Maclaren on Hebrews Pt1

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Alexander Maclaren Sermons on The Epistle to the Hebrews Part 1

Hebrews 2:1 - Drifting

'Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip.' — Hebrews 2:1.

'LET them slip'; that conveys a vivid picture of a man holding some treasure with limp fingers, and allowing it to drop from his nerveless grasp. But, striking as that picture is, the one which is really expressed by the original word is more striking still The Revised Version correctly renders, instead of, 'we should let them slip,' 'we drift away from them'; and that is the real meaning.

'Drifting' is the thing to be afraid of. Just as some boat, not made fast to the bank, certainly glides down stream so quietly and with so little friction that her passengers do not know that they are moving until they come up on deck, and see new fields around them, so the 'things which we have heard,' and to which we ought to be moored or anchored, we shall drift, drift, drift away from, and, in nine eases out of ten, shall not feel that we are moving, till we are roused by hearing the noise of the whirlpools and the falls close ahead of us; and look round and see a strange country. 'Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest, haply, we should drift away from them.'

I. So my text suggests, first, our danger.

We are in danger of drifting unconsciously from the anchorage of our faith — namely, the great words which we have heard. The currents that are brought to bear upon us run as strong as do any that are marked on charts and are the terror of sailors, and they need as careful steering and as great engine-power to resist them. Let us try to think of one or two of them. There is the current of years. Time changes us all; and there is many a professing Christian who all unconsciously has slid away from his early better self, and is not now as devout a man — or with his life as completely under the influence of Christ and His gospel as he was in the early days. He keeps up appearances, but they are deceptive, and years have carried him down the stream and away from his old self.

There is the current of familiarity with the truth-It is a sad illustration of the weakness of human nature that we all tend to think that the familiar is commonplace, and that it is almost impossible for us, without a very specific and continuous effort, to keep up as fresh and deep an interest in a truth that we have believed all our days as in one that comes to us with the attraction of novelty. It has been well said that the most certain truths too often lie 'in the dormitory of the soul, side by side with exploded errors.' We all know how silently and unconsciously we lose our hold of the things that we think to be most surely believed among us; and whilst we fancy that we are grasping them they are gone from us just because we had never doubted, and always 'believed' them. Conjurers will tell you that if you press a coin in a man's palm and shut the hand quickly, he does not know for a moment or two whether the coin remains there or not. There are many of us who have closed our hands on the precious gold coin of the gospel, and it has been filched away from us, and we do not know that it has been until we open our hand and see the empty palm. We drift away by time and by familiarity.

Then there is constantly acting upon us the current of the continual pressure of our daily cares and anxieties and duties and joys. All these in their minuteness and their multiplicity tend to weaken our possession of, and to carry us away from, the great central truths of the gospel. A snowflake is a very tiny thing, but when the air is full of them, minute as they are, their white multitudes will bring death and a grave to the creatures on which they fall. And so the thousand trifles of our daily lives are all acting upon us, whether we know it or not, to absorb interest and attention and effort, and to Withdraw all three from 'the truths which we have heard.' You may remember the story of the man in the Old Testament who had a prisoner put into his hands, with an injunction to guard carefully against his escape; and how, as he naively says, 'As thy servant was busy here and there, lo! he was gone. I had so many other things to do, on this side and that, and in front and behind, that I could not always keep my eyes on him; and he slipped through my fingers, and showed a clean pair of heels, and that is all I know. I never knew that he had gone until I came to look for him in an interval of my business, and found his fetters were empty.'

Ah, dear friends, that is the history of the decline and fall of many a professing Christian's Christianity: 'Thy servant was busy here and there doing his day's work' — the legitimate things that we are bound to do, and which are not meant to be occasions for withdrawing our hold of the truths of the gospel, but for deepening it. We are busied about them. and that which was committed to our care sups away, and we never know it.

Yes, and it is not only 'secular' work that does that. It may be done by what is called Christian work too. I believe, for my part, that much as one rejoices in the continual calls for service and activity that are addressed to the Christian Church to-day, there is a distinct danger that there shall be so much work that there is no time for solitude, for contemplation, for reviewing and deepening our communion with Jesus Christ. And I sometimes feel as if I would like to say to all Sunday-school teachers, and visitors, and Christian Endeavourers, and all the host of 'Christian workers': 'Come ye yourselves apart into a desert place and rest awhile,' and then you will be ready for better work. At all events, it is quite possible — if we may so use a phrase which is, perhaps, done violence to in such a use — to water other people's vineyards, and leave our own vines to die for want of tending and irrigation.

There are other currents as well, about which I need not say much here, but no doubt they are running very strong to-day, all round us: tides of opinion and ways of thinking about the gospel which will rob us, if we do not take care, of the simplicity and depth of our faith in that Saviour. I just specify these four currents: time, familiarity, work, and the prevalent tone of the people round about us — all these forces are continually operating on the Christian men and women of this day, and in many cases are doing their deadly work.

II. So let me say that, secondly, my text suggests our security.

'Let us give the more earnest heed.' Just because these forces are in operation, therefore there is more need that the vessel shall Be very safely moored to the strong post on the quay, than there would he if it was lying in a tideless harbour where the water was motionless. 'The more earnest heed' — if we know the danger we have gone a long way to escape it. If we will open our eyes to the fact that all about us there are thieves lurking and waiting to steal away our possessions, then we shall have done something towards securing the possessions. As in Christ's parable, there are light-winged flocks of birds filling the air about us, and ready to pounce down upon the seed the moment the sower's back is turned, and with a dig and a peck to pick it up, and then with glancing whir of the wings to be off, bearing away their prey out of sight and out of shot. If we realise that that is the condition of things, we shall have boys with clappers in the field to keep off the birds, at all events. If we have a clear sight of the fact that the world is full of thieves, we shall be likely to get strong locks to our doors, and bars to the windows, and not go to sleep, lest the house should be broken into.

But let me say a word or two about what we ought to do. 'Let us give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard.' That word 'give heed' suggests that there must be a concentration of attention, and a distinct effort of will in the way of resisting the tendencies. If you hold a thing slackly it goes out of your hands. If you have flung a careless bight of the rope round the post, and then lie down to sleep, the force of the stream will do the rest. There must be resistance to the continually acting tendencies, or they will become facts and realities. I have already suggested in the previous remarks what seems to me to be the great thing wanted in our present average Christian character, and that is the honest occupation of mind and heart with the truths of the gospel. We read newspapers, books, and magazines of all sorts, and we do not read our Bibles as our fathers used to do. There are many professing Christian people who do not make the Word of God familiar by daily and prayerful perusal; and there are many who do not understand much more about the whole majestic orb of divine truth than the one bit of it that they beheld at first, when they turned from darkness to light. That Jesus Christ is your Saviour is, in one sense, the whole gospel, but that is no reason for your not trying to understand all that is involved in, and all that flows from, that great truth, and all on which it rests as upon rock pillars. If we had more honest occupation of thought with, and more quiet feeding like a ruminant animal upon, the truths of the gospel, we might bid defiance to all the currents to sweep us away.

There is another thing by which we may hold ourselves fast moored to these truths — that is, by bringing them habitually to bear upon and to shape and dominate the little things of our daily lives. One way by which we can freshen up the most familiar, common,

place truth is by acting on it. If you will do that, you will find that the old truths have sap and vitality in them yet. People talk about 'toothless commonplaces.' Take the commonplaces of your Christian profession, and conscientiously try to shape your lives by them; and take my word for it, you will find that they are not toothless. There is a bite in them If s man wants to be confirmed in his creed, let him make it the law of his conduct. So if we will meditate upon the truth, and if we will live the truth, we may snap our fingers at all the currents that seek to draw us away from it.

III. And now one last word. — My text suggests the reasons for this exhortation.

You will notice that it begins with a 'therefore,' and that 'therefore' sums up all that has gone before in the epistle; and it is further expanded by a 'for' which follows. And what are the reasons thus suggested? I have no time to enlarge on them, and I do not know that they need it.

They are three, and the first of them is the dignity of the speaker. The writer has just been demonstrating the superiority of the Son by whom 'God hath, in these last times, spoken unto us,' over all former ministers and messengers of His Word, and over all angels before His throne. And he says, because such august lips have spoken, 'Let us give earnest heed to the things which we have heard.' For 'if the words spoken by angels' demanded attention, how much more the word spoken 'in these last times unto us by the Son,' 'whom He hath appointed heir of all things.' That is reason number one.

Reason number two is the steadfastness of the truth. I have been working perhaps till it is threadbare the metaphor underlying my text; I come back to it for a moment more. What is the good of a strong cable, which is my faith, unless it is wrapped round a strong post? Why should I give heed to a truth, unless it is an irrefragable and undeniable and important truth? And so says this writer, it is worth your while to give your whole attention to these truths, and to grapple yourselves to them with hooks of steel, for they stand fast, The word spoken by angels was steadfast, but the word of the gospel was at the first spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed by them that heard it. He fixed the post; they hammered it in; there it stands. You may hold on to it, and if your tackle does not give, nothing will sweep you away.

And reason number three is, what we lose if we let our moorings there slip.

'For if the word spoken by angels was steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received its just recompense of reward, how shall we escape if we neglect… ' — not reject; not fight against, simply 'neglect' — 'so great salvation,' and so let ourselves be drifted away from the things which we have heard?

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Hebrews 2:8, 9 Manhood Crowned in Jesus

'We see not yet all things put under Him, but we see Jesus.' — Hebrews 2:8, 9

ONE of our celebrated astronomers is said to have taught himself the rudiments of his starry science when lying on the hill-side, keeping his father's sheep. Perhaps the grand psalm to which these words refer had a similar origin, and may have come from the early days of the shepherd king, when, like those others of a later day, he abode in the field of Bethlehem, keeping watch over his flock by night. The magnificence of the Eastern heavens, with their 'larger constellations burning,' filled his soul with two opposite thoughts — man's smallness and man's greatness. I suppose that in a mind apt to pensive reflections, alive to moral truths, and responsive to the impressions of God's great universe, the unscientific contemplation of any of the grander forms of nature produces that double effect. And certainly the grandest of them all, which is spread over our heads, little as we dwellers in cities can see the heavens for daily smoke and nightly lamps, forces both these thoughts upon us. They seem so far above us, they swim into their stations night after night, and look down with cold, unchanging beauty on sorrow, and hot strife, and shrieks, and groans, and death. They are so calm, so pure, so remote, so eternal. Thus David felt man's littleness. And yet — and yet, bigness is not greatness, and duration is not life, and the creature that knows God is highest. So the consciousness of man's separation from, and superiority to these silent stars, springs up strong and victorious over the other thought. Remember that, in David's time, the nations near, who were believed to be the very centre of wisdom, had not got beyond the power of these impressions, but on Chaldean plains worshipped the host of heaven. The psalm then is a protest against the most fascinating, and to David's age the most familiar form of idolatry. These great lights are not rulers, but servants; we are more than they, because we have spirits which link us with God.

Then, kindling as he contemplates man as God meant him to be, the poet bursts into rapturous celebration of man's greatness in these respects — that he is visited by God, capable of divine communion, and a special object of divine care; that he is only lower than the loftiest. and that but in small degree and in one specific respect. because they, in their immortal strength, are not entangled in flesh as we; that over all others of God's creatures on earth he is king.

'Very fine words,' may be fairly said; 'but do they correspond to facts? What manhood are you talking about? Where is this being, so

close to God, so lowly before Him, so firmly lord of all besides?' That is the question which the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews deals with in our text. He has quoted the psalm as an illustration of his thesis that Christ, and we in Christ, are exalted above angels, and then he proceeds to admit that, as a matter of fact, men are not what David describes them as being. But the psalm is not, therefore, an exaggeration, nor a dream, nor a mere ideal of the imagination. True, as a matter of fact, men are not all this. But as a matter of fact Jesus Christ is, and in His possession of all that the psalm painted our possession is commenced and certified. It is an ideal picture, but it is realised in Jesus, and having been so in Him, we have ground to believe that it will be so in us. We see not yet all things put under man — alas no, but-we see Jesus crowned with glory and honour; and as He tasted death for every man, so in His exaltation He is prophecy and pledge that the grand old words shall one day be fulfilled in all their height and depth. The text, then, brings before us a threefold sight. It bids us look around, and if that sadden us, it bids us look up, and thence it bids us draw confidence to look forward. There is an estimate of present facts, there is a perception by faith of the unseen fact of Christ's glory, and there follows from that the calm prospect for the future for ourselves and for our brethren. Let us deal with these considerations in order.

I. Look at the sight around us.

'We see not yet all things put under man.' Where are the men of whom any portion of the psalmist's words is true? Look at them — are these the men of whom he sings? Visited by God I crowned with glory and honour! having dominion over the works of His hands! Is this irony or fact?

Let consciousness speak. Look at ourselves. If that psalm be God's thought of man, the plan that He hangs up for us His workmen to build by, what a wretched thing my copy of it has turned out to be! Is this a picture of me? How seldom I am conscious of the visits of God; how full I am of weaknesses and imperfections — the solemn voice within me tells me at intervals when I listen to its tones. On my brow there gleams no diadem; from my life, alas! there shines at the best but a fitful splendour of purity, all striped with solid masses of blackness. And as for dominion over creatures, how superficial my rule over them, how real their rule over me! I can tame animals or slay them; I can use the forces of nature for my purposes; I can make machinery, and bid the lightning do my errands and carry messages, the burden of which is mostly money, or power, or sorrow. But all these, and the whole set of things like them, are not ruling over God's creation. That consists in using all for God, and for our own growth in wisdom, strength, and goodness; and he only is master of all things who is servant of God. 'All are yours, and ye are Christ's.' If so, what are most of us but servants, not lords, of earth and its goods? We fasten our very lives on them, we tremble at the bare thought of losing them, we give our best efforts to get them — we say to the fine gold, 'Thou art my confidence.' We do not possess them, they possess us: and so, though materially we may have conquered the earth (and wonderfully proud of it we are now), spiritually, which is the same as to say really, the earth has conquered us.

The same impression of human incompleteness is made by all the records of human lives which we possess. Go into a library, and take down volume after volume-the biographies and autobiographies of the foremost men, the saints and sages whom we all reverence. Is there one on whose monument the old psalm could truthfully be written? Are not the honest autobiographies what one of the noblest of them is called, 'Confessions'? Are not the memoirs the stories of flawed excellence, stained purity, limited wisdom? There are no perfect men in them — no men after the pattern of David's words. Or if some enthusiastic admirer has drawn a picture without shadows, we feel that it is without life or likeness; and we look for faults and limitations that we may be sure of brotherhood.

And if we take a wider range, and listen to the sad voice of history chronicling the past, where in all her tragic story of bright hopes brought to nothing, of powers built up by force and rotted down by pride and selfishness, of war and wrong, of good painfully sought, and partially possessed, and churlishly treasured, and quickly lost — where on all her blotted pages, stained with tears, and sweat, and blood, do we find a record that verifies the singer's rapture, and shows us men like this of the Psalm?

Or let observation speak. Bring Before your minds, by an exercise of imagination vivifying and uniting into one impression, the facts which we all know of the social and moral condition — to say nothing now of the religious state — of any country upon earth. Think of the men in all lands who are helpless, hopeless, full of animal sins and lusts, full of stupid ignorance. Take our psalm and read it in some gaol, or in a lunatic asylum, or at the door of some gin-palace, or at the mouth of a court in the back streets of any city in England, and ask yourselves, 'Are these people, with narrow foreheads and villainous scowls, with sodden cheeks and foul hands, the fulfilment or the contradiction of its rapturous words?' Or think of naked savages, who look up to bears and lions as their masters, who are stunted by cold or enervated by heat, out of whose souls have died all memories beyond yesterday's hunger, and all hopes greater than a full meal to-morrow — and say if these are God's men. So little are they like it that some of us are ready to say that they are not men at all.

What then? Are we to abandon in despair our hopes for our fellows, and to smile with quiet incredulity at the rhapsodies of sanguine theorists like David? If we are to confine our view to earth — yes. But there is more to see than the sad sights around us. All these

men — these imperfect, degraded, half-brutified men — have their share in our psalm. They have gone out and wasted their substance in riotous living; but from the swine- trough and the rags they may come to the best robe and the feast in the father's house. The veriest barbarian, with scarcely a spark of reason or a flickering beam of conscience, sunken in animal delights, and vibrating between animal hopes and animal fears rote him may belong the wondrous attributes: to be visited by God, crowned with glory and honour, higher than all stars, and lord of all creatures.

It sounds like a wild contradiction, I know: and I do not in the least wonder that people pressed by a sense of all the misery that is done under the sun, and faintly realising for themselves Christ's power to heal their own misery and cleanse their own sins, should fling away their Bibles, and refuse to believe that 'God hath made of one blood all nations of men,' and that Christ has a message for the world. I venture to believe both the one and the other. I believe that though angels weep, and we should be smitten with shame, at the sight of what man has made of man, and we of ourselves, yet that God will be true though every man fail Him, and will fulfil unto the children the mercy which He has promised to the fathers.

'All the promises of God in Christ are yea,' And so against all the theories of the desperate school, and against all our own despondent thoughts, we have to oppose the sunny hopes which come from such words as those of our text. Looking around us, we have indeed to acknowledge with plaintive emphasis, 'we see not yet all things put under Him' — but, looking up, we have to add with triumphant confidence that we speak of a fact which has a real bearing on our hopes for men — 'we see Jesus.'

II. So, secondly, look upwards to Jesus.

Christ in glory appears to the author of this epistle to be the full realisation of the psalmist's ideal Our text deals only with the exalted dignity and present majesty of the ascended Lord; but before touching upon that, we may venture, for a moment, to dwell upon the past of Christ's life as being also the carrying out of David's vision of true manhood. We have to look backward as well as upward if we would have a firm hope for men. The ascended Christ upon the throne, and the historical Christ upon the earth, teach us what man may be, the one in regard to dignity, the other in regard to goodness.

Here is a fact. Such a life was verily once lived on earth; a life of true manhood, whatever more it was. In it we may see two things: first, we may see from His perfect purity what it is possible for man to become; and second, we may see from His experience who said, 'The Father hath not left Me alone, because I do always the things which please Him,' how close a fellowship is possible between the human spirit that lives for and by obedience, and the Father of us all. The man Christ Jesus was visited by God, yea, God dwelt with Him ever; whatever more He was — and He was infinitely more — He was also our example of communion, as He was our example of righteousness.

And that life is to be our standard. I refuse to take other men, the highest, as specimens of what we may become. I refuse to take other men, the lowest, as instances of what we are condemned to be. Here in Jesus Christ is the type; and, albeit it is alone in its beauty, yet it is more truly a specimen of manhood than the fragmentary, distorted, incomplete men are who are found everywhere besides. Christ is the power to conform us to Himself, as well as the pattern of what we may be. He and none lower, He and none beside, is the pattern man. Not the great conqueror, nor the great statesman, nor the great thinker, but the great Lover, the perfectly good — is the man as God meant him to be. As it has been said, with pardonable extravagance, 'Aristotle was but the rubbish of an Adam,' so in sober truth we may affirm that the noblest and fairest characters, approximating as they may to the picture in the psalm, and giving us some reason to hope that more is possible for us than we sometimes think, are after all but fragments of precious stones as compared with that one entire and perfect chrysolite, whose unflawed beauty and completeness drinks in, and flashes forth, the whole light of God. He is not ashamed to call us brethren. Therefore, if we would know what a man is, and what a man may become, let us not only look inward to our own faults, nor around us at these broken bits of goodness, but let us look back to Christ, and be of good cheer. We hear and see more than enough of men's folly, stupidity, godlessness, and sin. Nevertheless — we see Jesus. Let us have hope.

But turn now to the consideration of what is more directly intended by our text, namely, the contemplation of Christ in the heavens, 'crowned with glory and honour,' as the true type of man. What does Scripture teach us to see in the exalted Lord?

It sets before us, first, a perpetual manhood. The whole force of the words before us depends on the assumption that, in all His glory and dominion, Jesus Christ remains what He was on earth, truly and properly man. There is a strong tendency in many minds to think of Christ's incarnation and humanity as transitory. I do not mean that such a conception is thrown into articulate form as a conscious article of belief, but it haunts people none the less, and gives a feeling of unreality and remoteness to what the Scripture says of our Lord's present life. Many believers in the eternal existence and divinity of our Lord think of His incarnation much after the fashion in which heathendom conceived that the gods came down in the likeness of men — as if it were a mere transitory appearance, the wearing of a garb of human nature but for a moment. Whereas the Biblical representation is that for evermore, by an indissoluble union, the human is assumed into the divine, and that 'to-day and for ever' He remains the man Christ Jesus. Nor is a firm grasp of that truth of small importance, nor is the truth itself a theological subtlety, without bearing upon human interests and practical life. Rather it is the very hinge on which turn our loftiest hopes. Without it, that mighty work which He ever carries on, of

succouring them that are tempted, and having compassion with us, were impossible. Without that permanent manhood, His mighty work of preparing a place for us, and making heaven a home for men because a Man is its Lord, were at an end. Without it, He in His glory would be no prophecy of man's dominion, nor would He have entered for us into the holy place. Grasp firmly the essential, perpetual manhood of Jesus Christ, and then to see Him crowned with glory and honour gives the triumphant answer to the despairing question that rises often to the lips of every one who knows the facts of life, 'Wherefore hast Thou made all men in vain?' Again, we see in Jesus, exalted in the heavens, a corporeal manhood. That thought touches upon very dark subjects, concerning which Scripture says little, and no other voice says anything at all. The resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ are our great reasons for believing that man, in his perfect condition, has body as well as spirit. And that belief is one chief means of giving definiteness and reality to our anticipations of a future life. Without the belief of a corporeal manhood, the unseen world becomes vague and shapeless, is taken out of the range of our faculties altogether, and soon becomes powerless to hold its own against the pressure of palpable, present realities. But we see Jesus — ascended up on high in man's body. Therefore He is somewhere now. Heaven is a place as well as a state; and however, for the present, the souls that sleep in Jesus may have to 'wait for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of the body,' and, being unclothed, may be wrapped about with Him and rest in His bosom, yet the perfect men who shall one day stand before the Lord, shall have body and soul and spirit — like Him Who is a man for ever, and for ever wears a human frame.

Further, we see in Jesus transfigured manhood. Once when He was on earth, as some hidden light breaks through all veils, the pent-up glory of the great 'God with us' seemed to stream through His flesh, and tinge with splendour even the skirts of His garments. 'He was transfigured before them,' not as it would appear by light reflected from above, hut by radiance up-bursting from within. And besides all its other lessons, that solemn hour on the Mount of Transfiguration gave some small hint and prelude of the possibilities of glory that lay hidden in Christ's material body, which possibilities become realities after (though not, in His case, be) death; when He ascended up on high, beautiful and changed, being clothed with 'the body of His glory.' For Him, as for us, flesh here means weakness and dishonour. For us, though not for Him, flesh means corruption and death. For Him, as for us, that natural body, which was adequate to the needs and adapted to the material constitution of this earth, must be changed into the spiritual body correspondent to the conditions of that kingdom of God which flesh and blood cannot enter. For us, through Him, the body of humiliation shall be changed into likeness of the body of His glory. We see Jesus, and in Him manhood transfigured and perfected.

Finally, we see in Jesus sovereign manhood. The psalmist thought of man as crowned with glory and honour, as having dominion over the works of God's hands. And here is his thought embodied in far higher manner than ever he imagined possible. Here is a man exalted to absolute, universal dominion. The sovereignty of Jesus Christ is not a metaphor, nor a rhetorical hyperbole. It is, it we believe the New Testament writers, a literal, prose fact. He directs the history of the world, and presides among the nations. He is the prince of all the kings of the earth. He wields the forces of nature, He directs the march of providence, He is Lord of the unseen worlds, and holds the keys of death and the grave. ' The government is upon His shoulders,' and upon Him hangs 'all the glory of His Father's house.' Angels served Him in His lowliness, and strengthened Him in His agony they watched His grave, and when He ascended on high, the multitudes of the heavenly hosts, even thousands of angels, were the chariot of the conquering Lord. Angels are His servants now, and all do worship Him. He holdeth the stars in His right hand, and all creatures gather obedient round His throne. His voice is law, His will is power. He says to this one 'Go,' and he goeth; He rebukes winds and seas, diseases and devils, and they obey; to all He says, 'Do this,' and they do it. He speaks, and it is done. 'On His head are many crowns.' Thou art the King of Glory, O Christ — and, seeing Jesus, we see man crowned with glory and honour.

III. Finally, then, look forward.

Though it be only too true that the vision seems to tarry, and that weary centuries roll on, and bring us but so little nearer its accomplishment; though the fair promise, at which the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy, seems to have faded away; though the hope of the psalmist is yet unfulfilled; though the strain of a yet higher mood, proclaiming peace on earth, which later shepherds of Bethlehem heard from amid the silent stars, has died away, and the war shout lives on; still, in the strength which flows from seeing Jesus exalted, we can look for a certain future, wherein men. shall be all that God proposed, and all that their Saviour is. Rolling clouds hide the full view, but through them gleams the lustrous walls of the city which hath the foundations. We look forward, and we see men sharing in Christ's glory, and gathered together round His throne.

Christ is the measure of man's capacities. He is the true pattern of human nature. Christ is the prophecy and pledge of man's dominion. From Christ comes the power by which the prophecy is fulfilled, and the pattern reproduced in all who love Him. Whosoever is joined to Him receives into his soul that spirit of life in Christ which unfolds and grows according to its own law, and has for its issue and last result the entire conformity between the believing soul and the Saviour by whom it lives. It were a poor consolation to point to Christ and say, 'Look what man has become and may become,' unless we could also say, 'A real and living oneness exists between Him and all who cleave to Him, so that their characters are changed, their natures cleansed, their future altered, their immortal beauty secured.' He is more than pattern, He is power; more than specimen, He is source; more than example, He is redeemer. He has been made in the likeness of sinful flesh, that we may be in the likeness of His body of glory. He has been made 'sin for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him.' His exaltation, if it were ever so much a fact, and ever so

firmly believed, yields no basis for hope as to any beyond Himself, but on one supposition. To see man exalted and his glory ensured in Christ's, the glory of Christ must be connected, as is done in our text, with His tasting death for every man. When I know that He has died for me, and for all my brethren who sit in darkness, and hear each other groan as the poison shoots through their veins, then I can feel that, as He has been in the likeness of our death, we shall also be in the likeness of His resurrection. Brethren, the Cross, and the Cross alone, certifies our participation in the Crown. Unless Jesus Christ have and exercise that wondrous power of delivering from sin and self, and of quickening to a new life, which He exercises only as Sacrifice .and Saviour, there were nothing which were more irrelevant to the hopes of man's future than the story of His purity and of His dominion. What were all that to men writhing with evil? What hope for single souls or for the world in the knowledge that He was good, or in the belief that He had gone up on high? If that were all, what would it all matter? The lack-lustre eyes that have grown wan with waiting will have no light of hope kindled in them by such a gospel as that. But bid them look, languid and weary as they are, to Him who is lifted up, that whosoever believeth on Him should not perish — that vision will give to the still loftier sight of Christ on the throne its true meaning, as not a barren triumph for Himself alone, but as victory for us — yea, our victory in Him. If we can say, 'God, who is rich in mercy for His great love wherewith He loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together,' then we can add, 'and hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Jesus Christ,' And what wonderful hopes, dimly discerned indeed, but firmly founded, we have a right to cherish, if what we see in Jesus we may predict for His brethren! We shall be like Him in all these points to which we have already referred. We, too, shall have a corporeal manhood transfigured and glorified. We, too, shall have perfect union and communion with the Father. We, too, shall be invested with all the unknown prerogatives which are summed up in that last promise of His, beyond which nothing more glorious can be conceived, 'To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with Me on My throne.' Then the ancient word will be fulfilled in manner beyond our dreams, 'Thou hast put all things under his feet.' Who can tell what accessions of power, what new faculties, what new relations to an external universe, what new capacity of impressing a holy will upon all things, what new capability of receiving from all things their -most secret messages concerning God their Maker, may be involved in such words? We see darkly. The hopes for the future lie around us as flowers in some fair garden where we walk in the night, their petals closed and their leaves asleep, but here and there a whiter bloom gleams out, and sweet, faint odours from unseen sources steal through the dewy darkness. We can understand but little of what this majestic promise of sovereign manhood may mean. But the fragrance, if not the sight, of that gorgeous blossom is wafted to us. We know that 'the upright shall have dominion in the morning.' We know that to His servants authority over ten cities will be given. We know that we shall be 'kings and priests to God.' The fact we know, the contents of the fact we wait to prove. 'It doth not yet appear what we shall be.' Enough that we shall reign with Him, and that in the kingdom of the heavens dominion means service, and the least is the greatest.

We, too, shall be exalted above all creatures-far above all principality and power, even as Christ is Lord of angels. What that may include, we can but dimly surmise. Nearness to God, knowledge of His heart and will, likeness to Christ, determine superiority among pure and spiritual beings. And Scripture, in many a hint and half-veiled promise, bids us believe that men who have been redeemed from their sins by the blood of Christ, and have made experience of departure and restoration, are set to be the exponents of a deeper knowledge of God to powers in heavenly places, and, standing nearest the throne, become the chorus leaders of new praises from lofty beings who have ever praised Him on immortal harps. They who know sin, who remember sorrow, who learned God by the Cross of Christ, and have proved His forgiving and sanctifying grace, must needs have a more wondrous knowledge, and be knit to Him by a tenderer bond than the elder brethren who never transgressed His commandments. The youngest brother of the king is nearer to him than the oldest servant who stands before his face. Our brother is Lord of all, and His dominion is ours.

But we can speak little, definitely, about such matters. It is enough for the servant that he be as his Lord. This confidence, which can be certain, though it be not accurate, should satisfy our minds without curious detail, and should quiet our hearts however they be tempted to cast it away. Many enemies whisper to us doubts. The devil tempted first to sin by insinuating the question, 'Shall ye surely die?' The devil often tempts now to sin by insinuating exactly the opposite doubt, 'Can it be that you will live?' It seems to us often incredible that such hopes of immortal life should be true about such poor creatures, such wretched failures, as we feel ourselves to be. It seems often incredible that they should have any connection with men such as we see them on the average to be. We are tempted, too, in these days, to think that our psalm belongs to an exploded school of thought, to a simple astronomy which made the earth the centre of the universe, and conceived of moon and stars as tiny spangles on the hem of light's garment. We are told that science lights us to other conclusions as to man's place in creation than such as David cherished. No doubt it does as to man physically considered. But the answer to my own evil conscience, to the sad inferences from man's past and present, to the conclusions which are illegitimately sought to be extended from man's material place in a material universe to man's spiritual place as an immortal and moral being, lies in that twofold sight which we have been regarding — Christ on the cross the measure of man's worth in the eyes of God, and of man's place in the creation; Christ on the throne the prophecy of man's dignity, and of his most sure dominion.

When bordering on despair at the sight of so much going wrong, so much ignorance, sorrow, and vice, so many darkened understandings and broken hearts, such wide tracts of savagery and godlessness, I can look up to Jesus, and can see far, far away — the furthest thing on the horizon — like some nebula, faint, it is true, and low down, but flickering with true starry light — the

wondrous vision of many souls brought into glory, even a world redeemed.

When conscious of personal imperfection and much sin, no thought will bring peace nor kindle hope but this, that Christ has died to bring me to God, and lives to bring me to glory. Then, dear brethren, 'behold the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world.'

Behold Jesus entered within the veil for us. Look away from the imperfect men, the partial teachers, the incomplete saints, the powerless helpers around you, to Him, the righteous, the wise, the strong. Look at no man any more, as the hope for yourself, as the pattern for your life, save Jesus only. The gaze will feed your triumphant hope, and will make that hope a partial reality. Here you will be visited by God, here you will in some degree have all things for yours, if you are Christ's. Here, from far beneath, look up through the heavens to Him who is 'made higher than' them all. And hereafter, from the supreme height and pinnacle of the throne of Christ, we shall look down on sun, moon, and stars that once shone so far above us; and conscious that His grace has raised us up on high, and put all things under our feet, shall exclaim with yet deeper thankfulness and more reverent wonder: 'What is man, that Thou art mindful of him, and the son of man, that Thou visitest him?'

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Hebrews 2:10 Christ's Perfecting by Suffering

'It became Him, for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bribing many sons unto glory, to make the Captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings.' — Hebrews 2:10.

IT does not 'become' us to be hasty or confident in determining what 'becomes' God. We had need to know the divine nature more perfectly, and the bearings of His actions more comprehensively and clearly than we do, before it can be safe to reject anything on the ground that it is unworthy of the divine nature. Perhaps we have not quite got to the bottom of the bottomless; perhaps men's conceptions do not precisely constitute the standard to which God is bound to conform. It is unsafe to pronounce that a given thing is unworthy of Him. It is much safer to pronounce that a given thing is worthy of Him.

And that is what the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews does here, venturing upon ground on which the New Testament seldom enters, viz., the vindication of the doctrine of a suffering Christ, on the ground of its being congruous with the divine nature that He should suffer. Especially would such a thought be appropriate and telling to the audience to whom it was originally addressed. 'We preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling-block,' says Paul And that doctrine of a suffering Messiah was the thing that stood in the way of the Jewish reception of the gospel, more perhaps than anything besides. So here we have the writer turning the tables upon the people, who might oppose it, on the ground of that discord and incongruity, and asserting that the whole of the sufferings of Jesus Christ do entirely harmonise with, are worthy of, and 'become' the supreme and absolute sovereignty of the God 'for whom are all things, and by whom are all things.'

There are three points, then, to which I desire to turn. There is first, the great sweep of the divine purpose. There is, secondly, the apparently paradoxical method of effecting it; and there is, finally, the assertion of the entire congruity between that method and the divine nature.

I. First of all, then, regard for a few moments the great sweep of the divine action in the gift of Christ as it is set forth here.

It is bringing many sons unto glory, wherein there lies, of course, a metaphor of a great filial procession, being led on through all changes of this lower life, steadily upwards into the possession of what is here called 'glory.' The same metaphor colours the other expression of our text, 'the Captain of our salvation.'

For the word translated 'Captain, which only occurs some four times in Scripture, literally means one who leads, or begins any course or thing; and hence comes to mean a commander, or a prince, as it is twice translated; and then again, with a very easy transition from the notion of leading to that of origination, it comes to mean 'cause' or 'author,' as it is once translated. The conception of 'author' is the dominant one here, but it is also coloured by the prolongation of the metaphor in the previous clause. This great procession of sons up into glory, which is the object and aim of God's work, is all under the leadership of Him who is the Captain, the foremost, the Originator, and, in a profound sense, the Cause, of their salvation.

So, then, we have before us the thought that God brings, and yet Christ leads, and God's bringing is effected through Christ's leadership. Then we have other thoughts, upon which time will not allow me to dwell. Let me just indicate them to you for your own expansion.

Look at the extent of the divine act. ‘Many’ is used not in contrast to ‘all,’ as if there was proclaimed here a restricted application of Christ’s work in the divine idea; but ‘many’ is in opposition to ‘few,’ or, perhaps, in opposition to the One. There is One Leader, and there is an indefinite number of followers. The Connotation of the word ‘ many’ is the idea of uncounted number. This great procession, with its long and interminable files, sweeps onward under the guidance of the one Captain. So wide as to be universal is the sweep of God’s purpose to bring the ‘many,’ a ‘multitude that no man can number,’ into the possession of His glory. Then, note, the relationship which the members of that great company possess. The many are being brought as ‘sons’ under the leadership of the one Son. That opens out into the broad thought that the loftiest conception of God’s end in redemption is the making the ‘many’ like the One, and the investing of them all with every privilege and dignity which belongs to their Leader.

Then note, further, the end of the march. This great company stretching numberless away beyond the range of vision, and all exalted into the dignity of sons, is steadfastly pressing onwards to the aim of fulfilling that divine ideal of humanity, long since spoken in the psalm, which in its exuberant promises sounds liker irony than hope. ‘Thou crownest Him with glory and honour.’ They are not only steadily marching onwards to the realisation of that divine ideal, but also to the participation of the glory of the Captain who is the ‘brightness of the Father’s glory;’ as well as ‘the express image of His person.’ So again, the underlying thought is the identity, as in fate here, so in destiny hereafter, of the army with its Leader. He is the Son, and the divine purpose is to make the ‘many’ partakers of His Sonship. He is the realisation of the divine ideal We see not yet all things put under man, but we see Jesus, and so we know that the ancient hope is not the baseless fabric of a vision, nor a dream which will pass when we awake to the realities, but is to be fulfilled in every one, down to the humblest private in that great army, all of whom shall partake in their measure and degree in the glory of the Lord.

This, then, being the purpose, — the leading up out of the world into the glory, of a great company of sons who are conformed to the image of the Son — we attain the point from which we may judge of the adaptation of the means to the end. We cannot tell whether a thing is congruous with the nature of the doer of it till we know what the doer intended by the act. Inadequate conceptions of God’s purpose in Christ’s mission are sure to lead, as they always have led, to inadequate conceptions of the means to be adopted, and doubts of their congruity with the divine nature. If Christ’s mission is only meant to reveal to us a little more clearly truth concerning God and man, if He is only meant to stand before us as the ideal of conduct, and the pattern for our imitation, then there is no need for a Cross, which adds nothing to these; but if He has come to redeem, if He has come to turn slaves into sons, if He has come to lift men up from the mud and earthliness of their low and sensuous careers, and to set them upon the path that will lead them to share in the glory of God, then there is something more needed than would be adequate for the work of a Teacher howsoever wise, or than would be required for the work of an Example however beautiful and fair. The Cross is surplusage if Christ be a prophet only; it is surplusage and an incongruity if Christ be simply the foremost of the pure natures that have walked the earth, and shown the beauty of goodness. But if Christ has come to make men sons of God, by participation of His sonship, and to blanch and irradiate their blackness by the reflection and impartation of His own flashing glory, then it ‘became Him, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the Captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings.’

II. That leads me to the next point that is here, viz., the paradox of the method adopted to carry out this divine purpose.

Of course, I do not need to explain, I suppose, that the ‘perfecting through sufferings,’ which is here declared to take effect upon our Lord, does not mean the addition of anything to, or the purging away of anything from, His moral nature. You and I are refined by suffering; which purges out our dross, if we take it rightly. You and I are ennobled by suffering, which adds to us, if we rightly accept it, that which without it we could never possess. But Christ’s perfecting is not the perfecting of His moral character, but the completion of His equipment for His work of being the Captain of our salvation. That is to say, He Himself, though He learned obedience by the things that He suffered, was morally perfect, ere yet one shadow of pain or conflict had passed across the calm depths of His pure spirit. But He was not ready for His function of Leader and Originator of our salvation until He had passed through the sufferings of life and the agonies of death. Thus the whole sweep of Christ’s sufferings, both those which preceded the Cross, and especially the Cross itself, are included in the general expression of my text; and these equipped Him for His work.

So we learn this lesson, the Captain who comes to make the soldiers like Himself can only accomplish His purpose by becoming like the soldiers. The necessity for our Lord’s sufferings is mainly based in the text here upon the simple principle that He who is to deliver men must be a Man. The leader must have no exemption from the hardships of the company. If He is to be a leader, He and we must go by the same road. He must tramp along all the weary path that we have to tread. He must experience all the conflicts and difficulties that we have to experience. He cannot lift us up into a share of His glory unless He stoops to the companionship of our grief. No man upon a higher level can raise one on a lower, except on condition of Himself going down, with His hand at any rate, to the level from which He would lift. And no Christ will be able to accomplish the Father’s design, except a Christ that knows the fellowship of our sufferings, and is made conformable unto our death. Therefore because ‘He took not hold to help angels, but the seed of Abraham, it behooved Him to be made in all things like unto His brethren.’ And when the soldiers are weary on the march, footsore and tired, they bethink themselves

‘Headquarters were here yesterday.’
‘We can go through no darker rooms
Than He went through before.’

And where He has stretched Himself on the cold ground and bivouacked, we need not be ashamed or afraid to lie down. The Captain of our salvation has gone through and shared all our hardships, and plodded with bleeding feet over every inch of the ground over which He would lead us.

Again, we learn the necessity of His suffering in order to His sympathy. Before He suffers, He has the pity of a God; after He suffers He has learnt the compassion of a man. And though in the fight the general seems to have gone up the hill, and left the army to struggle in the plain, He has gone like Moses to the mount to lift all-powerful bands of intercession, and bearing in His heart tender compassion, a fellow-feeling of our pains. No Christ is worth anything to me, suffering and bleeding and agonizing here, unless He be a Christ of whom I know that His heart is full of sympathy because Himself has felt the same, and that He has learnt to run to the help of the miserable, because He Himself is not ignorant of misfortune.

Then we learn, further, the necessity of the Captain’s suffering in order to emancipate us from the dominion of the evil that He bears. No doctrine of identification with our common infirmities, or sympathy in regard of our daily trials is adequate to explain, or to reach to the depths of this paradox of a crucified Commander. We need another thought than that, and it lies in this. ‘He Himself bare our sins in His own body on the tree.’ The necessity for knowing all our condition and sharing it was not the only necessity that brought Christ to suffer and to die. But upon Him was gathered the whole mass and Blackness of human sin, and in His separation from the Father, and in the outward fact of death, He bare our miseries, and by His stripes we were healed. No Christ is enough for me a sinner except a Christ whose Cross takes away the Burden and the penalty of my transgression. And thus ‘it became Him to make the Captain of salvation perfect through suffering,’ else the design of making men His sons and sharers of His glory could never come to pass.

III. Therefore, lastly, mark the harmony between the loftiest conception of the divine character and nature and these sufferings of Jesus.

The writer dwells upon two aspects of God’s relation to the universe. ‘It became Him for whom are all things, and by or through whom are all things.’ That is to say, the sufferings and death of the Christ, in whom is God manifest in the flesh, are worthy of that lofty nature to the praise and glory of which all things contribute. The Cross is the highest manifestation of the divine nature. The paradox remains that a dying man should more worthily set forth the deep heart of God, and should therefore more completely realise the divine purpose that all things should be for His glory, than all besides can do. Creation witnesses of Him, providence witnesses of Him, these marvellous spirits of ours proclaim His praise, but the deep heart of God, like some rich fruit, if I may so say, is cleft open by the Cross, and all its treasures laid bare, as they are displayed nowhere besides. So the purpose — which may be so stated as to be only Almighty selfishness, but which is really the expression of Almighty love — the purpose of God that all creation should redound to His honour, and be ‘for Him,’ reaches its end through the suffering of Jesus Christ, and in Him, and in His death God is glorified. ‘It became Him, for whom are all things, to perfect through suffering the Captain of our salvation.’

Another aspect, closely connected with this, lies in that other clause. Christ’s sufferings and death are congruous with that Almighty power by which the Universe has sprung into being and is sustained. His creative agency is not the highest exhibition of His power. Creation is effected by a word. The bare utterance of the divine will was all that was needed to make the heavens and the earth, and ‘to preserve the stars from wrong.’ But the bare utterance of will is not enough here. If men are to be brought to glory, they cannot be brought by the mere desire of God to bring them, or by the mere utterance of His will that they should be brought. This work needs a process, needs that something should be done. This work needs the humiliation, the suffering, the death, resurrection, ascension, and session at the right hand of God, of the Captain of our salvation and the Prince of our life.

So though by Him are all things, if we would know the full sweep and Omnipotence of His power, He points us away from creation, and its ineffectual fires that pale before this brighter Light in which His whole self is embodied, and says, ‘There, that is the arm of the Lord made bare in the sight of all the nations.’ Omnipotence has made the world, the Cross has redeemed it. From that Cross there come the loftiest conceptions of Him for whom all things are, but for whom men are not, unless the Cross has won them; by whom are all things, but by whom men are, through more wondrous exercise of divine power, when they are redeemed by the precious blood, than when they were made by the creative fiat.

Therefore, brethren, listen to God saying, ‘I have set Him for a witness to the people, for a Leader and a Commander to the people,’ and see to it that you enlist in this Captain’s army, and follow His banners and trust in His Cross, that your sufferings may be His, and the merit of His may be yours, and that in His sonship you may be sons, and the flashings of His glory may change your earthliness from glory to glory, into the image of the Son, made perfect through suffering and crowned with glory and honour, which He parts among all His soldiers.

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Hebrews 2:11-13 The Brotherhood of Christ

'… He is not ashamed to call them brethren, 12. Saying, I will declare Thy name unto My brethren, in the midst of the church will I sing praise unto Thee. 13. And again. I will put My trust in Him. And again, Behold I and the children which God hath given Me.' — Hebrews 2:11-13.

NOT ashamed to call them brethren. Why should He be? It is no condescension to acknowledge the fact of brotherhood, any more than it is humility to be born. And yet there is One who had to empty and humble Himself in becoming man; and for whom to call men His brethren is a depth of unimaginable condescension. We would say that a prince was not ashamed to call his subjects his friends, and to eat and drink with them, but we should not say it of a subject. This word 'ashamed' is meaningless in the present connection unless there underlies it the lofty conception of Christ's person which is enfolded in the first chapter of this epistle. If He be, and only if He is, the 'brightness of the Father's glory, and the express image of His person,' is it condescension in Him to enroll Himself amongst our fraternity.

The writer selects three Old Testament passages which he thinks exhibit in prophetic outline the Messiah as claiming brotherhood with men. If the writer had known the gospels, he could have found other words that would have been even more weighty, such as 'Behold My mother and My brethren'; but probably he was ignorant of them; or possibly, writing to Jews, he may have felt that to use their own manner of exposition was the best way of reaching them.

It would lead us into discussions altogether unsuited to the pulpit to examine the relevance of these three prophetic quotations. My object is a different one. The three citations from the Old Testament, which are adduced in my text as proofs that the Messiah identifies Himself with His brethren, deal with three different aspects of our Lord's manhood; and if we take them altogether, they afford, if not a complete, yet a very comprehensive answer to the question why God became man. It is from that point of view that I desire to consider them here.

There are, then, three points here; (1) Christ's assumption of manhood in order to show God to men (2) Christ's assumption of manhood in order to show the pattern of a godly life to men; and (3) Christ's assumption of manhood in order to bring men into the family of sons.

I. First, then, here we have the declaration or manifestation of God as the great object of Christ's brotherhood with us, 'Saying, I will declare Thy name unto My brethren.'

Where do these words come from? They come from that psalm, the first words of which rang out from His lips amidst the darkness of eclipse upon the Cross, 'My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?' The psalm, springing directly from the heart of David, and expressing to his consciousness, I suppose, solely his own feelings in the midst of his own trials and humiliations, has yet been so moulded into language a world too wide for the writer's sorrows, and so corresponding in minute and singular details, with the historical facts of Christ's passion and death, that we cannot fail to perceive shimmering through the words of the earthly King who won His throne through persecutions and trials, the august figure of the loftier and true King, of whom the sovereign of Israel was, ex-officio, a type and a prophecy. Just as David felt that he, as monarch, must be the brother of his subjects, and that the meaning of his reign and of his deliverance was the declaration of the name of God to his brethren, so our King can only be King if He be brother; and the inmost purpose of His brotherhood and of His monarchy is that He may manifest to men the name of the Father.

What is that 'name'? The syllables by which men call Him? Surely not. But the name of the Lord is the manifest character of God; and therefore the only possible way of declaring Him is not by words but by acts. A person can only be revealed by a person. God can only be shown to men by a life. Words will never do it; they may represent men's thinkings, but they never can certify God's fact. Words will never do it, they may suggest hopes, fears, peradventures; but unless we have a living Person whose deeds on the plain level of human history, and in this solid world of ours, are the manifestation of God, our thoughts of Him will neither be solid with certainty nor sweet with comfort. It must be a human life which is more than a human life, but yet is thoroughly and altogether man, that to men can manifest God. Our highest conceptions of the divine nature must be in the form Of man. Between the little sphere of the dewdrop and the great sphere of the sun that is reflected prismatically in it, there is absolute identity in the laws that shape their round. So limited humanity has such an analogy with unlimited divinity as that, in the mirror of manhood, the brilliancy and ineffable brightness of the Godhead can be manifested. That life, the life of Jesus Christ, is the making visible for men of the glory of the invisible God.

And what is the substance of the declaration? Men point us to His miracles, to the omniscience, to the power, to the other attributes

of majesty, unlike to, and contradictory, of the attributes of finite humanity, and they say that these are the glory of God. Not so! That is a vulgar conception: high above all such as these towers the moral perfectness which is manifested in the purity of Jesus Christ. But when we have passed through what I may call the physical attributes revealed in the miracles which are the outer court, and the moral attributes of righteousness and stainlessness, which are the holy place, there is yet a veil to be lifted, and an inner sanctuary; and in it, there is nothing but a Mercy-seat, and a Shekinah above it. Which, being translated into plain English, is just this, the new-thing in Christ's declaration of the name of the Father is the love of God therein manifested. Other means of knowing Him give us fragmentary syllables of His name, and men do with the witness of nature, and the ambiguous witness of history, and the witness of our own intuitions, what antiquarians do with the broken, inscribed blocks which they find in ruins, piece them together, and try to make a sentence out of them. But the whole name is in Christ. God ' who hath spoken in divers manners' elsewhere, hath spoken the whole syllables of His manifest character in His Son. And this is the shining apex of all; the last utterances of Scripture, the culmination of all the long procession of self-manifestation — 'God is love.' You can only learn that when you look on your brother Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

Dear brethren, more and more is it becoming certain, as the tendencies of modern thought unfold themselves, that we are brought to this fork in the road —Christ or nothing! Either God manifest in Him, or no manifestation of God at all Theism or Deism has not substance enough to sustain the assaults of the modern scientific spirit. Unless 'the only begotten Son which is in the bosom of the Father He hath declared Him,' no man hath seen God at any time, or can see Him. It is Christ or darkness. Either the Father revealed in Him, or a God spelled with a little 'g,' who is an unverifiable and unnecessary hypothesis, or 'a stream of tendency not ourselves that makes for righteousness'; or a vague somewhat concerning whom we only know that He cannot be known. The cultivated mind of England has to make its choice this day between these two. And when we come back to Christ, declaring the name of the Father unto His brethren, the nebulous, doleful grey that veiled the sky disappears, and we feel the sun again, and regain a God whom we can love because He has an ear and a heart and a hand; a God of whom we can be sure, a God concerning whom we have not to say 'I think'; 'I hope'; 'I fear'; ' perhaps'; but a God whom we can know, and to know whom is life eternal.'

II. So much, then, for the first of the thoughts here. Secondly, we have Christ's brotherhood represented as intended to show to men the pattern of the religious life. 'I will put my trust in Him.'

These words came probably from the eighth chapter of the book of Isaiah, where the prophet, like the king in the former narrative, speaking altogether his own feelings, and with no consciousness of any prophetic or typical reference, expresses his personal dependence upon God. Our writer sees in Isaiah, as the chief of the prophetic order, which order in its totality was a prophecy or type of Jesus Christ, a dim shadow of Jesus, in so far as the prophet, though filled with the consciousness of a divine inspiration, and knowing that he stood before his brethren to make known to them the name of God, did not yet thereby feel himself absolved from the necessity of personal dependence and reliance on Him. And, says our writer, as it was with that foremost of the prophets, so is it with Him who is the Prophet by eminence. He, too, in His manhood and in His office of declaring the name of the Father, feels that for Him personally there must be the same faith in God which others exercise.

Now that is the point to which I want to turn for m moment. Jesus Christ is the object of our faith. Yes! but Jesus Christ is the example of our faith too. You orthodox people, who believe in the divinity of our Lord and Saviour, are far too much afraid of fronting such thoughts as this. They are not so familiar to us as they ought to be. We do not believe in His thorough manhood, some of us, nor in His real divinity, but in strange amalgam of the two, each destroying, to s certain extent, the quality of the other. And so the men who do know their own mind, and who know His simple manhood, will make wild work of the beliefs of some of those who call themselves orthodox believers.

A perfect manhood must needs be a dependent manhood. A reasonable creature who does not live by faith is either God or devil: Jesus Christ's perfect manhood, sinless, stainless, did not absolve Him from, but obliged Him to, a life of continual dependence upon God; His divinity did not, in the smallest measure, interfere with the reality of the faith which, as man, He exercised, and which was the same in kind as ours.

His perfect manhood modifies and perfects His faith. In Him dependence had no relation to a consciousness of sinfulness, as it must have in us, but in Him it had relation to a consciousness of need of a continual derivation of life and power from the Father; His faith being the faith of a perfect manhood, was a perfect faith. Our hands tremble as they hold the telescope that looks into the far-off unseen. His hand was steady. Our faith wavers and is interrupted, an intermittent fountain. His was a perennial flow. His perfect faith issued in perfect results in His life; in a perfect obedience, 'I do always the things that please Him,' and in a perfect communion. Like two metal plates of which the surfaces are so true that when you bring them into contact they adhere, that perfect nature of Jesus Christ's, by the exercise of its perfect faith, clung in unbroken fellowship to the Father — 'He hath not left me alone, because I do always the things that please Him.'

And thus, dear brethren, our brother does not stand above us only to show us God, but comes down amongst us to show us men. Out of His example of faith we may take both shame and encouragement — shame when we Consider the awful disparity between our wavering and His fixed faith; encouragement when in Him we see what humanity has in it to become, and what by the path of faith it may become. The staff that He leaned on He has bequeathed to us. The shield that He carried in the conflict in the wilderness, when He said, 'Man doth not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God,' and which He bore undinted by all the fiery darts through His earthly course, He has bequeathed to us His followers. The Captain, the Emperor, was once in the arena, and there He struggled. He, the Captain of the faith, the Leader of the hosts of believers, conquered because He said 'I will put my trust in Him'; and He has left us the same weapon for ours, that we, too, may conquer. 'This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith.' III. Lastly, we have our Lord's manhood represented here as the means by which He brings us into a family of sons. 'And again, behold, I and the children which God hath given Me.'

These words come from the immediate neighbourhood of the last quotation. In their original application the prophet regards his own family, and the little knot of disciples who had been drawn to him, as being associated with him in his prophetic office, set for 'signs and wonders,' and the salt of the nation, which without them was rotting to dissolution. So our writer sees in the prophet's humility, which associates in his office, and admits to its prerogatives, the children to whom he had given natural life, and the little ones who through him had received spiritual life, the dim foreshadowing of that great Saviour who by His becoming our Brother, makes us God's children.

For it is to be noticed that the unity referred to in the word 'children,' in this last quotation, does, not apply to the same sphere as the unity referred to in the former word 'brethren' 'Brethren' referred to the kindred which consisted of the common possession of humanity; 'children' refers to the kindred, consisting in the common possession of spiritual life. Thus, in this last quotation of our text we have presented the other side of Christ's Incarnation and its effects. Here we have to deal, not so much with His becoming us, as with our becoming like Him.

The words open out into thoughts which I can only specify without attempting to enlarge upon them. Jesus Christ has become our Brother, that from Him we may each of us draw a life, stored in Him, though having its source in God, which will make us His brethren, and God's children. The central blessing of the gospel is the communication to every trustful heart of an actual divine life which comes from Christ. Do not be satisfied with any more superficial conception of what God gives us in His Son than this, that He gives us a spark of Himself, that He comes into us through Christ, and bestows upon our deadness a real, mystical, spiritual life, which will unfold itself in forms worthy of its kindred, and like unto its source. For that gift of the life there is more than Incarnation needed. There is Crucifixion needed. The death of Death by death gives Death his death; and then, and then only, can He give us who were dead His life. The box must be broken, though it be alabaster very precious, that through its lustrous surface there may shine lambent the light of the indwelling spirit; the body must be broken, that the house may be filled with the odor of the ointment. Christ dies and life escapes from Him as it were, and passes into the world.

That life is a life of sonship. The children are God's children, being Christ's brethren. They are brought into a new unity; and the one foundation of true brotherhood amongst men is the common possession of a common relation to the One Divine Father.

And that life which leads thus to sonship leads likewise to a marvellous participation in the offices, functions and relations of the Christ who bestows it. Just as the prophet gathered his children and disciples into a family, and gave them to partake in his prophetic office, in his relation to God, and to the world, so Christ gathers us into oneness with Himself; having become like us, He makes us like Him and invests us with a similar relationship to the Father. Being the Son, He gives us the adoption of sons, and lays upon our shoulders the responsibilities and the honours of a similar relation to the world, making us kindled 'lights' derived from Himself the fontal source, making us, in our measure and degree, sons of God and Messiahs for the world.

This oneness of life — which thus leads to a participation in sonship, an identity of function, and of interest — remains for ever. If we love and trust Christ, He will never leave us until He 'presents us faultless before the presence of His glory, with exceeding joy.'

So, dear friends, it all comes to this; there is one way to know God and only one. 'He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father.' All else is darkness. There is one life, noble, pure, worthy of humanity, and only one: the life of trust in Christ, who is at once the object and pattern of our faith; and believing in whom we believe in the Father also. There is but one fountain of life opened in the graveyard of this world, and that is in the Son, drinking of whom there shall be in us a fountain springing up to life everlasting. There is but one way by which we can become sons of God, through the elder Brother, who grudges the prodigal neither the ring nor the feast, but Himself has provided them both. So listen to Him declaring the name; say, 'I will put my trust in Him'; for you trust God when you have faith in Christ; and then be sure that He will give you of His own life; that He will invest you with the spirit of adoption and the standing of sons, that He will keep His hand about you, and never lose you. 'Them whom Thou hast given Me, I have kept,' He will say at last, pointing to us; and there we shall stand, 'no wanderer lost, a family in Heaven,' whilst our brother presents us to

His Father and ours, with the triumphant words —

‘Behold I and all the children whom Thou hast given Me.’

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Hebrews 2:17 What Behooved Christ

"Wherefore In all things it behooved Him to be made like unto His brethren.’ —Hebrews 2:17

I BRING these words: ‘It behooved Him,’ into connection with similar words in an earlier verse of the chapter, on which I was lately preaching: ‘It became Him, for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the Captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings.’

In the latter words the sufferings of Jesus Christ and His consequent perfecting for His work of Messiah are considered, in an aspect somewhat unusual with scripture writers, as being in accordance with the divine nature, and worthy of God. ‘He, by whom are all things,’ had no other way of electing His highest purpose of redemption than through the sufferings of Jesus Christ. ‘He, for whom are all things,’ could win men to be for Him only through these sufferings. And so the paradox of the Cross was worthy of God and like Him. In my text the same series of historical facts, the life of Jesus Christ and His death, considered as a whole, are regarded not as worthy of God, but as that which ‘behoved’ Christ, ‘It behooved’ is stronger than ‘it became.’ The one phrase points to the conformity of the thing in question with God’s character and nature; the other declares that the thing in question has in it a moral necessity or obligation, and that Christ’s assimilation to His fellows, especially in all the ills that flesh is heir to, was laid upon Him as a necessity, in view of His purpose of redemption and the helping of His fellows.

So then we have here, in the words which I have read, and in the context, three thoughts on which I touch now. First of all, the completeness of Christ’s assimilation to us, especially in regard to suffering; second, Christ’s sufferings as necessary for the fulfilment of Christ’s design; and lastly and more especially, Christ’s sufferings as indispensable for His priestly office. Now look at these three things briefly.

I. Note, first of all, the emphasis of that expression, ‘it behooved Him to be made in all things like unto His brethren.’

And observe that the ‘all things’ here, concerning which our Lord’s likeness to mankind is predicated, are not the ordinary properties of human nature, but emphatically and specifically man’s sorrows.

That will appear, I think, if you notice that my text is regarded as being a consequence of our Lord’s incarnation for the help of His fellows. ‘He laid not hold upon angels, but He laid hold upon the seed of Abraham.’ Wherefore, ‘in all things it behoved Him to be made like unto His brethren.’

Now, if the likeness here be the possession of true manhood, then my text is mere tautology, and it would simply be saying, ‘He became a man, wherefore it behoved Him to become a man.’ The same conclusion is, I think, fairly to be deduced from the last words of our chapter, where the fact of His suffering being tempted, is stated as His preparation to help, and as His qualification as a merciful and faithful High Priest. That is to say, the ‘all things’ of which our Lord became partaker like us His brethren, are here the whole mass — in all its variety of pressure and diversity of nauseousness and bitterness — the whole mass of human sorrow which has ever made men’s hearts bleed and men’s eyes weep.

Christ, in His single manhood, says the writer, gathered unto Himself every form of pain, of misery, of weariness, of burden, which can weigh upon and wear out a human spirit; and no single ingredient that ever made any man’s cup distasteful was left out, in that dreadful draught which He emptied to the dregs ere He passed the chalice to our lips, saying, ‘Drink ye all of it.’

This is the great lesson and blessed thought of our text that no suffering soul, no harassed heart, no lonely life, has ever been able to say, ‘Ah! I have to bear this by myself, for Jesus Christ never knew anything like this.’ All the pain and sorrow of adverse circumstances, that try some of us, He knows who had ‘not where to lay His head’; who was a poor man all His days, to whom the women had to minister of their charity, and who depended upon others for His sustenance in life, and for cerements, and a grave in death. The sorrows that belong to a physical frame overwrought and crushed by excessive toil; the sorrows of weakness, of sickness, the pains of death — He understands them all. The sorrows that come from our relations to our fellows, whether they be the hopeless, quiet tears that fall for ever upon broken affections and lost loves, or whether they be the bitter griefs that come from unrequited affections and unappreciated aims, and benefits flung back, and hearts tortured by ingratitude — He knows them all. And the loftier and less selfish, more impersonal, griefs that make so large a portion of the weight and heaviness of the noblest spirits, they all cast their shadows across His pure soul, and the shadow was the deeper and the darker because of the very purity of the soul on which it fell. Purity is ever sad in the presence of foulness; and love is ever sorrowful when bowed with the burden of

another's sorrow; and both these sources of pain and grief, which diffuse their bitterness through the lives of the best men, weighed in all their gravity upon Him who felt the world's sorrow and the world's sin as a personal grief because His soul was perfectly unselfish, perfectly pure, perfectly united to God, and therefore perfectly clear- sighted. All the miseries of all men forced themselves into and filled Christ's heart, Dear brother! you and I have but a drop given to us; He drank the whole cup. Our natures are not capable of sorrow as varied, as deep, as poignant as the sorrow of Jesus Christ; but for each of us surely the assurance comes with some subtle power of consolation and strength, 'In all their afflictions He was afflicted'; and none of us can ever meet a sorrow with whose face Christ was not familiar, and which He Himself has not conquered for us.

II. So that brings me to the next point suggested here, viz., our Lord's varied, all-comprehensive sorrow was a necessity imposed upon Him by the purpose which He had in view.

The context gives us that assertion in distinct language. Adopting the improved and accurate rendering of the Revised Version of the previous verse, we read, 'Verily not of angels doth He take hold, but He taketh hold of the seed of Abraham; wherefore in all things it behoved Him to be made like unto His brethren.'

Now the word rendered here, 'taketh hold,' is the same word which is employed in the narrative of a very striking incident in the gospels, where the Apostle Peter is ready to sink in the water; and Jesus Christ 'stretched forth His hand and caught him.' And that story may serve as an illustration for us of the meaning of the writer here. Here we are all, the whole race of us, exposed to the pelting of the pitiless storm, and ready to sink beneath the waters, and Jesus Christ stretches forth His strong, gentle hand and lays hold of our tremulous and feeble fingers, and keeps us up above the surges which else would overwhelm us.

Now, says my text, no man can help another unless he stand by the side of, and on the level of, that other. 'He taketh hold, not of angels, but of the seed of Abraham'; and, therefore, He must have a hand like theirs, that can grasp theirs, and which theirs can grasp. Unless the Master had Himself been standing on the heaving surges, and Himself been subjected to the beating of the storm, He could not have revived and held up the sinking disciple.

And so our Lord's bitter suffering, diffused through life and concentrated on the Cross, was no mere necessary result of His humanity, was not simply borne because, being a Teacher, He must stand to His principles whatever befell Him because of them; but it was a direct result of the purpose He had in view, that purpose being our redemption. Therefore to say, 'It behoved Him to be made in all things like unto His brethren,' is but to declare that Christ's sufferings were no matter of physical necessity, but a matter of moral obligation. He must indeed suffer. But why must He? 'It behoved Him to he made like unto His brethren'; but why was it obligatory upon Him so to take the bitter bread that we eat, and to drink the water of tears that we drink? For one reason, and for one reason only, because He loved us and willed to save us.

So I beseech you to feel that underlying the bitter necessity which my text speaks about there is the voluntary endurance of Jesus Christ. Ah! we do not think enough about the necessity, all through His life, for a continual repetition of the great act of self-surrender of which His incarnation was the first consequence. At the beginning of His earthly career He emptied Himself, out of love to us; and step by step, and moment by moment, all through His life, there was the continual repetition of the same act. Each one of His sufferings was the direct result of His will at the moment to perfect the work which He came to do. At any instant He might have abandoned it; and that He did not was solely owing to His perennial love. For His own determination to save and succour us was the one cord that bound this sacrifice to the horns of the altar. The Man Christ, at every moment of His life, gave Himself; and as each fresh billow of sorrow rolled above His bowed and compliant head, it rolled because He still willed to save and help His fellows.

This voluntary submission of our Lord to all the sufferings which befell Him because of His determination to come to the help of His brethren ought to make us feel how that whole life of His was one pure efflux of infinite and unspeakable love; and we ought to see in it the gift which 'became' the divine mercy indeed, but which also 'behoved' the Man Jesus, to the end that all our sorrows may be comforted and all our evil taken away.

We know not, nor ever can know, by what mysterious process the Son learned obedience by the things which He suffered, nor can we understand how it was that the High Priest, who would never have become the High Priest had He not been merciful, became yet more merciful by His own experience o£ human sorrow. But this we know, that somehow the pity, the sympathy of Christ, was deepened by His own life; and we can feel that it is easier for men to lay hold of His sympathy when they think of His sufferings, and to be sure that because in all points He was tempted like as we are, 'He is able to succour them that are tempted.' Comfort drops but coldly from lips that have never uttered a sigh or a groan; and for our poor human hearts it is not enough to have a merciful God far off in the heavens. We need a Christ who can be touched with the feeling of our infirmities ere we can come boldly to the Throne of Grace, assured of there finding grace in time of need.

III. Lastly, we have here the specification of the main purpose of our Lord's sorrows — 'that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things appertaining to God to make reconciliation for the sins of the people.'

That defines more closely what He has to do, if He is to help us, and what He does do when He takes hold of the seed of Abraham.

There are but two remarks that I would make on this part of my subject. The one is — let us learn what is the true nature of Christ's help. It is the help of a priest who comes to offer a sacrifice which takes away the burden and the guilt o£ sin from the world.

Christ's help is not merely the help of a wise Teacher. Men do not want only teaching. Their need goes far deeper than that. Christ's help is not only the help of One who declares to His fellows what God is. Men's needs go deeper than that. Christ's help is not merely the help of One who sets forth in sweet attractive colours the beauty of holiness and the charm of purity. Men's needs go deeper than that. We do not only need to know what God is, we need to have our relation to God altered. We do not only need to be told what we ought to do, we need that the past shall be cancelled, and the fatal bias and tendency towards evil within ourselves be taken away. Christ is not the Helper whose help goes down to the depths and the roots of men's necessity, unless He is Priest as well as Prophet and King. He comes to do something as well as to say something; comes to alter our relations to God, as well as to declare God's heart to us. In a word, we must say even to Christ, 'Vain is Thy help, and impotent is Thy grasp, unless Thou dost bring by Thy sufferings reconciliation for the sins of the people.'

And then, notice again how here we have Christ's priestly office extended over His whole life of suffering. The popular representations of the gospel, and the superficial grasp of it which many good people have, are accustomed to draw a broad line of demarcation between Christ's life and Christ's death, and to concentrate the whole of the sacrificial and expiatory character of His work in His death only. My text goes in the other direction. It says that all that long-drawn sorrow which ran through the whole life of Jesus Christ, whilst it culminated in His death, was His sacrifice for the sins of the world. For all sorrow, according to scriptural teaching, is the fruit of sin; and the sinless Christ, who bore the sorrows which He had not earned, in bearing them bore them away.

And though the shell of them and the outward appearance of them may be left, the inward reality and the bitterness of them is gone. It is exactly in reference to the ills of life as it is in reference to the other penalty of sin which consists in death. The outward fact continues, the inward nature is altered. For he who can say, 'Christ my Lord suffered for me,' finds that sorrows become solemn joys, and all things work together for good.

The Cross is the climax of His sacrifice, but His whole life is sacrifice and expiation, because His whole life is the life of a sinless 'Man of sorrows acquainted with grief.'

So, then, we have to look to Him, in all the meek endurance of His life, and in all the mysterious darkness of His death, not merely as the pattern of patience, as the Teacher of the sanctity of sorrow, as the first of the martyrs; but we have to look to Him, and to feel that 'the Lord hath made to meet on Him the iniquity of us all.'

Brother, He became like us in our sorrows that we might become like Him in His gladness. Each of us, singly, was in His mind and in His heart when He bowed Himself to the flood of sorrows, and yielded His soul to the Cross of shame. So let us stretch out our poor hands to Him who reaches His tender omnipotent one across the billows, and grasping the hands with the print of the nails, we shall find that we have exchanged portions, and that He who has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows has bestowed upon us His gladness, and crowned us with the glory of the blessedness which He had with the Father before the world was.

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Hebrews 3:1 Consider Jesus

'… Consider the Apostle and. High Priest of our profession, Christ Jesus.' —Hebrews 3:1

THE kinds of consideration enjoined in these two exhortations are somewhat different. The former of them is expressed by a word which means fixed attention and close scrutiny. It is employed, for instance, by our Lord in His injunctions to consider the ravens and the lilies, and by Peter in his account of his vision of the great sheet let down from heaven, upon which, when he had fixed his eye, he considered. Such a fastened gaze of awakened interest and steady contemplation, the writer would have all who are partakers of the heavenly calling to direct upon Jesus.

The other exhortation refers to a specific kind of contemplation. The word might almost be rendered 'compare,' for it means to weigh one thing in relation to another. It is the contemplation of comparison which is meant. What or whom is the comparison to be drawn between? Jesus, as the Leader of the great host of the faithful, and ourselves. The main point of comparison is to be found in the difficulties of the Christian life. Think what he has borne and what you have to bear; how He bore it and where, having borne it, He is now. The Captain has sustained the whole brunt of the assault and has conquered. Think of Him and be brave, and lift up the hands that hang down, and confirm the feeble knees.

So, then, throwing these two injunctions together, we may regard them as impressing upon us an all-important exercise of mind and heart, without which there can be no vigorous Christian life, and which, I fear me, is woefully neglected by the average Christian to-day.

I. I ask you to think first of this gaze of the Christian soul 'Consider the Apostle and High Priest of our profession, Christ Jesus.'

I have said that the word implies an awakened interest, a fixed and steady gaze; and that is almost the Alpha and the Omega of the Christian life. So to live in the continual contemplation of Jesus our Pattern and our Redeemer is the secret of all Christian vitality and vigour. There must he no languid look, as between half-opened eyelids, as men look upon some object in which they have little interest, but there must be the sharpened gaze of interested expectancy, believing that in Him on whom we look there lie yet undiscovered depths, and yet undreamed-of powers, which may be communicated to us.

There must be not only the sharpened look of contemplation, but there must he a very considerable protraction of the gaze. You will never see Jesus Christ if you look at Him only by snatches for a moment, and then turn away the eye from Him, any more than a man who comes out from some brilliantly lighted and dazzling room into the darkness, as it at first appears, of the midnight heavens, can see their glories. The focus of the eye must be accommodated to the object of vision, before there can be any real sight of Him. We must sit before Him, and be content to give time to the gaze, if we are to get any good out of it. Nobody sees the beauties of a country who hurries through it in an express train. These passing glances, which are all that so many of us can spare for the Master, are of little use in revealing Him to us. You do not feel Mont Blanc unless you sit and gaze and let the fair vision soak into your souls, and you cannot understand Jesus Christ, nor see anything in Him, unless you deal with Him in like fashion.

But if there be this steady and protracted contemplation of the Lord, then, amidst all the bustle of our daily life, and the many distractions which we all have to face, there will come sudden flashes of glory and the clouds will lift often, and let us see the whole white range in its majesty and sublimity. They who know what it is to come apart into a solitary place, and rest awhile with Him, will know what it is to bear the vision with them amid all the distractions of duty and the noise of the world.

There is no way by which we can bring an unseen person to have any real influence upon our lives except by the direction of our thoughts to Him. So if you professing Christian men and women will give your thoughts and your affections and the run of your minds to everything and everybody rather than to your Master, there is no wonder that your religion is of so little use to you, and brings so little blessing or power or nobleness into your lives. The root of weakness lies in the neglect of that solemn and indispensable duty to consider Jesus, in patient contemplation and steadfast beholding.

Now such thoughts as these, as to the relation between the protracted gaze and a true realisation of the Master's presence, cast light upon such a question as the observance of the Sunday. I do not care to insist upon anybody keeping this day sacred for devout purposes unless he is a Christian man. I would not talk about the obligation, but about the privilege., And this I say, that unless you have a reservoir you will have empty pipes, and the water supply in your house will fail And unless you Christian men and women use this blessed breathing time, which is given to us week after week, in order to secure that quiet, continuous contemplation of the Master, which is almost impossible for most of us amidst the rush and hurry of the week day, your religion will always be a poor thing.

I know, of course, that we may be taunted with concentrating and clotting, as it were, devout contemplations into one day in seven, and then leaving all the rest of the week void of Christ, and may be told how much better is worship diffused through all life. But I am sure that the shortest way to have no religion at all is to have it only as a diffused religion. If it is to be diffused it must first be concentrated; and no man will carry Jesus Christ with him throughout the distractions of daily life who does not know what it is to be often in the secret place of the Most High, there in the silence of fixed spirit, to 'consider Jesus Christ.'

Then let me remind you, too, that such a gaze as this is not to be attained without decisive effort. You have to cut off sidelights; just as a man will twist up a roll of paper and put it to his eye and shut Out everything on either side, if he wants to see the depth of colour in a picture. So we have to look away from much if we would look unto Christ, and to be contented to be blind to a great deal that is fascinating and dazzling, if we would be clear sighted as to the things that are far off. The eye of nature must be closed if the eye of the Spirit is to be opened. And if we are to see the things that are, we must resolutely shut out the false glories of the things that only do appear. For these are perishable, and the others are real and eternal.

II. Secondly, notice here a little more particularly the object of the Christian gaze.

We may dwell briefly in this connection upon the predicates of our Lord in these two verses. According to the true reading of the first of them we are to consider Jesus. The first thing that is to rivet our interested and continuous contemplation is the manhood of the Lord. That name Jesus is never used in this epistle, and seldom in any part of the New Testament, without the intention of especially emphasizing the humanity of Christ. It is that fair life, as it is unrolled before us in the pages of the Gospels, to which we are to look

for illumination, for inspiration, for pattern and motive of service, and for all companionship in suffering and victory in warfare. ‘Consider Jesus,’ our Brother, the Man that has lived our life and died our death.

Note that we have to consider Him in His offices, ‘the Apostle and High Priest of our profession.’ This is the only instance in scripture in which the name ‘Apostle’ is given to our Lord. And of course it is here employed not in its technical, but in its wider and etymological sense. It means ‘one who is sent.’ The contrast floating in the writer’s mind is apparently between Jesus and Moses; the two men both of whom, though in different fashion, were God’s messengers to found a polity. Perhaps another contrast is floating in his mind, such as he has drawn out at length in the first chapter of this great epistle, between those by whom ‘at sundry times and in divers manners God spake unto the fathers’; and Him ‘by whom in these last days, He has, once for all, spoken unto us.’ Possibly there is also a contrast between Jesus Christ the Lord of the angels, and the ministering spirits who, the previous context tells us, ‘are sent forth to minister to them that shall be heirs of salvation’ The name thus lifts Christ above Moses, prophets, angels, and sets Him on a pedestal, as the sole and single Revealer of the will of God to the world. The Father sanctified and sent Him into the world to be the one communicator of His perfect Name. The completeness and uniqueness of our Lord’s revealing mission are expressed in that title.

The other side of what is needful for communion between God and man is expressed in the other designation, ‘the High Priest.’ Two things go to make complete communion — God’s revelation to us and our approach to God. Christ is the Agent of both. As the subsequent context — where this idea of High Priest is more fully developed — distinctly shows, the main ideas connected with it in the writer’s mind here, are intercession and sympathy. So on the one hand, as Apostle, He brings God to us; and on the other hand, as Priest, He brings us to God; and makes the golden link by which heaven and earth are united, and God tabernacles with man.

It is this Christ — not merely in His manhood, but in that manhood interpreted as being the medium of all revelation possible to the world, and as being, on the other hand, the medium of all the access that sinful men can have to God — it is this Christ whom we are to consider, not merely in the sweetness and gentleness and holiness of His lovely Manhood as recorded in the gospels, but in these mighty offices of which that Manhood was the discharge and the expression, whereby God dwells with man, and sinful men can dwell with God.

We hear a great deal in these days about Christianity being Christ and not doctrines. I say, too, Christianity is Christ, but I say it is the Christ whom these great truths proclaim to us that we have to grasp. And it is not enough to consider Jesus from a mere humanitarian point of view, nor will the consideration of Him be peace and power and holiness and life to men, unless they consider Him as the ‘Apostle and High Priest of their profession.’

And again, we have to consider not only the Manhood in itself, and the offices which that Manhood discharges, but also the sorrows through which it passes. That is the force of the second of my two texts. We have to think of that Lord, who is the Leader of all the great host of the faithful, whose praises have been sung in the magnificent roll-call of the eleventh chapter; and to turn away from their lesser struggles, and paler beauties, and less complete victories. We have to think of what Jesus Christ bore, of what was laid upon Him, of how He bore it, and of how He has been exalted now to the right hand of God. Compare our difficulties and trials with His, and think that these are the pattern for us; and that we have to tread the path which He trod. Then consider how insignificant ours are in comparison with His. The whole fury of the tempest broke upon Him. It is only the tail of the storm that comes to us. The whole force of the blow was sustained unfalteringly by the steadfast Christ. It is only the blunt sword which has glanced off His strong shoulder to smite us.

‘We need not seek a resting place
Where He we loved had none.’

And if we will ‘consider Him that endured,’ sorrow and difficulty and opposition in our Christian life will dwindle into a very little thing, and will become a token that as is the Master so is the servant.

III. Lastly, notice the blessings of this gaze.

First, let us consider Him for calmness amidst a world full of noise and confusion. We live in a time and in a city where life is very crowded; and the pressure of every day is almost more than some of us can bear. There is no relief from the continual agitation about trifles, from the hurry and bustle of this community and this country, as continuous, and in the truest point of view as aimless and insignificant as the running of ants upon an ant hill — except we live in the daily contemplation of Jesus Christ. Nothing will quiet a man like that. It gives a certain sense of remoteness, and a very positive conviction of insignificance, to what else is intrusively and obtrusively near, and fallaciously appears to be important to us. Christ’s voice quiets the storm.

‘On my soul

Looks Thy fair face and makes it still.'

If you would have inward calmness, without which life is busy slavery, 'consider Jesus.'

Again, that gaze will help us to a fixed confidence amidst the fluctuations of opinion. We live in a day of unrest, when the foundations are being re- investigated, and the Tree of Life can scarcely grow because men are digging it up to look at its roots. Let us try to remember that the vital centre of all is Jesus, that faith is independent of criticism, and that if we can realise His presence in our lives in these great capacities of which I have been speaking, and as the Companion of our difficulties who has trodden the same path that we have to tread, then we can look very quietly upon all the unsolved questions which are important in their place, but which, however they are answered, do not touch that central fact and our possible relation to Him. 'Consider Jesus,' and then you will be able to say, 'The things which can he shaken are removed that the things which cannot be shaken may remain.' Ceremonies, churches, creeds, have all of them a human element, which will go. The divine Christ is the permanent in Christianity.

I might turn the word of my text in another direction for a moment, though it is a digression. After unbelieving theories have done their worst, I would say to the men who advocate them, 'Consider Christ.' Look at that fair vision. Where did it come from? Account for Him on any hypothesis but the truth of these four gospels. Account for His influence in the world on any hypothesis but His divine mission. You may talk till Doomsday, but you have to reckon with Jesus Christ, and to explain Him. Until you do, you have not established your negations. The reef on which so many goodly ships of unbelief have struck, and where their hulls lie broken and covered with the drifting sands of oblivion, is waiting for many a flaunting theory of today. 'Consider Christ.' That shatters anti-supernatural religion.

And, last of all, let us do it for diligence in service and patience in suffering. If we lay that fair image upon our hearts, it will lead to love, and love will make us toil in His service. If the sensitive plate be laid in the sunshine it will receive the image of the sun. If we consider Him, thereby, and not without such consideration, shall we become like Him.

As for our suffering and toils and difficulties, how they dwindle, and how easy patience is when we think of Him! Simon the Cyrenian had to carry the Cross after Christ, but we have only to carry a very little, light one, when compared with that which He bore and which bore Him. We compare our suffering with His, and are silent. We have to think of what He deserved and we deserve, and the blush comes to our cheeks. We have to remember how He bore, and how we have borne, and we are ashamed of our fretfulness and petulance. We have to think of Him at the right hand of God. The poor fighters in the arena can lift their eyes to the place where the Emperor sits between the purple curtains, and with the flashing axes of the guard round Him, and remembering that He, throned there, was once wrestling here as we are, and that we shall be throned with Him, the thought will make us bear the blows, and run the race, and face the lions. So, dear brother, the sure means of calmness amidst agitation, of confidence amidst the fluctuations of a restless age, of strenuous warfare, of diligent service, and patient endurance, lies here in the consideration of Christ. If we try to keep Him before our eyes life will be blessed. The secret of joy and peace on earth is the consideration of the Master by faith, and to see Him as He is will be the heaven of heaven. Here, the condition of holiness, joy, peace, power, is 'consider Jesus'; and yonder the Charter of new felicities and new capacities will be, 'Behold the Lamb.' If we set Him at our right hand we shall not be moved, and shall walk in the light of His countenance on earth, and He will set us at His right hand in the heavens, where His servants shall serve Him and see His face; and His name shall be in their foreheads.

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Hebrews 3:6 Confidence and Rejoicing of Hope

'… If we .old fast the confidence and the reining of the hope firm unto the end.'— Hebrews 3:6

TWO of the favourite thoughts of this letter are included in these words. There are none of the New Testament writers who give so frequent and earnest warnings against the danger of falling away from the Christian profession as does the writer of this letter, and there are none of them who set the power and the blessedness of hope as a Christian virtue in so many attractive lights. The reason for the prominence of these two thoughts in the letter is, of course, largely the circumstances of the persons to whom it was addressed. They were Hebrew Christians, in constant danger of being drawn away from their Christian profession by the seductions of Judaism— the system from which they had passed, and which still exercised a power over them. These peculiarities, of course, have ceased to operate with regard to us, but the lessons contained in the words are of permanent value.

Note, then —

I. The characteristics of the Christian life as set forth here.

They are two, confidence and rejoicing. Now the word which is translated 'confidence' literally means frank, outspoken speech, and comes to mean, secondarily, the boldness which finds expression in such speech. It is employed here, not without some

reminiscence of its original meaning, but mainly in that secondary meaning which is expressed partially, and only partially, by the word in our translation, ‘confidence.’ A terrified Christian is an anomaly; a timid Christian is a monster. If he is a true Christian he ought to be elevated by his Christianity high above fears of all sorts and to walk so unembarrassed and unhedged in by dread and nervous anxieties and sorrows and apprehensions that his tongue is not tied, but that he can speak out all that is in him, both to God and to man. And then the other word rendered ‘rejoicing’ is in the original even more emphatic than that rendering. It means ‘boasting’ or ‘glorying,’ and conveys the notion of a triumphant exultation which finds words coming to it naturally and irrepressibly, and cannot but speak out its gladness and triumph.

So these two qualities, courage and exultation, are the very key-notes and marks of Christian men and women, who live up to their privileges and understand what it is that they say they believe. What is there for a man to be afraid of if he has God at his back and heaven in front of him? Circumstances? My own weak heart? Temptations? Of course there is a wholesome fear of all these which is beneficial because it sobers us and makes us watchful, and which he is a fool who flings away? ‘Be not high-minded, but fear’ is only the other side of the exhortation. ‘Cast not away courage,’ for the fear which apprehends danger and acknowledges weakness is the usher that leads in the Confidence that creates boldness, and will not be afraid. ‘What time I am afraid’ — and I shall often be — ‘I will trust in Thee,’ and then I may fling all fear behind my back and walk dreading nought.

Dear brethren, do we recognise it to be our duty to be brave? Does it ever enter into our minds that courage is part of the Christian character, and do we set ourselves to cultivate it accordingly?

But we have also to take into account the natural expression of this courageous temper which lies in the word — viz., frank outspokenness to God.

There are a great many of us who never turn our hearts inside out to God. Although we call ourselves Christians our prayers do not closely fit our real feelings. We pray about the things that we think it proper to pray about: about the things which we have always been in the habit of hearing good people pray about, whether we much care to have them or not. And these little annoyances that buzz about us like mosquitoes and fret so much of our lives, we never say a word to Him about them. No wonder that our hollow prayers are unanswered. If we were bolder with the boldness that this text tells us is our duty, we should turn ourselves inside out to God, and say, ‘Search me, O Lord; try me and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.’

And then, if in anything like the degree in which the facts of the case warrant all Christian people in having it, we had that courage, there would go along with it a wonderful slitting of the cords that tie our tongues to one another about our faith. What an extraordinary thing it is that so many professing Christians have no sort of compulsion to tell anybody what they are, and do not feel as if there was any necessity laid upon them to speak to others of the Saviour that they have found! Why, if the vessel is full it will run over and light will radiate and heat will pour itself out. If there be life in the heart the blood will be pumped through the veins. And so, if we had the courage of our profession we should all be eloquent in the right times and places and to the right persons in the praise of the Master. Courage and a triumphant exulting joy are the marks and signs of a true Christian. Put that picture side by side with what we see in others, and with what we ourselves are and do. Many of us have got the length of thinking that it is a sign of grace to be sad and timid, and anxious and afraid to say, ‘I know in whom I have believed.’ And there are very few of us who have got the length of walking in the light; and ‘always,’ as the Apostle says, being ‘confident’ and bold. That unbroken courage is within reach of us all, and the hand that grasps it is the hand of unfaltering faith or confidence.

The foundation of this Christian courage and triumphant exultation. Both the chief words in the text, I believe, are intended to be qualified by that expression, ‘of the hope,’ which follows the last of them. The confidence is the confidence ‘of the hope,’ and so is the ‘rejoicing.’ That is to say, the ground upon which there can be reared this fair structure of a Christian life all radiant and exultant with courage and triumph is the great hope which Christ sets before us, and which in Himself is brought into contact with our hearts and minds. The hope of the gospel is the basis upon which the courage and the exultation rest.

When a vessel is sunk at sea, how do they float it again? They take great caissons, and fasten them to the sunken hull, and pump them full of air, and their buoyancy lifts it up from the ocean bed, and brings it up into the sunshine again. Fasten your sunken and sad hearts to that great hope that floats upon the surface, and it will lift you from the depths, and bring you into the sunshine. Think of the hope which you and I profess to have! How can sorrow and dumpish dismality live in the presence of such a solid and radiant thing? What would become of our anxieties, real and deep as they are? What would become of our domestic sorrows, painful and heartrending as they are for some of us, if once we walked in the sunshine of that perpetual hope? Who cares about the rough stones, and the sharp, jagged thorns upon the road, or even much about the blood upon his naked feet, when he can see the prize hanging yonder at the winning-post? If we had that immortal crown, and that blessed peaceful hope that ‘we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is,’ always blazing as a reality at the end of every dirty alley down which we have to go, and every dreary road along which we have to travel, how the dirt and the dreariness would be forgotten, and we should ‘press toward the mark’ with courage and with triumph! Think and realise to yourselves, dear friends, the contents of your hope, if you are Christian people —

fellowship with Jesus Christ, the knitting of all broken ties that it will be for our joy and peace to have re- knit; the absence of all trouble that has served for discipline; the rod being broken when the child has grown to be a man; the rest and peace, the wisdom and power, the larger service and closer fellowship with the dear Lord, which are waiting certainly for every one of us. And then, if you can, grumble about the road, or be sad or cast down 'by reason of the greatness of the way.' 'We are saved by hope'; and if only we can make real to ourselves the facts which hope based upon Christ reveals as absolute certainties for us all, the clouds will scatter and the darkness will pass before the shining of the true Light.

III. Lastly, the effort that is needed to keep hold of the hope.

The writer uses very emphatic words. He not only speaks about holding it fast, but about doing so unto 'the end,' duplicating, as it were, the idea of effort in the grasp, and declaring that that effort is to be continuous until the time when hope is lost in fruition. Now I need not remind you — we can all remind ourselves if we think — of the many outward difficulties and hindrances that rise to the vigour and vitality of this Christian hope. These may be so dealt with by us that they become subservient to its vitality and vigour, but by reason of our weakness, they often draw us away from Christ, and become distractions instead of helps. These are perpetually at work in order to make the Christian hope less vivid, to blur the outlines and dim the colours of the picture which it paints. Our own weaknesses and worldlinesses and clinging loves that twine themselves round creatures of earth, make it hard for us to soar in devout contemplation high enough to leave the mists below and see the blue and the sun. We are all short- sighted in spiritual matters, and cannot see the things that are afar off, and the fact that they are far off makes them unreal to many of us. Therefore, unless there be constant effort directed to retain the vividness of our impression of the things that are unseen, the vulgar, intrusive, flashing brightnesses of the poor, paltry present will dim them all to our eyes. Whilst, then, there is constant need for effort, and without it we shall certainly lose our apprehension of the unseen blessedness, to hope in which is our very life, a great deal can be done by making direct efforts to cultivate these graces of which I have been speaking, and that from which they come. Though by no means altogether so, it is very much a matter of will and resolution whether Christian people shall be brave and exultant, or whether they shall go mourning all their days, and never taking up the privileges which they possess. If you were to say every morning, 'Now I am going to try to-day to keep myself up on the high level, the overhead railway, and to travel there,' you would find it possible to do it. A man cannot make himself glad by saying, 'Now I am determined I will be glad,' but the moods and changing emotions of our Christian life which reposes upon facts that do not change, are very largely under our own control, and it is generally our own fault if we find our confidence oozing out at our finger-ends, and an unnameable and vague sadness, of which we scarcely know the cause, wrapping our souls like a chill November mist. One honest and vigorous resolution would rend the mist, in nine cases out of ten, and we should find that it was all the product of the undrained ditches in our own hearts.

But whilst a great deal can be done by a dead lift of resolution, and by governing our feelings and keeping a tight hand upon our emotions, far more can be done by the simpler, and in some respects easier, and certainly more effectual, way of keeping our eyes fixed upon the Person and the facts on which our hope is grounded, and from which our courage flows. That is to say, look at Jesus Christ, and keep by His side, and look into His eyes until you can see love gleaming in them, and touch His pierced hands until you can feel the power trickling from His fingers into your weakness, and rest on the assurances of His faithful word until the unseen and far-off good that He has promised is more real than the little goods close beside you. You can cultivate hope most effectually by gazing upon the things unseen, and above all, on the Person who 'is our Hope.' If only we will keep ourselves By faith, love, aspiration, communion of thought, and feeling, and desire, near to Him, He will stand beside us, and repeat to us the old word that was so frequent upon His lips, 'Fear not,' and courage will come. He will say, too, as He did in the hour of deepest sorrow, 'These things have I spoken unto you that My joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full'; and our triumphant exultation will rise like water in a reservoir when a pure river flows into it. He will say, too, 'What and where I am, there shall also My servant be'; and the living hope that comes from union with Him will make us victors over all 'that is at enmity with joy,' and all that is sad, frowning, threatening, and perilous in our present life.

So, dear brethren, we are saved by Hope, and this Hope that we have 'has passed within the veil' with our great High Priest, and there we can anchor our souls and fear not shipwreck, but ride out every storm.

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Hebrews 3:7, 8 Hear His Voice

'Today if ye will hear His voice, harden not your hearts… ' — Hebrews 3:7, 8

WHOSE voice? The writer of the psalm from which these words are quoted meant God's. The writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews, in quoting them, means Christ's. And the unhesitating transfer, without explanation or apology, of a sacred saying of the Old Testament from God to Christ is a plain indication, especially considering that the writer was a Jew addressing Jews, of what he and they believed about Christ's divinity. His voice was God's voice, to be listened to with equal deference, and capable of bringing the same result.

‘To-day’; when is to-day? The writer of the psalm meant his own epoch; the writer of the Epistle go the Hebrews means his. And the unhesitating transfer of the words from one period to another rests on the principle that there is a continuous voice of God sounding through all the ages, to which each generation in turn has the privilege of listening, and the responsibility of not turning away. So we are not only permitted, but obliged, to bring down the ‘go-day’ to our Own period, and to believe that God’s voice in Christ is speaking to us individually as truly and directly as if it had never been uttered to any of the men of the past. One more remark by way of introduction. ‘If ye will hear His voice’ conveys the idea of volition. The writer of the epistle had no such intention. He did not mean to say, ‘If ye want to hear God’s voice, open your ears.’ But he uses the ‘if’ as it is often employed in Scripture, not go express doubt, but simply to east a statement into the form of a supposition. The meaning is really substantially equivalent to ‘as often as.’ Instead of ‘will’ we get the meaning much better when we read, with the Revised Version ‘ shall.’ ‘To-day, if ye shall hear His voice, harden not your hearts.’

Now if that be the connection and the meaning of the words before us, there are three things that I want to press upon you from them. First, that Jesus Christ is speaking to you; second, that there is a danger of steeling your hearts against Him; third, that it is wise to listen to-day.

I. That Jesus Christ is speaking to you.

The readers of this letter, certainly, and its writer, probably, never heard Jesus Christ in His earthly utterances; but as the letter says, in another place, ‘He now speaketh from heaven.’ The writer was sure that to these people, who had never heard a syllable of the Lord’s earthly sayings, that pleading, infinitely sweet and persuasive voice was ever coming. And, as I said, his bold transference of the ancient words to his own generation involves a principle which compels us to transfer them equally unhesitatingly from the generation of apostles and early Christians to our own prosaic and commonplace times. Jesus Christ, dear friends, is speaking to every one of us, direct and straight, as He spoke to the men of those days.

He speaks to us by His recorded earthly utterances. Oh, if people would read the gospels as they ought to be read — with the conviction that there was nothing in Christ’s words, local, temporary, or peculiar to the individuals to whom they were primarily addressed — how different they would be to us all! His own declaration is true about all His utterances, ‘What I say unto you’ — the little group gathered round Me here, — ‘I say unto all’ — those dim and distant multitudes away out to the very ends of the earth, and down through the ages, I speak to them all.

He stands and says to me, and to thee, ‘Come unto Me all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.’ Dear brother, straight to you, as if winged like an arrow from the heavens, comes this call of the Lord, ‘If any man thirst’ — and surely that is general enough to take us all in — ‘let him come unto Me and drink.’ We are putting no violence on the Lord’s words by thus asserting their direct aim at every human heart. For I believe, for my part, that the love and individualising knowledge of Jesus Christ are divine; and that each of us has his own place in that loving heart; and that to each of us He spoke when He spoke unto all. So if you will rightly use the record that you have, you will hear in it Christ speaking to you.

He speaks to us by one another. I do not believe in sacerdotal authority, nor in apostolic succession, nor in any mystical sacredness attaching to any form of the preacher’s office; but I do believe that the humblest and rudest of men who turns to another and says, ‘Brother, Jesus Christ is thy Saviour; wilt thou not let Him save thee?’ is speaking Christ’s words. ‘He that heareth you, heareth Me.’ That is no bestowment of superhuman and magical authority on either apostles or clergy, hut it is the declaration which I am trying to enforce, that every lip that is opened to proclaim the love of God in Jesus Christ our Lord derives all its power and all its music, if there be any, from the inspiration of Christ Himself. The body of a violin is but meant to reverberate the sound; it is His hand that is drawn across the strings. All Christian teachers are the sounding-boards and reverberators of the music that He has made. They are but like wind instruments; the breath that is blown through them is the breath of Christ Himself. Alas! that the instrument is so often out of tune, and so poorly reproduces the infinite sweetness of the pleading tones of Him into whose lips grace was poured. But He does speak, and speaks even through such poor instruments as me.

He speaks to you deep down in that solemn voice that sometimes wakes within, and rebukes and restrains and directs. If it be true, and true it is, that the eternal Word of God is the Light that lighteth every man that cometh into the world, it is tenfold more true — if I may so say — that consciences like ours, which have been saturated with the more or less, direct influences of Christian morality all our days, are to be taken as His voice.

And so, I beseech you, discern Christ’s words, and not the mere historical record of what a dead Man once said in the past — of which criticism may make more or less havoc — but Christ’s living words, springing fresh from His lips, and meant for you, in the words of the gospels. Hear His utterances, and not men’s poor faltering transcription and translation of them, in the words which my

fellows and I may chance to speak to you. And hear His voice in that august monitor which you carry within, to warn and to impel, a spur to all lingering good, and a check upon all rampant evil.

II. Notice the danger of steeling the heart against Him.

One would have thought that the last thing possible was that there should be a pleading God and a refusing man; that there should be a God manifest in Jesus Christ, beseeching us to accept the loftiest gifts, and that men should turn away from the beseeching. Old legends tell us how mystic music put motion into sticks and stones, and made the trees of the wood clap their hands. But men's hearts mysteriously and tragically remain stolidly deaf against that voice. It, always has been so. Of old, Wisdom cried in the high places of the city; and even her queenly majesty, and gentle persuasions, and infinitely desirable gifts, gained her no hearing, and her last word was, 'I have called and ye have refused.' The Incarnate Wisdom came upon earth, not to cry nor lift up His voice in the streets, but to appeal with gentleness and searching power to men, and He had to turn away from His temple and say, 'Thou knewest not the time of Thy visitation.' All that have had the best and highest things to say to the world have had the same experience. 'If a man prophesy of wine and strong drink,' speaking words that excite and offer to gratify sense and appetite, 'he shall be the prophet of this people,' and the God-messenger has to stand and say, 'All day long have I stretched out my hands to a disobedient and a gainsaying people.' A result so uniform must have deep-lying causes.

I do not intend to enter upon these now. I wish to say a word or two rather about the 'how' than about the 'why' of this strange fact, and to warn you, dear friends, against the courses by which so many of us, and you and I in our time, no doubt, have often stopped our ears against Christ's voice. Simple occupation with all sorts of other things will effectually do it, Great is the power of preoccupation, magical is the power of indifference. A man can resolve not to attend to almost anything, however imperative and urgent may be its appeals to him. They used to beat drums and blow trumpets in the market-places of the towns when John Wesley and the early Methodists went into them in order to prevent the preacher's voice from being heard. And you and I know but too well — do we not? — what it is to busy ourselves with such a clamant crowd of occupations that Christ's voice gets smothered and stifled. Go into a factory and you can see that two men are talking to one another, because their lips are moving, hut you cannot hear a word they say for the whir of the spindles and the clatter of the looms. And there are a great many of us that silence Jesus Christ in that fashion. We see His mouth move, and we make the more noise at our business, and so manage to harden our hearts. Do not, as soon as you go out of these doors, let the rattle of the world come in to deafen the ears of your conscience to the pleadings of your Saviour.

You can harden your hearts very effectually by neglecting to do what you know you ought to do. You can kill a plant if you persistently pick off the buds, and prevent it from flowering. You can kill your consciences in the same fashion. There is nothing which makes a man so receptive of further communications from his Lord as obedience to what He has already heard, and he who says, 'Thy servant heareth,' will never have to say in vain, 'Speak, Lord!' The converse is true. There is nothing that so hinders a man from knowing what Christ would have him do as to know that He would have him do something which He will not do. You can take the bell off the rock if you like. That will contribute to your sleeping on the voyage, and you will be troubled by no intrusive ringings until the bow is amongst the white breakers and the keel grinding on the black rocks. You can harden your hearts thus by neglecting your convictions.

You can do it by wilfully fighting them down. And I am sure that there are men and women here who know what it is to do that. Take a lump of raw cotton, and put it under sufficient pressure, and you can make it as compact as a bullet. So you can take your hearts, and by dint of determined resistance, and bringing all manner of pressure to bear upon them, you can squeeze and squeeze and squeeze till you squeeze all generous impulses and lofty thoughts and wishes to be better, and convictions of duty, clean out of them, and leave them no bigger than a walnut, and as hard as a cannon-ball. You can do it; do not risk it, It is possible by plunging yourselves into a deliberate course of exciting and intoxicating evil to shake off impressions so as to laugh at them. 'Take a hair of the dog that bit you' is the devil's prescription. I dare say there are people who know what it is, in order to get rid of themselves, or rather I should say of Christ speaking in themselves, to plunge more desperately into some absorbing course of evil. That is the Nemesis of all wrongdoing, that as it continues the delight of it diminishes and the necessity for it increases, to bury remembrances, to drown reflections, to get rid of self. And so as chemists can liquify oxygen you can freeze down your hearts if you will into a solid mass, impervious to anything but the retributive blow that will shatter it. Beware! 'Since ye hear His voice, harden not your hearts.'

III. Lastly, notice the wisdom of listening to-day.

Now, as I have said, the 'to-day' of my text was the epoch of the generation which the writer was addressing; and in one very blessed sense 'to-day' for each of us is the whole period of our earthly lives, during which sounding on for ever will be the pleading of Jesus Christ's voice. And so men say, 'It is never too late to mend.' Yes, perfectly true; but is not the other side as true: It is never too soon to mend? Whilst the 'to-day' of my text, thank God, lasts as long as the day of life, there is a very real sense in which the

more ordinary meaning of it is applicable to this matter. I do not need to remind you how in all regions of life there is nothing more deleterious to character nor more fatal to success than the habit of putting off doing plain duty. In your business you are trained to promptitude. The man that does not let grass grow under his feet in ordinary matters will be half way on his journey whilst another man is thinking of getting his boots on. And promptitude is no less important — in some aspects it is even more so-in regard to listening to the voice of Jesus Christ, and obeying His commandments. So I want to plead with you, dear friends, to that effect.

'That thou doest do quickly,' if it be a right thing. 'That thou doest drop quickly,' if it be a wrong thing. But let there be no hesitation in regard of the one course or the other. As Elijah said, 'How long halt ye between two opinions?' or in the very picturesque word of the original, 'How long do you hobble along upon both knees,' resting now upon one and then upon the other. 'If the Lord be God,' then plain common sense says 'follow Him'; 'if Baal, then follow Him.'

And this is the more needful, because impressions or convictions stirred by the voice of Christ are apt to be very evanescent. They are delicate; they require prompt fixing, or they fade off the sensitive plate. They are like the images of a dream — very clear at the moment we wake, ten minutes afterwards irrecoverable. Do not trifle with what may be a fleeting inclination to eternal duty.

And they are very hard to reproduce. I am sure I am speaking to some who were once on the verge of taking Christ for their Saviour, and then something within said, 'Yet a little more sleep and a little more slumber,' and the disposition has never come back again. Felix sent for Paul many a time after the first time, and talked with him, but he never' trembled' any more, but talked comfortably with his prisoner about the possibility of screwing a ransom out of him. I say nothing about other reasons for prompt action, such as that every moment makes it harder for a man to turn to Jesus Christ as his Saviour. The dreadful power Of habit weaves chains about him, thin at first as a spider's web, solid at last as an iron fetter. Associations that entangle, connections that impede grow with terrible rapidity. And if it is hard for you to turn to your Lord now, it will never be easier, and will certainly be harder.

And, dear friends, 'to-day' — how long is it going to last? Of course I know that all the deepest reasons for your being a Christian remain unaffected if you were going to live in the world for ever. And, of course, I know that the gospel of Jesus Christ is as good to live by as it is to die by. But, notwithstanding, common sense says that if our time here is so uncertain as we know it to be, there is no time to put off. You and I have to die, whether we find a convenient season for it or not. And perhaps we have to die before we find Felix's 'convenient season' to send for Paul or Paul's Master. So in the narrowest sense of the word, 'To-day… harden not your hearts.'

But I dare say some of you, and especially some of you young people, may be kept from accepting Jesus Christ as your Saviour, and serving Him, by a vague disinclination and dread to make so great a change. I beseech you, do not give a feather's weight to such considerations. If a change is right, the sooner it is made the better. The shrinking all passes when it is made, just as a bather recovers himself when once his head has been plunged beneath the water.

And some of you may be kept back because you know that there are sins that you will have to unveil if you become Christians. Well, do not let that keep you back either. Confession is healing and good and sweet to the soul, if it is needful for repentance. Sins that men have a right to know hurt as long as they are hid, and cease to hurt when they are acknowledged, like the fox beneath the Spartan boy's robe, that gnawed when it was covered up, and stopped biting when it was revealed.

So, dear friends, you hear Christ speaking to you in His Word, in His servants, in the depths of your hearts. He speaks to you of a dying Saviour, of His infinite love, of His perfect sacrifice, of a complete salvation, a cleansed heart, a blessed life, a calm death, an open heaven for each if we will take them. See that ye refuse not Him that speaketh.'

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Hebrews 3:13 - The Lies of the Temptress

The deceitfulness of sin. — Hebrews 3:13.

THERE is a possible reference here, in this personification of **Sin**, as leading men away by lies, to the story of the First Temptation. There, the weapons of the Tempter were falsehoods.

There was a lie about the unlawfulness of the suggested act, insinuated rather than boldly spoken, 'Hath God said, ye shall not eat?' (Ge 3:1)

There was a lie about its disadvantages, 'Ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil.' (Ge 3:5KJV)

There was a lie about its ultimate consequences, 'Ye shall not surely die.' (Ge 3:4)

And these three falsehoods are typical of the methods whichSin employs to draw us away from the path of right.

The writer of this letter does not leave us in much doubt as to what he means by sin, for he includes in it not only gross outward acts, but goes a great deal deeper, and in the verse before my text, all but defines it as being 'an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God.' (He 3:12-note) Whether it come in the form of gross breaches of the common laws of morality, or whether it come in more refined but not less dangerous forms, everything by which my heart goes away from God is sin; and **every such thing gains its power over me by dangling before my credulous eyes a series of falsehoods.**

So then my purpose is just to try to unrip some of these lies, and see what is inside of them. The d**eceitfulness 'of sin'** tells **lies** about the bait; — **lies** about the hook that it hides; **lies** about the criminality of the act to which she would draw us; and, lastly, **lies** about the possibilities of deliverance. Let me touch on each of these in order.

LIES ABOUT
THE BAIT

I. First, then, my text suggests to me Sin's lies about the bait.

The old story is typical, and may stand as a well-developed specimen of the whole set of evil deeds. 'When she saw that it was pleasant to the eye, and good for food, and a thing to be desired,' (Ge 3:6) then the inflamed desire, perceiving the attainable object, went straight at it. And that is the history of all the evil that we do.

It is either for the sake of **winning a desirable object,** or for the sake of **avoiding some undesirable issu**e; **we never do the wrong thing, and go away from God, except under a delusion that we shall be better and happier when we have got the desired thing than we should be without it.**

Now I do not mean to say for a moment that there is not a very solid reality in the pleasurable results of a great many wrong things (cp Heb 11:25**-note**). If a man chooses to sin to gratify sense, he does get the sensuous enjoyment out of it. The food that is stolen will stay hunger, and be sweet upon the palate, just as much as that which is the product of honest industry. The things which tempt our desires we may get; and there will be no illusion at all about the reality and solidity of the pleasure.

But there is another question to be asked. You have got the thing you wanted; have you — what then? Are you much the better for it? Are you satisfied with it? Was it as good as it looked when it was not yours? Is it as blessed now that you have stretched your hand across the **flames of Hell** and made it your own as it seemed when it danced there on the other side? Is not the giant painted on the canvas outside the caravan a great deal bigger than the reality inside, when you go in to look at him?

> **Is there anything that we have got by doing wrong for it, howsoever it may have satisfied the immediate impulse in obedience to whose tyrannous requirements we were stirred up to grasp it, which is worth, in solid enjoyment, what we gave for it?**

Having attained the desire, do we not find that it satisfies not us, but only some small part of us? If I might so say, we are like those men that old stories used to tell about that had swallowed some loathly worm. We feed the foul creeping thing within us, but ourselves continue hungry. We cannot slake our thirst out of empty cups, however jeweled.

Besides, sin's pleasures are false, because along with them all comes an after tang that takes the sweetness out of them. Like the prophet's book, they may be honey on the lip, but bitter as gall when swallowed. Some foul-tasting preparation of naphtha is put into spirits of wine to keep people from drinking it. The cup that sin brings to you, though it may be fiery and intoxicating, has got the "nasty naphtha" in it too. And you taste both the one and the other!

There is only one thing that promises less than it performs, and which can satisfy a man's soul; and that is cleaving to God. Go to Him, let nothing draw you away from Him. Let us hold by Him in love, thought, obedience; and the lies that tempt us to our destruction will have no power over us (cp Ro 13:14**-note**); and we shall possess joys that neither pall nor end (Ps 16:11**-note**), nor leave behind them a bitterness upon the lips. 'Even in laughter the heart is sorrowful, and the end of that mirth is heaviness.' (Pr 14:13KJV) Better what Christ offers in the cup which He drank off, whereof, though the taste may be bitter at first, what remains is His own joy, perpetual and full (cp He 11:26**-note**)

LIES ABOUT
THE HOOK

II. Again, note the lies about the hook.

The old story lends itself to us as a kind of general expression to which all the falsehoods of sin may be reduced. 'Ye shall not surely die.' (Ge 3:4) **I suppose that if any man had clear before him at the moment of any temptation, howsoever fiery and strong, the whole sweep of the consequences that are certainly involved in his yielding to it, he would pause on the edge, and durst not do it.**

But sin suppresses facts; and here are a few of the barbed points which she hides.

(Barbed point #1) She does not tell you anything about outward consequences.

I have been speaking about gross forms of sin. I wish I could believe that there is no man among my hearers to whom dehortations from them are appropriate, but I fear that in a great city like this there are never gathered as many men and women together as are here, without there being some whose sin lies in the direction of sensuous passion and animal indulgence. And I beseech such to remember the hook as well as the bait, and to think of the outward consequences in broken constitutions, poisoned blood, enfeebled frames, damaged reputations, loss of faculty, position, prospects, and a thousand other things, which hang round about the path of the profligate man. Every year there come into Manchester young men who fancy they can **play the game** and not **pay the stakes**.

Every month, I was going to say, there drop out of this great city, bankrupt in reputation, ruined in health, driven from positions of hopes and profit, the heart-break of their families, and a curse to themselves, young fellows that listened to such words as I am speaking to them now, and went away and said:

'We will chance it! It is exaggerated.'

Yes, it would be, if I said that this was true about the whole circle of evil-doers, but it is not exaggerated, if you remember that a definite percentage of all the young profligates of Manchester, year by year, go away to die, with their 'bones full of the iniquity of their youth.'

Did Pleasure show you that hook when she dangled her bait before your eyes?

(Barbed point #2) She suppresses the action of conscience.

There is nothing more awful than the occasional swiftness and completeness of the revulsion of feeling between the **moment before** and the **moment after**. (**Ed**: Referring to knowingly committing sin). While yet escape from the temptation was possible, the thing looked so fascinating, so all-desirable; and the next moment, when the thing is done, and can never be undone, and you have got round to the back of it, it looks so hideous and threatening. Conscience lulled, or at least unheard during the hubbub of the clamant voices of the passions that yelled to be fed, lifts up her solemn voice sometimes, the moment that they are silent, gnawing the poisoned portion that is thrown to them, and speaks.

Did Pleasure tell you about that hook when she dangled the bait before your eyes?

(Barbed point #3) She suppresses the action of sin upon character.

We do not perceive how all our deeds, even the small and apparently transitory and incidental, are really linked together in an iron net-work of cause and effect, so as that every one of them lives on and on, in more or less perceptible and distinct effects upon our characters (**Ed**: Beloved, does not this statement cause give you a sense of "horror"? It does me!).**You cannot do a wrong thing, 'departing from the living God,' without thereby leaving an indelible mark upon your whole spiritual and moral nature.**

Loftier aspirations die out of you, the incapacity for better actions is confirmed, and that awful, mysterious thing that we call '**habit**' comes in to ensure that once done, twice will be probable, and twice done, thrice and innumerable times more will be **almost certain**.

There is nothing more mystical and solemn about our lives than the way in which unthought of and trifling deeds harden themselves into habits, and dominate us, whether we will or no. And so the sin which once stood in front of us with a smile and tempted us, because it was desirable, afterwards comes behind us with a frown, and is a taskmaster with a whip. Instead of being drawn from before by anticipated delight, we are driven from behind by tyrannous habit, and commit the old sin, not because we expect pleasure, but to get away from misery (**Ed**: While some might call this "**addiction**", **Maclaren** calls it by it's real name "**Sin**"!). The flowery fetters become iron, and the evil once done gets to be our master, and we are held and bound in the chain of our sins (cp Pr 5:22-**note**, 2Pe 2:19-**note**, Jn 8:34, Ro 6:16-**note**, Ro 6:19-**note**, Ro 6:20-**note**, Ro 6:21, 22-**note**).

And more than that, there is the necessity for perpetual increase, heavier doses, more pungent forms of evil, in order to titillate the increasing insensitiveness of the nature. You take a tiger cub into your house when it is little; it is prettily striped, graceful in its motions, playful and affectionate; and it grows up, and when it is big, it is the master of you, if it is not the murderer of you!

Do not you take the little sin into your hearts.

It will grow, and its claws will grow, and its ferocity will grow.

And now all these consequences suggest the last of sin's suppressions that I would specify.

(Barbed point #4) They all make a future retribution a probable thing.

And that future retribution is a plain and necessary inference from any belief at all in a God and in a future life. But the tempting sin has nothing to say about that future judgment, or if it has, has only this to say: 'Ye shall not die.' Is it not strange that it is almost impossible to get many of you — reasonable, farsighted, prudent men and women as you are, in regard to ordinary things — to look that fact fairly in the face? You are like sailors who get into the spirit-room in a ship when she is driving on the rocks, and as long as you can get the momentary indulgence, never mind about what is coming.

But you cannot 'jump the life to come.'

> '**Let no man deceive** (**present imperative** + a negative = command to stop action already in progress) you with vain (**kenos**) words; because of these things (**What things?** Eph 5:5-**note**) the wrath (**orge**) of God is coming upon the children of disobedience (**apeithes**).' (Eph 5:6-**note**)

And so, dear brethren, let me plead with you. Weak my words are 'I know, to break down the walls with which we surround ourselves.' But oh, let me try to get within the defenses, and plead with you not to let wishes, inclinations, and earthly tastes make you so short-sighted (cp 2Pe 1:9-**note**, 2Pe 1:10-**note**); but take into view all the consequences of your actions, and then tell me, if, in comparison with the duration of their results, anything is so wise as to love and serve and cleave to God Who dwells in Christ, and in Whom is our portion and our all (cp Ps 73:25, 26-**note**) 'It is an evil thing and a bitter to depart from the living God.' (He 3:12-**note**)

LIES ABOUT

THE CRIMINALITY

III. Then notice again, the lies as to the criminality of the deed.

Once more the old story avails us. 'Hath God said Ye shall not eat?' is the insinuated suggestion that creeps into most men's minds. I suppose that the number of us who, with clear eyes, knowing the thing at the moment that we do it to be wrong, do yet resolve that, wrong as it is, it shall be done, is comparatively few. I suppose that by far the majority simply ignore the question of right or wrong, when the question of pleasant and desirable comes to be canvassed.

Before the committal — as I was saying a moment ago — we have an awful power of silencing our consciences. Just as housebreakers carry some drugged meat for the house-dogs when they intend to break into some lonely farmhouse, so we are all adepts in applying gentle phrases to our own evil, while if the same thing is done by anybody else we shall flame up in indignation, as David did when Nathan told him about the man and his one ewe lamb (**cp** 2Sa 11:1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 15, 16, 17 with 2Sa 12:1, 2, 3, 4, 5,6 ,7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14).

Therefore it comes to this — do not you trust to instinctive utterances of inclination calling itself conscience

Remember that you can bribe **conscience (word study)** to say anything but that it is right to do wrong. You will get it to say anything that you teach it about what is wrong and what is not. And therefore you must find a better guide than conscience. You have to enlighten it and educate it and check it, and keep it wakeful and suspicious, as the price of purity.

The same set of lies about the criminality of our actions operates with still greater effect after the committal.

I was speaking a moment or two ago about the sudden waking of conscience when the deed is done. But there is a worse thing than that, and that is when conscience does not wake. That is the condition, I have no doubt, of many people listening to me now. 'She wiped her mouth and said I have done no harm.'

You can muffle the bell so that there will come no sound. You can sear your hand, if you once press a hot iron upon it; and you can make the cuticle of your conscience, if I may so say, just as insensitive by the same process.

So then, my friend, do you take care that you do not thus darken the light that is in you, till it becomes darkness. (cp Mt 6:22, 23)

And remember also that your knowing nothing against yourself does not prove you to be blameless.

There is nothing harder than to drive home the consciousness of sinfulness.

I can fancy what is passing in some, as they listen to me now. Some of you refer all that I am saying to that other man in the corner there, whom it will fit so well. Some of you are saying to yourselves, 'Oh yes, I admit it all in a general way'; but not summoning up in your mind any of the evils which cling and cleave to you individually. And some of you are trying to break the force of what I am saying by theories about responsibility, and how a man is the creature of circumstances and the like (**Ed**: Much like our modern tendency toward a "victim" mentality and it's close "cousins" like "it's my family's fault" or "I'm not responsibile", etc); or by pleading in arrest of judgment your better side: 'I am a respectable man. Nobody can find any fault with me. I am a good father, a good husband, an honest tradesman, a man of my word, a cultured gentleman perhaps, a student, a man abhorring gross sin, and so forth; and your words have nothing at all to do with me.'

Ah! have they not? **'Departing from the living God'**; that is the sin that I am talking about, brother — not going and getting drunk stealing, wallowing in the sty of sensualism; not the mere external acts.

The kernel of all sin is living to ourselves.

That is what I want to lay upon all your consciences. And that is the hardest of all results for even the most earnest and pleading words to effect, in the minds of the respectable, self-complacent, gospel- hardened people that come and fill these pews.

LIES ABOUT

DELIVERANCE THEREFROM

IV. So the last word that I wish to say is in reference to the falsehoods of sin in regard to the deliverance therefrom.

These other lies, like bubbles, sometimes burst. The first of them, about the pleasures, generally bursts as soon as the thing is done. The others about the pains and the criminality often disappear when pricked by some thought of God and contact with Him. But the repertory of the deceiver is not empty yet. And she can turn her hand and bring out another set of lies, in order to retain her dominion. For the sin that said to you before you did it:

> 'There is no harm in it; you do not need to do it again; it is only just once and it will be done with,'

says to you after you have done it, when you begin to feel that it was wrong, and try to shake off its guilt and power:

> 'You have done it now! You never can get away any more. The thing is past, and neither in regard to its consequences nor in regard to its power will you ever escape from it. What you have written you have written. You are mine!'

And so she lays her iron claw upon the man and holds him. Some of us put that into a philosophical principle, and say that in this great system of rigid interlocking of cause and effect, the idea of forgiveness and of a new beginning of life is impossible and absurd. Some of us that cannot talk in that strain, yet know what it is to have to say:

> 'There is no hope! I have loved evil, and after it I must yet go.'

So sin lies to us just as she lied before.

And I have to come now with the message that, of all her falsehoods none is more false and fatal than the falsehood that a sinful man cannot turn from his evil; conquer all his transgression; begin a new happy, clean life; and be sure of forgiveness from His Father in Heaven.

'Jesus Christ, the faithful and true witness,' has died that it may be possible to bring to us pure and true promises of lasting and satisfying blessedness, and to avert from each of us, if we will trust in the power of His blood, the worst and penal consequences of our transgression, and if we will trust in the power of His imparted Spirit, to make our future altogether unlike our past, and deliver us from the habit and entail of our sins.

THE SORCERESS

OR

THE SAVIOR

So, dear friend, these two stand before you.

On one side the Sorceress with a smile on her lips, a lie on her tongue, and a knife in her sleeve. Do not go into her house. 'The dead are there; and her guests are in the depths of Hell.'

On the other side stands Jesus Christ Who has died to 'redeem our souls from' her 'deceit and violence'; and trusting in whom we may all say: 'My soul is escaped as a bird out of the snare of the fowlers. The snare is broken and I am escaped.'

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Hebrews 3:14 A Momentous 'If'

'We are made partakers of Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast unto the end.' — Hebrews 3:14

ONE of the great characteristics of this remarkable letter to Hebrew Christians is the frequency and earnestness of its warnings against apostasy. Over and over again we find these recurring, and in fact we may say that the whole letter is written in order to guard against that danger. The circumstances in which the persons to whom it was originally addressed found themselves largely explain that emphasis laid upon their danger of forsaking Christ. For they had to face what was perhaps the greatest trial to which faith was ever exposed, in the entire dissolution and violent extinction of the whole Jewish system which the prescription of uncounted centuries, in addition to the direct voice of God Himself, had consecrated:. And they were to 'hold fast by their confidence,' though it seemed as if heaven and earth were being swept away. No wonder that there was danger of their becoming 'of those that drew back to perdition,' when such convulsions were uprooting the pillars on which their whole habits of thought and action had rested.

But, dear brethren, though our lot is cast in quieter times, the continual tendencies of our nature, and the continual stress of circumstances, make the exhortation of my text quite as important and as fitting for us. 'Cast not away your confidence, which hath great recompense of reward,' must ever ring in the ears of Christ's disciples. And in these words of our text we
have set forth very strongly and beautifully —

I. The necessity that is laid upon every believing heart.

'Hold fast the beginning of our confidence steadfast unto the end.' Now what is meant by 'the beginning of our confidence'? It may mean either of two things — I am inclined to believe that it means Both. The outward fact, from which our confidence took its Beginning as its ground foundation, or to use learned words, the objective fact manifested to us in the gospel which tells of the incarnate dying and raised Christ, is the beginning of all true confidence. On it, and on it alone, can there be built a solid, rational assurance that can give an account of itself, and face the facts of the present and the future. And if my text be understood from that point of view, then the exhortation is to keep a firm hold of the initial truth that first of all stirred faith in our trembling hearts and breathed a tranquil assurance over our troubled consciences. Keep a firm grasp of the elementary initial truths which at first drew you to the Master.

But then, on the other hand, not excluded by this interpretation, but rather inextricably interwoven with it, is the other possible meaning of the text. 'Hold fast the beginning of your confidence' — the initial act on your parts. What was it, Christian man, that first breathed a little light air of hope through the stagnant calm of indifference in your heart? That new hope was the consequence of two simple but mighty acts — repentance and trust in Jesus Christ. From these two inward dispositions there sprung, like a rainbow over a cataract, the quivering, painted bow of hope. Confidence is born of penitence and faith. 'Hold fast the beginning of your confidence,' and ever reiterate the two initial acts from which it flowed. These two will be reiterated in proportion as our understandings and our hearts grasp the initial fact which, first of all, evoked them.

Now this exhortation, thus comprehensively understood, goes upon the understanding that in that elementary gospel there lies all that a man needs, and it goes also on the understanding that in these two primary acts of the Christian life, repentance and faith, there lie the seeds of all the growths and progresses which it may afterwards attain. In the first word that made these Hebrews Christians, there lay, like the leaves of the beech wrapped up in their tiny brown sheaths, in germ and miniature, and needing only sunshine and dew to open them out, all that their understandings needed for enlightenment, their wills for command, their hearts for their home — all that their hope could paint, all that their love could sigh for. The elements of this science, spoken first, are in one sense its last results. The Alpha is the Omega, and holds in itself all the alphabet — ay, and all the words and books that will be made out of the alphabet. For in that truth, 'God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish,' there lie the beginnings, the 'Principia,' of all knowledge of moral and spiritual matters that a saint can learn or an angel can apprehend. There needs but development; there needs but the commentary of experience and of life in order to bring out of 'the beginning of your confidence' everything that heart and will and mind can need.

And this exhortation goes also on the other understanding that any advance — and advance there must be, for the very word 'begin' implies continuance and progress — that any advance which is to be according to the true law of the Christian system must not be away from, but deeper into that which we apprehended at first. I believe in the advance of Christian thought through the centuries. I believe in the advance of Christian knowledge as well as character in the individual. But I believe that the advance consists in getting to understand more and more of the fulness which lies in the earliest word, and that whosoever construes Christian progress in the sense of leaving behind, as beggarly elements, the truths of a Christ divine, incarnate, dying, raised again, ruling, and coming again to judge, and of a Divine Spirit imparted by that Christ — whosoever supposes that these things are elements to be left far in the rear — will find that his progress is retrogression and not advance. The beginning of the confidence must be continued, and the continuance consists in plunging ourselves more deeply into the beginning.

But, dear brethren, is it not the case that a tragical number of so-called Christians have lost the very conception, not only of progress, but of holding fast by the initial fact and the initial act? I have no doubt there are some of you professing to be Christians, members no doubt of Christian churches, who not only have not advanced one step from the place that they stood in when, as they suppose, they were first of all converted, but who are not nearly as much under the influence of God's truth in Jesus Christ as they were at that far away day, twenty, thirty, or forty years ago. They have made no advance; they have not held their ground. The beginning of their confidence has Been like some of those abortive shoots that trees and shrubs are seduced to put out by the warmth of a mild October, nipped by November frost, and destined never to bear any fruit. The message comes to such with immense and convicting power: 'Hold fast the beginning of your confidence.'

No man on this side of heaven, however deep his devotion, long his career, consistent his conduct, and progressive his piety, is beyond the need for the injunction. My text says, very emphatically, 'to the end.' There have been ships wrecked at the harbour-mouth, and which have gone to pieces with the loss of all hands, on the bar. And as John Bunyan saw long ago, a door opens down to the depths, at the very gate of the Celestial City. So that we can never relax our watchfulness nor our effort to retain what we had, and to continue to practise what we did, long ago. Let me say a word about

II. The hindrances that He in the way of obeying this exhortation.

The Christian life is not different from all other courses of conduct in regard to this characteristic, that it is apt, unnoticed either by the man himself or by onlookers, to slide off its original foundations. All great causes, begun in enthusiasm, are apt to lose their first impulses, and to be actuated at last by little more than use and wont. The deadening influence of habit comes in all our life, and in our religious life just us much as in any other department.

No doubt there are aspects in which it is seen to be a good thing that we should have the stay of a formed habit, instead of having, for each act, to find a fresh and distinguishable impulse towards good. But the evil that goes with bringing life under the sway of habit is no less real than the good. And we are all apt to drop into a complacent taking for granted that the old energy lasts; and that our religious life is bottomed on the old foundations, and that it yields to and is guided by the old motives, when all the while an entire change has come over the man, and what he used to do from fresh impulse he now does as a matter of routine. Is not that true about all of us in some parts of our lives, and about the religious life and acts of many of us? And do we not need to break up this custom, which 'lies upon us with a weight heavy as frost and deep almost as life,' and to go back to the original impulse and the initial fact which brought about the impulse, and while we fight against the evil of habit, to get all the good out of it that it can yield? Again, of course, there must be many changes in a man's attitude to the truth, in proportion as it becomes familiar to him. Wonder goes, excitement must necessarily pass, emotion will cool A fire crackles when it is newly lit, but when it is well burnt up it glows with a steady and unspluttering heat. And so it is by no means all loss if we leave behind us our early agitations and keep our ancient confidence. Emotion is meant to consolidate into principle, and there will be pure gain if it does. But for all that, there is a danger of familiarity with the truth making us indifferent to the truth, and of repeated exercise of the act of penitence or of faith making the act not less emotional — that it must become — but less deep and real; and then there is nothing but loss.

Further, besides these necessary changes in the accompaniments of our confidence, there is the continual operation of our own wayward and feeble natures slackening the grasp that we have of Christ, and enfeebling the practice of the initial repentance and faith. And besides these there are the continual enemies that we carry within ourselves, and the continual operation of externals, which the writer of this letter sets forth in another striking image, when he tells us that we must 'give the more earnest heed to the things that we have heard, lest at any time we should drift away from them.' Yes, the current of life, legitimate duties and occupations, our daily business, our daily joys, and the good and pleasant things which God has bestowed upon us, acting upon us like the pressure of a stream upon a boat not made fast to the bank, tend to sweep us silently down the river. And if the boatman is lying asleep in the bottom of it he will find, when he awakes and opens his eyes, that he is surrounded by strange objects, and that those that he saw before he went to sleep are away far up the stream and out of sight. This unconscious, silent drift, drift, drift is

sweeping away hundreds of Christian men from the firm moorings on the bank there, and unless we each make a continuous effort to retain it, we shall lose our hold of ‘the beginning of our confidence.’

I need not say more than a word about the last thought suggested by the text.

III. The large, blessed result of holding fast the beginning of our confidence.

‘We are made partakers of Christ,’ says the writer. He uses very remarkable language on which we can but touch lightly. I may point out that the words may either mean — and it is difficult to say which of the two things they do mean — either partakers of Christ, as if all of us together sat round that sacred board, and shared the common meal which Christ presents to us, or they may mean partakers with Christ, as if we were each of us partners with Him in the possession of all that He possesses. The difference is merely one of representation, the idea presented is substantially the same in both cases. It is this: we receive Jesus Christ and all that He has and all that He is on condition of faithfully holding fast by the beginning of our confidence. Not as though we did not possess Him until the end came. The writer is not saying anything so doleful as that. The initial act gives a real possession of Jesus. Observe the language of my text. It almost sounds inconsistent with itself, inasmuch as in the first clause it says, ‘We have become,’ if we render the Greek accurately, ‘We have become "partakers,"’ as if the partaking were an accomplished fact; and then goes on as if it were one lying still in the future and contingent. That is to say, the initial, feeblest, most rudimentary, most unintelligent grasp of Christ as Saviour and Friend brings a participation in Him in proportion to its depth and its comprehension of Him. But that participation is capable of indefinite increase, and the way to get more of Christ is to reiterate the initial act and to keep a firm grasp of the first facts, ‘To him that hath shall be given; and from him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath.’