud and selfish noble, abounding in all he desires except the one thing needful; the great multitude of the sorrowful, which no man can number, who refuse to be comforted; the dying, whose death will be an unwilling leap in the dark--all these, yea, and all others, may find in the law of Christ that which will harmonise every conflicting interest, which will solve the problems of human life, which will build up a holy character, which will gather up and sanctify everything that is good in every faith and in every man, and will unite all who will obey it in the one great brotherhood of the one fold and the one Shepherd.

IV.

Liberty.

The new Century will call for freedom in every walk of human life.

That bright dream of the ages--Liberty--how far ahead of us she still lies!

What a bondage life is to multitudes! What a vast host of the human race, even of this generation, will die in slavery--actual physical bondage! Slaves in Africa, in China, in Eastern Europe, in the far isles of the sea and dark places of the earth, cry to us, and perish while they cry.

What a host, still larger, are in the bondage of unequal laws! Little children, stricken, cursed, and damned, and there is none to deliver. Young men and maidens bound by hateful customs, ruined by wicked associations, torn by force of law from all that is best in life, and taught all that is worst. Nine men out of ten in one of the great European armies are said to be debauched morally and physically by their military service; and all the men in the nation are bound by law to serve.

What a host--larger, again, than both the others--of every generation of men are bound by custom in the service of cruelty. It is supposed that every year a million little children die from neglect, wilful exposure, or other form of cruelty. Think of the bondage of those who kill them! Look at the cruelty to women, the cruelty of war, the cruelty to criminals, the cruelty to the animal creation. What a mighty force the slavery of cruel custom still remains!

All that is best in man is crying out for emancipation from this bondage, and I know of no deliverance so sure, so complete, so abiding as that which comes by the teaching and spirit of Jesus. But, even if freedom from all these hateful bonds could come, and could be complete, without Him, there still remains a serfdom more degrading, a bondage more inexorable than any of these, for men are everywhere the bond-slaves of sin. Look out upon the world--upon your own part of it, even upon your own family or household--and see how evil holds men by one chain or another, and grips

them body and soul. This one by doubt, this by passion, this by envy, this by lust, this by pride, this by strife, this by fear, this one by love of gold, this one by love of the world, and this one by hatred of God! _Is it not so_?

What men want, then, is PERSONAL, INDIVIDUAL LIBERTY FROM SIN. Given that, and a slave may be free. Given that, and the child in the nursery of iniquity may be free. Given that, and the young man or maiden held in the charnel-house of lust may be free. Given that, and the victim of all that is most cruel and most brutal in life may still be free. Oh! blessed be God, he whom the Son makes free is free indeed!

This, and this alone, is the liberty for the new Century--the Gospel liberty from sin for the individual soul and spirit, without respect of time or circumstance; and here alone is He who can bestow it--Jesus, the Lion of the Tribe of Judah.

This, I say, is _The Man for the new Century_.

V.

Knowledge.

The new Century will be marked by a universal demand for knowledge.

One of the most remarkable features of the present time is the extraordinary thirst for knowledge in every quarter of the world. It is not confined to this continent or that. It is not peculiar to any special class or age. It is universal. One aspect of it, and a very significant one, is the desire for knowledge about life and its origin, about the beginning of things, about the earth and its creation, about the work which we say God did, which He alone could do.

Oh, how men search and explore! How they read and think! How they talk and listen! Where one book was read a generation ago, a hundred, I should think, are read now; and for one newspaper then read, there are now, probably, a thousand. Every man is an inquiry agent, seeking news, information, or instruction; seeking to know what will make life longer for him and his; and, above all, what can make it happier.

And here, again, I say that _Jesus is The Man for the new Century_. He has knowledge to give which none other can provide. I do not doubt that universities, and schools, and governments, and a great press, can, and will, do much to impart knowledge of all sorts to the world. But when it comes to knowledge that can serve the great end for which the very power to acquire knowledge was created--namely, _the true happiness of man_--then, I say, that JESUS is the source of that knowledge; that without Him it cannot be found or imparted; and that with Him it comes in its liberating and enlightening glory.

Oh, be sure _you have that_! No amount of learning will stand you in its stead. No matter how you may have stored your mind with the riches of the past, or tutored it to grapple with the mysteries of the present, _unless you know Him, it will all amount to nothing_. But if you know Him who is life, that is life eternal. Knowledge without God is like a man learned in all the great mysteries of light and heat who has never seen the sun. He may understand perfectly the laws which govern them, the results which follow them, the secrets which control their action on each other--all that is possible, and yet he will be _in the dark_.

So, too, knowledge, learning, human education and wisdom are all possible to man; he may even excel in them so as to be a wonder to his fellows by reason of his vast stores of knowledge, and yet know nothing of that light within the mind by which he apprehends them. Nay, more! he may even be a marvellous adept in the theory of religion, and yet, alas! alas! may never have seen its SUN--may still be in the blackness of gross darkness, because he knows not Jesus, the Light of the world, whom to know is life eternal.

VI.

Government.

The new Century will demand governors.

Every thoughtful person who considers the subject must be struck by the modern tendency towards personal government all over the world. Whatever may be the form of national government prescribed by the various constitutions, it tends, when carried into practice, to give power and authority to individual rulers. Whether in monarchies like England, where Parliament is really the ruling power; or in republics like France and the United States, where what are called democratic institutions are seen in their maturity; or in empires like Germany and Austria, the same leading facts appear. Power goes into the hands of one or two who, whether as ministers, or presidents, or monarchs, are the real rulers of the nation.

Perfect laws, liberal institutions, patriotic sentiments, though they may elevate, can never rule a people. A crowd of legislators, no matter how devoted to a nation, can never permanently control, though they may influence it. Out of the crowd will come forth one or two; generally one commanding personality, strong enough to stand alone, though wise enough not to attempt it. In him will be focussed the ideas and ambitions of the nation, to him the people's hearts will go out, and from him they will take the word of command as their virtual ruler. It has ever been so. It is so to-day. It will always be so.

And as with nations so with individuals. _Every man must have a king_. Call him what we will, recognise him or not, every man is the subject of some ruler. And this will, if possible, be more manifest in the future than in the past. Men will not be satisfied to serve ideas, to live

for the passing ambitions of their day, they will cry out for a king.

Am I wrong when I say that JESUS IS THE COMING KING? In Him are assembled in the highest perfection all the great qualities which go to make the KING OF MEN. And so the new Century will need Him, must have Him; nay, it cannot prosper without Him, the Divine Man, for He is the rightful Sovereign of every human soul.

VII.

A New Force.

The new Century will demand great moral forces as well as high ideals.

Nothing is more evident than that the forms and ceremonies of religion are rapidly losing--even in nominally Christian countries--all real influence over the lives of men. The form of godliness without the power is not only the greatest of all shams, but it is the most easily detected. Hence it is that a large part of mankind is either disgusted to hostility or utterly estranged from real religion by theories and ceremonials which, though they may continue to exist in shadow, have lost their life and soul.

For example, the old lie, that money paid to a Church can buy "indulgences" which will release men in the next world from the penalty of sin committed in this, and the miserable theory which made God the direct author of eternal damnation to those who are lost, are among the theories which, though they are still taught and professed here and there, have long ago ceased to have real influence over men's hearts or actions. In the same way, there are multitudes who still conform to the outward ceremony of Confirmation, upon whose salvation from sin or separation from the world that ceremony has absolutely no influence whatever, although, for custom's sake, they submit to it.

But a greater danger than this lies in the fact that _it is possible to hold and believe the truth, and yet to be totally ignorant of its power_. Sound doctrine will of itself never save a soul. A man may believe every word of the faith of a Churchman or a Salvationist, and yet be as ignorant of any real experience of religion as an infidel or an idolater. And it is this merely intellectual or sentimental holding of the truth about God and Christ, about Holiness and Heaven, which makes the ungodly mass look upon Christianity as nothing more than an opinion or a trade; a something with which they have no concern.

The new Century will demand something more than this. Men will require something beyond creeds, be they ever so correct; and traditions, be they ever so venerable; and sacraments, be they ever so sacred. They will ask for an endowment of power to grapple with what they feel to be base in human nature, and to master what they know is selfish and sinful in their own hearts.

And right here _The Man for the Century_ comes forward. The doctrine of Jesus is the spirit of a new life. It is a transforming power. A man may believe that the American Republic is the purest and noblest form of government on the earth, and may give himself up to live, and fight, and die for it, and yet be the same man in every respect as he was before; but if he believes with his heart that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and gives himself up to live, and fight, and die for Him, he will become a new man, he will be a new creature. The acceptance of the truth, and acting upon it, in the one case, will make a great change in his manner of life--his conduct; the acceptance of the truth, and acting upon it, in the other, will make a great change in the man _himself_--in his tastes and motives, in his very nature.

Again, I say, this is what we shall need for the new Century. Not good laws only, but the power to observe them. Not beautiful and lofty ideals only, but the power to translate them into the daily practice of common lives. Not merely the glorious examples of a pure faith, but the actual force which enables men to live by that faith amid the littleness, the depression, the contamination, and the conflict of an evil world.

VIII.

Atonement.

The new Century will demand an atonement for sin.

The consciousness of sin is the most enduring fact of human experience. From generation to generation, from age to age, amidst the ceaseless changes which time brings to everything else, this one great fact remains, persists--_the condemning consciousness of sin_. It appears with men in the cradle, and goes with them to the tomb; without regard to race, or language, or creed it is ever with us. It was this robbed Eden of its joys; it is this makes life a round of labour and sorrow; it is this gives death its terrors; it is this makes the place of torment which men call Hell--for the unceasing consciousness of sin will be "the worm that never dies."

All attempts to explain it away, to modify its miseries, to extract its sting--whether they have come from the party of unbelief, or the party of education, or the party of amusement, have failed--and failed utterly. No matter what men say or do to get rid of it, there it is--staring them in the face! Whether they look amongst the most highly civilized peoples or amongst the lowest savages; whether they look into the past history of mankind or into its present condition, there is the _stupendous fact of sin_, and there is the incontrovertible fact that everywhere _men are conscious of it_.

It is going to be so in this twentieth century. If God, in His mercy, allows the families of men to continue during another hundred years, this great fact will still stand out in the forefront of life. Sin will still

be the skeleton at every feast, the horrid ghost haunting every home and every heart, the spectre, clothed with reproaches, ever ready to plunge his dripping sword into every breast.

Sin. The world's sin. The sin of this one generation. The sin of one city. The sin of one family. The sin of one man--_my sin_! Ah! depend upon it, the twentieth century will cry aloud, "_What shall be done with our sin_?"

Yet, thanks be to God! there is an atonement. The MAN of whom I write has made a propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only, but for the sins of the whole world. He stands forth the ONLY SAVIOUR. None other has ever dared even to offer to the sin-stricken hearts of men relief from the _guilt_ of sin. _But He does_. He can cleanse, He can pardon, He can purify, He can save, because _He has redeemed_. "Thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us unto God by Thy blood, out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation."

Will you come and join in our great world-mission of making His atonement known? Will you turn your back on the littleness, and selfishness, and cowardice of the past, and arise, in the strength of the God-Man, to publish to all you can reach, by tongue, and pen, and example, that there is a sacrifice for men's sins--for the worst, for the most wretched, for the most tortured? As you set your face with high resolve towards the unknown years, take your stand with THE MAN FOR ALL THE AGES; and let this be your message, your confidence, your hope for all men--"_Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world_!"

II.

The Birth of Jesus.

"_For unto you is born . . . a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord._"
--Luke ii. 11.

"_The firstborn among many brethren._"--Romans viii. 29.

The birth of Jesus is one of the great signs of His condescension; and, no matter how we view it, is perhaps scarcely less wonderful than His death. If the one manifests His glorious divinity, then the other exalts His wonderful humanity. If Calvary and the Resurrection reveal His power, does not Bethlehem make manifest His love? And did not both the former come out of the latter? The infinite glory which belongs to the cross and the tomb had its rise in the gloom of the stable. If the Babe had not been laid in the manger, then the Man would not have been nailed to the tree, and the Lamb that was slain would not have taken His place on the Everlasting Throne.

I claim, therefore, a little more attention to the events which relate to the Saviour's birth, and to the lessons which may be derived from them; and though, perhaps, something of what I have to say will have already occurred to some who will read this paper, I will venture to suggest one or two thoughts as they have been presented to my own mind. Their very simplicity has made them of service to me.

I.

He Came.

The nature of the whole work of our redemption is made manifest by the one fact-- He really came. His everlasting love, His infinite compassion, His all-embracing purpose were from eternity; but we only got to know of it all because He came. If He had contented Himself with sending messages or highly-placed messengers, or even with making occasional and wonderful excursions of Divine revelation, man would, no doubt, have been greatly attracted, and perhaps even helped somewhat in his tremendous conflict with evil; yet he might never have been subdued in will, he might never have been touched and won back to God; he might never have been brought down from his pride to cry out, "My Lord and my God." No, it was His coming to us that wrought conviction of sin, and then conviction of the truth in our hearts.

He came Himself.

There is something very wonderful in this principle of contact as illustrated by the life of Jesus. Just as to save the human race He felt it necessary to come into it, and clothe Himself with its nature and conform Himself to its natural laws, so all the way through His earthly journey He was constantly seeking to come into touch with the people He desired to bless. He touched the sick, He fed the hungry, He placed His fingers on the blind eyes, and put them upon the ears of the deaf, and touched with them the tongue of the dumb. He took the ruler's dead daughter "by the hand, and the maid arose." He lifted the little children up into His arms, and blessed them; He stretched forth His hand to sinking Peter; He stood close by the foul-smelling body of the dead Lazarus; He took the bread, and with His own hands brake it, and gave it to His disciples at that last farewell meal. He even took poor Thomas's trembling hand, and guided it to the prints in His hands and the wounds in His side.

Yes, indeed, it is written large, in every part of His life, that He really came, and that He came very near to lost and suffering men.

Is there not a lesson here for us, my comrade? As He is in the world, so are we. This principle in His life was not by accident or by chance, it was an essential qualification of His nature for the work entrusted to Him. It is a necessary qualification for those who are called to carry on that work.

Is this, then, the impression you are able to give to those among whom you labour: that you have come to them in very truth; that in mind and soul, in hand and heart, you are seeking to come into the closest contact of love and sympathy with them, especially with those who most need you?

Oh, aim at this! Do not for your own sake, as well as for your Master's, move about amid your own people, or among those to whom God and The Army have given you entrance, as one who has little in common with them, who does not know them, who does not feel with them. Go into their houses, put your hand sometimes to their burdens, take a share in their toils, nurse their sick, weep with them that weep, and rejoice with them that rejoice. Make them feel that it is your own religion, rather than The Army system, that has made you come to them. Let them see by your sympathy and kindness that love is the over-mastering influence in your life, the influence that has brought you to them. Compel them to turn to you as a warm-hearted unselfish example of the truths you preach. Let them feel that you are indeed come from God to take them by the hand, as far as may be, and lead them through this Vale of Tears to the City of Light and Rest.

II.

His Humble Origin.

Everything associated with the advent of Jesus seems to have been specially ordered to mark His humiliation. It is true that Mary, His mother, was of the lineage of King David, but her relationship with the royal house was a very distant one, and the family had fallen upon sad times. The Romans were masters in the land, and a stranger sat upon the throne of Israel. Mary, therefore, was but a poor village maiden; Joseph, her betrothed husband, was a carpenter--an ordinary working man. Bethlehem, the place of the Saviour's birth, was a tiny straggling village, which, though not the least, was certainly one of the least of the villages of Judea. And Nazareth, where He grew from infancy to childhood, and from youth to manhood, was another little hamlet among the hilly country to the north of Jerusalem, and was held in low repute by the people of those days.

The occupation chosen for the early life of Jesus was a humble one. He learned the trade of a joiner, and worked with Joseph at the carpenter's bench. His associates and friends were of the village community, and He "whose Name is above every name" passed to and fro and in and out among the cottage homes of the poor--as one of themselves. Probably none but His mother had, in these early years, any true idea of the mysterious promise which had been given concerning Him.

What a contrast it all presents to the years of stress and storm and of victory which were to follow, and to the supreme influence His teaching and example were to exert in the world!

Is there not something here for us? Do not the lowly origin and simple country habits and humble tastes of some of our comrades make them hesitate on the threshold of great efforts, when they ought to leap forward in the strength of their God? Let them remember their Master, and take courage. Let them call to mind the unfashionable, uneducated, uncultivated surroundings of Nazareth. Let them bear in mind the carpenter's shed, the rough country work, the bare equipment of the village home, the humble service of the family life. Let them, above all, remember the plain and gentle mother, and the meek and lowly One Himself, and in this remembrance let them go forward.

To be of lowly origin, or of a mean occupation; to come out of poverty and want; to be looked down upon by the rich or the powerful ones of earth; to be treated as of no consequence by governments and rulers, and yet to go on doing and daring, suffering and conquering for God and right; what is all this but the fulfilment of Paul's words, "And base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: that no flesh should glory in His presence"? Nay, what is it all but to tread in the very steps that the Master trod?

III.

His High Nature.

But if, on the human side, our Redeemer's origin and circumstances were of the humblest, and we are thus enabled to see His humanity, as it were face to face, there was united with it the Divine nature; so that as our Doctrines say, "He is truly and properly God, and He is truly and properly man." Many mysteries meet by the side of that manger, some of them to remain mysteries, so far as human understanding can grapple with things, till God Himself reveals them to our stronger vision in the world to come. But, blessed be God, some, things that we cannot compass with our mental powers are very grateful to our hearts.

How Thou canst love me as I am,
Yet be the God Thou art,
Is darkness to my intellect,
But sunshine to my heart.

And we to whom the Living Christ has spoken the word of life and liberty, although we may not now fully comprehend this great wonder of all wonders --God manifest in the flesh--and may not be able effectively to make it plain to others, we cannot for ourselves doubt its central truth--
that GOD dwelt with man.

Here was, indeed, a perfect union of two spirits. There was the suffering and obedient spirit of the true man; there was the unchanging and Holy Spirit of the true God. It was a union--it was a unity. It was God in man--it was man in God. A being of infinite might and perfect moral

beauty, sent forth from the bosom of the Father; and yet a being of lowly and sensitive tenderness, having roots in our poor human nature, tempted in all points like as we are, and touched with the feeling of all our infirmities.

Is it not to something of the same kind we are called? Is not every true Salvation Army Officer designed by God to be also (not, of course, in the same degree, but still up to the measure of his own capacity and of his Master's will) a dual, or two-fold creature, with associations and roots and attachments in all that is human, and yet with the divine life, the divine spirit, divine love, divine zeal, divine power, divine fire united with him and dwelling in him?

The perfect man would have been a great marvel, a great teacher, a great prophet; but without the God he could never have been the perfect Saviour. The Divine, without the human, would have been an awe-inspiring fact, a spectacle of holiness too great for human eyes; but He could not have been a Saviour. If it were possible for us to conceive the one without the other we should certainly not find a JESUS in either.

And so, your merely _human_ Officer, no matter how pure, how strong, how thoughtful, how clever, how industrious, will fail, and ever fail. And even so the Officer who is lost in visionary seeking after the Divine alone, to the neglect of action, of duty, of law, of self-denial, of the common conflicts and contracts of the man, will equally fail, and always fail. It is the man we want. The MAN--but the man born of the SPIRIT. The MAN--but the man full of the HOLY GHOST. The MAN--but the man with PENTECOST blazing in his head and heart and soul.

Comrade, what are you? Are you striving to be a prophet without possessing the spirit of the prophets? Are you trying to be a priest without the priestly baptism? Are you labouring to be a king without the Divine anointing? Beware!

IV.

From Infancy to Manhood.

Birth implies the weakness, the dependence, the ignorance of infancy. But it implies, also, the promise of growth, of increase, of advance from infancy to manhood. Thus it is with man generally. So it was with the Son of Man. First, He was "wrapped in swaddling clothes, and laid in a manger." Presently He goes forth in His mother's arms into Egypt, and back to Nazareth. By and by it is written that "the Child grew and waxed strong in spirit, and the grace of God was upon Him." Then He is found in the Temple, asking that wonderful question about His Father's business, and at last we find Him "increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man."

We know, also, that He was found in fashion as a servant, and was obedient

unto death; that He was tempted of the Devil, and that "He learned obedience by the things that He suffered." In fact, a very slight acquaintance with the history of His life reveals the truth that in some wonderful way He steadily grew in wisdom and grace; in the power to love and to serve, and in strength to grapple with sin and death--all the while He journeyed from the cradle to the grave and the victory beyond.

His life was a discipline, in the very highest sense of the word. Many of the hopes He might rightly entertain about the success of His work were dashed. Much of His love for those around Him was disappointed, and His trust betrayed. He was despised where He should have been honoured: rejected where He should have been received. "He came unto His own, and His own received Him not." "Not this man," they cried, "but Barabbas." But out of it all He came forth perfect and entire, lacking nothing--the chiefest among ten thousand, the altogether lovely. It may be a mystery, but it is a fact all the same, that the more the precious and wondrous and eternal jewel was cut and cut again, the more the light and glory of the Day-spring from on High was made manifest to men.

And here also I find a word of help and courage and cheer for you and me, my precious comrade. I am not sure that you could receive any more valuable Christmas gift than the full realisation of this truth--_that your advance from the infancy to the manhood of your life in God will not be hindered and delayed, but rather will be helped and quickened by the storms and trials, the conflicts and sufferings, which will overtake you_.

It was so with the man Christ Jesus; it has been so with thousands of His chosen. As He, our dear Lord, was made perfect through suffering, so are His saints. We are "chosen in the furnace of affliction," and often cast into it, too! And yet He who chooses all our changes, might have spared us every trial and conflict, and taken us to victory without a battle, and to rest without a toil. But He knows better what will make us _men_, and it is _men_ He wants to glorify Him--men, not babes.

The dark valleys of bitterness and loneliness are often better for us than the land of Beulah. A certain queen, once sitting for her portrait, commanded that it should be painted without shadows. "Without shadows!" said the astonished artist. "I fear your Majesty is not acquainted with the laws of light and beauty. There can be no good portrait without shading." No more can there be a good Salvationist without trial and sorrow and storm. There might, perhaps, remain a stunted and unfruitful infant life--but a _man_ in Christ Jesus, a _Soldier_ of the Cross, a _leader_ of God's people, without tribulation _there can never be_. Patience, experience, faith, hope, love, if they do not actually grow from tribulations, are helped by them in their growth. For what says the Apostle? "Tribulation worketh patience, and patience experience, and experience hope, and hope maketh not ashamed."

The finest pine-trees grow in the stormiest lands. The tempests make them strong. Surgeons tell us that their greatest triumphs are often those in which the patients have suffered most at their hands--for every stroke of the knife is to heal. The child you most truly love is the one you most

anxiously correct, and "whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth." Oh, _do_ believe that by every blow of disappointment and sorrow He permits to fall upon you, He is striving to bring you to the measure of the stature of a man in Christ Jesus. _Do_ work with Him in the full knowledge that He will not forsake you. He, the Man who has penetrated to the heart of every form of sorrow, and left a blessing there; He who has watched in silence by every kind of earthly grief, and found its antidote: the Man who trod the wine-press alone--He will be with you.

And, since He is with you, see to it you acquit yourself well in His presence. It is related of an old Highland chief that when advancing to give battle he fell at the head of his clan, pierced by two balls from the foe. His men saw him fall, and began to waver. But their wounded captain instantly raised himself on his elbow, and, with blood streaming from his wounds, exclaimed, "Children, I am not dead; _I_ am looking to see if you do your duty_!"

My comrade, this is the path of progress, the way of advance from the littleness and weakness of infancy to the battles and victories of manhood. It is the way of duty, and your Captain, with the wounds in His hands and His side, is looking on.

III.

Contrasts at Bethlehem.

The birth and infancy of Jesus--notwithstanding that Christmas time comes round again and again--receive less attention than they deserve; owing, no doubt, to the interest attached to the events of His manhood and death. Nevertheless, they suggest some useful lessons, especially to those of us who have much to do with the weak and trembling, and are ourselves, alas! often weak and trembling, too. May I offer one or two thoughts on the subject, which, though quite simple, have proved of blessing to my own heart?

I.

Great weakness may be quite consistent with true greatness and goodness.

It is unnecessary to dwell even for a moment on the weakness of the Infant Jesus. The Scripture has left no possible doubt about it.

Unable to speak, to walk, indeed to do anything for Himself--weak with all the weakness of the human race; yea, more truly helpless than a young bird

or a tiny worm, the Holy Child was laid in the manger hard by the beasts that perish.

And yet we know that there was the Divine SON, the Express Image of the Father, the Everlasting King, the Enthroned One, the Creator, "without whom was not anything made that was made"! It is indeed a contrast, which first astounds us, and then compels our adoration and love. Our God is a consuming Fire--_our God is a little Child_. Holy, Holy, Holy, is the Lord of Hosts; the whole earth is full of His glory--_and yet He is there in fashion as a Babe_, for whom, in all His sweet innocence, they cannot find a room in the crowded inn.

Yes, my friend, to be weak, to be small, to be sadly unfit for the strifes of time; to feel weary and unequal to the hard battles of life; to realise that you are pushed out and away by the crowd, to be contemptuously forgotten by the multitude shouting and singing across the road--all this may be your case; and _yet_ you may be God's chosen vessel, intended --framed "to suffer and triumph with Him." You, even you, may be destined by His wisdom to fill for Him some great place in action against the hosts of iniquity and unbelief. Above all, you may be appointed by God the Father to be like His Son, with a holy likeness of will, of affection, of character.

For, indeed, weakness in many things is not inconsistent with goodness, and purity, and love. The manger has in this also a message for us. Out of that mystery of helplessness came forth the Lion-Heart of Love, which led Him, for us, to the winepress alone, and which, while we were yet rebels, loved us with an everlasting love, going, for us, to a lonely and shameful death. Take heart, then, remembering that it is out of weakness we are to be made strong. Be of good courage--to-day may be the day of the enemy's strength, when you are constrained to cry out: "This is your hour and the power of darkness!" but to-morrow will be _yours_. The weakness and humiliation of the stable must go before the Mount of Transfiguration, the Mount of Calvary, the Resurrection Glory, and the exaltation of the Father's Throne. Take heart!

II.

A condition of complete dependence may be quite consistent with a great vocation--the call, that is, to a great work.

I suppose that there is nothing known to man so absolutely dependent upon the help of others as a little child! Life itself begins in total dependence upon another life, and is only preserved in still greater dependence on powers outside itself--for air, for light, for heat, for food, for clothes, for comfort--indeed, for every needed thing. This is especially the case with the child. The young lions and sheep, the tiny flies and the small fishes--these are all able to do something for their own support; but the new-born babe presents a picture of complete dependence. And this Babe was no exception. What a service of imperishable

worth to all the world was rendered by His mother in her loving care of Him!

And yet we know something of the stupendous task to which He came! That little Child was to become the greatest Example, the greatest Teacher, the greatest, the only Saviour, the greatest Healer of the sorrows of men, the greatest Benefactor, the greatest Ruler and King. Upon Him and upon His word, who lies there in His Virgin mother's arms, dependent on her breast for life and warmth, unnumbered multitudes were to rest their all for this life and the next--tens of thousands, in the face of inexpressible agonies, were to trust to Him their every hope, and for His sake were to die a thousand deaths.

Let not, then, your heart be troubled because you also are so dependent on others--so hedged in by your circumstances, so limited by sickness and pain, so incompetent through inexperience and ignorance, or that you are so compelled to stand and wait when you would fain rush on and do or dare for your Lord. All this may be even so, and yet you may be called to share in the same high vocation as your Saviour.

I read lately of an old saint chained for weary years to a dungeon-wall, unable even to feed himself, whose testimony for Jesus was powerful to the deliverance of many of his persecutors. He was killed at last, lest, one by one, he should convert the jailers also who were employed to supply him with food.

Are you "bound" in some way? Are you chained fast to some strange trial? Are you appointed to serve in what seems like a den of beasts? Are you under the compulsion of some injustice? Are you made to feel helpless and useless without the support of those around you? Ah, well, do not repine. Do not forget that God's call comes often--Oh, so often--to just such as you--to witness for Him in spite of "these bonds," to declare the truth, to dare to reprove sin. Above all, _do not doubt your God. You may be very dependent to-day, but you may be more than victorious to-morrow_.

III.

Poverty and friendlessness are often found in company with a great heart.

There was no home for Jesus in Bethlehem. There was no room for Him in the inn. There was no cradle in the stable. There was no protector when Herod arose to kill. What a strange world it is! Did ever babe open eyes on such a topsy-turvy condition of affairs? The King of Glory had not where to lay His head! Mary, it is true, was strong in faith, but both she and Joseph must needs soon fly into Egypt with the Babe. Refused at the inn, soon even the stable must cast them out!

He came to take all men into His heart, and they, ere ever they saw Him, cast Him forth as an outlaw!

And we who know what it means to be loved of Him, what can we say? Our hearts are bowed with something of shame and grief that He thus suffered, and yet we have a secret joy because He suffered so well! For of all the greatneses of the Babe this is the greatest--the greatness of His heart. "The Sacred Heart of Jesus," the Romanists call it. "The All-Conquering Heart of Jesus," I prefer to name it. For it was His wealth of love that really gave Him the victory.

Does one read these lines who is poor, who is cast out by those who are dear, who is a stranger in a strange land, who is driven from "pillar to post," who is harassed by open foes and wounded by secret enmity? Well, to that one let me say, remember your Lord's poverty and friendlessness; remember the tossings up and down of His infancy; the frugal cottage home in Nazareth wherein His family was finally gathered--despite its bareness and toil--was a place of peace and abundance, compared with the stable, the flight into Egypt, and the sojourn among aliens there.

Are you, dear friend, tempted to complain of your narrow surroundings, of your small opportunity to shine before others, or of a want of appreciation of your service and gifts and powers by those who should know you? Oh, remember the Babe, and the long years of His condescension to men of low estate, to the cramped surroundings of the carpenter's shed, and the sleepy Jewish village. Are you tried sometimes because you have to suffer the hatred or jealousy, secret or open, of those for whom you feel nothing but goodwill, and who perhaps once thought themselves happy in your friendship? Well, in such hours, remember your Master, and the hatred of Herod seeking to kill the Child. Try to call to mind something of the secret, as well as the open, bitterness of men, religious and irreligious alike, which began to hunt Him while yet in swaddling clothes, and which hunted Him still all through His days.

But amidst it all, what a great heart of passionate love was His! Blessed be His Name for ever! Whether the poverty and suffering and hatred were or were not favourable to it, there it was--_the Great Heart of all the world_. What about you? Can you ever be again the same since you learned that He loved you? Can you ever be again content to remain little and narrow, with interests and affections that are little and narrow also? Will you not rise, as He rose, above the small ambitions of the spiritual pigmies who meet you at every turn, determined to look beyond your own tiny circle, and the low aims of those around you? Depend upon it, you ought to do so. Depend upon it, the Holy Saviour can enable you to do so. Depend upon it, the world's great need is "Great Hearts." Will you be one?

IV.

Christ Come Again.

"_And she brought forth her firstborn Son, and wrapped Him in swaddling clothes, and laid Him in a manger_"--Luke ii. 7.

"_Christ formed in you_"--Gal. iv. 19.

The life of Jesus Christ in Palestine was a foreshadowing of His life in all who accept Him. God appointed Him a Saviour, not only because He should bring redemption nigh by a sacrifice which He alone could offer, but because He was also appointed to be the firstborn of many brethren, to be the head of a new family, the beginning--the new Adam--the first of a new line, in which character should cease to be merely human, even though perfect with all human perfections, and should become a union of the human and the Divine; in which, in fact, the body and mind and spirit of man should continue to exhibit the wonder of Christ's Incarnation, and show forth God clothed with man.

The life of Jesus divides itself quite naturally into several distinct periods, each having its own special characteristics and peculiar history. There is His birth and infancy; His childhood; His youth; His manhood; His perfected or completed life following Calvary and the Resurrection; and, may we not say, His eternal glory, upon which a few of His disciples saw Him begin to enter in the transcending splendour of the Ascension.

Every one of these phases or sections of His wonderful experience of earth has its continuing lessons for us. All speak aloud to us of His purposes and plans, and reveal to us the power and force of His inner life in the outward or public appearances and acts which belong to each. God has hidden many things from us--mysteries of nature, of grace, of eternity; but this mystery of God's relations to men, He has exhausted His resources in order to make plain. Before all else the life of Jesus is a revelation of the mind and methods, the principles and the practices of God, as they ought to appear, and as they ought to work out, amid the surroundings and limitations of humanity.

It is to the beginnings of that life to which our thoughts turn at this Christmas season. We dwell with affection on the oft-depicted picture, and repeat the oft-repeated words, and join in the old, old Hallelujahs of the shepherds with something of the zest and freshness of a first love. The story is so unlike all others, and touches with such unerring potency chords in the human soul which call it to a higher and nobler life, that, no matter who gazes upon the Babe of Bethlehem, he feels a kinship with all the world in hailing the Desire of all Nations. The manger, the silent companions of the stable, the swaddling clothes--what a touch of human tenderness--_motherliness_, so to speak--is in that line, "and wrapped Him in swaddling clothes"--the adoring shepherds, the star, the wise men (all thoughts of their wisdom for the moment gone); the gold, the frankincense, the myrrh, the rejoicing and yet trembling mother, the little Child--we see it all. Seeing, we believe; and believing, we rejoice. The Day Star from on High hath visited _us_. We _know_ in whom we have believed. The great condescension is before us. Strength has made itself dependent on weakness, cause upon effect, eternity upon time, God upon man; and He has done it for our sakes.

The Divine condescension never appears so new and so real to us as when we stand at the side of this lowly cradle. Here are no high-sounding doctrines, no hard words, no terrible commands, no far-off thunders of a new Sinai, no rumblings of a coming Judgment. Here we see Jesus, and Jesus only. Jesus showing Himself in our very own flesh and blood; submitting Himself to the weakness of our infirmities; voluntarily clothing Himself with our ignorance, and making God the present tangible possession of the whole human family, bringing Him "very nigh to us, in our mouth and in our heart, if we can but believe." And, more than this, God joined in that Babe His great strength to our great nothingness; He bound us to Himself; He robed us, as it were, with Himself, and He robed Himself in us. Henceforth the Tabernacle of God is with men. Henceforth every one of us may be conscious of an inward Presence, of which we may say in holy joy: "Angels and men before Him fall, and devils fear and fly."

It is this manifestation of Jesus in His people for which the Apostle prays in the words I have quoted, "My little children, of whom I travail in birth again until Christ be formed in you." Nothing less will satisfy him, because he knew that nothing less will prevail against the power of the world, the flesh, and the Devil, in any human heart. "Christ formed in you," Christ born again in them--that is his agonised prayer, his one hope for them.

In the workshops of human effort no instruments, no skill, no motive power exist for the formation and development of character apart from the energising vitality of God's Spirit dwelling in us. He is the indispensable foundation of any goodness, or wisdom, or beauty that can last. Purity begins and ends in Him. Faith finds her author and finisher in Him. Truth, which is the beauty of the soul, is but a reflection of His image, and love has no being but in Him. And so Paul says, "Let Him in." Conformity to His example is only possible by the re-formation in you of His life, and the growth again in you of His person; the mind of Christ in your mind, the spirit of Christ in your spirit, the presence of Christ in your flesh and blood; the motive power of Christ, the Father's will, prompting your every thought and word and deed, and thereby transforming your body into a temple of the Son of God.

And, because, in this unity of purpose with the Father, the Christ of Glory stooped to the infancy and childhood of Nazareth, yielding Himself completely to the bonds and limits inseparable from the life and conditions of a little child, and thinking no humiliation of our nature too deep for His love to tread, "so He will condescend to the lowest depths of weakness and want revealed in your heart and life." He will meet you where you are. He will deal with you just where you are weakest and worst. This is indeed the key-note of all that God has to show you. It is your own link in the long chain of patient and ever-new revelations of God to man.

For what is the history of man, what is the story the Bible has to tell, what is the testimony of all time, but that God has ever been speaking to man, appearing to man, opening now his eyes, and now his understanding, and now his heart, and making an everlastingly new revelation to the soul that God in him is his sole hope of glory. And His Christmas-message

to-day is still the same. To you, if you are willing, Christ will come as really, as sensibly, as wonderfully--nay, a thousand times more so--as He came to Mary and to Bethlehem. In truth, a second coming; but in many and wonderful ways like unto the first.

I.

The childhood of Jesus was attended by remarkable recognitions of His Divinity. At His birth, at His dedication, in Herod's instant resolve to kill Him, in the Temple with the fathers, by many clear tokens men confessed and acknowledged that He was the Son of God. If He is being formed in you there will be equally definite and not very dissimilar signs of recognition.

First, before all else, you will know, with Mary, that the new life entrusted to you is Divine; that God has entered into your heart to make all things new. It is just the absence of this assurance which stamps so much of the Christianity of the present day as--in effect--a religion without God. Its professors have no certainty. They seek, but they do not find; they ask, but they do not receive; they have no sure foundation in the sanction of their own consciousness to the indwelling Person; they have no revelation; they have, in short, no God. How far--even as the east is from the west--is this from the glorious confidence with which Mary sang, and in which you can join, if, indeed, your Christ is come: "My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit hath rejoiced _in God my Saviour_."

Salvation is of the Lord, and so is the assurance of it. Where there is the life of God, there will be His witness, even in the heart of the weakest and slowest servant of all His household. If you are not clear about this first evidence of your Lord's coming, let me counsel you that there is something wrong. _If Christ be formed in you, you will assuredly know it beyond the power of men or devils to make you doubt_.

But others than Mary also acknowledge this appearance of God "manifest in the flesh." The shepherds and the Wise Men, Holy Simeon, and Herod the king, each in his own way adds his own tribute to the New Life that had come down to man.

The shepherds and the strangers from afar bow down and worship. Strangers, perhaps, were more ready to rejoice with you than your own kith and kin when first Christ came to you.

Simeon, who had so desired to see the salvation of God, sees and is satisfied. Perhaps some Simeon had thus watched and waited and wept for you, and when the Lord came to His temple, he saw it, and was ready to depart with joy.

Herod the king sought to kill the Child. So it is even now. Don't be deceived; where Christ comes, storms come. The world of selfishness and

power and wealth will kill the Divine Thing in you, if it can. Between the prince of this world and the Prince of the world to come no truce was possible long ago in quiet Judea, and no truce is possible now. The spirit of the world is still the spirit of murder. It is called by other names to-day, and, under its influence, men will tell you that the life of God in you is not to take those forms of violent opposition to wrong, and of passionate devotion to right, and of burning zeal and self-denial for the lost, which they took in Jesus. The real meaning of their tale is that they are seeking to kill the Child.

But do not be dismayed. Remember Mary's flight into Egypt. The great peril of her Son made her regardless of her friends, of her reputation, of her home, of her life. She must guard that precious Life at any cost, at any risk, at any loss. Is there not a lesson in her example? Let nothing, let not all the sum total of this world's pleasures and possessions lead you to risk the Life of God in your soul. Listen to no voices that counsel friendship, or parley, or compromise with the world--_the spirit of Herod is in it_. If you cannot preserve that Indwelling without flying --from somewhere, or something, or some one--then fly. If you cannot guard that Presence without losing all, then let all be lost, and in losing all you shall find more than all.

II.

Side by side with these evidences of His Divinity the infancy and childhood of Jesus revealed His dependence and weakness; that is, _the reality of His human nature_.

The first recorded act of His mother shows us one aspect of that weakness after a fashion which appeals to the tenderest recollections of the whole human family, "_She wrapped Him in swaddling clothes_"; and then, as though to mark for ever the perfection of dependence, the history goes on, "_and laid Him in a manger_." There are other equally striking incidents teaching just as clearly that the Babe was a babe, and that the Child was really a child. It is the perfect union of Him "Who was, and is, and is to come," with him who flourisheth as the flower of the field; the wind passeth over him, and he is gone.

Even so may Christ be formed in you. The purity and dignity of His life will be all the more wonderfully glorious in the eyes of men and angels because it is linked with dependence and trial, and weakness and sorrow. As it was at Nazareth, so it is now. Hand in hand with Divinity walked hunger and weariness, poverty, disappointment, and toil. Did we think it would be otherwise? Did we, do we, sometimes wonder why the road is so rough, and the burden so heavy, and the sky so dark? Are we found asking the old question about sitting on the twelve thrones, judging those around us, and sharing in some way the royal glory of a King? and is there an echo of murmuring at these bonds and infirmities and drudgeries of daily duty and common sorrow? So did the Rabbis of old, and, in consequence, refused Him.

Ah! the answer to it all is in the one word, it was because "He was made perfect through suffering;" it was because He learned obedience by the things He suffered that He must do it again through you--in you. Every energy of your being may thus be sanctified. Every pain, every sorrow, every joy, every purpose will be--not taken away; not crushed and hardened into a series of unfeeling forms and empty signs; not passed over as having no relation to his life, but touched and purified and ennobled with the love and power of an indwelling God.

Yes, it is _man_ whom He came to restore--it is _man_, whose beauty and power were the glory of creation, that drew Him with infinite attractions from the centre of His Father's heaven, and plunged Him into the centre of a very hell of suffering and shame. It was man whose nature, passing by the angels, He took upon Him. It was man He swore to save. He loves our manhood--its will--its intelligence--its emotions--its passions; and it is our manhood He has redeemed. He designs to make men really men, to cleanse--to restore--to indwell in them, and finally to present every one in the beauty of a perfected character before the presence of His Father, without spot or blemish or any such thing.

It is this great principle of Redemption that has found expression in The Salvation Army. We are of those who see in every human being the ruins of the Temple of God; but ruins which can be repaired and reconstructed, that He may fit them for His own possession, and then return and make them His abode.

Never listen to that fatal lie, that to be a man means of necessity to be always a sinner; that humanity is only another word for irreclaimable desert or irreparable despair. When the enemy of your soul whispers to you out of his lying heart that because sin has found one of its strongholds in the appetites and propensities of your poor body, or in the original perversity of a rebellious spirit, and that you cannot be expected to triumph over that evil nature because it _is_ your nature, remember Bethlehem, and answer him with the promise of God, "_I will dwell in you, and walk in you_." It was because He purposed to cleanse wholly, body and soul and spirit, that He came, taking the body, soul, and spirit of a man, and that He will come again, taking your body, soul, and spirit as His dwelling-place.

III.

The birth and childhood of Jesus were the beginning of His great sacrifice, as well as the preparation for it. The spirit of Bethlehem and the spirit of Calvary are one. He was born for others that He might die for others. The mystery of God in the Babe was the beginning of the mystery of God on the cross. The one was a part of the other. If they had not "laid Him in a manger" for us, they could never have laid Him in the tomb, that He might "taste death for every man." And it was because "He grew, and waxed strong in spirit, and increased in wisdom, and the grace

of God was upon Him" in those early years, that He was able afterwards to tread the winepress alone, to work out a perfect example of manhood, to wrestle with Death and the Grave, and finally to stand forth for us as the great Victorious One, conqueror of all our foes.

And is it not in this same fashion and for this same purpose that Christ is to be formed in us? "_He grew_" Progress is the law of happiness, the law of holiness, the law of life. To stand still is to die. It was not enough for the fulfilment of His great mission that He should be born, that He should live--He must grow.

Let us take that lesson to our hearts, in this superficial, painted, rushing generation. Let us beware of resting our hope to satisfy the eternal claims of God upon some great event in our spiritual history of long ago. It is not enough to have been converted. It is not enough to have had the adoption of the Father. It is not enough to have entered the spiritual family of Christ. It is not enough that even Jesus revealed Himself in us. Thousands of false hopes are built on these past events, which, divinely wrought as they may have been, have ceased to possess any vital connexion with the life and character of to-day. Such a religion is a religion of memory, destined to be turned in the presence of the Throne to unmixed remorse.

But how, and in what, are we to grow? In manner and in substance like our Lord. Jesus grew in strength and stature, in wisdom and in grace--the grace of God was upon Him.

In spiritual strength and stature; that is, from the timid babe to the bold and valiant soldier; in the power to do the things we ought to do, in the ability to obey the inward voice. It is by the exercise of the muscles and tendons of the babe that the bodily frame is fitted for the rush and struggle of life. It is by the A B C of the infant class that the mind is fitted to comprehend and appreciate the duties and obligations of political, social, physical, and family relationships. It is by the humble wail of the penitent, and the daily acts of loving help, that the soul learns to soar on eagles' wings, and shout the truth that God is gracious, and to brave difficulty and danger in His service. They go from strength to strength. Are you so journeying?

In wisdom. Wisdom is a thing of the heart more than of the brain, and the wisdom of God is really a revelation of the love of God. To be "wise unto salvation" is to learn the lesson of love. To be "wise to win souls" is first to love souls. To feel that "it is more blessed to give than to receive," is the fruit of love. How different this from the calculating wisdom of this world!

Dear comrade and friend, are you taking care that the Divine Life in you shall grow after this Christ-like fashion? When I hear Christian people say: "Oh, I have so little love, so little faith, so little joy," I generally find that it is so because they stifle and quench the blessed yearnings of the Divine Spirit to seek the souls of others; because they leave unanswered the urgings and promptings of duty which God in their conscience is demanding; because they neglect prayer, and self-denial, and

heart-searching, and the Word of God; because, in short, they starve the Child. What wonder if love and faith are feeble, and joy is like to die!

"And the grace of God was upon Him." Here was the promise of that entire sacrifice for men which culminated when a man cried out to Him on the cross: "_He saved others; Himself He cannot save_." It is ever thus that God repeats Himself. When we are ready to be offered up for the blessing and saving of others, then grace will come upon us for the struggle as it came upon Him. When Christ formed in us finds free course for all His mind and all His passion; when our eyes are opened to the great purposes of His life in the salvation of the whole world; and when we hear, through Him, the cry of those for whom He was born, and for whom He died, God will pour out on us grace to send us forth--grace sufficient, grace abundant, grace triumphant. Have you come to this? Can you say He is thus dwelling in you, and working in you, to will and to do of His good pleasure?

Do not turn away with the paralysing fear that it cannot be; that the life of Jesus can never be lived out again in flesh and blood. Remember, He is "_the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever_." All He was in Bethlehem, to Mary and Joseph; all He was to His work-mates at Nazareth; all He was in the wilderness, fighting with fiends, in the deserts feeding the hungry, or among the multitude--healing the sick, blessing the little children, casting out devils, and preaching the Kingdom; all He was in Bethany, weeping over Lazarus, and crying, "Lazarus, come forth"; in the garden of His agony, in the darkness of His cross, in the hour of His Resurrection, all this--all--all--all--He is to-day. _He belongs to the everlasting Now_. All He was to the martyrs who died for His Name, all He has been to our fathers, He is to us, and will be to our children, for with Him is no variableness nor shadow of turning. Yes! This unchanging Christ "_is in us, except we be reprobate_," the Life and Image of God, and the Hope of Glory.

V.

The Secret of His Rule.

"_For we have not an High Priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin_."--Heb. iv. 15.

We hail the Christmas season as the anniversary of our King's birth. Our eyes turn to the manger, and our hearts to Mary, for a thousand and one reasons, but the chiefest is that Jesus was born in Bethlehem as the Divine Son and the Royal Branch.

Although we know that many shadows darken the way of the Cross, and that it is roughened by many thorns and agonies, many dark descents and weary

struggles, we have always the assurance that at the end, and at the right time, there will be a crown and a throne.

Standing at the manger, and looking over the hills of hatred and suffering, we can already see the great white Throne. From the wilderness of the Temptation we can even catch a glimpse of the marriage supper of the Lamb. In the darkness around the cross, we have visions of a great multitude, which no man can number, casting their crowns at the feet of the Crucified. Written large on all the life of Jesus there is, in fact, the witness that He will triumph. We know and feel it. It is revealed even when it is not stated. It is assured even when not promised.

But I do not think that it is by virtue of this that Jesus Christ has exerted His greatest influence on the hearts of men. To be a king, to be in the royal line, is a great thing; and to be the Divine King is infinitely greater. To be a king, however, is one thing; to be a ruler is often quite another. The right descent, the royal birth, the due recognition, the ultimate taking possession of the throne, are enough to make the king, but far from enough to make the ruler.

Principles, of course, there are, very important and far-reaching, involved in any sort of kingship. We have all heard of "the divine right of kings." We all see--even if we cannot understand it--the love of peoples for a king. Even when the heads of states are called by some other name than king, the fact of kingship is still there. All this denotes the working of great principles, having their roots in the deepest feelings of the human race. But I repeat, that to rule is quite another thing than to be a king. History abounds with examples of great monarchs who have not ruled, and of true rulers who have had no royal blood and no kingly throne.

And just as there are facts in human experience which have made kings necessary and possible, so are there principles by which alone it is possible to rule.

The kingship and rule of Jesus Christ our Lord was no exception. It is not my purpose to dwell here on the great and unchanging demands of the human soul which make His sovereignty a necessity of our well-being alike as citizens, and as individuals of His world. Unless the Lord is King, all must be confusion, dissonance, and disaster. The supreme fact in human life after all is, that our God is "the creator, preserver, and governor of all things."

But what of His rule? There another principle comes into operation. On what is His rule based? By what agency does He extend His authority until it becomes control?

And here it must be remembered that He aspires to rule men's hearts. His kingdom is moral and spiritual first, and then physical and material. That is why it will endure for ever. It is in the region of motive and affection, of reason and emotion, of preference and choice, that He designs to be Ruler. It is to reign in men's hearts that Christ laid aside His heavenly crown and throne. If He cannot be a Ruler there, then He will

account little of His kingship in the skies.

By what, then, does He rule? _Is it not by His compassion_? Has not that been the chief influence which has drawn men to Him, and held them in His service?

Just think for a moment of one or two commonplace facts.

I.

The Children.

At least three-fourths of the human family are always little children. To what does He owe the influence He exercises in the minds and hearts of multitudes of these little ones? His exalted throne? His royal lineage? His majesty? No; I think not to these, but to the revelation of His pity, His sympathy, His patience, His sweet, forgiving grace, His tender compassion as a Saviour. To them He is the "Friend above all others"--the Lowly One, the "Gentle Jesus, meek and mild." Viewing Him thus, they confess to Him in sin, they fly to Him in sorrow.

His creative power, His everlasting habitations, His throne of unapproachable glory, His glorious and terrible judgments, are little more to the children than words and phrases--may I not say?--at best but the "trappings" of His person. They solemnise, they inspire, perhaps, with reverent fear; but they do not, they could not, secure that true ascendancy over the nature of the child by which alone there can be real control and true rulership.

II.

The Sorrowful.

Sorrow is the most common of all human experiences. There are no homes without it, and there are very few hearts which have not tasted of its cup. Earth is a vale of tears. Sooner or later, all men suffer. "Man is born unto trouble, as the sparks fly upward," and to millions of men Christ has appeared in their affliction and taken possession of their lives.

What was the secret of His influence over them? Was it His dominion from sea to sea? Was it even His victory over death and His kingly conquest of the grave? Was it His sovereign throne of power? No, I do not think it was thus He won them; but as "the Man of Sorrows and acquainted with grief," who learned obedience by the things that He suffered, and who could compassionate with them in their sorrows also.

It is one of the commonplaces of life that people associated in great suffering and trials obtain great influence with each other. And it is so here. Let the human heart once realise that in its deepest depths of sorrow it may have for helper One who has been deeper still; and it is in the nature of things that it should fly to that One for succour, for sympathy, for strength. And when that One out of His riches gives of His own might, and of His own sweet, unfathomed consolations, then His government is assured, His rule is established.

III.

The Tempted.

Did I say that sorrow was the commonest of all human experiences? Ought I not to have said temptation? We all know the reality of temptation: its biting wounds, its power to assail, to harass, to irritate, to worry; its appeals to the senses, the animal in us; its assault of our confidence; its liberty to terrorise and to torment.

Yes, every man is tempted. How shall he withstand temptation? What is it in Jesus Christ that calls the sorely-tempted one to Him? Is it His divine purity, His kingly holiness, His might as the supreme Sovereign whose law is good? No; I think that only those who have learned to love Him will love His law. Is it not rather the wonderful pity of Him of whom it is written, "We have a great High Priest, . . . touched with the feeling of our infirmities, . . . in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin"? Touched with the feeling of our infirmities. There is the attraction of a supreme compassion for the tempted. There is the means by which the King of Righteousness becomes also the Ruler over tempted and sinful men.

I can add but one other word now.

If it is only by His continual compassion that our Master obtains and maintains His rule, will it not be by a similar means that we may hope to bless and influence the souls of men? Yes; that has been already the great lesson of The Salvation Army. It is founded on sympathy, on a universal compassion.

The moment we turn away from that, and rely merely on our system, or on methods, or our teaching, we cease just in that proportion to be true Salvationists. We aspire to rule men's hearts. We care nothing for the position of a church or sect; we care everything for a real control over the souls and conduct of living men and women, that we may lead them to God and use them for His glory. It is by tenderness we shall win it. By seeking them in their sorrows and sins; by making them feel our true heart-hunger over them, our true love, our entire union with the Christ in His compassion for them.

And the same principle will hold good in training those whom we have

already won. This was, no doubt, the secret of Paul's great influence with his people. His whole heart was theirs; and they knew it. "We were gentle among you," he says, "even as a nurse cherisheth her children; so, being affectionately desirous of you, we were willing to have imparted unto you, not the Gospel of God only, but also our own souls, because ye were dear unto us."

We know his courage, his lofty standard, his splendid impatience of shams, his tenacity of the truth, his contempt for danger, his daring unto death; and yet he can say of himself that, with it all, he was gentle among them as a nurse cherishing her children--ready to give up his very soul for them.

Ah, Colonel, Captain, Sergeant, leaders all, whatever name you bear, do you want to lead and rule the people whom God has given you as a charge? Then here is the true secret of power--be for ever pouring out your heart's deepest, tenderest love for them, and most of all for the weak and the most unworthy and sinful amongst them. Do this, and you will not merely be walking after Paul--you will be walking with Christ.

VI.

A Neglected Saviour.

"And He came and found them asleep again: for their eyes were heavy."--Matt. xxvi. 43.

I.

There are few more instructive or more touching things in the life of our Lord Jesus Christ than His evident appreciation of human sympathy. Whether we observe Him at the marriage feast, or in the fishing-boat, or on the Mount of Olives, or when spending a time apart with His disciples, or in the Garden of His Agony, this appreciation expresses itself quite naturally and consistently. The Son of Man, though one with the Father, yet found joy and comfort in the society of men. What we call "companionship" had real charms for Him. It helped to draw Him out to the hungerings and thirstings of men; it assisted in revealing to Him the facts of human sin, and the needs of the human soul. Thus it enabled Him more perfectly to be our living example, as well as the propitiation for our sins.

And as He valued the consolations arising from human friendship and love, so also He had to suffer the loss of them, in order that He might carry out His great work for God and man. For His work's sake, His soul was

required to pass through the agony of losing every human consolation. Many were His moments of bitterness. The world proved itself to be, what it still remains, a cold-hearted affair; His own, to whom He came, received Him not. But the bitterest sorrow which can come to a leader was added to His cup, when He witnessed the failure of His trusted disciples in the hour of trial, and when He realised that their unfaithfulness was towards Himself as a person, as well as to the great mission to which He had consecrated both Himself and them.

Now, when we are called upon to suffer in the same way, may we not be brought into very intimate fellowship with Jesus? Shall we complain because the servant is not above his Lord? Shall we doubt His love, and care, and power, because He does not always shield us from that same blast of loneliness which swept over His own soul in the Garden, when for the second, aye, and for the third time, He found His three disciples asleep?

II.

Sad as it is, it is none the less certain that we, too, must expect some in whom we have trusted to fail us in that hour when we most need them, be it the hour of supreme temptation, or of great opportunity, or of deep sorrow for the Kingdom's sake. It was precisely this which happened to our Lord. It is bad to be so dependent on men--even on the most beautiful, or most perfect souls--that we cannot fight on without them. The dependence of love must work hand in hand with the independence of faith, if we are to take our share in this trial of our Master and to profit by it.

Those who thus fail us will, perchance, be the very persons upon whom we have most reason to rely, and whom in some sore trial of our faith or moment of danger, we have specially called upon for defence and prayer, for strength and sympathy, as did our Lord in the case of these disciples. Until now, Peter had been a valiant, not to say, reckless follower of Jesus; while all, John especially, had been well beloved and tenderly watched over by Him. And yet this woeful sleep deadens them to it all. Even for one short hour they cannot watch with Him.

III.

But such failure on the part of those who were loved and trusted will add immensely to the burden of the battle that we are fighting for God and the souls of men. It did so even to Jesus. Nothing more pathetic, more deeply heart-moving, is written in all God's Book, than this simple picture of the Man of Sorrows--struggling for the life of the human race, absolutely bereft of human aid--coming in the midst of His dark conflict to seek the touch of sympathy, a hand-grasp, a word, a look from those His well-loved followers, only to find them asleep in the gloom. Retracing His steps, He casts Himself on the ground, and cries, "My Father, if it be possible, let

this cup pass from Me." Am I wrong in saying that it was an added ingredient of bitterness in that cup to find that these, His trusted ones, could only sleep, while He must go forward to suffer?

But their failure did not stop Him. No, not for one moment. There was agony in His heart, there were death shadows around Him, and bloody sweat upon His brow, but He did not waver. He went right on to finish the work He had promised to do. Gladly would He have had them with Him; steadfastly He goes forward without them! Here also is a lesson for you and for me. _The work is more than the worker_. And in times when we must lose, for our work's sake, that which we count dearer to us than our lives, when the iron of disappointed love enters our souls, as it entered His, we must follow Him, and go forward, steadfastly forward.

IV.

And after all, the failure of the disciples was very human. Their eyes were heavy. They were weary and sore tired. This, too, is typical of many of the losses we Salvationists are called upon to suffer. Some on whom we have relied and trusted grow weary in well-doing. The strain is so great! The tax on brain and heart and hand is so constant! Life becomes so burdened with watchings and prayings and sufferings for and with others, that there is little, if any, time or strength left for oneself! And so they cannot keep up, but seek rest and quiet for themselves elsewhere. They are heavy, and no longer feel the need to watch with us.

Dear comrade, in your like trial do not doubt that the Lord Jesus is with you. Suffering of this kind will help to liken you to Him--it is a very real bearing of the Cross of Christ. Pitiful followers of Him should we be, if we wished to have only joy when He had only suffering.

V.

But the disciples' strange failure did not call forth one word of bitterness from our Lord's lips. A gentle reproach was certainly implied in the words, "Could ye not watch with Me one hour?" but no shade of personal displeasure expressed itself, much as the occasion might seem to warrant it. No! Jesus knew the failures begotten of human weakness, as well as the horror of human sin. And so He made allowances, and was as patient with those who left Him, as He was tender to those who were steadfast. He loved them both.

Go thou, and do likewise. In your home; in your family circle; in your Corps; in your office; in your work, be it what it may; when men fail and forsake your Lord; even if all disappoint and desert you, _you must love them still_. Be faithful with them; but, above all, be steadfast in your own purpose, and devote all your zeal and strength to finish the work

that God has given you to do. In short, go forward without them; but let your words, and thoughts, and prayers for them be like your Master's.

And Jesus utters no word of complaint about this failure. The silence all through that great anguish is indeed very wonderful. Abandoned by man, He abandoned Himself all the more earnestly to His work for men without a murmur. And abandoned by God--as for a little time it seemed--He all the more completely abandoned Himself to God. To have fellowship with Him, you and I will have to walk the same path, and mind the same rule.

When friends, or followers, or comrades trample upon the solemn covenants made alike to us and to God, and forsake, and leave us to finish our work and tread our winepress alone, let there be no moaning because of the pain it inflicts. When those upon whom we had a right--right by reason of natural law, or right by reason of the obligations and precious vows of friendship, or right on the ground of spiritual indebtedness--when those, I say, upon whom we had a right to depend fail us, let there be no complaining of their treatment because it is painful to us. Let there be no filling of the earth with laments and wailings, no accusing of our accusers, no reviling of those who revile us. Let us be silent in the patience of Jesus and in the strength of His love, and let His way of meeting the loneliness of desertion be our way--let us pray.

But all the same, that sleep, that failure to respond to the personal claim of Jesus, was a sure forerunner of the cowardly flight, and the deadly denial which followed it. The seeds of Peter's lies and curses were sown in the selfishness and slumber of the garden; they came to maturity in the kitchen of the judgment hall. Poor Peter! How many hours of bitter self-reproach would you have been spared, had you but held out during that one brief hour of your watch in Gethsemane! How differently we could have regarded your poor wobbling nature! How differently, too, your Lord's great trial would have come to Him! How different might have been the history of mankind!

VI.

The method of love which Jesus adopted towards the forsakers received the sanction of success, _for they all came back_. In spite of their shame and their fears, they returned to their allegiance, with, I think, much more than their old faith and love. Judas was the only exception, and even he sought a place of repentance, and, but for his horrid league with the jealous and cruel religionists, would, I think, have found one.

You see the lesson? If you go on with your work for God, and finish it, paying no heed to those who, having put their hand to the plough, look back; and if, in spite of your sorrow, you will struggle steadily forward in the face of the coldness and carelessness of those between whom and you there was once the tenderest love, God will not only carry you through your appointed labour for the world, but He will restore many of those others to their allegiance to Him and His.

Will they ever be quite the same? Will they not have lost something? Yes, they will indeed have lost; but, if they come back, in reality they will gain more. The new union will be more divine than the former one. They will not merely

. . . rise on stepping stones
Of their dead selves to higher things;

but the beauty, and excellence, and glory of love, the exceeding profitableness of enduring grace, and the sweet aroma of faithfulness, will be the more clearly manifest to the sons of men by reason of the weakness and breakableness of the human vessel.

Let us, then, press forward, without one backward glance, until we finish our work. Let us thank God for those who are faithful; let us love and pray for those who fail, expecting to see them restored, healed, and purified.

VII.

Windows in Calvary.

"_And they crucified Him . . . And sitting down they watched Him there_"--MATT, xxvii. 35, 36.

Passing words spoken in times of deep emotion often reveal human character more vividly than a lifetime of talk under ordinary circumstances. Conduct which at other times is of the most trifling significance, reveals in the hour of fiery trial, the very inwards of the soul, even making manifest that which has been hidden, perhaps, for a generation. Thus, while watching a man with the opportunity and the temptation to deceive or oppress those who are in his power, you may see into the very thoughts of his heart; you may learn what he really is. Or you may measure the depths of a mother's love in observing her when, after violating every principle she has valued and lived for, her prodigal boy comes to ask her to take him in once more.

In the same way, words spoken by the dying are often like windows suddenly uncovered, through which one may catch a glimpse of the ruling passion of life, in the light of which their life-witness and life-labour alike look different. It is this fact which often gives the dying hour of the meanest, importance as well as solemnity. The veriest trifler that ever trifled through this vale of tears has, in that last solemn hour something to teach of the secrets of mortality.

And this revelation of the real facts of human experience is of the highest value to the world. It is one of God's witnesses to truth, _that

truth will out_. Sooner or later, selfishness and sin will
appear in their naked deformity, to horrify those who behold them;
and in the end, justice and truth and love are certain to be made manifest
in their natural beauty, to convince and to charm and to attract their
beholders.

It is not only one of the uses of trial to bring this about, but it is one
of the means by which God converts to His own high purposes, the miseries
and sorrows the Devil has brought in. The one burns the martyrs; the other
brings out of that cruel and frightful wrong the glorious testimony which
is the very seed of His Church. The one casts us into fiery dispensations
of suffering and loss; the other takes these moments of human anguish and
desolation, and makes of them open windows through which a doubting or
scoffing world may see what love can do. Thus He makes us to triumph in
the midst of our foes, while working in us a likeness to Himself, the
All-patient and All-perfect God.

Nor is it the good and true alone who are thus made object-lessons to
others, and to themselves, by these ordeals of pain. By them, many a bad
man also is forced to appear bad to himself. Many a hypocrite, anxious
about the opinions and the traditions of men, is at last stripped of his
lies to see himself the wretched fraud he really is. Many a
heart-backslider, whose religion has long ceased to be anything but a
memory, awakes to the shame of it and to the danger; and often, thank God,
awakes in time.

Now, the words of the dying Christ on His cross are, in the same way, a
true and wonderful revelation of His character and His spirit. As it is
only by the light of the sun that we see the sun, so it is by Jesus that
Jesus is best revealed. Never one spake like He spake; and yet in this
respect, so real was His humanity, He spake like us all--He spake out what
was in Him. _The Truth_ must, above all, and before all, make
manifest what is true of Himself.

To whom, then, did our Lord speak on the tree, and what spake He? What
special thoughts and beauties of His soul do His words reveal?

Jesus, so far as His words have been recorded for us, spoke from the cross
to Mary His mother, to one of the thieves who was crucified with Him, to
God His Father, and to Himself.

I.

His Words to Mary.

"_When Jesus therefore saw His mother, and the disciple standing by,
whom He loved, He saith unto His mother, Woman, behold thy son! Then
saith He to the disciple, Behold thy mother!_"

The position of Mary in those last hours was peculiarly grievous. She had
lived to see the breaking down of every hope that a mother's heart could

cherish for her son. Standing there amidst that mob of relentless enemies, and watching Jesus, forsaken by God and man in His mortal agony, her present sorrow, great as it was, was crowned by the memory of the holy and happy anticipations of His birth, and the maiden exultations of her soul when the angels foretold that her Son should be the Saviour of His people and their King. How cruelly different the reality had turned out! How far, how very far away, would seem to her the quiet days in Nazareth, the rapture of her Son's first innocent embraces, and the evening communions with Him as He grew in years! What tender memories the sight of those dear bleeding feet, those outstretched, wounded hands, would recall to that mother's heart! Yes, Mary on Calvary is to me a world-picture of desolate, withering, and helpless grief--of pain increased by love, and of love intensified by pain!

And Jesus in His great agony--the Man of Sorrows come at last to the winepress that His heart might be broken in treading it alone; come to the hour of His travail; come to the supreme agony of the sin-offering; face to face with the wrath of the Judge, blackness and tempest and anguish blotting out for the moment even the face of the Father--forsaken at last --FORSAKEN--Jesus, in this depth of midnight darkness sees her standing by the cross. Bless Him, Oh, ye that weep and mourn in this vale of tears! Bless Him for ever! His eyes are eyes for the sorrowful. _He sees them_. He has tears to shed with them. He is touched with the same feelings and moved by the same griefs. He sees Mary, and speaks to her, and in a word gives her to John, and John to her, for mutual care and love. It was as though He said, "Mother, you bare Me; you watched and suffered for Me, and in this redeeming agony of My love, I remember your anguish, and I take you for ever under My care, and I name you Mine."

Surely, there never was sorrow like unto His sorrow, and yet in its darkest crisis He has eyes and heart for this one other's sorrow. Far from Him, as the east from the west, is any of that selfish thought and selfish seclusion which grief and pain so often work in the unsanctified heart, aye, and in the best of us. What a lesson of practical love it is! What a message--especially to those who are called to suffer with Him for the souls of men--comes streaming from those words spoken to Mary. The burden of the people's needs, the care of the Church, the awful responsibility of ministering to souls--these things, sacred as they may be, cannot excuse us in neglecting the hungry hearts of our own flesh and blood, or in forgetting the claims of those of our own household.

Dear friend and comrade, in _your_ sorrow, in your sore trial of faith, in _your_ Calvary, take to your heart this revelation of the heart of the Son of Man, and be careful of the solitary and heart-bleeding ones near you, no matter how humble and how unworthy they may seem.

II.

His Words to the Thief.

"_And Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, To-day shall thou be with Me in Paradise_."

The crucifixion of the two robbers with Jesus was a sort of topstone of obloquy and disgrace contrived by His murderers with the double object of further humiliating Him in the eyes of the people, and of adding poignancy to His own agony. The vulgarity and shamefulness of it were the last touch of their contempt, and the last stroke of His humiliation. There was a kind of devilish ingenuity in this circumstantial way of branding Him as a malefactor. And yet in the presence of this extremity of human wickedness and cruelty, Jesus found an opportunity of working a wondrous work of God; a work which reveals Him as the Saviour, strong to save, both by His infinite mercy and by His infinite confidence in the efficacy of His own sacrifice.

"_To-day shalt thou be with Me in Paradise_." Eyes and heart for the _sorrowful_ He had, as we see; and now ears, and hope nigh at hand, for the _sinful_. No word of resentment; no sense of distance or separation between the spotlessness and perfection of His character and this poor lonely convict--but a strange and wonderful nearness, now and to come. "_With Me_," He says--"_With Me in Paradise_." Ah! this is the secret of much in the life of the Son of God--this intimate, constant, conscious nearness to sinners and to sin! He had sounded the depth of evil, and, knowing it, He pitied, with an infinite compassion, its victims; He got as near as He could to them in their misery, and died to save them from it.

That heart-nearness to the thief had nothing to do with the nearness of the crosses. Every one knows what a gulf may be between people who are very near together--father and son--husband and wife! No, it was the nearness of a heart deliberately trained to seek it; a heart delighting in mercy, and deliberately surrendering all other delights for it; hungering and thirsting for the love of the lost and ruined.

The hart panteth after the waters,
The dying for life that departs,
The Lord in His glory for sinners
For the love of rebellious hearts.

And so He is quite ready, at once, to share His heaven with this poor defiled creature, the first trophy of the cross. Again--what a lesson of love!--how different, all this, from the common inclination to shrink away from contact and intercourse with the vile! Oh, shame, that there can ever have been such a shrinking in our poor guilty hearts! The servant is not above his Lord. He came to sinners. Let us go to them with Him!

III.

His Words to the Father.

"_Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do_"

This prayer for His murderers is a revelation of the wonderful nearness and capacity of love. The Saviour passes from pole to pole of human ken, to find a ground on which He can plead for the forgiveness of those cruel and wicked men; and He finds it in their ignorance of the stupendousness of their sin against Him. It seems as though He chooses to remain in ignorance of what they did know, and to dwell only on what they did not. "They know not what they do!"

It was ever so with Him! He has no pleasure in iniquity. Wrong-doers are so precious to Him that He never will magnify or exaggerate their wrong--no, not a hair's breadth. He will not dwell on it--no, not a moment, except to plead some reasonable ground for its pardon, such as this--the ignorance of the wrong-doer, or the rich efficacy of His sacrifice. He will only name sin to the Father, in order that He may confess it for the sinner, and intercede for mercy and for grace.

This is the old and ever new way of dealing with injuries, especially "personal injuries." "_Is it yours_? Are you seeking thus after reasons for making the wrong done to you appear pardonable? Is your first response to an affront or insult or slander, or to some still greater wrong, to pray the Father for those whom you believe to be injuring you, that His gracious gift of forgiveness may come upon them?"

That is the principle of Calvary. That is the spirit, the mind of Christ. That is the way in which

He won the meed and crown:
Trode all His foes beneath His feet,
By being trodden down.

"_Father, into Thy hands I commend My spirit_"

Death has always been held to afford a final test of faith, and here the human soul of Jesus passed through that mortal struggle which awaits us all when heart and flesh shall fail. "_Into Thy hands_"--that is enough. As He passes the threshold of the unknown--goes as we must--into the Valley of the Shadow, faith springs forth and exclaims, "Into Thy hands." All shall be well. In this confidence I have laboured; in this confidence I die; in this confidence I shall live before Thee.

IV.

"_To Himself_"

"_It is finished_"!

Thus in His last, ever-wonderful words Jesus pronounces Himself the sentence of His own heart upon His own work. "_It is completed_" Every

barrier is broken down, every battle is fought, every hellish dart has flown, every wilderness is past, every drop of the cup of anguish has been drunk up, and, with a note of victorious confidence, He cries out, "It is finished!" Looking back from the cross on all His life in the light of these words, we see how He regarded it as an opportunity for accomplishing a great duty, and for the fulfilment of a mission. Now, He says, "The duty is done--the mission is fulfilled; the work is finished!" Truly, it is a lofty, a noble, yea, a godlike view of life!

Is it ours? Death will come to us. "The living know that they shall die." The waters will overflow, and the foundations will be broken up, and every precious thing will grow dim, and our life, also, will have passed. We shall then have to say of something, "_It is finished_" It will be too late to alter it. "There is no man that hath power in the day of death."

What, then, shall it be that is finished? A life of selfish ease, or a life of following the Son of Man? A life of sinful gratification, of careful thought of ourselves, unprofitable from beginning to end, or a life of generous devotion to the things which are immortal in the honour of God and the salvation of men?

VIII.

The Burial of Jesus.

Good Friday Fragments.

"_And after this Joseph of Arimathoea, being a disciple of Jesus, but secretly for fear of the Jews, besought Pilate that he might take away the body of Jesus: and Pilate gave him leave. He came therefore, and took the body of Jesus. And there came also Nicodemus, which at the first came to Jesus by night, and brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about an hundred pound weight. Then took they the body of Jesus, and wound it in linen clothes with the spices, as the manner of the Jews is to bury. Now in the place where He was crucified there was a garden; and in the garden a new sepulchre, wherein was never man yet laid. There laid they Jesus therefore, because of the Jews' preparation day; for the sepulchre was nigh at hand_"--John xix. 38-42.

Death has many voices. This death and burial speak aloud in tones of triumph. It as a death that made an end of death, and a burial that buried the grave. And yet it was also a very humble and painful and sad affair. We must not forget the humiliation and poverty and shame written on every circumstance any more than the victory, if we would learn by it all that God designed to teach.

I

"_He tasted Death_"

To many, even among those who have been freed from guilty fear, mortality itself still has terrors. By Divine grace they can lift up their hearts in sure and certain hope of a glorious resurrection, and yet they shrink with painful apprehension at the thought of the change which alone can make that resurrection possible. There is probably no instinct of the whole human family more frequently in evidence than this repulsion for the grave. Death is such an uncouth and hideous thing.

Nothing but bones

The sad effect of sadder groans;

Its mouth is open, but it cannot sing.

All its outward circumstances help to repel us--the shroud, the coffin, the grave, the silent shadows, the still more silent worms, the final nothingness. The mental conditions, too, generally common to the last acts of life, tend to intensify the feeling: the separation from much that we love, the sense of unfinished work, the appreciation of grief which death most usually brings to others: the reality of disappointed hopes, the feeling that heart and flesh fail, and that we can do no more--all these tend to make it in very truth the great valley of the dark shadow.

To many, even among the chosen spirits of the household of faith, approaching death also starts the great "_Why_" of unbelief. For, in truth, the death of some is a mystery. It is better that we should say so, and that they should say so, rather than that we should profess to be able to account for what, as is only too evident, we do not understand. In confronting death this mystery is often the great bitterness in the cup. To die when so young! To die when so much needed! To die so soon after really beginning to live! To die in the presence of so great a task! Oh, why should it be? How much of gloom and shadow has come down on hearts and households I have known, from the persistency of that "Why?" intensifying every repulsion for the hideous visitor, adding to every other the greatest of all his terrors--_doubt_.

Now, in the presence of such doubts--or perhaps I ought rather to call them questionings and shrinkings--has not this vision of the dead body of our Lord something in it to charm away our fears? Does it not say to us: "I have passed on before; I that speak in righteousness, Mighty to save. I have trodden the winepress alone. At My girdle hang the keys of life and death; I, even I, was dead; yes, really, cruelly dead; but I am alive for evermore"?

He tasted death. The king of terrors was out to meet Him. The long shadows of the gloomy valley really closed Him round, and He crossed over the chilly stream just as you and I must cross it--all alone. Nothing was wanting which could invest the scene, the hour, the circumstances with

horror and repulsion. There was pain, bodily pain; there was mental anguish; there was the howling mob, the horrid contempt for Him as for a malefactor; the lost disciples and shattered hopes; the reviling thief; the mystery of the Father's clouded face; the final sinking down; the letting go of life; the last physical struggle--when He gave up the ghost and died.

Yes. He passed this same way before you. He wore a shroud. He lay in a grave. The last resting-place is henceforth for us fragrant with immortality. The very horrors, and shadows, and mysteries of the death-chamber have become signs that death is vanquished. The tomb is but the porch of a temple in which we shall surely stand, the doorway to the place of an abiding rest. "In My Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you."

Living or dying--but especially when dying--we have a right to cry with Stephen, the first to witness for Christ in this horror of death, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." To Him we commit all. He passed this way before with a worn and bruised body, in weakness and contempt, with dyed garments and red in His apparel, and on Him we dare to cast ourselves--on Him and Him alone. On His merits, on His blood, on His body, dead and buried for us. He will be with us even to the end--_He has passed this way before us_.

II.

"_A Saviour of Death unto Death._"

A celebrated Roman Emperor who had in the very height of his power embarked on a campaign for the extermination, with all manner of cruelties, of the followers of Jesus Christ, spoke one day to a Christian, asking him in tones of lofty contempt and derision:--

"What, then, is the Galilean doing now?"

"_The Galilean_," replied the Christian, "_is making a coffin!_"

In a few years the great Emperor and the vast power he represented were both in that coffin!

Since his day, how many other persecutors have also journeyed surely to it! How many infidels--nay, how many systems of infidelity, have passed on to dust and oblivion in that same casket! What multitudes of doubters--of ungodly, unclean, unregenerate--have been laid within its ever-widening bands! What vast unions of darkness, hatred, and cruelty, under the leadership of the great and the mighty, have been broken to pieces beside that coffin! How much that seemed for a time proud and rich and great in this poor world's esteem, has at last passed into it, and disappeared for ever! Yes, the martyr of long ago, on the blood-besmeared stones of persecuting Rome, was right, the Galilean Saviour and King not only made a Cross, but He made, and He goes on making, a coffin!

Will you not have His Cross? Is there no appeal to you to-day from that hill side, without the city wall? Does it not speak to you of the power, the sweetness and nobleness of a life of service, of sacrifice for others, of toil for His world. Has it no message for you of victory over sin and death, of life from the dead--life, abundant life, in the Blood of the Son of Man! Believe me, unless you accept His Cross, He will prepare for you a coffin. "The wages of sin is death." It matters not how noble your aspirations, how lofty your ideals of life and conduct, how faithful your labour to raise the standard of your own life--unless you accept the Cross, all must go into the grave. Your highest aims, together with your lowest, your most cherished conceptions, your most deeply-loved ambitions, all must be entombed. "Whosoever shall fall on this stone shall be broken, but on whomsoever it shall fall it will grind him to powder."

If His death-sacrifice be not a savour of life unto life it must be a savour of death unto death. This is the single alternative. Jesus Christ in life and death is working in you, in us all, toward one of these ends--either by love and tears and the overflowing fountain of His passion to gather us into the union of eternal life with Him and with the Father; or to entomb us--all that we have and all that we are--in the death and oblivion of the grave He has prepared.

III.

"And He was Buried."

For a little time they lost Him. The grave opened her gloomy portals; they laid Him down, and the gates were closed--for a little time. And yet He was just as really there, as really alive for evermore, as really theirs and ours, as really a victor--nay, a thousand times more so, than if He had never bowed Himself under the yoke of Nature. He was gone on before, just a little while, that was all.

Is not that the lesson of His burial for every one who sorrows for the loss of loved ones called up higher? Are they not buried with Him? Are they not gone on before? Are they not ours still? Are we not theirs as really as ever? He passed through that brief path of darkness and death out into the everlasting light of the Resurrection Glory. Do you think, then, that He will leave them behind? The grave could not contain Him. Do you think it has strength to hold them? You cannot think of Him as lying long in the garden of Joseph of Arimathaea; why, then, should you think of your dear ones as in the chilly clay of that poor garden in which you laid them? No--no! they are alive--alive for evermore; because He lives, they live also.

Yes! this was the meaning of that strange funeral of His--this was at least one reason why they buried Him. It was that He might hold a flaming torch of comfort at every burial of His people to the end of time. Sorrow

not, then, as those that have no hope. He is hope. Your lost ones, perhaps, were strongly rooted in your affection, and your heart was torn when they were plucked up. You cried aloud with the Prophet: "Woe is me, for my hurt! my wound is grievous. But I said, Truly this is a grief, and I must bear it; my tabernacle is spoiled, and all my cords are broken." Ah, but remember He was buried also. He knows about the way. He was there. He has them in His keeping. They are His, and yours still. You have no more need to grieve over their burial than over His. They live, they love, they grow, they rejoice. They are blessed for evermore.

And our dear dead will meet us again, if we are faithful, in those bodies which our Lord has redeemed. That also is the witness of His burial and resurrection. The corruptible shall put on incorruption. In the twinkling of an eye shall it be done. And we shall see them in the body once more, even as His disciples saw Him. They supposed at first that they saw a spirit, but He said: No! "Behold My hands and My feet, that it is I Myself: handle Me, and see; for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see Me have!"

This blessed hope is our hope. Love is indeed stronger than death; many waters, nay, the swellings of Jordan themselves, cannot quench it! Dear ones, gone on before, we shall embrace you again; hand in hand--the very same hands--we shall greet our King:--

Together we'll stand
When escaped to the shore,
With palms in our hands
We Will praise Him the more;
We'll range the sweet plains
On the banks of the river,
And sing of Salvation
For ever and ever.

Yes--we know and love you still, because we know and love our Lord.

IX.

Conforming to Christ's Death.

"_That I may know Him . . . being made conformable unto His death_"--Phil. iii. 10.

"_Conformable unto His death_" At first sight the words are something of a surprise. "_His death?_" Has not the thought more often before us been to conform to _His life_? His death seems "too high for us"--so far off in its greatness, in its suffering, in its humiliation, in its strength, in its glorious consequences. How is it possible we should ever be conformed to such a wonder of love and power?

And yet, here is the great Apostle, in one of those beautiful and illuminating references to his own experience which always seem to bring his messages right home to us, setting forth this very conformity as the end of all his labours, and the purpose in all his struggles. "What things were gain to me," he says, "those I counted loss for Christ; yea, I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ, and be found in Him*, having . . . the righteousness which is of God by faith: that I may know Him, and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, _being made conformable unto His death_."

[Footnote *: Or, as the Revised Version has it in the margin, "not having as my righteousness that which springs from the law; but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is of God on the condition of faith: . . . becoming conformed unto His death."]

There are probably depths of thought and purpose here which I confess that I cannot hope to fathom; which in the limits of such a paper as this I cannot even suggest. Is it possible, for example, that the sorrow and suffering which fall upon those who are entirely surrendered to God and His work are, in some hidden way, sorrow and suffering for others? Is this what Paul means when he says in his letter to the Colossians: I "fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ, in my flesh, for His body's sake, which is the Church"? It may be so. This would indeed be a glorious and a wonderful "_fellowship of His sufferings_."

Or, again, consider what an entirely new light might be thrown upon God's dealings with us in afflictions and pain, if it should appear, in the world to come, that, in much which is now most mysterious and torturing to us, we had but been bearing one another's burdens! Every one knows how often love makes us long to bear grief and pain for those dear to us; every one has seen a mother suffer, in grateful silence, both bodily pain and heart-anguish, in her child's stead, preferring that the child should never know. Suppose it should turn out, hereafter, that many of the afflictions which now seem so perplexing and so grievous have really been given us to bear in order to spare and shield our loved ones, and make it easier for them--tossing on the stormy waters--to reach Home at last? Would not this add a whole world of joy to the glory which shall be revealed? And would it not transform many of the darkest stretches of our earthly journey into bright memorials of the infinite wisdom and goodness of our God?

But I pass away from matters of which we have, at best, but a gleam, to those concerning which "he that runs may read."

But if Christ upon His cross is meant for an object-lesson to His people, is it not reasonable to expect that His words spoken in those supreme moments should throw light upon that conformity to His death of which we are thinking? The words of the dying have always been received as revealing their true character. Death is the skeleton-key which opens the closed chambers of the soul, and calls forth the secret things--and in the presence of the "Death-Angel" men generally appear to be what they really

are. Our Lord and Saviour was no exception to this universal rule.

To the latest breath,
We see His ruling passion strong in death.

His dying words are filled with illuminating truth about Himself, and they throw precious light upon His death. Let us, then, tarry for a few moments before His cross, and look and listen while He speaks.

I.

"_Father, forgive them; they know not what they do_."

Men were doing the darkest deed of time. Nothing was wanting to make it hateful to God and repulsive to mankind. All the passions to which the human heart is prone, and all that the spirits of Hell can prompt, had joined forces at Calvary to finish off, in victory if possible, the black rebellion which began in Eden. Everything that is base in human nature--the hate that is in man, the beast that is in man, the fiend that is in man--was there, with hands uplifted, to slay the Lamb. The servants of the Husbandman were beating to death the beloved Son whom He had sent to seek their welfare. It was amidst the human inferno of ingratitude and hatred that these words of infinite grace and beauty fell from the lips of Love Immortal. Long nails had just pierced the torn flesh and quivering nerves of His dear hands and feet; and while He watched His murderers' awful delight in His agony, and heard their jeering shouts of triumph, He lifted up His voice and prayed for them, "_Father--forgive_."

There are thoughts that lie too deep for words. The inner light of this message may be revealed--it cannot be spoken. But one or two reflections will repay our consideration. Here was a consciousness of sin. Here was the suggestion of pardon. Here was prayer for sinners.

A _consciousness of sin--of theirs--ours--not His own. Infinite Love takes full account of sin. Boldly recognises it. Straightway refers to it as the source of men's awful acts and awful state. "_O My Father, forgive_!" On the cross of His shame, in the final grip with the mortal enemy, the dying Christ--looking away from His own sufferings, forgetful of the scorn, and curses, and blows of those around Him--is overflowing with this great thought, with this great _fact--that men's first imperative, overwhelming need, is the forgiveness of their sin.

The suggestion of pardon. He prays for it. What a transforming thought is the possibility of forgiveness! How different the vilest, the most loathsome criminal becomes in our eyes the moment we know a pardon is on the way! How different a view we get of the souls of men, bound and condemned to die, given up to selfishness and godlessness, the moment we stand by the cross of Jesus, and realise, with Him, that a pardon is possible! The meanest wretch that walks looks different from us. Even the outwardly respectable and very ordinary person who lives next door, to

whom we so seldom speak, is at once clothed with a new interest in our minds, if we really believe that there is a pardon coming for him from the King of kings.

He prays. Yes, this is the great prayer. What an example He has left us! It was not enough to die for the sinful--the ungrateful--the abominable--He must needs pray for them. Dear friend, you may have done many things for the ungodly around you--you may have preached to them, and set them also a lofty example of goodness; you may even have greatly suffered on their behalf; but I can imagine one thing still wanting: have you prayed the Father for them?

Remember, He pleaded for the worst: those very men who said, "Let His blood be on us, and on our children." He prayed even for those, and I do not doubt that He was heard. Indeed, it was, I earnestly believe, His prayer which helped on that speedy revival in Jerusalem; and among the three thousand over whom Peter and the rest rejoiced were some who had urged on and then witnessed His cruel death, and for whom His tender accents ascended to the Throne of God amid the final agony of His cross.

Dear friend, are you "becoming conformed unto His death"?

II.

"To-day shalt thou be with Me in Paradise."

"He saved others--Himself He cannot save!" Amidst the din of discordant voices, this taunt sounded out clear and loud, and fell upon the ears of a dying thief. Perhaps, as so often happens now, the Devil over-reached himself even then, and the strange words made the poor criminal think. "'Others'--'others'--He saves others--then why not me?" Presently he answered the railing unbelief of his fellow-prisoner; and then, in the simple language of faith, said to the Saviour: "Lord, remember me when Thou comest into Thy Kingdom."

Jesus Christ's reply is one of the great landmarks of the Bible. It denotes the boundary line of the long ages of dimness and indefiniteness about two things--assurance of salvation in this life, and certainty of immediate blessedness in the life to come. "To-day shalt thou be with Me in Paradise!" There is nothing like it in all the Scriptures. It is as though great gates, long closed, were suddenly thrown wide open, and we saw before our eyes that some one passed in where none had ever trodden before. The whole freedom and glory of the Gospel is illustrated at one stroke. Here is the Salvation of The Salvation Army! To-day--without any ceremonies, baptisms, communions, confirmations, without the mediation of any priest or the intervention of any sacraments--such things would indeed have been only an impertinence there--to-day, "TO-DAY shalt thou be with ME." Indeed the gates are open wide at last!

But the great lesson of the words lies rather in their revelation of

our Lord's instant accessibility to this poor felon. His nearness of heart; His complete confidence in His own wonderful power to save; His readiness of response--for it may be said that He leaps to meet this first repentant soul--are all revealed to us. But it is the fact that, amid that awful conflict, His ear was open to another's cry--and such another!--which appeals most to my own heart. With those blessed words of hope and peace in my ears, how can I ever fear that one could be so vile, so far away, so nearly lost, as to cry in vain? Nay, Lord, it cannot be.

III.

"_Woman, behold thy son_."

When Jesus had spoken these words to His mother, He addressed the disciple He had chosen, and indicated by a word that henceforth Mary was to be cared for as his own mother. Great as was the work He had in hand for the world, great as was His increasing agony, He remembered Mary. He knew the meaning of sorrow and loneliness, and He planned to afford His mother such future comfort and consolation as were for her good.

This tender care for His own is a rebuke, for all time, to those who will work for others while those they love are left uncared for; left, alas! to perish in their sins. If regrets are possible in the Kingdom of Heaven, surely those regrets will be felt most keenly in the presence of divided families. And if anything can enhance the joys of the redeemed, surely it must be that they are "families in Heaven." Who can think, even now, without a thrill of unmixed delight, of the reunions of those who for long weary years were separated here? What, then, will it be--

When the child shall greet the mother,
And the mother greet the child;
When dear families are gathered
That were scattered on the wild!

And what strength and joy it was to Mary. Looking forward to the coming victory, He knew that nothing could so possess her mother-heart with gratitude, and fill her soul with holy exultation as this--that He, the Sacrifice for sin, the Conqueror of Death, and the Redeemer of His people, was _her Son_. And so He makes it quite plain that He, the dying Saviour, was Mary's Son.

IV.

"_It is finished_."

There is a repose, a kind of majesty about this declaration which marks it out from all other human words. There is, perhaps, nothing about the death

of Jesus which is in more striking contrast with death as men generally know it than is revealed in this one saying. We are so accustomed to regrets, to confessions that this and that are, alas! _unfinished_; to those sad recitals which so often conclude with the dirge-like refrain, "it might have been," that death stands forth in a new light when it is viewed as the end of a completed journey, and the conclusion of a finished task. This is exactly the aspect of it to which our Lord refers. His work was done.

The suffering, also, was ended. Darkness had had its night of sore trial, and now the day was at hand. Trial and suffering do end. It is sometimes hard to believe it, but the end is already appointed from the beginning. It was so with the Saviour of the world; and at length the hour is come, and He raises His bruised and bleeding head for the last time, and cries in token of His triumph, "_It is finished_!"

But is there not also here a suggestion of something more? _Up to that concluding hour it was always possible for Him to draw back._ "I lay down My life for the sheep," He had said; "no man taketh it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself." His was, in the very highest and widest sense of the word, a voluntary offering, a voluntary humiliation, a voluntary death. Up to the very last, therefore, He could have stepped down from the cross, going no further toward the dark abyss. But the moment came when this would be no longer possible; when, even for Him, the sacrifice would be irrevocable--when the possibility "to save Himself" was ended, and when He became for ever "the Lamb that was slain," bearing the marks of His wounds in His eternal body. When that moment passed, He might well say, "It is finished."

Is there not something that should answer to this in the lives of many of His disciples? Is there not a point for us, also, at which we may pass over the line of uncertainty or reserve in our offering, saying for ever--it is finished? Is there not an appointed Calvary somewhere, at which we can settle the questions that have been so long unsettled, and, in the strength of God, at last declare that, as for controversy of any kind with Him, "it is finished"? Is there not at this very same cross of our dying Saviour a place where doubt and shame may perish together--crucified with Him, and finished for ever?

This would be, indeed, a blessed conformity to His death.

V.

"_I thirst_."

This is the first of the three words of Christ which relate specially to His own inner experiences, and which I have placed together for the purpose of this paper.

"_I thirst_." They gave Him vinegar to drink--or, probably, in a

moment of pity the soldiers brought Him the sour wine which they had provided for themselves. He seems to have partaken of it, although He had refused the mixture that had been before offered Him merely to deaden His pain. To bear that pain was the lofty duty set before Him, and so He would not turn aside from it one hair's breadth.

But He humbled Himself to receive what was necessary from the very hands that had been crucifying Him. He, who could have so easily commanded a whole multitude of the heavenly host to appear for His succour, and to whose precious lips, parched in death, the princes of the eternal Kingdom would have so gladly hastened with a draught from celestial springs, condescended to ask the help of those who mocked Him, and to take the support He so sadly needed from His triumphant persecutors.

Oh, you who are proud by nature, who are reserved by nature, who are sensitive in spirit, who feel every wrong done to you like a knife entering your breast, and who, when you forgive an injury, find it difficult to forget, and harder still to humble yourselves in any way to those who, you feel, have wronged you--here for you is a lesson, here for you is an example, a precious example, of the condescension of Love. Yes, to love those who seem to be against you, to love those in whom there always appears to you to be some difference of spirit or incompatibility of temperament, will mean, if you are made conformable unto your Master's death, that you will be able to receive at their hands services, kindnesses, pity, advice, which your own poor, fallen nature would, without divine grace, have scorned and spurned.

VI.

"_My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?_"

Here is a great mystery. No doubt, to the human nature of our Lord, it did appear as though the Father had forsaken Him, and that was the last bitter drop in the cup of His humiliation and anguish. If men only knew it, the realisation that God has left them will be the greatest agony of the sinner's doom. And here upon the cross, our Lord, undergoing the penalty of sins not His own has yet to experience fully the severance which sin makes between God and the human soul.

But, even to many of those who love and serve God fully, there does come at times something which is very similar to this strange and dark experience of our Lord's. Before the final struggle in many great conflicts, those inward consolations on which so much seems to depend are often mysteriously withdrawn. Why it should be so we do not know; it is a mystery. Some loyal spirits have thought that God withdraws His consolations and His peace, that the soul may be more truly filled with His presence, thus substituting for divine consolation the "God of consolation," and for divine peace the "God of peace." In any case we have this comfort: it was so with our Master. Do not let the servant expect to be above his Lord.

This terrible moment of seeming separation from the Father, and the dark cry which was wrung from our Saviour's broken heart, did not, however, make the final victory any the less. And, if you are one with Him, and have really set your heart on glorifying Him, and if you can only _endure_, such moments will not take from your victory one shred of its joy. Oh, then, _hold on to your cross_! hold on to your cross! even if it seems, as it sometimes may, that God Himself has forsaken you, and that you are left to suffer alone, without either the sympathy of those around you, or the conscious support of the indwelling God. _Hold on to your cross_. This is the way of Calvary--this is becoming conformable to the death of the Lord Jesus.

VII.

"_Father, into Thy hands I commend My spirit_."

Here our Lord enters upon the extremity of His humiliation. Death must have been repulsive to Him. If the failure of heart and flesh, the cold sweat, the physical collapse, the last parting, the solitude and separation of the grave are all repelling and painful to us, _how much more to Him_!

And, indeed, the picture which Christ presents to the outward eye in these last moments is unquestionably one of deep humiliation. The disordered garments--stained with blood and dirt, the distended limbs, the bleeding wound in His side, the face smeared with bloody sweat and dust, the torn brow and hair, and the swollen features, must have combined with all the horrible surroundings to make one of the most gruesome sights that ever man saw. And it was at this moment, _in His extremity_, that He says: "Father, into Thy hands I commend My spirit." "Father, I have done all that I can do; now I leave Myself and the rest to Thee."

Here is a beautiful message--the great message about Death. This is, in fact, the one way to meet the shivering spectre with peace and joy.

But the great lesson of this last word from the cross of Jesus is the lesson of Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob: _that faith in the Father is the inner strength and secret of all true service_. It was, in a very wonderful and real sense, by _faith_ that He wrought His wonders, by faith He suffered, by faith He prayed for His murderers, by faith He died, by faith He made His atonement for the sins of the world. The faith that not one iota of the Father's will could fail of its purpose.

Oh, dear comrade and friend, here is the crowning lesson of His life and death alike--"_Have faith in God_." Will you learn of Him? In _your_ extremity of grief or sorrow--if you are called to sorrow--will you not trust Him, and say, "Father, into Thy hands I commend my bereaved and bleeding heart"? In your extremity of poverty--if you are called to poverty--Oh, cry out to Him, "Father, into Thy hands I commend

my home, my dear ones." In your extremity of shame and humiliation--arising, maybe, from the injustice or neglect of others--let your heart say in humble faith, "Father, into Thy hands I commend my reputation, my honour, my all." In your extremity of weakness and pain--if you are called to suffer weakness or pain--cry out in faith, "Father, into Thy hands I commend this my poor worn and weary frame." In your extremity of loneliness and heart-separation from all you love for Christ's sake, if that be the path you tread, will you not say to your Lord, "Father, into Thy hands I commend my future, my life; lead Thou me on."

Yes, depend upon it, _faith is the great lesson of the cross_. By faith the world was made; by faith the world was redeemed. If we are truly conformed to His death, we also must go forward in faith with the great work of bringing that redemption home to the hearts of men; and all we aim at, all we do, all we suffer, must be sought for, done, and suffered in that personal, simple faith in our Father and God which Jesus manifested on His cross, in that hour when all human aid failed Him, and when He cried in the language of a little child, "_Father, into Thy hands I commend My spirit_."

X.

The Resurrection and Sin.

"_Concerning His Son Jesus Christ our Lord, which was . . . declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead_"--Romans i. 3, 4.

Just as one of the great proofs, if not the great proof, of the truth of Christianity is the vast fact of the world's need for it, so one grand proof of the Resurrection lies in the fact that no interpretation of Christ's teaching or Christ's life would be worth a brass farthing--so far as the actual life of suffering man is concerned--without His Death and Resurrection. That teaching might be illuminating--convincing--exalting; yes, even morally perfect; and yet, if He did not die, it would be little more than a superior book of proverbs or a collection of highly-polished copy-book maxims. That life--that wonderful life--might be the supremest example of all that is or could be good and great and lovely in human experience; and yet, if He did not rise again from the tomb, it would, after all, be only a dead thing--like a splendid specimen of carved marble in some grand museum, exquisite to look upon, and of priceless value, but cold and cheerless, lifeless and dead.

For it is a Living Person men need to be their Friend and Saviour and Guide. The splendid statue might possibly invite or challenge us to imitate it, but it could never call a human heart to love its stony features. Noble and pure as Jesus Christ's example undoubtedly was, it could of itself never satisfy a human soul or inspire poor, broken, human

hearts with hope and love, or wash away from human consciousness the stains of sin. These things can only be done by a Living Person. So it is that we are not told to believe on His teaching or on His Church, but on Him. He did not say "Follow My methods or My disciples," but "Follow ME." If He be not risen from the dead, and alive for evermore; if, in short, it be a dead man we are to follow and on whom we are to believe--then we are, indeed, as Paul says, "of all men the most miserable."

I.

But it is the life of Jesus, and the evidence of that life, in us that are really all-important. No extent of worldly wisdom or historical testimony can finally establish for us the fact and power of Christ's Resurrection, unless we have proof in ourselves of His presence there as a Living Spirit. With St. Paul, we must "know Him, and the power of His resurrection." That is the grand knowledge. That is the crown of all knowledge. That is the knowledge which places those who have received it beyond the freaks and fancies of human wisdom or human folly. That is the knowledge which cleanses the heart, destroys the strength of evil, and brings in that true righteousness which is the power to do right. That is the greatest proof of the Resurrection.

No books, not even the Bible itself; no testimony, not even the testimony of those who were present on that first Easter Day, can be so good as this, the experimental proof. It is the most fitting and grateful, and adapts itself to every type of human experience. And it is beyond contradiction! What avail is it to contradict those who can answer, "Hereby we know that we dwell in Him, and He in us, because He hath given us of His Spirit"? It is even beyond argument! For of what advantage can it be to argue with a man that he is still blind, when he tells you that his eyes have been opened, and when he declares, "Whereas I was blind, NOW I SEE"?

To us Salvationists, the hope of the world, and the strength of our hard and long struggle for the souls of men, centre in this glorious truth. He is risen, and is alive for evermore; and because He lives we live also! All around us are the valleys of death, filled with bones--very many and very dry. Love lies there, dead. Hope is dead. Faith is dead. Honour is dead. Truth is dead. Purity is dead. Liberty is dead. Humility is dead. Fidelity is dead. Decency is dead. It is the blight of humanity. Death--moral and spiritual death in all her hideous and ghastly power--reigns around us. Men are indeed dead--"dead in trespasses and sins." What do we need? What is the secret longing of our hearts? What is the crying agony of our prayers? Is it for any human thing we seek? No. God knows--a thousand times, no! We have but one hope or desire, and that is "life from the dead." We want life, the risen life--life more abundant--life Divine, amid these deep, dark noisome valleys of the dead.

Here, then, is our hope. He rose again, and ascended up on high, and

received gifts for men. This is the hope which keeps us going on; this is the invisible spring from which our weary spirits draw the elixir of an invincible courage--Christ, the risen Christ, who has come to raise the dead! "You _hath_ He quickened who were dead in trespasses and sins." Hallelujah!

"Dead in sins!" Jesus never made light of sin. He used no disguise when He talked of it, no equivocal terms, no softening words. There is no single suggestion in all His discourses or conversations that He thought it merely a disease, or a derangement, or a misfortune, or anything of that kind, or that He deemed it anything but a ruinous and deadly rebellion against God--the great disaster of the world, and the most awful, dangerous, and far-reaching precursor of suffering in the whole existence of the universe. He said it was bad, bad all through--in form, in expression, in purpose; above all, in spirit and desire. That there was no remedy for it but His remedy. No rains in all the heavens to wash it, no waters in all the seas to cleanse it away, no fires in Hell itself to purge its defilement. The only hope was in the blood of His sacrifice. And so He came to shed it, to save the people from their sins.

That is our hope. We are of those who see something of the fruits of sin, and to whom it is no matter for the chastened lights of the literary drawing-room. We know--some of us--how deep the roots of pollution can strike into human character by our own scorched and blistered histories; and we know by our observation into what deeps of black defilement men can plunge. The charnel houses of iniquity must ever be the workshops of the Salvationist. There we see of the havoc, the cruelty, the debauchment, the paralysis, the leprosy, the infernal fascination of sin. And we know there is only one hope--the Lamb that was slain, and rose again from the dead, and ever liveth for our salvation.

II.

The only really satisfactory test of any faith, or system of faiths, lies in its treatment of sin. Human consciousness in all ages, and in all conditions of development, bears witness to the fact of sin with universal and overwhelming conviction. Men cannot prevent the discomfort of self-accusation which ever follows wrong-doing. They cannot escape from the bitter which always lies hidden in the sweet. They cannot forget the things they wish to forget. Even when they are a law unto themselves, they are compelled to judge themselves by that law. It is as though some unerring necessity is laid upon every individual of the race to sit in judgment upon his own conduct, and to pass sentence upon himself. He is compelled to speak to his own soul of things about which he would rather be silent, and to listen to that which he does not wish to hear.

The proof that this is so is open, manifest, and indisputable. Human experience in the simplest and widest sense of the word attests it. It stands unquestioned amid floods of questions on every other conceivable subject. No system of philosophy, no school of scientific thought, no

revelation from the heavens above or the earth beneath can really weaken it. It is not found in books, or received by human contact, or influenced by human example. It is revealed in every man. It is felt by all men. They do not learn it, or deduce it, or believe it merely. They know it. All men do. You do. I do.

Many things contribute to this simple and yet supremely wonderful and awful fact of human experience. One of them is the faculty of thought. Man is made a thinking creature, and think he must; and if he thinks, he must, above all, think about himself, about his future, his present, his past. A great French writer--and not a Christian writer--says on this subject: "There is a spectacle grander than the ocean, and that is the conscience. After many conflicts, man yields to that mysterious power which says to him, 'Think.' One can no more prevent the mind from returning to an idea than the sea from returning to a shore. With the sailor this is called 'the tide.' With the guilty it is called 'remorse.' God, by a universal law, upheaves the soul as well as the ocean."

And side by side with this thinking faculty, there is the further fact, that God will not leave men alone. On those unerring and resistless tides He sends into the human soul His messages. He visits them. He arouses them. He compels their attention. In His providence, by acts of mercy and of judgment--by sorrow and loss--by stricken days and bitter nights, He makes them remember their sin. All the weapons in His armoury, and all the wisdom of His nature are employed to bring men to a sense of guilt--to prick them to the heart--in order to lead them to recognise and to confess and to turn away from sin. If, therefore, man by any invention had found out a way by which he could escape from the consciousness of evil without putting it away, God would not let him go.

Clearly, then, the initial proof of success in religion must be that religion can deal satisfactorily with the conscious guilt of sin. To this high test, all theories, all pretences, all promises must come at last. What are they in their actual effect on the memories and consciences of men in relation to their sin? How do they treat with guilt? How do they meet remorse? Can they silence the clamours of the night? Can they give peace when it is too late to undo what sin has done? Do they suffice amid the deepening shadows of the death chamber--the place where ever and anon the forgotten past comes forth to demand the satisfaction so long delayed?

But these, after all, are only the fruits--some of the fruits of sin. What of the thing itself? That is the sternest test of all. The mere condemnation of sin, no matter how fully it harmonises with our sense of what ought to be, does not satisfy man. The excusing of sin is no better; it leaves the sinner who loves his sin, a sinner who loves it still. If excuses could silence conscience, or set free from the bondage of hate or passion, how many of the slaves of both would soon be at liberty!

The re-naming of evil which has often been attempted during the last two or three thousand years, and again in quite recent days, has little or no effect either upon its nature or upon those who are under its mastery. The new label does not change the poison. Its victim is a victim still. Nor does the punishment of sin entirely dispose of it, either in the sufferer,

or in the consciousness of the onlooker. No doubt the discovery and punishment of sin do give men a certain degree of satisfaction, but at best it is only a _relief_, when what they need, and what they see their fellows need, is a _remedy_. Sending a fever patient to hospital is a poor expedient unless we cure the disease. Sending a thief to prison is a poor affair if he remains a thief. It is not in reality a victory over thieving; it is, in fact, a defeat.

Yes--it is a cure we need. And we know it. A cure which is not merely a remedy for the grosser forms which evil takes in men's lives, and their terrible consequences, but a cure of the hidden and secret humours from which they spring. The deceitfulness of the human heart. The thoughts and intents which colour all men do. The lusts and desires, the loves and hates from which conduct springs. The selfishness and rebellion which drive men on to the rocks.

The real question for us then is, Can our religion--does our religion, when tried by the test of human experience--afford any remedy for these? Unless it does, man can no more be satisfied or be set free by condemnations, or excusings, or re-christenings, or punishments of sin, than the slave can be contented with discussions about his owner's mistakes or emancipated by new contrivances for painting his chains!

III.

But what is this sin, the consciousness of which is thus forced upon all --this determined, persistent, active evil? It is not the mere absence of good--a negative gain--but it is the love of, and the actual striving after that which is flatly condemned by God, and is in open rebellion against Him. The centring of the corrupt heart upon its own corruption. Opposition to the pure will of God. Pride, falseness, unscrupulous ambition. Self-seeking, regardless of the means by which its object is obtained. Luxury, effeminacy, and sensuality. The lusts and fleshly passions. Malice, cruelty, and envy. The greed of gain. The love and thralldom of the world. There it is--the running sore of a suffering race. The outflow of the carnal mind, which is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be. There is no getting away from it. "Against this immovable barrier--the existence of sin--the waves of philosophy have dashed themselves unceasingly since the birth of human thought, and have retired broken and powerless, without displacing the minutest fragment of the stubborn rock, without softening one feature of its dark, rugged surface."

And the worst of all is that sin is a wrong against God. _Man sins, of course, against himself._ That is written large on human affairs, so that no fool, however great a fool, may miss it. Well may the prophet say, "O Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself!" Men mix the hemlock for themselves! The sinner is a moral suicide!

Man sins against his fellow. Nothing is more evident to us than

that men tempt and corrupt one another. They hold one another back from righteousness. They break down virtue, and extinguish faith, and silence conscience in their neighbours. They act as decoys and trappers for each other's souls. They play the Devil's cat's-paws, and procure for him the rum of their fellows, which could not be compassed without their aid. In short, the sinner is a moral murderer!

But, after all--and it is a hideous all--_the crowning wrong, and the crowning misery, is that sin is sin against God_.

Unless the Bible be a myth, and the prophets a disagreeable fraud, and the whole lesson of Jesus Christ's life and death an illusion, God is deeply concerned with man. That concern extends to man's whole nature, his whole existence, his whole environment; and most of all it is manifest with regard to his sin. God puts Himself forward in the whole history of His dealings with men as an intimate, responsible, and observing Party in the presence of wrong-doing. He watches. He sees. He knows. He will consider. He will remember or He will forget. He will in no wise acquit the guilty, or He will pardon. Justice and vengeance are His, and so is forgiveness. He will weigh in the balances. He will testify against the evil-doer, or He will make an atonement for him. He will cut off and destroy, or He will have mercy. He will repay, or He will blot out.

From beginning to end of Revelation--and there is something in the human soul which strangely responds to Revelation in this matter--we have a sense, a spiritual instinct, of the truth which Job set forth, "_If I sin, then Thou markest me, and Thou wilt not acquit me from mine iniquity_," which is confirmed by Jeremiah, "Though thou wash thee with nitre and take thee much soap, _yet thine iniquity is marked before Me, saith the Lord God_;" and which is insisted upon by the Apostle when he writes, "We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad."

Yes, it is against the Lord God men have sinned, and to Him they are accountable. And they know it. Here again is something which does not come by observation or instruction, but by an inward sense which can neither be mistaken nor long denied. Sooner or later, men are compelled to acknowledge God, and to acknowledge that they have sinned against Him. As with David, when he cried out, "Against Thee, Thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in Thy sight"--so to every man comes at last the awakening. We see, as David saw, that whomsoever else we have wronged, _God_ is most wronged; whomsoever else we may have injured, the great evil is that we have broken _His_ law and violated _His_ will.

In the light of that experience, sin becomes instantly a terrible and bitter thing. The fact that sinners can win the approval of men, the honour of success; that they can hide iniquity; that they can for a time escape from punishment, makes no difference when God appears upon the scene. Evil starts up for judgment. Memory marshals the ranks of transgression. Retribution seems the only right thing to look for. Punishment appears to be so deserved that nothing else can be possible. In their own eyes they are guilty. Guilt is branded upon them.

It is from this realisation of having offended God that there spring the dark forebodings of punishment. Men may dread it, and be willing to make superhuman sacrifices to escape it, but they expect it all the same. Thus in all ages men have cried out less for pardon and release from penalty than for deliverance from the guilt and domination of evil. Their language by a universal instinct has been like David's: "Have mercy upon me, O God, according to Thy loving kindness: according unto the multitude of Thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. For I acknowledge my transgressions: and my sin is ever before me. Against Thee, Thee only, have I sinned."

XI.

"Salvation Is of the Lord"

"_Salvation is of the Lord_."--Jonah ii. 9.

"_Work out your own salvation_."--Phil. ii. 12.

Salvation is of the Lord, or not at all. It is a touch; a revelation; an inspiration; the life of God in the soul. It is not of man only, nor of that greatest of human forces--the will of man, but of God and the will of God. It is not mere will-work, a sort of "self-raising" power--it is a redemption brought home by a personal Redeemer; made visible, tangible, knowable to the soul redeemed in a definite transaction with the Lord. It brings forth its own fruits, carries with it the assurance of its own accomplishment, and is its own reward. It is impossible to declare too often or too plainly that Salvation is of the Lord.

I.

And yet, around us on every side are those who are relying upon something short of this new life. They have set up a sort of human virtue in the place of the God-life. They are slowly mastering their disordered passions. The base instigations of their lower nature are being thwarted. Greedy appetites which reign in others are in them compelled to serve. Tendencies to cunning and falsehood, the fruits of which are only too apparent in the world at large, they watch and harass and pinch. Animosities, and jealousies, and envies--those enemies of all kinds of peace--are repressed, if not controlled.

And these followers of virtue go further than this. They aim at building up a character which can be called noble, or at least virtuous. And some succeed--or appear to themselves to do so. They cultivate truth. Honesty is with them, whether as to their business or their social life, the best

policy. They are just. They are temperate. By nature and by training they are kind and generous; so much so that it is as difficult to convict them of an unkindly act as it is easy to prove them more generous and liberal than many of the professed followers of Jesus. Often they are charitable, giving of their substance to the poor; not hard to please, considerate of their inferiors, patient with one another; in a very high sense they have true charity. And after long periods of struggle, and lofty and faithful effort, they may be able to claim that they have developed a fine character; that by self-cultivation, and perhaps by a kind of self-redemption, they have produced a very beautiful and desirable being!

I will not stay to inquire how far heart conceit and heart deceit may account for much of this, or to suggest that a great contrast may exist between the outer life and the unseen deeps within. I will admit for the moment that all is as stated, and even more. What, then? With much of grace and beauty, it may be; trained and tutored in the ways of humility and virtue; able to live in the constant and kindly service of others, and devoted to truth and duty--with all these excellencies they may yet be dead while they live. "That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit." Generous, lovable, dutiful, honourable flesh, but only flesh. A chaste, and, if you like to have it so, a useful life, but LIFELESS. A fine product of a lifetime of labour in the culture of the physical, intellectual, and moral powers, but, after all--DEAD. For "_He that believeth not on the Son of God hath not life_."

II.

In this view the body, and in a larger degree the mind, becomes a sepulchre for the soul. All the attention given to education, to refinement and culture, to the development of gifts--for instance, such as music or inventive science--to the practice of self-restraint and the pursuit of morality, is so much attention to the casket that will perish, to the neglect of the eternal jewel that is enclosed. It may be possible to present a kindly, honest, law-abiding, agreeable life to our neighbours; to go through business and family life without rinding anything of great moment with which to condemn ourselves; to be thought, even by those nearest to us, to be living up to a high standard of morality, and yet--for all this has to do with the casket only--to be dead all the while in trespasses and sins.

The young man who should spend his fortune upon his tomb would be scarcely so great a fool as he who spends his life on those things in himself which are temporal, to the neglect of those which are eternal. Only think of the absurdity of devoting the splendid energy of youth and manhood, the grand force of will, the skill of genius, and the other gifts which commonly men apply to their own advancement and success, to the adornment, enriching, and extension of one's _grave_!

And yet this is very much the case of those of whom I am thinking. All

their advances, whether in moral attainment, in personal achievement, or in worldly advantage, are, at the best, but enlargements and adornments of a tomb, and of a tomb destined itself to perish!

III.

Do I, then, discourage good works? Has man no part to play in his own deliverance? Is he, after all, only an animal--the mere creature of circumstance and natural law? Have I forgotten that "faith without works is dead"? No, I think not. I have but remembered that _works without faith are dead also_. The one extreme is as dangerous as the other. The legal, mechanical observance of the rules of a right life, apart from a living faith in Christ, can no more renew the heart in holiness and righteousness, than can a mere intellectual belief of certain facts about Christ, apart from working out His will, save the soul, or make it meet for the inheritance of the saints. In both cases the verdict will be the same. The faith in the one is "_dead_"; the works in the other are also "_dead_."

The fact is, Salvation is a two-fold work. It is of God--it is of man. Did God not will man's Salvation he could not be saved. Unless man will his own Salvation he cannot be saved. God is free. Man also is free. He may set up a plan for saving himself; but, no matter how perfect, it will fail unless it have God for its centre. And God, though He has devised the most infinitely complete and beautiful and costly scheme of redemption for man, will none the less fail unless the individual man wills to co-operate with Him. Man is not a piece of clay which God can fashion as He likes. He is not even a harp out of which He can get what strains He will without regard to its strings. There is in man something--a force--an energy--which must act in union with God, and with which God must act in wonderful partnership, if His will is to be accomplished.

IV.

It is true, of course, that God does much for a man without his aid. I do not now refer to material blessings. He it is who gives us "life, and breath, and all things"--and gives them largely without our effort. But even in man God does much without his help. He calls. He stirs up conscience. He gives flashes of light to the most darkened heart. He softens by the hand of sorrow, and rebukes with the stripes of affliction. Memory, human affection, hope, ambition, are all made means by the Holy Ghost to urge men to holiness. The ministry of goodness in others is so directed as to point multitudes to the way of the Cross. But this will not provide the one thing needful. Instruction, clear views of the truth, belief in the facts of God's love and grace, admiration of Salvation in other lives, even the desire to declare the Gospel, may all be present, and yet the soul be--DEAD--dead in trespasses and sins--cursed, bound, and

corrupted by dead works. Just as the noblest and highest efforts of man towards his own Salvation, _without the co-operating, life-giving work of God_, can result only in confusion and death; so the most powerful, gracious, long-suffering and tender yearnings and work of God for man's Salvation, _without the co-operating will of man_, can result only in distress, disappointment, and death.

V.

Are _you_ dead? Are _you_ in either of these classes? Are you relying on God's mercy; waiting for some strange visitation from on high; depending with a faith which is merely of the mind upon some past work of Christ; but without the vital power of His mighty life in you? Filled with desires that are not realised; offering prayers that are not answered; striving at times to work out a law of goodness which you feel all the time is an impossibility for you? Living, so to speak, out of your element--like a fish out of water? That is DEATH.

Or are you, on the other hand, depending for Salvation on your own labour to build up a good character, and to live a decent, honourable, and honest life? Conscious of advance, but not of victory? The servant of a high ideal, but without _liberty_? The devotee of your own self? All the powers and qualities of your nature growing towards maturity, _except the powers of your soul_? The casket--as life goes on--growing more and more adorned, while the eternal spirit, the priceless jewel made to receive the likeness of God and enjoy Him for ever, seems ever of less and less worth to you? That also is DEATH.

The man who is in either class is dead while he lives. He is a walking mortuary.

XII.

Self-Denial.

"_If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me_."--Matt. xvi. 24.

It is a striking thought that self-denial is, perhaps, the only service that a man can render to God without the aid or co-operation of something or some one outside himself. No matter what he does--unless it be to _pray_, which would hardly be included in the idea of _service_--he is more or less dependent upon either the assistance or presence of others. If, for example, he speaks or sings for God, whether in public or in private, he must have hearers; if he writes, it is that he may have

readers; if he teaches, he needs scholars; if he distributes gifts, there must be receivers of his charity; if he leads souls to Christ, these souls must be willing to come; if he suffers persecution, there must be persecutors; or if, like Stephen, he is called to die for his Lord, there must be those who stone him, and others who stand by consenting to his death.

A few moments' consideration will, I think, also show, that even in the sphere of our personal spiritual experience, it is very much the same. We can, after all, do but little for ourselves. Salvation comes to men through human instrumentality, and seldom apart from it. We are, I know, saved by faith; but how shall we believe unless we hear? and how shall we hear without a preacher? That instruction on the things of God, which is a necessity for every true child of God, comes almost invariably by the agency or through the experiences of others.

The joys and consolation of fellowship can only be the result of communion with the saints. In spiritual things, as in ordinary affairs, it is the countenance of his friend which quickens and brightens the tired toiler as "iron sharpeneth iron." And though it is true that God can, and often does, wonderfully teach and inspire His people without the direct aid of any human agent, it is equally true that He generally does so by the employment of His word, which He has revealed to men, or by the recalling of some message which has already been received into the mind and heart.

Nor does this in the least detract from our absolute dependence upon Him. The man who crosses the Atlantic in a steamship is no less dependent on the sea because he employs the vessel for his journey. We are no less dependent upon the earth for our sustenance because we only partake of the wheat after it has been ground into flour and made into bread. And so, we are no less dependent upon God because He has been pleased to employ various humble and simple instruments to save, and teach, and guide us. After full allowance has been made for the power and influence of intervening agencies, it is in Him we really live, and move, and have our being.

But I return to my first word. There is one kind of service open to all, irrespective of circumstances and gifts, which can be rendered to God without the intervention of anyone. And this we may truly call self-denial. Much that quite properly comes under that description need never--probably will never--be known to anyone but God. It may be a holy sacrament indeed, kept between the soul and its Lord alone.

I.

There is the Denial of all that remains of Evil in us.

How many sincere souls, when they look into their own hearts, find, to their horror, evil in them where they least expected it; find them part stone, when they should be all flesh; find them bound to earth and the

love of earthly things, when they should be free from the world and the love of the world; find them occupied, alas! so often with idols and heart-lusts, when God alone ought to rule and reign. Here is a sphere for self-denial. Here is a service to be rendered to God, which will be very acceptable to Him, and which you alone can perform.

And if you would thus deny yourself, then examine yourself. Study the evils of your own nature. Recognise sin. Call it by its right name when you speak of it in the solitude of your own heart. If there are the remains of the deadly poison in you, say so to God, and keep on saying so with a holy importunity. "Confess your sins." Attack them as the farmer attacks the poison-plant amongst his crops, or the worms and flies which will blight his harvest, and which, unless he can ruin them, he knows full well will ruin him. That is the "_perfect self-denial_"--to cut off the right hand, and to pluck out and cast away what is dear as the right eye, if it offend against the law of purity and truth and love.

But you yourself are to do it. Do not say you cannot, for you alone can. If you would be His disciple--His holy, loving, pure, worthy disciple--you must deny _yourself_. Cry to Him for help as much as you will--you cannot cry too often or too long--but you must do more than that: you must arise, and deny your own selfish nature; pinch, and harass, and refuse your own inward sins, and expose them to the light of God. Confess them without ceasing, mortify them without mercy, and slay them, and give no quarter. Say, and say in earnest:--

Oh, how I hate these lusts of mine
That crucified my God!--
These sins that pierced and nailed His flesh
Fast to the fatal wood.

Yes, my Redeemer, they shall die--
My soul has so decreed;
I will not longer spare the things
That made my Saviour bleed.

Whilst with a melting, broken heart,
My murdered Lord I view,
I'll raise revenge against my sins,
And slay the murderers too.

II.

There are Denials of the Will.

Human nature is a collection of likes and dislikes. The great mass of men are governed by their preferences. What they like, they strive after; what they do not like, they neglect, or refuse, or resist. Many of these preferences, though not harmful in themselves, lead continually to that subjection of the will to self-interest, and help that self-satisfaction

and self-love which are the deadly enemies of the soul. Now, true self-denial is the denial, for Christ's sake and the sake of souls, of these preferences. To say to God: "I sacrifice my way for Thy way--my wish for Thy wish--my will for Thy will--my plan for Thy plan--my life for Thy life"--this is self-denial.

Nothing can be more acceptable to a good father's heart than the knowledge that his son, living and labouring far away from him amid difficulties and opposition, is courageously sacrificing his own preferences, and faithfully seeking to carry out his, the father's, will. In such a son that father sees a reproduction of all that is strongest and best in his own nature. And so it is with the Heavenly Father. No greater joy can be His than to see the resolute surrender of His children's own will to His, and the daily denial of their hopes and plans for themselves and theirs in favour of His plans.

III.

There are Denials of the Affections.

The precious things of earth--
The mother's tender care,
The father's faith and prayer--
From Thee have birth.

And, just because love is of such high origin, and is the greatest power in human life, it is often captured and held by the Devil as his last stronghold against God. The heart is at once the strongest and the most sensitive part of our nature; and it is here, therefore, that we often find the most blessed and profitable opportunities for self-denial.

That pleasant companionship, so grateful, so fruitful of joy, and yet so likely to tempt me from the path of faithful service, "Lord, I deny myself of it." That mastering affection for wife, or husband, or children--so beautiful in its strength and simplicity, and yet so exacting in its claims--"Lord, I deny myself of the abandonment to which it invites me; I put it in its proper place, second to Thee, and to the work Thou hast given me to do." That love of home, and friends, and circle, which is so powerful a factor in life, and enters so constantly into all the arrangements and details of our conduct, influencing so largely all real plans for doing God's work--"Lord, I will deny it, when it is in danger of lessening my labours for Thee and Thy Kingdom." The pleasant hour, the quiet evening, the restful book, "I will lay them at Thy feet, for Thy sake, when they hinder me doing Thy will. It is between me and Thee alone; it is the sacrifice of love."

How precious it must be to God to see such self-denial! When the true lover sees the woman he has chosen leaving all for his sake, calmly laying down the love of father and family, and even braving the rebuffs and unkindness of those from whom before she has known nothing but affection,

in order that she may give him her whole heart and life, how strong become the cords which bind him to her! Every sacrifice she makes for his sake forges another bond which will not easily be broken. And is the Lord a man, that He should be behind us in loving with an everlasting love those who thus give up and deny their own loves for Him? No! a thousand times no! He will repay. Every self-denial is a seedling rich with future joys. For it is indeed true that "He that soweth to the Spirit, shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting. He that overcometh shall inherit all things, and I will give him the morning star."

IV.

There are Denials with reference to our Gifts.

"Look not," says the Apostle, "every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others." That is, even in the exercise of his choicest gifts and graces, let a man forget his own in his desire to employ and bring forward the gifts of others. "Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves." That is, in your own mind take a humble view of yourself, your own powers, and your own worthiness, and hold your comrades in higher esteem than you hold yourself, in honour preferring one another to yourself. _That would be a very real self-denial to some people!_

"Recompense to no man evil for evil," though you know he well deserves it; "Avenge not yourselves." "If thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink." "Rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep." That is, deny yourself of your own joys, that you may enter into the sorrow of others; and lay aside your own sorrows and tears, and silence your own breaking heart, when you can help others by entering with joy into their joys.

You will see, beloved, that all this is work which _no one can do for you_, and that it is in a very true sense high service to God as well as to man.

How, then, is it with you?

Are you a self-denying disciple? If not, beware, lest it should shortly appear that you are not a disciple at all.

XIII.

In Unexpected Places.

"_And . . . while they communed together and reasoned, Jesus Himself drew near, and went with them. But their eyes were holden that they should not know Him_"--Luke xxiv. 15, 16.

I.

The Knife-grinder.

The only person in the house, except the man and his wife, was a young domestic servant, a Soldier of The Salvation Army. Her employers were generally drinking when they were not asleep, and the drinking led to the most dreadful quarrelling. Disgusting orgies of one kind or another were of almost daily occurrence, and such, visitors as came to the house only added fuel to the fiery furnace of passion and frenzy through which the girl was called to walk.

Since that happy Sunday afternoon two years ago, when she gave herself to God in the wholesome village from which she came, the meetings and the opportunity, given her by The Army, of doing some work for other souls had been a bright light in her life. Little by little religion had come to have for her something of the same meaning it had for St. Paul: though I fear she knew very little of St. Paul, or of the great and wise things he wrote--domestic service is seldom favourable to the study of the Scriptures. But the same spirit which led the great Apostle to confer not with flesh and blood, and which took him into Arabia before he went to Jerusalem, was leading this quiet, country maiden to see that to be a follower of Christ means something more than to win a fleeting happiness in this life and a kind of pension in the next. She was beginning to understand that to be really Christ's means also to be a Christ; that to be His, one must seek for the lost sheep for whom He died. And so Rhoda--I call her Rhoda, though that was not her name--when she found to what sort of people she had, in her ignorance of the great city, engaged herself, had set to work to seek their salvation.

Many very good people would probably think that she would have been a wiser girl to have gone elsewhere--that the risks of such a position were very great, and so on. No doubt; but the light of a great truth was rising in Rhoda's heart and mind. She perceived in her very danger an opportunity to prove her love for her Saviour by risking something for the souls of those two besotted creatures, for whom she dared to think He really died.

And so, day after day, she toiled for them: night after night she prayed for them. And in her sober moments the wreck of a woman, her mistress, wept aloud in her slobbering way, and talked of the days long, long ago, when she, too, believed in the things that are good.

The first flush of novelty in the sense of doing an unselfish thing for God wore away, and presently Rhoda's real trial began. The drinking and fighting grew worse, and the difficulty of getting out to a meeting grew greater. Gradually the weary body robbed the struggling soul of its time

to pray; and, worst of all, by slow degrees Rhoda's faith was shaken, for her prayers, her agonising prayers, on behalf of those dark souls were only too manifestly not answered. Was it worth while, after all, troubling about sinners? Was it her affair? Why should she care? Of what use could it be to become an Officer, in order to seek the many, if God did not hearken to her cry for the few?

One day the Captain of the Corps to which Rhoda belonged called, and seemed grieved with her for neglecting the meetings. This was a heavy blow. She could not or would not explain, and when that night, in the midst of a drunken brawl, her master struck her in the face, heart and flesh both failed, and she determined to say no more about salvation, and to abandon all profession of religion.

That night seemed long and dark, and when at last sleep came, the pillow was wet with tears of anguish, of anger, and of pride.

"Scissors to mend! to mend! to mend!" The monotonous calls of London hawkers are a strange mixture of sounds--at one moment attractive, at another repelling; they are, perhaps, more like the cry of a bird in distress than anything else.

Rhoda looked at her wood-chopper as the knife-grinder came nearer to the house, and as he passed beckoned him, and gave it to him. She made no remark. He was rough and grimy, and his torn coat gave him an appearance of misery, which his face rather belied. She was miserable enough, and made no reply to his cheery "Good morning!"

Presently the axe was sharpened, and the man brought it to the door. She paid him.

"Thank you," he said. And then, with kindly abruptness--"Excuse me, but I see you have been crying. Do you ever pray?" And, after a silence, "God answers prayer, though He may not do it our way. _He did it for me._ I was a drunkard, but my mother's prayers are answered now, and I belong to The Salvation Army. Do you know any of them? Oh, they just live by prayer!"

Rhoda stood in silence listening to the strange man till she ceased to hear him, and looking at him till she ceased to see him! Another Presence and another Voice was there.

It was the Christ.

Rhoda was delivered. She is still fighting for souls, and loves most to do it where Satan's seat is. But the knife-grinder never knew.

II.

A Kiss.

The heat and smell in the narrow slum were worse than usual. A hot Saturday night in midsummer is a bad time in the slums, and worse in the slum public-houses. It was so on the night I speak of. In and out of the suffocating bar the dirty stream of humanity came and went. Men who had ceased long ago to be anything but beasts; women with tiny, white children in their bony arms; boys and girls sipping the naphtha of perdition, and talking the talk of fools; lewd and foul-mouthed women of the streets, all hustled and jostled one another, and sang, and swore, and bandied horrid words with the barmen--and, all the while, they drank, and drank, and drank! The atmosphere grew thicker and thicker with the dust and tobacco-smoke, and little by little the flaming gas-jets burnt up the oxygen, till by midnight the place was all but unendurable.

Among the last to go was a woman of the town, who betook herself, with a bottle of whisky, to a low lodging-house hard by. There she drank and quarrelled with such vehemence that in the early hours of the morning the "Deputy"--as the guardian of order is called in these houses--picked her up and threw her into the gutter outside. There, amid the garbage from the coster-mongers' barrows and the refuse of the town, this remnant of a ruined woman lay in a half-drunken doze, until the golden sunlight mounted over the city houses and pierced the sultry gloom on the Sabbath morning.

Another woman chanced that way. Young, beautiful alike in form and spirit, and touched with the far-offness of many who walk with Christ, she hastened to the early Sunday morning service, there to join her prayers with others seeking strength to win the souls of men.

"What is that?" she asked her friend as they passed.

"That," replied the other, "is a drunken woman, unclean and outcast."

In a moment the Salvationist knelt upon the stones, and kissed the battered face of the poor wanderer.

"Who is that--what did you do?" said the Magdalene. "Why did you kiss me? _Nobody ever kissed me since my mother died_."

It was the Christ.

That kiss won a heart to Him.

III.

A Promotion.

Henry James was coming rapidly into his employer's favour. Thoughtful, obliging, attentive to details, anxious to please, and, above all, thoroughly reliable in word and deed, he was a first-class servant and an exemplary Salvationist. In the Corps to which he belonged he stood high in

the esteem both of the Local Officers and the Soldiers, and there was no more welcome speaker in the Open-air or more successful "fisher" in the sinners' meetings than "Young James."

The question of his own future was beginning to occupy a good deal of attention. Ought he to offer himself for Officership in The Army? He was very far from decided either one way or the other, when one evening at the close of business his master sent for him. He expressed his pleasure at the progress James was making, and offered him a greatly improved position--the managership of a branch establishment, with certain privileges as to hours, an immediate and considerable advance in salary, and the prospect of a still more profitable position in the future. There was really only one condition required of him--he must live in premises adjoining the new venture, and he must not come to and fro in the uniform of The Army. His employers had a high esteem for The Salvation Army. It was a noble work, and their opinion of it had risen since they had employed one or two of its Soldiers. But business was business, and the uniform going in and out would not help business, and so forbh.

The young man hesitated, and, to the senior partner's surprise, asked for a week to consider.

During the week there were consultations with almost every one he knew. The majority of his own friends said decidedly "Accept." A few Salvationists of the weaker sort said, "Yes, take it; you will, in the end, be able to do more for God, and give The Army more time, more money, more influence." On the other hand, the Captain and the older Local Officers answered, "No; it is a compromise of principle; the uniform is only the symbol of out-and-out testimony for Christ; you put it on in holy covenant with Him; you cannot take it off, especially for your own advantage, without breaking that covenant. Don't!"

James promised himself--quite sincerely, no doubt--that it should not be so with him. And on the appointed day informed the firm that he accepted their proposal.

The new enterprise was a success. Everything turned out better than was expected. At the end of six months the new manager received a cordial letter of thanks from the firm, and a hint of further developments.

But Henry James was an unhappy man. He had gained so much that he was always asking himself how it came about that he seemed to have lost so much more! Position, prospects, opportunity, money--these were all enhanced. And yet he went everywhere with a sense of loss, burdened with a consciousness of having parted with more than he had received in return. As a man of business, the impression at last took the form of a business estimate in his mind. Yes, that was it; he had secured a high--a very high--price that evening in the counting-house, when the partners waited for his answer; he had parted with something; he had, in fact, sold something.

It was the Christ.

It proved a ruinous transaction.

XIV.

Ever the Same.

A New Year's Greeting.

"Blessed be the name of God for ever and ever: for wisdom and might are His: and He changeth the times and the seasons." --Daniel ii. 20, 21.

"I am the Lord, I change not." --Malachi iii. 6.

"He changeth the times and the seasons." What a beautiful thought it is! Instead of the hard compulsion of some inexorable and unchanging law fixing summer where it must, and planting winter in our midst whether it be well or ill, here is the sweet assurance that the seasons change at His command; and that the winds and the waves obey Him. It is not some abstract and unknowable force, taking no account of us and ours, with whom we have to do, but a living and ruling Father: He who maketh small the drops of water that pour down rain; He who shuts up the sea with doors, and says: "Here shall thy proud waves be stayed"; He who maketh the south winds to blow, and by whose breath the frost is given; He who teaches the swallow to know the time of her coming, and has made both summer and winter, and the day and the night His servants--He is our Father. How precious it is to feel that our times are in His hands; and to know that, whether the year be young or old, He will fill it with mercy and crown it with loving-kindness!

Do not be deceived by the modern talk about the laws of Nature into forgetting that they are the laws ordained by your Father for the fulfilment of His will. Every day that dawns is as truly God's day as was the first one. Every night that draws its sable mantle over a silent world sets a seal to the knowledge of God who maketh the darkness. Behind the mighty forces and the ceaseless activities around us stands the Sovereign of them all. The hand of Him who never slumbers is on the levers. The earth is the Lord's, and His chosen portion is His people; and when "He changes the times and the seasons," He fits the one to the other.

It is with some such thoughts as these that I send out a brief New Year's Greeting to my friends. I wish them a Happy New Year, because I feel that God has sent it, that He wills it to be a happy year--a good year: that in all the changes it may bring, He will be planning with highest benevolence for their truest welfare. Whether, therefore, it holds for them sorrow or joy, it will be a year of mercy, a year of grace, a year of love. "Blessed be God for ever and ever, for wisdom and might are His. He revealeth the deep and secret things. He knoweth what is in the darkness, and the light

dwelleth with Him."

Let us, then, go forward, and fear not.

I.

Material Changes.

All things that touch the life of man are marked for change. As knowledge advances, and men come nearer to the secrets of the world in which they live, they find how true indeed it is, that man is but "a shadow dwelling in a world of shadows." Everything is changing--everything but God. The sun, the astronomers tell us, is burning itself away. "The mountains," say the geologists, "are not so high as they once were; their lofty summits are sliding down their sides year by year. The everlasting hills are only everlasting in a figure; for they, too, are crumbling day by day. The hardest rocks are softening into soil every season, and we are actually eating them up in our daily bread."

The hills are shadows, and they flow

From form to form, and nothing stands;

They melt like mists, the solid lands,

Like clouds they shape themselves and go.

The great ocean-currents are changing, and vast regions of the earth's surface are being changed with them, and Time is writing wrinkles on the whole world and all that is therein.

But, above it all, I see One standing--my Unchanging God. "Thou, Lord, in the beginning hast laid the foundations of the earth, and the heavens are the works of Thine hands; they shall perish, but Thou remainest; and they all shall wax old as doth a garment, and as a vesture shalt Thou fold them up, and they shall be changed; but Thou art the same, and Thy years shall not fail."

What a contrast there is between the Worker and His work, between the Creator and the creature! We see it in a thousand things; but in none is it so manifest for the wayfaring man, or written so large upon the fading draperies of time, as in this: "_They shall perish, but Thou remainest_."

And greater changes yet seem to lie ahead. A universal instinct points to the time of the restitution of all things. "The whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together, waiting"--and it has been a long, weary waiting--"for deliverance." But the day of the Lord will come. "As the lightning cometh out of the east, and shineth even unto the west, so shall the coming of the Son of Man be." In his vision John saw, as it were, a picture of that final change. "Lo," he says, "there was a great earthquake, and the sun became black as sack-cloth of hair"--it looks as though the wise men who say it will burn itself out are right!--"and the

moon became as blood; and the stars of heaven fell unto the earth, even as a fig tree casteth her untimely figs, when she is shaken of a mighty wind. And the heaven departed as a scroll when it is rolled together; and every mountain and island were moved out of their places." What a combination of astounding catastrophes is here! Earth and stars are to meet in awful shock! Sun and moon to fail! Cloud and sky to disappear; the elements to melt with fervent heat--a world on fire!

But, above it all, the Lamb that was slain will take His place upon the Throne--unmoved, unchanged, amidst the tumult of dissolving worlds. My God, my Saviour, in Thy unchanging love I put my trust:--

Jesus, Thy blood and righteousness
My beauty are, my glorious dress;
'Midst flaming worlds, in these arrayed,
With joy shall I lift up my head.

II.

Changes of Association.

But far-reaching as are the changes in our material surroundings, those with which we have to battle in our personal associations are often as great, and are often much more painful. Indeed, man himself is the most changeable thing in all man's world.

It is not merely that our companions and friends and loved ones die--the wind passeth over them, and they are gone, and the dear places that knew them know them no more--it is not merely this; nor is it that their circumstances change, that wealth becomes penury, that health is changed to weakness and suffering, and youth to age and decay--it is not merely this, but it is that _they_ change. The ardour of near friendship grows cold and fades away; the trust which once knew no limitations is narrowed down, and, by and by, walled in with doubts and fears; the comradeship which was so sweet and strong, and quickened us to great deeds, as "iron sharpeneth iron," is changed for other companionships; the love which seemed so deep and true, and was ready "to look on tempests" for us, becomes but a name and a memory, even if it does not change into a well of bitter waters in our lives.

This fact of human mutability, this inherent changeableness in man, is the key to many of the darkest chapters of the world's history. The prodigal, the traitor, the vow-breaker, these have ever been far more fruitful sources of anguish and misery than the life-long rebel and law-breaker.

The Psalmist touches the inner springs of sorrow when he says, "All that hate Me whisper together against Me; yea, Mine own familiar friend, in whom I trusted, which did eat of My bread, hath lifted up his heel against Me."

No one who has once read it can forget that revelation of the pent-up shame and agony in David's heart, which was voiced in his cry, "O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! would God I had died for thee, O Absalom, my son, my son!"

The human heart probably fell to its lowest depth of ingratitude and sin when poor Judas changed sides and sold his Lord. What a change it was! Alas, alas, what a quagmire of uncertainties and shifting sand unsanctified human nature must be! Nay, _is_.

I suppose that few of us have escaped some sorrowful experiences of this kind. Even to those who have not tasted the fruits of human fickleness in the great affairs of Christ's Kingdom, there has generally come some share of it into the more private relationships of life. In the home, in the family, or in the circle of friendship or comradeship, we have had to lament the failure of many tender hopes. But, blessed be the name of our God, who knoweth what is in the darkness, amidst the changing scenes we have found one Comfort. Above the strife of tongues, and over the stormy seas of sorrow, when, as Job said, even our kinsfolk have failed, and our familiar friends have forgotten us, there is borne to us the voice of One who sticketh closer than a brother, saying, "I am the Lord; I change not. With Me there is no variableness, neither the shadow of turning. I will never leave thee nor forsake thee." The more men change, the surer God will be; the more they forget, the more He will remember; the further they withdraw, the nearer He will come.

III.

Personal Changes.

And we, ourselves, change also. As the years fly past, the most notable fact about us, perhaps, is the changes that are going on in our own experiences, our habits, our thoughts, our hopes, our conduct, our character. How much there was about us, only a few years ago, which has changed in the interval--nay, how much has grown different even since last New Year's Day! Indeed, might we not say of a great deal in us, which to-day is, that to-morrow it will be cast away for ever?

Have you, my friend, not had to mourn over some strange changes?

Has not your joy been often so quickly turned to sorrow that you have wondered how you yourself could be the same person? Has not some trifling circumstance often seemed to cloud your sky for days, darkening all the great lights in your heaven, so that your whole past, and present, and future have seemed different to you, and you stood in the stupor of astonishment at the gloomy change? Has not your zeal for souls been subject to like strange and unaccountable changes, so that the work you once thought impossible you have found easy; or the work you once delighted in, you now find hard, difficult, and barren? Has not your freedom in prayer, and your desire for it, wavered between this and that

until you have not known what to think of yourself?

Has not your perception of duty, and your devotion to it, at one time clear and strong, become at another so dim and feeble, that you have been utterly ashamed of your wobbling and cowardice, and amazed at your failure? And, most sorrowful of all, has not your love for your God and Saviour been up and down--shamefully down--so that when you have afterwards reflected on your coldness towards Him and His cause, you have been covered with confusion and astonishment at the fickleness of your own heart?

And more than this. How great are the changes wrought in us by the curbing influence of time! How much that in youth and early manhood we meant to do, and could do, and did do, has to be laid down, or left to others, as our years approach the limits of their pilgrimage! I have known some men who, for this reason alone, did not desire to live beyond the years of strength and vigour--they preferred "to cease at once to work and live."

The loss by death, or disappointments worse than death, of our friends and dear ones--what changes this also works! Unconsciously men narrow the sphere of their sympathies. The mainspring of life--love--grows slowly rusty for want of use, and from some hearts that were once true fountains of joy to those around them, the living water almost ceases to flow. Criticism, and fault-finding, and censoriousness too often take the place of generous labour for the welfare of the world. This may, no doubt, arise in part from the natural desire that others should profit by our past experiences, which renders us the more observant of their conduct the more we love. But, no matter what the cause, certain it is that within and without all seems to change.

Is it not, then, a joy unspeakable that, amidst all this, whether we are or are not fully alive to the weakness, and variability, and deceitfulness of our own hearts, we can look up to the ROCK that changeth NOT? In the darkest hour of disappointment with ourselves; in the depths of that miserable aftermath of sorrow and failure which follows all pride and foolish self-assertion; in the miry pit of condemnation and guilt in which sin always leaves the sinner, we can look up to Him whose power, whose grace, whose love is ever the same.

Do you really believe it? There is a great hope in it for you if you do. High above all your changes, high above all the storms and disappointments that belong to them; high above all the wretched failure and doubting of the "do-the-best-I-can" life you are living, He lives to bless, to save, to uplift, to keep. Unnumbered multitudes, fighting their way to Him in spite of the timidities and wobbings, the "couldn'ts" and "wouldn'ts" of their own nature, have proved Him the Faithful and Unchanging God. Will not you?

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