Maclaren on Exodus

Exodus 1:1-14:
FOUR SHAPING CENTURIES

The four hundred years of Israel's stay in Egypt were divided into two unequal periods, in the former and longer of which they were prosperous and favoured, while in the latter they were oppressed. Both periods had their uses and place in the shaping of the nation and its preparation for the Exodus. Both carry permanent lessons.

I. The long days of unclouded prosperity. These extended over centuries, the whole history of which is summed up in two words: death and growth. The calm years glided on, and the shepherds in Goshen had the happiness of having no annals. All that needed to be recorded was that, one by one, the first generation died off, and that the new generations 'were fruitful, and increased abundantly, and multiplied, and waxed exceeding mighty.' The emphatic repetitions recall the original promises in Genesis xii. 2 , xvii. 4, 5 , xviii. 18 . The preceding specification of the number of the original settlers (repeated from Genesis xlvi. 27) brings into impressive contrast the small beginnings and the rapid increase. We may note that eloquent setting side by side of the two processes which are ever going on simultaneously, death and birth.

One by one men pass out of the warmth and light into the darkness, and so gradually does the withdrawal proceed that we scarcely are aware of its going on, but at last 'all that generation' has vanished. The old trees are all cleared off the ground, and everywhere their place is taken by the young saplings. The web is ever being woven at one end, and run down at the other. 'The individual withers, but the race is more and more.' How solemn that continual play of opposing movements is, and how blind we are to its solemnity!

That long period of growth may be regarded in two lights. It effected the conversion of a horde into a nation by numerical increase, and so was a link in the chain of the divine working. The great increase, of which the writer speaks so strongly, was, no doubt, due to the favourable circumstances of the life in Goshen, but was none the less regarded by him, and rightly so, as God's doing. As the Psalmist sings, ' He increased His people greatly.' 'Natural processes' are the implements of a supernatural will. So Israel was being multiplied, and the end for which it was peacefully growing into a multitude was hidden from all but God. But there was another end, in reference to which the years of peaceful prosperity may be regarded; namely, the schooling of the people to patient trust in the long-delayed fulfilment of the promise. That hope had burned bright in Joseph when he died, and he being dead yet spake of it from his coffin to the successive generations. Delay is fitted and intended to strengthen faith and make hope more eager. But that part of the divine purpose, alas! was not effected as the former was. In the moral region every circumstance has two opposite results possible. Each condition has, as it were, two handles, and we can take it by either, and generally take it by the wrong one. Whatever is meant to better us may be so used by us as to worsen us. And the history of Israel in Egypt and in the desert shows only too plainly that ease weakened, if it did not kill, faith, and that Goshen was so pleasant that it drove the hope and the wish for Canaan out of mind. 'While the bridegroom tarried they all slumbered and slept.' Is not Israel in Egypt, slackening hold of the promise because it tarried, a mirror in which the Church may see itself? and do we not know the enervating influence of Goshen, making us reluctant to shoulder our packs and turn out for the pilgrimage? The desert repels more strongly than Canaan attracts.

II. The shorter period of oppression.

Probably the rise of a 'new king' means a revolution in which a native dynasty expelled foreign monarchs. The Pharaoh of the oppression was, perhaps, the great Rameses II., whose long reign of sixty-seven years gives ample room for protracted and grinding oppression of Israel. The policy adopted was characteristic of these early despotisms, in its utter disregard of humanity and of everything but making the kingdom safe. It was not intentionally cruel, it was merely indifferent to the suffering it occasioned. 'Let us deal wisely with them'—never mind about justice, not to say kindness. Pharaoh's 'politics,' like those of some other rulers who divorce them from morality, turned out to be impolitic, and his 'wisdom' proved to be roundabout folly. He was afraid that the Israelites, if they were allowed to grow, might find out their strength and seek to emigrate; and so he set to work to weaken them with hard bondage, not seeing that that was sure to make them wish the very thing that he was blunderingly trying to prevent. The only way to make men glad to remain in a community is to make them at home there. The sense of injustice is the strongest disintegrating force. If there is a 'dangerous class' the surest way to make them more dangerous is to treat them harshly. It was a blunder to make 'lives bitter,' for hearts also were embittered. So the people were ripened for revolt, and Goshen became less attractive.

God used Pharaoh's foolish wisdom, as He had used natural laws, to prepare for the Exodus. The long years of ease had multiplied the nation. The period of oppression was to stir them up out of their comfortable nest, and make them willing to risk the bold dash

for freedom. Is not that the explanation, too, of the similar times in our lives? It needs that we should experience life's sorrows and burdens, and find how hard the world's service is, and how quickly our Goshens may become places of grievous toil, in order that the weak hearts, which cling so tightly to earth, may be detached from it, and taught to reach upwards to God. 'Blessed is the man . . .in whose heart are thy ways,' and happy is he who so profits by his sorrows that they stir in him the pilgrim's spirit, and make him yearn after Canaan, and not grudge to leave Goshen. Our ease and our troubles, opposite though they seem and are, are meant to further the same end,—to make us fit for the journey which leads to rest and home. We often misuse them both, letting the one sink us in earthly delights and oblivion of the great hope, and the other embitter our spirits without impelling them to seek the things that are above. Let us use the one for thankfulness, growth, and patient hope, and the other for writing deep the conviction that this is not our rest, and making firm the resolve that we will gird our loins and, staff in hand, go forth on the pilgrim road, not shrinking from the wilderness, because we see the mountains of Canaan across its sandy flats.

Exodus 1:6-7
DEATH AND GROWTH

And Joseph died, and all his brethren, and all that generation. 7. And the children of Israel were fruitful, and increased abundantly, and multiplied, and waxed exceeding mighty — Exodus 1:6, 7

These remarkable words occur in a short section which makes the link between the Books of Genesis and of Exodus. The writer recapitulates the list of the immigrants into Egypt, in the household of Jacob, and then, as it were, having got them there, he clears the stage to prepare for a new set of actors. These few words are all that he cares to tell us about a period somewhat longer than that which separates us from the great Protestant Reformation. He notes but two processes—silent dropping away and silent growth. 'Joseph died, and all his brethren, and all that generation.' Plant by plant the leaves drop, and the stem rots and its place is empty. Seed by seed the tender green spikelets pierce the mould, and the field waves luxuriant in the breeze and the sunshine. 'The children of Israel were fruitful, and increased abundantly.'

I. Now, then, let us look at this twofold process which is always at work—silent dropping away and silent growth.

It seems to me that the writer, probably unconsciously, being profoundly impressed with certain features of that dropping away, reproduces them most strikingly in the very structure of his sentence: 'Joseph died, and all his brethren, and all that generation.' The uniformity of the fate, and the separate times at which it befell individuals, are strongly set forth in the clauses, which sound like the threefold falls of earth on a coffin. They all died, but not all at the same time. They went one by one, one by one, till, at the end, they were all gone. The two things that appeal to our imagination, and ought to appeal to our consciences and wills, in reference to the succession of the generations of men, are given very strikingly, I think, in the language of my text—namely, the stealthy assaults of death upon the individuals, and its final complete victory.

If any of you were ever out at sea, and looked over a somewhat stormy water, you will have noticed, I dare say, how strangely the white crests of the breakers disappear, as if some force, acting from beneath, had plucked them under, and over the spot where they gleamed for a moment runs the blue sea. So the waves break over the great ocean of time; I might say, like swimmers pulled under by sharks, man after man, man after man, gets twitched down, till at the end—'Joseph died, and all his brethren, and all that generation.'

There is another process going on side by side with this. In the vegetable world, spring and autumn are two different seasons: May rejoices in green leaves and opening buds, and nests with their young broods; but winter days are coming when the greenery drops and the nests are empty, and the birds flown. But the singular and impressive thing (which we should see if we were not so foolish and blind) which the writer of our text lays his finger upon is that at the same time the two opposite processes of death and renewal are going on, so that if you look at the facts from the one side it seems nothing but a charnel-house and a Golgotha that we live in, while, seen from the other side, it is a scene of rejoicing, budding young life, and growth.

You get these two processes in the closest juxtaposition in ordinary life. There is many a house where there is a coffin upstairs and a cradle downstairs. The churchyard is often the children's playground. The web is being run down at the one end and woven at the other. Wherever we look—

Every moment dies a man,
Every moment one is born.

Joseph died, and all his brethren, and all that generation. And the children of Israel . . .multiplied . . .exceedingly.

But there is another thought here than that of the contemporaneousness of the two processes, and that is, as it is written on John Wesley's monument in Westminster Abbey, 'God buries the workmen and carries on the work.' The great Vizier who seemed to be the only protection of Israel is lying in 'a coffin in Egypt.' And all these truculent brothers of his that had tormented him, they are gone, and the whole generation is swept away. What of that? They were the depositories of God's purposes for a little while. Are

God's purposes dead because the instruments that in part wrought them are gone? By no means. If I might use a very vulgar proverb, 'There are as good fish in the sea as ever came out of it,' especially if God casts the net. So when the one generation has passed away there is the other to take up the work. Thus the text is a fitting introduction to the continuance of the history of the further unfolding of God's plan which occupies the Book of Exodus.

II. Such being the twofold process suggested by this text, let us next note the lessons which it enforces.

In the first place, let us be quite sure that we give it its due weight in our thoughts and lives. Let us be quite sure that we never give an undue weight to the one half of the whole truth. There are plenty of people who are far too much, constitutionally and (perhaps by reason of a mistaken notion of religion) religiously, inclined to the contemplation of the more melancholy side of these truths; and there are a great many people who are far too exclusively disposed to the contemplation of the other. But the bulk of us never trouble our heads about either the one or the other, but go on, forgetting altogether that swift, sudden, stealthy, skinny hand that, if I might go back to my former metaphor, is put out to lay hold of the swimmer and then pull him underneath the water, and which will clasp us by the ankles one day and drag us down. Do you ever think about it? If not, surely, surely you are leaving out of sight one of what ought to be the formative elements in our lives.

And then, on the other hand, when our hearts are faint, or when the pressure of human mortality—our own, that of our dear ones, or that of others—seems to weigh us down, or when it looks to us as if God's work was failing for want of people to do it, let us remember the other side—'And the children of Israel . . .increased . . .and waxed exceeding mighty; . . .and the land was filled with them.' So we shall keep the middle path, which is the path of safety, and so avoid the folly of extremes.

But then, more particularly, let me say that this double contemplation of the two processes under which we live ought to stimulate us to service. It ought to say to us, 'Do you cast in your lot with that work which is going to be carried on through the ages. Do you see to it that your little task is in the same line of direction as the great purpose which God is working out—the increasing purpose which runs through the ages.' An individual life is a mere little backwater, as it were, in the great ocean. But its minuteness does not matter, if only the great tidal wave which rolls away out there, in the depths and the distance amongst the fathomless abysses, tells also on the tiny pool far inland and yet connected with the sea by some narrow, long fiord.

If my little life is part of that great ocean, then the ebb and flow will alike act on it and make it wholesome. If my work is done in and for God, I shall never have to look back and say, as we certainly shall say one day, either here or yonder, unless our lives be thus part of the divine plan, 'What a fool I was! Seventy years of toiling and moiling and effort and sweat, and it has all come to nothing; like a long algebraic sum that covers pages of intricate calculations, and the pluses and minuses just balance each other; and the net result is a great round nought.' So let us remember the twofold process, and let it stir us to make sure that 'in our embers' shall be 'something that doth live,' and that not 'Nature,' but something better—God—'remembers what was so fugitive.' It is not fugitive if it is a part of the mighty whole.

But further, let this double contemplation make us very content with doing insignificant and unfinished work.

Joseph might have said, when he lay dying: 'Well! perhaps I made a mistake after all. I should not have brought this people down here, even if I have been led hither. I do not see that I have helped them one step towards the possession of the land.' Do you remember the old proverb about certain people who should not see half-finished work? All our work in this world has to be only what the physiologists call functional. God has a great scheme running on through ages. Joseph gives it a helping hand for a time, and then somebody else takes up the running, and carries the purpose forward a little further. A great many hands are placed on the ropes that draw the car of the Ruler of the world. And one after another they get stiffened in death; but the car goes on. We should be contented to do our little bit of the work. Never mind whether it is complete and smooth and rounded or not. Never mind whether it can be isolated from the rest and held up, and people can say, 'He did that entire thing unaided.' That is not the way for most of us. A great many threads go to make the piece of cloth, and a great many throws of the shuttle to weave the web. A great many bits of glass make up the mosaic pattern; and there is no reason for the red bit to pride itself on its fiery glow, or the grey bit to boast of its silvery coolness. They are all parts of the pattern, and as long as they keep their right places they complete the artist's design. Thus, if we think of how 'one soweth and another reapeth,' we may be content to receive half-done works from our fathers, and to hand on unfinished tasks to them that come after us. It is not a great trial of a man's modesty, if he lives near Jesus Christ, to be content to do but a very small bit of the Master's work.

And the last thing that I would say is, let this double process going on all round us lift our thoughts to Him who lives for ever. Moses dies; Joshua catches the torch from his hand. And the reason why he catches the torch from his hand is because God said, 'As I was with Moses so I will be with thee.' Therefore we have to turn away in our contemplations from the mortality that has swallowed up so much wisdom and strength, eloquence and power, which the Church or our own hearts seem so sorely to want: and, whilst we do, we have to look up to Jesus Christ and say, 'He lives! He lives! No man is indispensable for public work or for private affection and solace so long at there is a living Christ for us to hold by.'

Dear brethren, we need that conviction for ourselves often. When life seems empty and hope dead, and nothing is able to fill the vacuity or still the pain, we have to look to the vision of the Lord sitting on the empty throne, high and lifted up, and yet very near the aching and void heart. Christ lives, and that is enough.

So the separated workers in all the generations, who did their little bit of service, like the many generations of builders who laboured through centuries upon the completion of some great cathedral, will be united at the last; 'and he that soweth, and he that reapeth, shall rejoice together' in the harvest which was produced by neither the sower nor the reaper, but by Him who blessed the toils of both.

'Joseph died, and all his brethren, and all that generation'; but Jesus lives, and therefore His people 'grow and multiply,' and His servants' work is blessed; and at the end they shall be knit together in the common joy of the great harvest, and of the day when the headstone is brought forth with shoutings of 'Grace! grace unto it.'

Exodus 2:1-10
THE ARK AMONG THE FLAGS

I. It is remarkable that all the persons in this narrative are anonymous.

We know that the names of 'the man of the house of Levi' and his wife were Amram and Jochebed. Miriam was probably the anxious sister who watched what became of the little coffer. The daughter of Pharaoh has two names in Jewish tradition, one of which corresponds to that which Brugsch has found to have been borne by one of Rameses' very numerous daughters. One likes to think that the name of the gentle-hearted woman has come down to us; but, whether she was called 'Meri' or not, she and the others have no name here. The reason can scarcely have been ignorance. But they are, as it were, kept in shadow, because the historian saw, and wished us to see, that a higher Hand was at work, and that over all the events recorded in these verses there brooded the informing, guiding Spirit of God Himself, the sole actor.

'Each only as God wills Can work—God's puppets, best and worst, Are we: there is no last nor first.'

II. The mother's motive in braving the danger to herself involved in keeping the child is remarkably put.

'When she saw that he was a goodly child, she hid him.' It was not only a mother's love that emboldened her, as it does all weak creatures, to shelter her offspring at her own peril, but something in the look of the infant, as it lay on her bosom, touched her with a dim hope. According to the Septuagint translation, both parents shared in this. And so the Epistle to the Hebrews unites them in that which is here attributed to the mother only. Stephen, too, speaks of Moses as 'fair in God's sight.' As if the prescient eyes of the parents were not blinded by love, but rather cleared to see some token of divine benediction resting on him. The writer of the Hebrews lifts the deed out of the category of instinctive maternal affection up to the higher level of faith. So we may believe that the aspect of her child woke some prophetic vision in the mother's soul, and that she and her husband were of those who cherished the hopes naturally born from the promise to Abraham, nurtured by Jacob's and Joseph's dying wish to be buried in Canaan, and matured by the tyranny of Pharaoh. Their faith, at all events, grasped the unseen God as their helper, and made Jochebed bold to break the terrible law, as a hen will fly in the face of a mastiff to shield her brood. Their faith perhaps also grasped the future deliverance, and linked it in some way with their child. We may learn how transfiguring and ennobling to the gentlest and weakest is faith in God, especially when it is allied with unselfish human love. These two are the strongest powers. If they are at war, the struggle is terrible: if they are united, 'the weakest is as David, and David as an angel of God.' Let us seek ever to blend their united strength in our own lives.

Will it be thought too fanciful if we suggest that we are taught another lesson,—namely, that the faith which surrenders its earthly treasures to God, in confidence of His care, is generally rewarded and vindicated by receiving them back again, glorified and sanctified by the altar on which they have been laid? Jochebed clasped her recovered darling to her bosom with a deeper gladness, and held him by a surer title, when Miriam brought him back as the princess's charge, than ever before. We never feel the preciousness of dear ones so much, nor are so calm in the joy of possession, as when we have laid them in God's hands, and have learned how wise and wonderful His care is.

III. How much of the world's history that tiny coffer among the reeds held!

How different that history would have been if, as might easily have happened, it had floated away, or if the feeble life within it had wailed itself dead unheard! The solemn possibilities folded and slumbering in an infant are always awful to a thoughtful mind. But, except the manger at Bethlehem, did ever cradle hold the seed of so much as did that papyrus chest? The set of opinion at present minimises the importance of the individual, and exalts the spirit of the period, as a factor in history. Standing beside Miriam, we may learn a truer view, and see that great epochs require great men, and that, without such for leaders, no solid advance in the world's progress is achieved. Think of the strange cradle floating on the Nile; then think of the strange grave among the mountains of Moab,

and of all between, and ponder the same lesson as is taught in yet higher fashion by Bethlehem and Calvary, that God's way of blessing the world is to fill men with His message, and let others draw from them. Whether it be 'law,' or 'grace and truth,' a man is needed through whom it may fructify to all.

IV. The sweet picture of womanly compassion in Pharaoh's daughter is full of suggestions.

We have already noticed that her name is handed down by one tradition as 'Merris,' and that 'Meri' has been found as the appellation of a princess of the period. A rabbinical authority calls her 'Bithiah,' that is, 'Daughter of Jehovah'; by which was, no doubt, intended to imply that she became in some sense a proselyte. This may have been only an inference from her protection of Moses. There is a singular and very obscure passage in I Chronicles iv. 17, 18 , relating the genealogy of a certain Mered, who seems to have had two wives, one 'the Jewess,' the other 'Bithiah, the daughter of Pharaoh.' We know no more about him or her, but Keil thinks that Mered probably 'lived before the exodus'; but it can scarcely be that the 'daughter of Pharaoh,' his wife, is our princess, and that she actually became a 'daughter of Jehovah,' and, like her adopted child, refused royal dignity and preferred reproach. In any case, the legend of her name is a tender and beautiful way of putting the belief that in her 'there was some good thing towards the God of Israel.'

But, passing from that, how the true woman's heart changes languid curiosity into tenderness, and how compassion conquers pride of race and station, as well as regard for her father's edict, as soon as the infant's cry, which touches every good woman's feelings, falls on her ear! 'One touch of nature makes the whole world kin.' All the centuries are as nothing; the strange garb and the stranger mental and spiritual dress fade, and we have here a mere woman, affected, as every true sister of hers to-day would be, by the helpless wailing. God has put that instinct there. Alas that it ever should be choked by frivolity or pride, and frozen by indifference and self-indulgence! Gentle souls spring up in unfavourable soil. Rameses was a strange father for such a daughter. How came this dove in the vulture's cage? Her sweet pity beside his cold craft and cruelty is like the lamb couching by the lion. Note, too, that gentlest pity makes the gentlest brave. She sees the child is a Hebrew. Her quick wit understands why it has been exposed, and she takes its part, and the part of the poor weeping parents, whom she can fancy, against the savage law. No doubt, as Egyptologists tell us, the princesses of the royal house had separate households and abundant liberty of action. Still, it was bold to override the strict commands of such a monarch. But it was not a self-willed sense of power, but the beautiful daring of a compassionate woman, to which God committed the execution of His purposes.

And that is a force which has much like work trusted to it in modern society too. Our great cities swarm with children exposed to a worse fate than the baby among the flags. Legislation and official charity have far too rough hands and too clumsy ways to lift the little life out of the coffer, and to dry the tears. We must look to Christian women to take a leaf out of 'Bithiah' s' book. First, they should use their eyes to see the facts, and not be so busy about their own luxury and comfort that they pass the poor pitch-covered box unnoticed. Then they should let the pitiful call touch their heart, and not steel themselves in indifference or ease. Then they should conquer prejudices of race, pride of station, fear of lowering themselves, loathing, or contempt. And then they should yield to the impulses of their compassion, and never mind what difficulties or opponents may stand in the way of their saving the children. If Christian women knew their obligations and their power, and lived up to them as bravely as this Egyptian princess, there would be fewer little ones flung out to be eaten by crocodiles, and many a poor child, who is now abandoned from infancy to the Devil, would be rescued to grow up a servant of God. She, there by the Nile waters, in her gracious pity and prompt wisdom, is the type of what Christian womanhood, and, indeed, the whole Christian community, should be in relation to child life.

V. The great lesson of this incident, as of so much before, is the presence of God's wonderful providence, working out its designs by all the play of human motives.

In accordance with a law, often seen in His dealings, it was needful that the deliverer should come from the heart of the system from which he was to set his brethren free. The same principle which sent Saul of Tarsus to be trained at the feet of Gamaliel, and made Luther a monk in the Augustinian convent at Erfurt, planted Moses in Pharaoh's palace and taught him the wisdom of Egypt, against which he was to contend. It was a strange irony of Providence that put him so close to the throne which he was to shake. For his future work he needed to be lifted above his people, and to be familiar with the Egyptian court as well as with Egyptian learning. If he was to hate and to war against idolatry, and to rescue an unwilling people from it, he must know the rottenness of the system, and must have lived close enough to it to know what went on behind the scenes, and how foully it smelled when near. He would gain influence over his countrymen by his connection with Pharaoh, whilst his very separation from them would at once prevent his spirit from being broken by oppression, and would give him a keener sympathy with his people than if he had himself been crushed by slavery. His culture, heathen as it was, supplied the material on which the divine Spirit worked. God fashioned the vessel, and then filled it. Education is not the antagonist of inspiration. For the most part, the men whom God has used for His highest service have been trained in all the wisdom of their age. When it has been piled up into an altar, then 'the fire of the Lord' falls.

Our story teaches us that God's chosen instruments are immortal till their work is done. No matter how forlorn may seem their outlook, how small the probabilities in their favour, how divergent from the goal may seem the road He leads them, He watches

them. Around that frail ark, half lost among the reeds, is cast the impregnable shield of His purpose. All things serve that Will. The current in the full river, the lie of the flags that stop it from being borne down, the hour of the princess's bath, the direction of her idle glance, the cry of the child at the right moment, the impulse welling up in her heart, the swift resolve, the innocent diplomacy of the sister, the shelter of the happy mother's breast, the safety of the palace,—all these and a hundred more trivial and unrelated things are spun into the strong cable wherewith God draws slowly but surely His secret purpose into act. So ever His children are secure as long as He has work for them, and His mighty plan strides on to its accomplishment over all the barriers that men can raise.

How deeply this story had impressed on devout minds the truth of the divine protection for all who serve Him, is shown by the fact that the word employed in the last verse of our lesson, and there translated 'drawn,' of which the name 'Moses' is a form, is used on the only occasion of its occurrence in the Old Testament (namely Psalm xviii. 16 , and in the duplicate in 2 Sam. xxii. 17) with plain reference to our narrative. The Psalmist describes his own deliverance, in answer to his cry, by a grand manifestation of God's majesty; and this is the climax and the purpose of the earthquake and the lightning, the darkness and the storm: 'He sent from above, He took me, He drew me out of many waters.' So that scene by the margin of the Nile, so many years ago, is but one transient instance of the working of the power which secures deliverance from encompassing perils, and for strenuous, though it may be undistinguished, service to all who call upon Him. God, who put the compassion into the heart of Pharaoh's dusky daughter, is not less tender of heart than she, and when He hears us, though our cry be but as of an infant, 'with no language but a cry,' He will come in His majesty and draw us from encompassing dangers and impending death. We cannot all be lawgivers and deliverers; but we may all appeal to His great pity, and partake of deliverance like that of Moses and of David.

Exodus 3:1:
THE BUSH THAT BURNED, AND DID NOT BURN OUT

And, behold, the bush burned with fire, and the bush was not consumed — Exodus 3:1

It was a very sharp descent from Pharaoh's palace to the wilderness, and forty years of a shepherd's life were a strange contrast to the brilliant future that once seemed likely for Moses. But God tests His weapons before He uses them, and great men are generally prepared for great deeds by great sorrows. Solitude is 'the mother-country of the strong,' and the wilderness, with its savage crags, its awful silence, and the unbroken round of its blue heaven, was a better place to meet God than in the heavy air of a palace, or the profitless splendours of a court.

So as this lonely shepherd is passing slowly in front of his flock, he sees a strange light that asserted itself, even in the brightness of the desert sunshine. 'The bush' does not mean one single shrub. Rather, it implies some little group, or cluster, or copse, of the dry thorny acacias, which are characteristic of the country, and over which any ordinary fire would have passed like a flash, leaving them all in grey ashes. But this steady light persists long enough to draw the attention of the shepherd, and to admit of his travelling some distance to reach it. And then—and then—the Lord speaks.

The significance of this bush, burning but not consumed, is my main subject now, for I think it carries great and blessed lessons for us.

Now, first, I do not think that the bush burning but not consumed, stands as it is ordinarily understood to stand, for the symbolical representation of the preservation of Israel, even in the midst of the fiery furnace of persecution and sorrow.

Beautiful as that idea is, I do not think it is the true explanation; because if so, this symbol is altogether out of keeping with the law that applies to all the rest of the symbolical accompaniments of divine appearances, all of which, without exception, set forth in symbol some truth about God, and not about His Church; and all of which, without exception, are a representation in visible and symbolical form of the same truth which was proclaimed in articulate words along with them. The symbol and the accompanying voice of God in all other cases have one and the same meaning.

That, I think, is the case here also; and we learn from the Bush, not something about God's Church, however precious that may be, but what is a great deal more important, something about God Himself; namely, the same thing that immediately afterwards was spoken in articulate words.

In the next place, let me observe that the fire is distinctly a divine symbol, a symbol of God not of affliction, as the ordinary explanation implies. I need not do more than remind you of the stream of emblem which runs all through Scripture, as confirming this point. There are the smoking lamp and the blazing furnace in the early vision granted to Abraham. There is the pillar of fire by night, that lay over the desert camp of the wandering Israelites. There is Isaiah's word, 'The light of Israel shall be a flaming fire.' There is the whole of the New Testament teaching, turning on the manifestation of God through His Spirit. There are John the Baptist's words, 'He shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire.' There is the day of Pentecost, when the 'tongues of fire sat upon each of them.' And what is meant by the great word of the Epistle to the Hebrews, 'Our God is a consuming fire'?

Not Israel only, but many other lands—it would scarcely be an exaggeration to say, all other lands—have used the same emblem

with the same meaning. In almost every religion on the face of the earth, you will find a sacred significance attached to fire. That significance is not primarily destruction, as we sometimes suppose, an error which has led to ghastly misunderstandings of some Scriptures, and of the God whom they reveal. When, for instance, Isaiah (xxxiii. 14) asks, 'Who among us shall dwell with the devouring fire? who among us shall dwell with everlasting burnings?' he has been supposed to be asking what human soul is there that can endure the terrors of God's consuming and unending wrath. But a little attention to the words would have shown that 'the devouring fire' and the 'everlasting burnings' mean God and not hell, and that the divine nature is by them not represented as too fierce to be approached, but as the true dwelling-place of men, which indeed only the holy can inhabit, but which for them is life. Precisely parallel is the Psalmist's question, 'Who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord, and who shall stand in His holy place?'

Fire is the source of warmth, and so, in a sense, of life. It is full of quick energy, it transmutes all kinds of dead matter into its own ruddy likeness, sending up the fat of the sacrifices in wreathes of smoke that aspire heavenward; and changing all the gross, heavy, earthly dullness into flame, more akin to the heaven into which it rises.

Therefore, as cleansing, as the source of life, light, warmth, change, as glorifying, transmuting, purifying, refining, fire is the fitting symbol of the mightiest of all creative energy. And the Bible has consecrated the symbolism, and bade us think of the Lord Himself as the central fiery Spirit of the whole universe, a spark from whom irradiates and vitalises everything that lives.

Nor should we forget, on the other side, that the very felicity of this emblem is, that along with all these blessed thoughts of life-giving and purifying, there does come likewise the more solemn teaching of God's destructive power. 'What maketh heaven, that maketh hell'; and the same God is the fire to quicken, to sanctify, to bless; and resisted, rejected, neglected, is the fire that consumes; the savour of life unto life, or the savour of death unto death.

And then, still further, notice that this flame is undying—steady, unflickering. What does that mean? Adopting the principle which I have already taken as our guide, that the symbol and the following oral revelation teach the same truth, there can be no question as to that answer. 'I am the God of thy fathers, the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob. 'I AM THAT I AM.'

That is to say, the fire that burns and does not burn out, which has no tendency to destruction in its very energy, and is not consumed by its own activity, is surely a symbol of the one Being whose being derives its law and its source from Himself, who only can say—'I AM THAT I AM'—the law of His nature, the foundation of His being, the only conditions of His existence being, as it were, enclosed within the limits of His own nature. You and I have to say, 'I am that which I have become,' or 'I am that which I was born,' or 'I am that which circumstances have made me.' He says, 'I AM THAT I AM.' All other creatures are links; this is the staple from which they all hang. All other being is derived, and therefore limited and changeful; this Being is underived, absolute, self-dependent, and therefore unalterable for evermore. Because we live we die. In living the process is going on of which death is the end. But God lives for evermore, a flame that does not burn out; therefore His resources are inexhaustible, His power unwearied. He needs no rest for recuperation of wasted energy. His gifts diminish not the store which He has to bestow. He gives, and is none the poorer; He works, and is never weary; He operates unspent; He loves, and He loves for ever; and through the ages the fire burns on, unconsumed and undecayed.

O brethren! is not that a revelation—familiar as it sounds to our ears now, blessed be God!—is not that a revelation of which, when we apprehend the depth and the preciousness, we may well fix an unalterable faith upon it, and feel that for us, in our fleeting days and shadowy moments, the one means to secure blessedness, rest, strength, life, is to grasp and knit ourselves to Him who lives for ever, and whose love is lasting as His life? 'The eternal God, the Lord . . .fainteth not, neither is weary. They that wait upon Him shall renew their strength.'

The last thought suggested to me by this symbol is this. Regarding the lowly thorn-bush as an emblem of Israel—which unquestionably it is, though the fire be the symbol of God—in the fact that the symbolical manifestation of the divine energy lived in so lowly a shrine, and flamed in it, and preserved it by its burning, there is a great and blessed truth.

It is the same truth which Jesus Christ, with a depth of interpretation that put to shame the cavilling listeners, found in the words that accompanied this vision: 'I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.' He said to the sneering Sadducees, who, like all other sneerers, saw only the surface of what they were sarcastic about, 'Did not Moses teach you,' in the section about the bush, 'that the dead rise, when he said: I AM the God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob.' A man, about whom it can once be said that God is his God, cannot die. Such a bond can never be broken. The communion of earth, imperfect as it is, is the prophecy of Heaven and the pledge of immortality. And so from that relationship which subsisted between the fathers and God, Christ infers the certainty of their resurrection. It seems a great leap, but there are intervening steps not stated by our Lord, which securely bridge the gulf between the premises and the conclusion. Such communion is, in its very nature, unaffected by the accident of death, for it cannot be supposed that a man who can say that God is His God can be reduced to nothingness, and such a bond be snapped by such a cause. Therefore Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are still living, 'for all' those whom we call dead, as well as those whom we call living, 'live unto Him,' and though so many centuries have passed, God still is , not was , their God. The relation between them is eternal and guarantees their immortal life. But immortality without corporeity is not conceivable as the perfect state,

and if the dead live still, there must come a time when the whole man shall partake of redemption; and in body, soul, and spirit the glorified and risen saints shall be 'for ever with the Lord.'

That is but the fuller working out of the same truth that is taught us in the symbol 'the bush burned and was not consumed.' God dwelt in it, therefore it flamed; God dwelt in it, therefore though it flamed it never flamed out. Or in other words, the Church, the individual in whom He dwells, partakes of the immortality of the indwelling God. 'Every one shall be salted with fire,' which shall be preservative and not destructive; or, as Christ has said, 'Because I live ye shall live also.'

Humble as was the little, ragged, sapless thorn-bush, springing up and living its solitary life amidst the sands of the desert, it was not too humble to hold God; it was not too gross to burst into flame when He came; it was not too fragile to be gifted with undying being; like His that abode in it. And for us each the emblem may be true. If He dwell in us we shall live as long as He lives, and the fire that He puts in our heart shall be a fountain of fire springing up into life everlasting.

Exodus 3:10-20:
THE CALL OF MOSES

The 'son of Pharaoh's daughter' had been transformed, by nearly forty years of desert life, into an Arab shepherd. The influences of the Egyptian court had faded from him, like colour from cloth exposed to the weather; nor is it probable that, after the failure of his early attempt to play the deliverer to Israel, he nourished further designs of that sort. He appears to have settled down quietly to be Jethro's son-in-law, and to have lived a modest, still life of humble toil. He had flung away fair prospects,—and what had he made of it? The world would say 'Nothing,' as it ever does about those who despise material advantages and covet higher good. Looking after sheep in the desert was a sad downcome from the possibility of sitting on the throne of Egypt. Yes, but it was in the desert that the vision of the bush burning, and not burning out, came; and it would not have come if Moses had been in a palace.

This passage begins in the midst of the divine communication which followed and interpreted the vision. We note, first, the divine charge and the human shrinking from the task. It was a startling transition from verse 9 , which declares God's pitying knowledge of Israel's oppression, to verse 10 , which thrusts Moses forward into the thick of dangers and difficulties, as God's instrument. 'I will send thee' must have come like a thunder-clap. The commander's summons which brings a man from the rear rank and sets him in the van of a storming-party may well make its receiver shrink. It was not cowardice which prompted Moses' answer, but lowliness. His former impetuous confidence had all been beaten out of him. Time was when he was ready to take up the rôle of deliverer at his own hand; but these hot days were past, and age and solitude and communion with God had mellowed him into humility. His recoil was but one instance of the shrinking which all true, devout men feel when designated for tasks which may probably make life short, and will certainly make it hard. All prophets and reformers till to-day have had the same feeling. Men who can do such work as the Jeremiahs, Pauls, Luthers, Cromwells, can do, are never forward to begin it.

Self-confidence is not the temper which God uses for His instruments. He works with 'bruised reeds,' and breathes His strength into them. It is when a man says 'I can do nothing,' that he is fit for God to employ. 'When I am weak, then I am strong.' Moses remembered enough of Egypt to know that it was no slight peril to front Pharaoh, and enough of Israel not to be particularly eager to have the task of leading them. But mark that there is no refusal of the charge, though there is profound consciousness of inadequacy. If we have reason to believe that any duty, great or small, is laid on us by God, it is wholesome that we should drive home to ourselves our own weakness, but not that we should try to shuffle out of the duty because we are weak. Moses' answer was more of a prayer for help than of a remonstrance, and it was answered accordingly.

God deals very gently with conscious weakness. 'Certainly I will be with thee.' Moses' estimate of himself is quite correct, and it is the condition of his obtaining God's help. If he had been self-confident, he would have had no longing for, and no promise of, God's presence. In all our little tasks we may have the same assurance, and, whenever we feel that they are too great for us, the strength of that promise may be ours. God sends no man on errands which He does not give him power to do. So Moses had not to calculate the difference between his feebleness and the strength of a kingdom. Such arithmetic left out one element, which made all the difference in the sum total. 'Pharaoh versus Moses' did not look a very hopeful cause, but 'Pharaoh versus Moses and Another'—that other being God—was a very different matter. God and I are always stronger than any antagonists. It was needless to discuss whether Moses was able to cope with the king. That was not the right way of putting the problem. The right way was, Is God able to do it?

The sign given to Moses is at first sight singular, inasmuch as it requires faith, and can only be a confirmation of his mission when that mission is well accomplished. But there was a help to present faith even in it, for the very sacredness of the spot hallowed now by the burning bush was a kind of external sign of the promise.

One difficulty being solved, Moses raised another, but not in the spirit of captiousness or reluctance. God is very patient with us when we tell Him the obstacles which we seem to see to our doing His work. As long as these are presented in good faith, and with the wish to have them cleared up, He listens and answers. The second question asked by Moses was eminently reasonable. He

pictures to himself his addressing the Israelites, and their question, What is the name of this God who has sent you? Apparently the children of Israel had lost much of their ancestral faith, and probably had in many instances fallen into idolatry. We do not know enough to pronounce with confidence on that point, nor how far the great name of Jehovah had been used before the time of Moses, or had been forgotten in Egypt.

The questions connected with these points and with the history of the name do not enter into our present purpose. My task is rather to point out the religious significance of the self-revelation of God contained in the name, and how it becomes the foundation of Israel's deliverance, existence, and prerogatives. Whatever opinions are adopted as to the correct form of the name and other grammatical and philological questions, there is no doubt that it mainly reveals God as self-existent and unchangeable. He draws His being from no external source, nor 'borrows leave to be.' Creatures are what they are made or grow to be; they are what they were not; they are what they will some time not any more be. But He is what He is. Lifted above time and change, self-existing and self-determined, He is the fountain of life, the same for ever.

This underived, independent, immutable being is a Person who can speak to men, and can say 'I am.' Being such, He has entered into close covenant relations with men, and has permitted Himself to be called 'the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.' The name Jehovah lifts Him high above all creatures; the name 'the God of your fathers' brings Him into tender proximity with men, and, in combination with the former designation, guarantees that He will forever be what He has been, even to all generations of children's children. That mighty name is, indeed, His 'memorial to all generations,' and is as fresh and full of blessedness to us as to the patriarchs. Christ has made us understand more of the treasures for heart and mind and life which are stored in it. 'Our Father which art in heaven' is the unfolding of its inmost meaning.

We may note that the bush burning but not consumed expressed in symbol the same truth which the name reveals. It seems a mistake to take the bush as the emblem of Israel surviving persecution. Rather the revelation to the eye says the same thing as that to the ear, as is generally the case. As the desert shrub flamed, and yet did not burn away, so that divine nature is not wearied by action nor exhausted by bestowing, nor has its life any tendency towards ending or extinction, as all creatural life has.

The closing verses of this passage (vs. 16-20) are a programme of Moses' mission, in which one or two points deserve notice. First, the general course of it is made known from the beginning. Therein Moses was blessed beyond most of God's servants, who have to risk much and to labour on, not knowing which shall prosper. If we could see, as he did, the lie of the country beforehand, our journeys would be easier. So we often think, but we know enough of what shall be to enable us to have quiet hearts; and it is best for us not to see what is to fail and what to succeed. Our ignorance stimulates effort, and drives to clinging to God's hand.

Then we may note the full assurances to be given to the 'elders of Israel.' Apparently some kind of civic organisation had been kept up, and there were principal people among the slaves who had to be galvanised first into enthusiasm. So they are to be told two things,—that Jehovah has appeared to Moses, and that He, not Moses only, will deliver them and plant them in the land. The enumeration of the many tribes (v. 17) might discourage, but it is intended to fire by the thought of the breadth of the land, which is further described as fertile. The more exalted our conceptions of the inheritance, the more willing shall we be to enter on the pilgrimage towards it. The more we realise that Jehovah has promised to lead us thither, the more willing shall we be to face difficulties and dangers.

The directions as to the opening of communications with Pharaoh have often been made a difficulty, as if there was trickery in the modest request for permission to go three days' journey into the wilderness. But that request was to be made, knowing that it would not be granted. It was to be a test of Pharaoh's willingness to submit to Jehovah. Its very smallness made it so more effectually. If he had any disposition to listen to the voice speaking through Moses, he would yield that small point. It is useless to speculate on what would have happened if he had done so. But probably the Israelites would have come back from their sacrificing.

Of more importance is it to note that the failure of the request was foreseen, and yet the effort was to be made. Is not that the same paradox which meets us in all the divine efforts to win over hard-hearted men to His service? Is it not exactly what our Lord did when He appealed to Judas, while knowing that all would be vain?

The expression in verse 19 , 'not by a mighty hand,' is very obscure. It may possibly mean that Pharaoh was so obstinate that no human power was strong enough to bend his will. Therefore, in contrast to the 'mighty hand' of man, which was not mighty enough for this work, God will stretch out His hand, and that will suffice to compel obedience from the proudest. God can force men by His might to comply with His will, so far as external acts go; but He does not regard that as obedience, nor delight in it. We can steel ourselves against men's power, but God's hand can crush and break the strongest will. 'It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.' It is a blessed thing to put ourselves into them, in order to be molded by their loving touch. The alternative is laid before every soul of man.

Exodus 11:1-10:

A LAST MERCIFUL WARNING

The first point to be noted in this passage is that it interposes a solemn pause between the preceding ineffectual plagues and the last effectual one. There is an awful lull in the storm before the last crashing hurricane which lays every obstacle flat. 'There is silence in heaven' before the final peal of thunder. Verses 1 to 3 seem, at first sight, out of place, as interrupting the narrative, since Moses' denunciation and prophecy in verses 4 to 8 must have been spoken at the interview with Pharaoh which we find going on at the end of the preceding chapter. But it is legitimate to suppose that, at the very moment when Pharaoh was blustering and threatening, and Moses was bearding him, giving back scorn for scorn, the latter heard with the inward ear the voice which made Pharaoh's words empty wind, and gave him the assurances and commands contained in verses 1 to 3 , and that thus it was given him in that hour what he should speak; namely, the prediction that follows in verses 4 to 8 . Such a view of the sequence of the passage makes it much more vivid, dramatic, and natural, than to suppose that the first verses are either interpolation or an awkward break referring to a revelation at some indefinite previous moment. When a Pharaoh or a Herod or an Agrippa threatens, God speaks to the heart of a Moses or a Paul, and makes His servant's face 'strong against their faces.'

The same purpose of parting off the preceding plagues from the past ones explains the introduction of verses 9 and 10 , which stand as a summary of the whole account of these, and, as it were, draw a line across the page, before beginning the story of that eventful day and night of Israel's deliverance.

Moses' conviction, which he knew to be not his own thought but God's revelation of His purpose, pointed first to the final blow which was to finish Pharaoh's resistance. He had been vacillating between compliance and refusal, like an elastic ball which yields to compression and starts back to its swelling rotundity as soon as the pressure is taken off. But at last he will collapse altogether, like the same ball when a slit is cut in it, and it shrivels into a shapeless lump. Weak people's obstinate fits end like that. He will be as extreme in his eagerness to get rid of the Israelites as he had been in his determination to keep them. The sail that is filled one moment tumbles in a heap the next, when the halyards are cut. It is a poor affair when a man's actions are shaped mainly by fear of consequences. Fright always drives to extremes. 'When he shall let you go, he shall surely thrust you out hence altogether.' Many a stout, God-opposing will collapses altogether when God's finger touches it. 'Can thy heart endure in the days that I shall deal with thee?'

Verses 2 and 3 appear irrelevant here, but the command to collect from the Egyptians jewels, which might be bartered for necessaries, may well have been given to Moses simultaneously with the assurance that he would lead forth the people after the next plague, and the particulars of the people's favour and of Moses' influence in the eyes of the native inhabitants, come in anticipatively to explain why the request for such contributions was granted when made.

With the new divine command swelling in his heart, Moses speaks his last word to Pharaoh, towering above him in righteous wrath, and dwindling his empty threats into nothingness. What a contrast between the impotent rage of the despot, with his vain threat, 'Thou shalt die,' and the unblenching boldness of the man with God at his back! One cannot but note in Moses' prediction of the last plague the solemn enlargement on the details of the widespread calamity, which is not unfeeling gloating over an oppressor's misery, but a yearning to save from hideous misery by timely and plain depicting of it. There is a flash of national triumph in the further contrast between the universal wailing in Egypt and the untouched security of the children of Israel, but that feeling merges at once into the higher one of 'the Lord' s' gracious action in establishing the 'difference' between them and their oppressors. It is not safe to dwell on superiority over others, either as to condition or character, unless we print in very large letters that it is 'the Lord' who has made it. There is a flash, too, of natural triumph in the picture of the proud courtiers brought down to prostrate themselves before the shepherd from Horeb, and to pray him to do what their master and they had so long fought against his doing. And there is a most natural assertion of non-dependence on their leave in that emphatic 'After that I will go out.' He is not asserting himself against God, but against the cowering courtiers. 'Hot anger' was excusable, but it was not the best mood in which to leave Pharaoh. Better if he had gone out unmoved, or moved only to 'great heaviness and sorrow of heart' at the sight of men setting themselves against God, and rushing on the 'thick bosses of the Almighty's buckler' to their own ruin. Moses' anger we naturally sympathise with, Christ's meekness we should try to copy.

The closing verses, as we have already noticed, are a kind of summing-up of the whole narrative of the plagues and their effects on Pharaoh. They open two difficult questions, as to how and why it was that the effect of the successive strokes was so slight and transient. They give the 'how' very emphatically as being that 'Jehovah hardened Pharaoh's heart.' Does that not free Pharaoh from guilt? And does it not suggest an unworthy conception of God? It must be remembered that the preceding narrative employs not only the phrase that 'Jehovah hardened Pharaoh's heart,' but also the expression that Pharaoh hardened his own heart. And it is further to be noted that the latter expression is employed in the accounts of the earlier plagues, and that the former one appears only towards the close of the series. So then, even if we are to suppose that it means that there was a direct hardening action by God on the man's heart, such action was not first, but subsequent to obstinate hardening by himself. God hardens no man's heart who has not first hardened it himself. But we do not need to conclude that any inward action on the will is meant. Was not the accumulation of plagues, intended, as they were, to soften, a cause of hardening? Does not the Gospel, if rejected, harden, making consciences and

wills less susceptible? Is it not a ‘savour of death unto death,’ as our fathers recognised in speaking of ‘gospel-hardened sinners’? The same fire softens wax and hardens clay. Whosoever is not brought near is driven farther off, by the influences which God brings to bear on us.

The ‘why’ is stated in terms which may suggest difficulties,—‘that my wonders may be multiplied in the land of Egypt.’ But we have to remember that the Old Testament writers are not wont to distinguish so sharply as more logical Westerns do between the actual result of an event and its purpose. With their deep faith in the all-ruling power of God, whatever had come to pass was what He had meant to come to pass. In fact, Pharaoh’s obstinacy had not thwarted the divine purpose, but had been the dark background against which the blaze of God’s irresistible might had shone the brighter. He makes the wrath of man to praise Him, and turns opposition into the occasion of more conspicuously putting forth His omnipotence.

Exodus 12:1-14:
THE PASSOVER:
AN EXPIATION AND A FEAST,
A MEMORIAL AND A PROPHECY

The Passover ritual, as appointed here, divides itself into two main parts—the sprinkling of the sacrificial blood on the door-posts and lintels, and the feast on the sacrifice. These can best be dealt with separately. They were separated in the later form of the ritual; for, when there was a central sanctuary, the lambs were slain there, and the blood sprinkled, as in other expiatory sacrifices, on the altar, while the domestic feast remained unaltered. The former was more especially meant to preserve the Israelites from the destruction of their first-born; the latter as a permanent memorial of their deliverance. But both have perpetual fitness as prophetic of varying aspects of the Christian redemption.

I. The ritual of the protecting blood.

In the hurry and agitation of that eventful day, it must have seemed strange to the excited people that they should be called upon to observe such a service. But its institution at that crisis is in accordance with the whole tone of the story of the Exodus, in which man is nothing and God all. Surely, never was national deliverance effected so absolutely without effort or blow struck. If we try to realise the state of mind of the Israelites on that night, we shall feel how significant of the true nature of their deliverance this summons to an act of worship, in the midst of their hurry, must have been.

The domestic character of the rite is its first marked feature. Of course, there were neither temple nor priests then; but that does not wholly account for the provision that every household, unless too few in number to consume a whole lamb, should have its own sacrifice, slain by its head. The first purpose of the rite, to provide for the safety of each house by the sprinkled blood, partly explains it; but the deepest reason is, no doubt, the witness which was thereby borne to the universal priesthood of the nation. The patriarchal order made each man the priest of his house. This rite, which lay at the foundation of Israel’s nationality, proclaimed that a restricted priestly class was a later expedient. The primitive formation crops out here, as witness that, even where hid beneath later deposits, it underlies them all.

We have called the Passover a sacrifice. That has been disputed, but unreasonably. No doubt, it was a peculiar kind of sacrifice, unlike those of the later ritual in many respects, and scarcely capable of being classified among them. But it is important to keep its strictly sacrificial character in view; for it is essential to its meaning and to its typical aspect. The proofs of its sacrificial nature are abundant. The instructions as to the selection of the lamb; the method of disposing of the blood, which was sprinkled with hyssop—a peculiarly sacrificial usage; the treatment of the remainder after the feast; the very feast itself,—all testify that it was a sacrifice in the most accurate use of the word. The designation of it as ‘a passover to the Lord,’ and in set terms as a ‘sacrifice,’ in verse 27 and elsewhere, to say nothing of its later form when it became a regular Temple sacrifice, or of Paul’s distinct language in 1 Corinthians v. 7 , or of Peter’s quotation of the very words of verse 5 , applied to Christ, ‘ a lamb without blemish,’ all point in the same direction.

But if a sacrifice, what kind of sacrifice was it? Clearly, the first purpose was that the blood might be sprinkled on the door-posts and lintels, and so the house be safe when the destroying angel passed through the land. Such is the explanation given in verse 13 , which is the divine declaration of its meaning. This is the centre of the rite; from it the name was derived. Whether readers accept the doctrines of substitution and expiation or not, it ought to be impossible for an honest reader of these verses to deny that these doctrines or thoughts are there. They may be only the barbarous notions of a half-savage age and people. But, whatever they are, there they are. The lamb without blemish carefully chosen and kept for four days, till it had become as it were part of the household, and then solemnly slain by the head of the family, was their representative. When they sprinkled its blood on the posts, they confessed that they stood in peril of the destroying angel by reason of their impurity, and they presented the blood as their expiation. In so far, their act was an act of confession, deprecation, and faith. It accepted the divinely appointed means of safety. The consequence was exemption from the fatal stroke, which fell on all homes from the palace to the slaves’ hovel, where that red streak was not found. If any son of Abraham had despised the provision for safety, he would have been partaker of the plague.

All this refers only to exemption from outward punishment, and we are not obliged to attribute to these terrified bondmen any higher thoughts. But clearly their obedience to the command implied a measure of belief in the divine voice; and the command embodied, though in application to a transient judgment, the broad principles of sacrificial substitution, of expiation by blood, and of safety by the individual application of that shed blood.

In other words, the Passover is a Gospel before the Gospel. We are sometimes told that in its sacrificial ideas Christianity is still dressing itself in 'Hebrew old clothes.' We believe, on the contrary, that the whole sacrificial system of Judaism had for its highest purpose to shadow forth the coming redemption. Christ is not spoken of as 'our Passover,' because the Mosaic ritual had happened to have that ceremonial; but the Mosaic ritual had that ceremonial mainly because Christ is our Passover, and, by His blood shed on the Cross and sprinkled on our consciences, does in spiritual reality that which the Jewish Passover only did in outward form. All other questions about the Old Testament, however interesting and hotly contested, are of secondary importance compared with this. Is its chief purpose to prophesy of Christ, His atoning death, His kingdom and church, or is it not? The New Testament has no doubt of the answer. The Evangelist John finds in the singular swiftness of our Lord's death, which secured the exemption of His sacred body from the violence inflicted on His fellow-sufferers, a fulfilment of the paschal injunction that not a bone should be broken; and so, by one passing allusion, shows that he recognised Christ as the true Passover. John the Baptist's rapturous exclamation, 'Behold the Lamb of God!' blends allusions to the Passover, the daily sacrifice, and Isaiah's great prophecy. The day of the Crucifixion, regarded as fixed by divine Providence, may be taken as God's own finger pointing to the Lamb whom He has provided. Paul's language already referred to attests the same truth. And even the last lofty visions of the Apocalypse, where the old man in Patmos so touchingly recurs to the earliest words which brought him to Jesus, echo the same conviction, and disclose, amidst the glories of the throne, 'a Lamb as it had been slain.'

II. The festal meal on the sacrifice.

After the sprinkling of the blood came the feast. Only when the house was secure from the destruction which walked in the darkness of that fateful night, could a delivered household gather round the board. That which had become their safety now became their food. Other sacrifices were, at a later period, modelled on the same type; and in all cases the symbolism is the same, namely, joyful participation in the sacrifice, and communion with God based upon expiation. In the Passover, this second stage received for future ages the further meaning of a memorial. But on that first night it was only such by anticipation, seeing that it preceded the deliverance which it was afterwards to commemorate.

The manner of preparing the feast and the manner of partaking of it are both significant. The former provided that the lamb should be roasted, not boiled, apparently in order to secure its being kept whole; and the same purpose suggested the other prescriptions that it was to be served up entire, and with bones unbroken. The reason for this seems to be that thus the unity of the partakers was more plainly shown. All ate of one undivided whole, and were thus, in a real sense, one. So the Apostle deduces the unity of the Church from the oneness of the bread of which they in the Christian Passover partake.

It was to be eaten with the accompaniments of bitter herbs, usually explained as memorials of the bondage, which had made the lives bitter, and the remembrance of which would sweeten their deliverance, even as the pungent condiments brought out the savour of the food. The further accompaniment of unleavened bread seems to have the same signification as the appointment that they were to eat with their garments gathered round their loins, their feet shod, and staves in hand. All these were partly necessities in their urgent hurry, and partly a dramatic representation for later days of the very scene of the first Passover. A strange feast indeed, held while the beat of the pinions of the destroying angel could almost be heard, devoured in hot haste by anxious men standing ready for a perilous journey, the end whereof none knew! The gladness would be strangely dashed with terror and foreboding. Truly, though they feasted on a sacrifice, they had bitter herbs with it, and, standing, swallowed their portions, expecting every moment to be summoned to the march.

The Passover as a feast is a prophecy of the great Sacrifice, by virtue of whose sprinkled blood we all may be sheltered from the sweep of the divine judgment, and on which we all have to feed if there is to be any life in us. Our propitiation is our food. 'Christ for us' must become 'Christ in us,' received and appropriated by our faith as the strength of our lives. The Christian life is meant to be a joyful feast on the Sacrifice, and communion with God based upon it. We feast on Christ when the mind feeds on Him as truth, when the heart is filled and satisfied with His love, when the conscience clings to Him as its peace, when the will esteems the 'words of His mouth more than' its 'necessary food,' when all desires, hopes, and inward powers draw their supplies from Him, and find their object in His sweet sufficiency.

Nor will the accompaniments of the first Passover be wanting. Here we feast in the night; the dawn will bring freedom and escape. Here we eat the glad Bread of God, not unseasoned with bitter herbs of sorrow and memories of the bondage, whose chains are dropping from our uplifted hands. Here we should partake of that hidden nourishment, in such manner that it hinders not our readiness for outward service. It is not yet time to sit at His table, but to stand with loins girt, and feet shod, and hands grasping the pilgrim staff. Here we are to eat for strength, and to blend with our secret hours of meditation the holy activities of the pilgrim life.

That feast was, further, appointed with a view to its future use as a memorial. It was held before the deliverance which it commemorated had been accomplished. A new era was to be reckoned from it. The month of the Exodus was thenceforward to be the first of the year. The memorial purpose of the rite has been accomplished. All over the world it is still observed, so many hundred years after its institution, being thus, probably, the oldest religious ceremonial in existence. Once more aliens in many lands, the Jewish race still, year by year, celebrate that deliverance, so tragically unlike their homeless present, and with indomitable hope, at each successive celebration, repeat the expectation, so long cherished in vain, 'This year, here; next year, in the land of Israel. This year, slaves; next year, freemen.' There can be few stronger attestations of historical events than the keeping of days commemorating them, if traced back to the event they commemorate. So this Passover, like Guy Fawkes' Day in England, or Thanksgiving Day in America, remains for a witness even now.

What an incomprehensible stretch of authority Christ put forth, if He were no more than a teacher, when He brushed aside the Passover, and put in its place the Lord's Supper, as commemorating His own death! Thereby He said, 'Forget that past deliverance; instead, remember Me.' Surely this was either audacity approaching insanity, or divine consciousness that He Himself was the true Paschal Lamb, whose blood shields the world from judgment, and on whom the world may feast and be satisfied. Christ's deliberate intention to represent His death as expiation, and to fix the reverential, grateful gaze of all future ages on His Cross, cannot be eliminated from His founding of that memorial rite in substitution for the God-appointed ceremonial, so hoary with age and sacred in its significance. Like the Passover, the Lord's Supper was established before the deliverance was accomplished. It remains a witness at once of the historical fact of the death of Jesus, and of the meaning and power which Jesus Himself bade us to see in that death. For us, redeemed by His blood, the past should be filled with His sacrifice. For us, fed on Himself, all the present should be communion with Him, based upon His death for us. For us, freed bondmen, the memorial of deliverance begun by His Cross should be the prophecy of deliverance to be completed at the side of His throne, and the hasty meal, eaten with bitter herbs, the adumbration of the feast when all the pilgrims shall sit with Him at His table in His kingdom. Past, present, and future should all be to us saturated with Jesus Christ. Memory should furnish hope with colours, canvas, and subjects for her fair pictures, and both be fixed on 'Christ our Passover, sacrificed for us.'

Exodus 13:9:
THOUGHT, DEED, WORD

'It shall be for a sign unto thee upon thine hand, and for a memorial between thine eyes, that the Lord's law may be in thy mouth.'—Exodus 13:9 .

The question may be asked, whether this command is to be taken metaphorically or literally. No doubt the remembrance of the great deliverance was intrusted to acts. Besides the annual Passover feasts, inscriptions on the door-posts and fringes on the dress were appointed for this purpose. And the Jews from a very early period, certainly before our Lord's time, wore phylacteries fastened, as this and other places prescribe, on the left arm and on the forehead, and alleged these words as the commandment which they therein obeyed. But it seems more probable that the meaning is metaphorical, and that what is enjoined is rather a constant remembrance of the great deliverance, and a constant regulation of the practical life by it. For what is it that is to be 'a sign'? It is the Passover feast. And the 'therefore' of the next verse seems to say that keeping this ordinance in its season is the fulfilment of this precept. Besides, the expression 'for a sign,' 'for a memorial,' may just as well mean 'it shall serve as,' or 'it shall be like,' as 'you shall wear.' So I think we must say that this is a figure, not a fact; the enjoining of an object for thought and a motive for life, not of a formal observance. And it is very characteristic of the Jew, and of the universal tendency to harden and lower religion into outward rites, that a command so wide and profound was supposed to be kept by fastening little boxes with four slips of parchment containing extracts from the Pentateuch on arm and forehead. Jewish rabbis are not the only people who treat God's law like that. Even if literal, the injunction is for the purpose of remembering. Taking that meaning, then, the text sets forth principles that apply quite as much to us. You will observe 'hand,' 'eyes,' 'mouth'; the symbols of practice, knowledge, expression; work, thought, and word. Observe also that there is a slight change in construction in the three clauses; the two former are to be done in order that the latter may come to pass. Then the memorial of the great deliverance is to be 'on the hand' and 'before the eyes,' in order that 'the Lord's law' may be 'in the mouth.' Keeping these points in view—

I. God's great deliverance should be constantly before our thoughts.

It is more than an accident that both Judaism and Christianity should begin with a great act of deliverance; that that act of deliverance should constitute a community, and that a memorial rite should be the centre of the ritual of both. The Lord's Supper historically took the place of the Passover. It was instituted at the Passover and instead of it. It is precisely the same in design, a memorial feast appointed to keep up the vivid remembrance of the historical fact to which redemption is traced; and not only to keep up its remembrance, but to proclaim the importance of extending that remembrance through all life.

Notice the peculiarity of both the Jewish and the Christian rite, that the centre point of both is a historical fact, a redeeming act. Judaism and Christianity are the only religions in regard to which this is true to anything like the same extent or in the same way.

Christianity as a revelation is not so much the utterance in words of great religious thoughts as the history of a life and a death, a fact wrought upon the earth, which is at once the means of revelation and the means of redemption. This is a feature unshared by other religions.

This characteristic determines the principal object of our religious thought. The true object for religious thought is Christ, and His life and death.

All religious truth flows from and is wrapped up in that: e.g. theology, or the nature of God; anthropology, or the nature of man; soteriology, morality, etc. All truth for the individual and for the race has its source in God's great redeeming act. Religious emotion is best fed at this source, e.g. thankfulness, wonder, love: all these transcendent feelings which are melted together in adoration. Here is where they are kindled. You cannot pump them up, or bring them into existence by willing, or scourge yourself into them, any more than you can make a seed grow by pulling at the germ with a pair of pincers, but this gives the warmth and moisture which make it germinate.

The clear perception of this truth is valuable, as correcting false tendencies in religion, e.g. the tendency to be much occupied with the derived truths, and to think of them almost to the exclusion of the great fact from which they come; the tendency to substitute melancholy self-inspection for objective facts; the tendency to run out into mere feeling.

The command requires of us a habitual occupation of mind with the great deliverance.

And the habitual presence of this thought will be best secured by specific times of occupation with it. Let every Christian practise the habit of meditation, which in an age of so many books, newspapers, and the distractions of our busy modern life, is apt to become obsolete.

II. The great deliverance is to be ever present in practical life.

The 'hand' is clearly the seat and home of power and practical effort. So the remembrance is to be present and to preside over our practical work.
How it is fitted to do so.

(a) It gives the law for all our activity.

The pattern. The death as well as the life of Christ teaches us what we ought to be.

The motive. He died for me! Shall I not serve Him who redeemed me?

(b) That remembered deliverance arms us against temptations, and lifts us above sinking into sin.

How blessed such a life would be! How victorious over the small motives that rule one's life, the deadening influence of routine, the duties that are felt to be overwhelmingly great and those that are felt to be wearisomely and monotonously small! How this unity of motive would give unity to life and simplify its problems! How it would free us from many a perplexity! There are so many things that seem doubtful because we do not bring the test of the highest motive to bear on them. Complications would fall away when we only wished to know and be like Christ. Many a tempting amusement, or occupation, or speculation would start up in its own shape when this Ithuriel spear touched it. How it would save from distractions! How strong it would make us, like a belt round the waist bracing the muscles tighter! 'This one thing I do' is always a strengthening principle.
How far is this possible? Not absolutely, but we may approximate very closely and indefinitely towards it. For there is the possibility of such thought blending with common motives, like a finer perfume in the scentless air, or some richer elixir in a cup. There is the possibility of its doing to other motives what light does to landscape when a sudden sunbeam gleams across the plain, and everything leaps into increased depth of colour. Let us try more and more to rescue life from the slavery of habit and the distractions of all these smaller forces, and to bring it into the greatness and power of submission to the dominion of this sovereign, unifying motive. Our lives would thus be greatened and strengthened, even as Germany and Italy have been, by being delivered from a rabble of petty dukes and brought under the sway of one emperor or king. Let us try to approach nearer and nearer to the fusion of action and contemplation, and to the blending with all other motives of this supreme one.

This command supplies us with an easily applied and effective test. Is there any place where you cannot take it, any act which you feel it would be impossible to do for His sake? Avoid such. Where the safety-lamp burns blue and goes out, is no place for you.

It is a beautiful thought that Jesus does for us what we are thus commanded to do for Him. The high priest bore the names of the tribes on his shoulders and in his heart. 'I have graven thee on the palms of my hands.' We bear Him in our hands and in our hearts. 'I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus.'

III. The great deliverance is to be ever on our lips.

The three regions here named are the inward thought, the outward practice, and the testimony of the lips. Note that that testimony is a consequence of thought and practice.

1. The purpose of the deliverance is to make 'prophets of His law.' Such was the divine intention as to Israel. Such is God's purpose as to all Christians. The very meaning of redemption is there. He has 'opened our lips' that we 'should show forth His praise.' He has regard to 'His own name.' He desires to make us vocal, for the same purpose for which a man strings a harp, to bring sweet music out of it. Words of testimony are a form of love.

2. The other two are incomplete without this vocal testimony.

3. The utterance of the lips, to be worth anything, must rest on and follow the other two. How noble, then, and blessed, how strong and calm and simple our lives would be, if we had this for the one great object of our thoughts, of our practical endeavour, of our words, if all our being was sustained, impelled, made vocal, by one thought, one love!

O my brother, see to it that you give yourself to Him. That great Light will gladden your eyes, will guide your activity, and, like the sunrise striking Memnon's voiceless, stony lips, will bring music. Thought will have one boundless home of 'many mansions.' Work will have one law, one motive, its consecration and strength; and as in some solemn procession, all our steps and all our movements will keep time to the music of our praise to 'Him who loved us.'

Exodus 14:19-31:
A PATH IN THE SEA

This passage begins at the point where the fierce charge of the Egyptian chariots and cavalry on the straggling masses of the fugitives is inexplicably arrested. The weary day's march, which must have seemed as suicidal to the Israelites as it did to their pursuers, had ended in bringing them into a position where, as Luther puts it, they were like a mouse in a trap or a partridge in a snare. The desert, the sea, the enemy, were their alternatives. And, as they camped, they saw in the distance the rapid advance of the dreaded force of chariots, probably the vanguard of an army. No wonder that they lost heart. Moses alone keeps his head and his faith. He is rewarded with the fuller promise of deliverance, and receives the power accompanying the command, to stretch forth his hand, and part the sea. Then begins the marvellous series of incidents here recorded.

I. The first step in the leisurely march of the divine deliverance is the provision for checking the Egyptian advance and securing the safe breaking up of the Israelitish camp.

The pursuers had been coming whirling along at full speed, and would soon have been amongst the disorderly mass, dealing destruction. There was no possibility of getting the crossing effected unless they were held at bay. When an army has to ford a river in the face of hostile forces, the hazardous operation is possible only if a strong rearguard is left on the enemy's side, to cover the passage. This is exactly what is done here. The pillar of fire and cloud, the symbol of the divine presence, passed from the van to the rear. Its guidance was not needed, when but one path through the sea was possible. Its defence was needed when the foe was pressing eagerly on the heels of the host. His people's needs determined then, as they ever do, the form of the divine presence and help. Long after, the prophet seized the great lesson of this event, when he broke into the triumphant anticipation of a yet future deliverance,—which should repeat in fresh experience the ancient victory, 'The Lord will go before you; and the God of Israel will be your rearward,' In the place where the need is sorest, and in the form most required, there and that will God ever be to those who trust Him.

We can see here, too, a frequent characteristic of the miraculous element in Scripture, namely, its reaching its end not by a leap, but by a process. Once admit miracle, and it appears as if adaptation of means to ends was unnecessary. It would have been as easy to have transported the Israelites bodily and instantaneously to the other side of the sea, as to have taken these precautions and then cleft the ocean, and made them march through it. Legendary miracle would have preferred the former way. The Bible miracle usually adapts methods to aims, and is content to travel to its goal step by step.

Nor can we omit to notice the double effect of the one manifestation of the divine presence. The same pillar was light and darkness. The side which was cloud was turned to the pursuers; that which was light, to Israel. The former were paralysed, and hindered from advancing a step, or from seeing what the latter were doing; these, on the other hand, had light thrown on their strange path, and were encouraged and helped to plunge into the mysterious road, by the ruddy gleam which disclosed it. So every revelation is either light or darkness to men, according to the use they make of it. The ark, which slew Philistines, and flung Dagon prone on his own threshold, brought blessing to the house of Obededom. The Child who was to be 'set for the fall,' was also for 'the rising of many.' The stone laid in Zion is 'a sure foundation,' and 'a stone of stumbling.' The Gospel is the savour of life unto life, or of death unto death. The same fire melts wax and hardens clay. The same Christ is salvation and destruction. God is to each of us either our joy or our dread.

II. The sudden march of the Egyptians having thus been arrested, there is leisure, behind the shelter of the fiery barrier, to take the next step in the deliverance.

The sea is not divided in a moment. Again, we have a process to note, and that brought about by two things,—Moses' outstretched rod, and the strong wind which blew all night. The chronology of that fateful night is difficult to adjust from our narrative. It would appear, from verse 20 , that the Egyptians were barred advancing until morning; and, from verse 21 , that the wind which ploughed with its strong ploughshare a furrow through the sea, took all night for its work. But, on the other hand, the Israelites must have been well across, and the Egyptians in the very midst of the passage, 'in the morning watch,' and all was over soon after 'the morning appeared.' Probably the wind continued all the night, so as to keep up the pressure which dammed back the waters, but the path was passable some hours before the gale abated. It must have been a broad way to admit of some two million frightened people with wives and children effecting a crossing in the short hours of part of one night.

But though God used the wind as His besom to sweep a road clear for His people, the effect produced by ordinary means was extraordinary. No wind that ever blew would blow water in two opposite directions at once, as a man might shovel snow to right and left, and heap it in mounds by the sides of the path that he dug. That was what the text tells us was done. The miracle is none the less a miracle because God employed physical agents, just as Christ's miracles were no less miraculous when He anointed blind eyes with moistened clay, or sent men to wash in Siloam, than when His bare word raised the dead or stilled the ocean. Wind or no wind, Moses' rod or no rod, the true explanation of that broad path cleared through the sea is—'the waters saw Thee, O God.' The use of natural means may have been an aid to feeble faith, encouraging it to step down on to the untrodden and slippery road. The employment of Moses and his rod was to attest his commission to act as God's mouthpiece.

III. Then comes the safe passage.

It is hard to imagine the scene. The vivid impression made by our story is all the more remarkable when we notice how wanting in detail it is. We do not know the time nor the place. We have no information about how the fugitives got across, the breadth of the path, or its length. Characteristically enough, Jewish legends know all about both, and assure us that the waters were parted into twelve ways, one for each tribe, and that the length of the road was three hundred miles! But Scripture, with characteristic reticence, is silent about all but the fact. That is enough. We gather, from the much later and poetical picture of it in Psalm lxxvii. , that the passage was accomplished in the midst of crashing thunder and flashing lightnings; though it may be doubted whether these are meant to be taken as real or ideal. At all events, we have to think of these two millions of people—women, children, and followers—plunging into the depths in the night.

What a scene! The awestruck crowds, the howling wind, perhaps the thunderstorm, the glow of the pillar glistening on the wet and slimy way, the full paschal moon shining on the heaped waters! How the awe and the hope must both have increased with each step deeper in the abyss, and nearer to safety! The Epistle to the Hebrews takes this as an instance of 'faith' on the part of the Israelites; and truly we can feel that it must have taken some trust in God's protecting hand to venture on such a road, where, at any moment, the walls might collapse and drown them all. They were driven to venture by their fear of Pharaoh; but faith, as well as fear, wrought in them. Our faith, too, is often called upon to venture upon perilous paths. We may trust Him to hold back the watery walls from falling. The picture of the crossing carries eternal truth for us all. The way of safety does not open till we are hemmed in, and Pharaoh's chariots are almost come up. It often leads into the very thick of what we deem perils. It often has to be ventured on in the dark, and with the wind in our faces. But if we tread it in faith, the fluid will be made solid, and the pathless passable, or any other apparent impossibility be realised, before our confidence shall be put to shame, or one real evil reach us.

IV. The next stage is the hot pursuit and the panic of the Egyptians.

The narrative does not mark the point at which the pillar lifted and disclosed the escape of the prey. It must have been in the night. The baffled pursuers dash after them, either not seeing, or too excited and furious to heed where they were going. The rough sea bottom was no place for chariots, and they would be hopelessly distanced by the fugitives on foot. How long they stumbled and weltered we are not told, but 'in the morning watch,' that is, while it was yet dark, some awful movement in the fiery pillar awed even their anger into stillness, and drove home the conviction that they were fighting against God. There is something very terrible in the vagueness, if we may call it so, of that phrase 'the Lord looked . . .through the pillar.' It curdles the blood as no minuteness of narrative would do. And what a thought that His look should be a trouble! 'The steady whole of the judge's face' is awful, and some creeping terror laid hold on that host of mad pursuers floundering in the dark, as that more than natural light flared on their path. The panic to which all bodies of soldiers in strange circumstances are exposed, was increased by the growing difficulty of advance, as the chariot wheels became clogged or the ground more of quicksand. At last it culminates in a shout of ' Sauve qui peut! ' We may learn how close together lie daring rebellion against God and abject terror of Him; and how in a moment, a glance of His face, a turn of His hand, bring the wildest blasphemer to cower in fear. We may learn, too, to keep clear of courses which cannot be followed a moment longer, if once a thought that God sees us comes in. And we may learn the miserable result of all departure from Him, in making what ought to be our peace and blessing, our misery and terror, and turning the brightness of His face into a consuming fire.

V. Then comes, at last, the awful act of destruction, of which a man is the agent and an army the victim.

We must suppose the Israelites all safe on the Arabian coast, when the level sunlight streams from the east on the wild hurry of the fleeing crowd making for the Egyptian shore. What a solemn sight that young morning looked on! The wind had dropped, the rod is stretched out, the sea returns to its strength; and after a few moments' despairing struggle all is over, and the sun, as it climbs, looks down upon the unbroken stretch of quiet sea, bearing no trace of the awful work which it had done, or of the quenched hatred and fury which slept beneath.

We can understand the stern joy which throbs so vehemently in every pulse of that great song, the first blossom of Hebrew poetry, which the ransomed people sang that day. We can sympathise with the many echoes in psalm and prophecy, which repeated the lessons of faith and gratitude. But some will be ready to ask, Was that triumphant song anything more than narrow national feeling, and has Christianity not taught us another and tenderer thought of God than that which this lesson carries? We may ask in return, Was it divine providence that swept the Spanish Armada from the sea, fulfilling, as the medal struck to commemorate it bore, the very words of Moses' song, 'Thou didst blow with Thy wind, the sea covered them'? Was it God who overwhelmed Napoleon's army in the Russian snows? Were these, and many like acts in the world's history, causes for thankfulness to God? Is it not true that, as has been well said, 'The history of the world is the judgment of the world'? And does Christianity forbid us to rejoice when some mighty and ancient system of wrong and oppression, with its tools and accomplices, is cleared from off the face of the earth? 'When the wicked perish, there is shouting.' Let us not forget that the love and gentleness of the Gospel are accompanied by the revelation of divine judgment and righteous retribution. This very incident has for its last echo in Scripture that wonderful scene in the Apocalypse, where, in the pause before the seven angels bearing the seven plagues go forth, the seer beholds a company of choristers, like those who on that morning stood on the Red Sea shore, standing on the bank of the 'sea of glass mingled with fire,'—which symbolises the clear and crystalline depth of the stable divine judgments, shot with fiery retribution,—and lifting up by anticipation a song of thanksgiving for the judgments about to be wrought. That song is expressly called 'the song of Moses' and 'of the Lamb,' in token of the essential unity of the two dispensations, and especially of the harmony of both in their view of the divine judgments. Its ringing praises are modelled on the ancient lyric. It, too, triumphs in God's judgments, regards them as means of making known His name, as done not for destruction, but that His character may be known and honoured by men, to whom it is life and peace to know and love Him for what He is.

That final victory over 'the beast,' whether he be a person or a tendency, is to reproduce in higher fashion that old conquest by the Red Sea. There is hope for the world that its oppressors shall not always tyrannise; there is hope for each soul that, if we take Christ for our deliverer and our guide, He will break the chains from off our wrists, and bring us at last to the eternal shore, where we may stand, like the ransomed people, and, as the unsetting morning dawns, see its beams touching with golden light the calm ocean, beneath which our oppressors lie buried for ever, and lift up glad thanksgivings to Him who has 'led us through fire and through water, and brought us out into a wealthy place.'

Exodus 15:2:
MY STRENGTH AND SONG

The Lord is my strength and song, and He is become my salvation — Exodus 15:2

These words occur three times in the Bible: here, in Isaiah 12:2 , and in Psalm 118:14 .

I. The lessons from the various instances of their occurrence.

The first and second teach that the Mosaic deliverance is a picture-prophecy of the redemption in Christ. The third (Psalm cxviii. 14), long after, and the utterance of some private person, teaches that each age and each soul has the same mighty Hand working for it. 'As we have heard, so have we seen.'

II. The lessons from the words themselves.

(a) True faith appropriates God's universal mercy as a personal possession. ' My Lord and my God!' 'He loved me , and gave Himself for me .'

(b) Each single act of mercy should reveal God more clearly as 'My strength.' The 'and' in the second clause is substantially equivalent to 'for.' It assigns the reason for the assurance expressed in the first. Because of the experienced deliverance and God's manifestation of Himself in it as the author of 'salvation,' my faith wins happy increase of confidence that He 'is the strength of my heart.' Blessed they who bring that treasure out of all the sorrows of life!

(c) The end of His deliverances is 'praise.' 'He is my song.' This is true for earth and for heaven. The 'Song of Moses and the Lamb.'

Exodus 15:13:

THE SHEPHERD AND THE FOLD

Thou hast guided them in Thy strength unto Thy holy habitation.'— Exodus 15:13

What a grand triumphal ode! The picture of Moses and the children of Israel singing, and Miriam and the women answering: a gush of national pride and of worship! We belong to a better time, but still we can feel its grandeur. The deliverance has made the singer look forward to the end, and his confidence in the issue is confirmed.

I. The guiding God: or the picture of the leading.

The original is 'lead gently.' Cf. Isaiah xl. 11 , Psalm 23:2 . The emblem of a flock underlies the word. There is not only guidance, but gentle guidance. The guidance was gentle, though accompanied with so tremendous and heart-curdling a judgment. The drowned Egyptians were strange examples of gentle leading. But God's redemptive acts are like the guiding pillar of fire, in that they have a side that reveals wrath and evokes terror, and a side that radiates lambent love and kindles happy trust.

'In Thy strength.' Cf. Isaiah xl. 10 , 'with strong hand.' 'He shall gently lead.' Note the combination with gentleness. That divine strength is the only power which is able to guide. We are so weak that it takes all His might to hold us up. It is His strength, not ours. 'My strength is made perfect in (thy) weakness.'

'To the resting-place of Thy holiness.' The word is used for pasture, or resting-places for cattle. Here it meant Canaan; for us it means Heaven—'the green pastures' of real participation in His holiness.

II. The triumphant confidence as to the future based upon the deliverance of the past.

'Hast, ' a past tense. It is as good as done. The believing use of God's great past, and initial mercy, to make us sure of His future.

(a) In that He will certainly accomplish it.

(b) In that even now there is a foretaste—rest in toil. He guides to the 'waters of resting.' A rest now (Heb. 4:3); a rest 'that remaineth' (Heb. 4:3, 9)

III. The warning against confidence in self. These people who sang thus perished in the wilderness! They let go hold of God's hand, so they 'sank like lead.' So He will fulfil begun work (Philippians i. 6). Let us cleave to Him. In Hebrews iii. and iv. lessons are drawn from the Israelites not 'entering in.' See also Psalm xcv.

Exodus 15:17:
THE ULTIMATE HOPE

'Thou shalt bring them in and plant them in the mountain of Thine inheritance. . ..'— Exodus 15:17

I. The lesson taught by each present deliverance and kindness is that we shall be brought to His rest at last.

(a) Daily mercies are a pledge and a pattern of His continuous acts.

The confidence that we shall be kept is based upon no hard doctrine of final perseverance, but on the assurance that God is always the same, like the sunshine which has poured out for all these millenniums and still rushes on with the same force. Consider—

The inexhaustibleness of the divine resources.
The steadfastness of the divine purposes.
The long-suffering of the divine patience.

(b) Thus daily mercies should lead on our thoughts to heavenly things.

They should not prison us in their own sweetness. We should see the great Future shining through them as a transparent, not an opaque medium.

(c) That ultimate future should be the great object of our hope.

Surely it is chiefly in order that we may have the light of that great to-morrow brightening and magnifying our dusty to-days, that we are endowed with the faculty of looking forward and 'calling things that are not as though they were.' So we should engage and enlarge our minds with it.

II. The form which that ultimate future assumes.

The Israelites thought of Canaan, and in particular of 'Zion,' its centre-point.

(a) Perpetual rest.

'Bring in and plant'—a contrast to the desert nomad life.

(b) Perpetual safety.

'The sanctuary which Thy hands have established,' i.e. made firm.

(c) Perpetual dwelling in God.

'Thy dwelling,' 'Thy mountain,' ' Thy holy habitation' (ver. 13), rather than ' our land.' For Israel their communion with Jehovah was perfected on Zion by the Temple and the sacrifices, including the revelation of (priestly) national service.

(d) Perpetual purity.

'Thy sanctuary.' 'Without' holiness 'no man shall see the Lord.'

Exodus 15:23-25:
MARAH

And when they came to Marah, they could not drink of the waters of Marah, for they were bitter: therefore the name of it was called Marah. 24. And the people murmured against Moses, saying, What shall we drink? 25. And he cried unto the Lord; and the Lord showed him a tree, which when he had cast into the waters, the waters were made sweet. . ..'— Exodus 15:23-25

I. The time of reaching Marah—just after the Red Sea.

The Israelites were encamped for a few days on the shore to shake themselves together, and then at this, their very first station, they began to experience the privations which were to be their lot for forty years. Their course was like that of a ship that is in the stormy Channel as soon as it leaves the shelter of the pier at Dover, not like that of one that glides down the Thames for miles.

After great moments and high triumphs in life comes Marah.

Marah was just before Elim—the alternation, how blessed! The shade of palms and cool water of the wells, one for each tribe and one for each 'elder.' So we have alternations in life and experience.

II. The wrong and the right ways of taking the bitter experience.

The people grumbled: Moses cried to the Lord. The quick forgetfulness of deliverances. The true use of speech is not complaint, but prayer.

III. The power that changes bitter to sweet.

The manner of the miracle is singular. God hides Himself behind Moses, and His miraculous power behind the material agent. Perhaps the manner of the miracle was intended to suggest a parallel with the first plague. There the rod made the Nile water undrinkable. There is a characteristic economy in the miraculous, and outward things are used, as Christ used the pool and the saliva and the touch, to help the weak faith of the deaf and dumb man.

What changes bitter to sweet for us?—the Cross, the remembrance of Christ's death. 'Consider Him that endured.' The Cross is the true tree which, when 'cast into the waters, the waters were made sweet.'

Recognition of and yielding to God's will: that is the one thing which for us changes all. The one secret of peace and of getting sweetness out of bitterness is loving acceptance of the will of God.

Discernment of purpose in God's 'bitter' dealings—'for our profit.' The dry rod 'budded.' The Prophet's roll was first bitter, then sweet. Affliction 'afterwards yieldeth the peaceable fruit.'

Exodus 16:4-12:
THE BREAD OF GOD

Unbelief has a short memory. The Red Sea is forgotten in a month. The Israelites could strike their timbrels and sing their lyric of praise, but they could not believe that to-day's hunger could be satisfied. Discontent has a slippery memory. They wish to get back to the flesh-pots, of which the savour is in their nostrils, and they have forgotten the bitter sauce of affliction. When they were in Egypt, they shrieked about their oppression, and were ready to give up anything for liberty; when they have got it, they are ready to put their necks in the yoke again, if only they can have their stomachs filled. Men do not know how happy they are till they cease to

be so. Our present miseries and our past blessings are the themes on which unbelief harps. Let him that is without similar sin cast the first stone at these grumbling Israelites. Without following closely the text of the narrative, we may throw together the lessons of the manna.

I. Observe God's purpose in the gift, as distinctly expressed in the promise of it.

'That I may prove them, whether they will walk in My law or no.' How did the manna become a test of this? By means of the law prescribed for gathering it. There was to be a given quantity daily, and twice as much on the sixth day. If a man trusted God for to-morrow, he would be content to stop collecting when he had filled his omer, tempting as the easily gathered abundance would be. Greed and unbelief would masquerade then as now, under the guise of prudent foresight. The old Egyptian parallels to 'make hay while the sun shines,' and suchlike wise sayings of the philosophy of distrust, would be solemnly spoken, and listened to as pearls of wisdom. When experience had taught that, however much a man gathered, he had no more than his omer full, after all,—and is not that true yet?—then the next temptation would be to practise economy, and have something over for to-morrow. Only he who absolutely trusted God to provide for him would eat up his portion, and lie down at night with a quiet heart, knowing that He who had fed him would feed. When experience had taught that what was saved rotted, then laziness would come in and say, 'What is the use of gathering twice as much on the sixth day? Don't we know that it will not keep?' So the whole of the gift was a continual training of, and therefore a continual test for, faith. God willed to let His gifts come in this hand-to-mouth fashion, though He could have provided at once what would have obviously lasted them all their wilderness life, in order that they might be habituated to cling to Him, and that their daily bread might be doubly for their nourishment, feeding their bodies and strengthening that faith which, to them as to us, is the condition of all blessedness. God lets our blessings, too, trickle to us drop by drop, instead of pouring them in a flood all at once upon us, for the same reason. He does so, not because of any good to Him from our faith, except that the Infinite love loves infinitely to be loved; but for our sakes, that we may taste the peace and strength of continual dependence, and the joy of continual receiving. He could give us the principal down; but He prefers to pay us the interest, as we need it.

Christianity does not absolutely forbid laying up money or other resources for future wants. But the love of accumulating, which is so strong in many professing Christians, and the habit of amassing beyond all reasonable future wants, is surely scarcely permitted to those who profess to believe that incarnate wisdom forbade taking anxious care for the morrow, and sent its disciples to lilies and birds to learn the happy immunities of faith. We too get our daily mercies to prove us. The letter of the law for the manna is not applicable to us who gain our bread by God's blessing on our labour. But the spirit is, and the members of great commercial nations have surely little need to be reminded that still the portion put away is apt to breed worms. How often it vanishes, or, if it lasts, tortures its owner, who has more trouble keeping it than he had in getting it; or fatally corrupts his own character, or ruins his children! All God's gifts are tests, which—thanks be to Him—is the same as to say that they are means of increasing faith, and so adding to joy.

II. The manna was further a disclosure of the depth of patient long-suffering in God.

Very strikingly the 'murmurings' of the children of Israel are four times referred to in this context, and on each occasion are stated as the reason for the gift of the manna. It was God's answer to the peevish complaints of greedy appetites. When they were summoned to come near to the Lord, with the ominous warning that 'He hath heard your murmurings,' no doubt many a heart began to quake; and when the Glory flashed from the Shechinah cloud, it would burn lurid to their trembling consciences. But the message which comes from it is sweet in its gentleness, as it promises the manna because they have murmured, and in order that they may know the Lord. A mother soothes her crying infant by feeding it from her own bosom. God does not take the rod to His whimpering children, but rather tries to win them by patience, and to shame their unbelief by His swift and over-abundant answers to their complaints. When He must, He punishes; but when He can, He complies. Faith is the condition of our receiving His highest gifts; but even unbelief touches His heart with pity, and what He can give to it, He does, if it may be melted into trust. The farther men stray from Him, the more tender and penetrating His recalling voice. We multiply transgressions, He multiplies mercies.

III. The manna was a revelation in miraculous and transient form of an eternal truth.

The God who sent it sends daily bread. The words which Christ quoted in His wilderness hunger are the explanation of its meaning as a witness to this truth: 'Man doth not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.' To a Christian, the divine power is present and operative in all natural processes as really as in those which we call miraculous. God is separable from the universe, but the universe is not separable from God. If it were separated, it would cease. So far as the reality of the divine operation is concerned, it matters not whether He works in the established fashion, through material things, or whether His will acts directly. The chain which binds a phenomenon to the divine will may be long or short; the intervening links may be many, or they may be abolished, and the divine cause and the visible effect may touch without anything between. But in either case the power is of God. Bread made out of flour grown on the other side of the world, and fashioned by the baker, and bought by the fruits of my industry, is as truly the gift of God as was the manna. For once, He showed these men His hand at work, that we all might know that it was at work, when hidden. The lesson of the 'angel's food' eaten in the wilderness is that men are fed by the power of God's

expressed and active will,—for that is the meaning of 'the word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God,'—in whatever fashion they get their food. The gift of it is from Him; its power to nourish is from Him. It is as true to-day as ever it was: 'Thou openest Thine hand, and satisfiest the desire of every living thing.' The manna ceased when the people came near cornfields and settled homes. Miracles end when means are possible. But the God of the miracle is the God of the means.

Commentators make much of what is supposed to be a natural substratum for the manna, in a certain vegetable product, found in small quantities in parts of the Arabian peninsula. No doubt, we are to recognise in the plagues of Egypt, and in the dividing of the Red Sea, the extraordinary action of ordinary causes; and there is no objection in principle to doing so here. But that an exudation from the bark of a shrub, which has no nutritive properties at all, is found only in one or two places in Arabia, and that only at certain seasons and in infinitesimal quantity, seems a singularly thin 'substratum' on which to build up the feeding of two millions of people, more or less exclusively and continuously for forty years, by means of a substance which has nothing to do with tamarisk-trees, and is like the natural product in nothing but sweetness and name. Whether we admit connection between the two, or not, the miraculous character of the manna of the Israelites is unaffected. It was miraculous in its origin—'rained from heaven,' in its quantity, in its observance of times and seasons, in its putrefaction and preservation,—as rotting when kept for greed, and remaining sweet when preserved for the Sabbath. It came straight from the creative will of God, and whether its name means 'What is it?' or 'It is a gift,' the designation is equally true and appropriate, pointing, in the one case, to the mystery of its nature; in the other, to the love of the Giver, and in both referring it directly to the hand of God.

IV. The manna was typical of Christ.

Our Lord Himself has laid His hand upon it, and claimed it as a faint foreshadowing of what He is. The Jews, not satisfied with the miracle of the loaves, demand from Him a greater sign, as the condition of what they are pleased to call 'belief'—which is nothing but accepting the testimony of sense. They quote Moses as giving the manna, and imply that Messiah is expected to repeat the miracle. Christ accepts the challenge, and goes on to claim that He not only gives, but Himself is, for all men's souls, all and more than all which the manna had been to the bodies of that dead generation. Like it, He came—but in how much more profound a sense!—from heaven. Like it, He was food. But unlike it, He could still for ever the craving of the else famishing soul; unlike it, He not only nourished a bodily life already possessed, but communicated a spiritual life which never dies; and, unlike it, He was meant to be the food of the whole world. His teaching passed beyond the symbolism of the manna, when He not only declared Himself to be the 'true bread from heaven which gives life to the world,' but opened a glimpse into the solemn mystery of His atoning death by the startling and apparently repulsive paradox that 'His flesh was food indeed and His blood drink indeed.' The manna does not typically teach Christ's atonement, but it does set Him forth as the true sustenance and life-giver, sweet as honey to the soul, sent from heaven for us each, but needing to be made ours by the act of our faith. An Israelite would have starved, though the manna lay all round the camp, if he did not go forth and secure his portion; and he might no less have starved, if he did not eat what Heaven had sent. 'Crede et manducasti,' 'Believe, and thou hast eaten,'—as St. Augustine says. The personal appropriating act of faith is essential to our having Christ for the food of our souls. The bread that nourishes our bodies is assimilated to their substance, and so becomes sustenance. This bread of God, entering into our souls by faith, transforms them into its substance, and so gives and feeds an immortal life. The manna was for a generation; this bread is 'the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever.' That was for a handful of men; this is for the world. Nor is the prophetic value of the manna exhausted when we recognise its witness to Christ. The food of the wilderness is the food of the city. The bread that is laid on the table, 'spread in the presence of the enemy,' is the bread that makes the feast in the king's palace. The Christ who feeds the pilgrim soldiers is the Christ on whom the conquerors banquet. 'To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna.'

Exodus 17:15:
JEHOVAH NISSI

And Moses built an altar, and called the name of it Jehovah Nissi [that is, the Lord is my Banner].— Exodus 17:15

We are all familiar with that picturesque incident of the conflict between Israel and Amalek, which ended in victory and the erection of this memorial trophy. Moses, as you remember, went up on the mount whilst Joshua and the men of war fought in the plain. But I question whether we usually attach the right meaning to the symbolism of this event. We ordinarily, I suppose, think of Moses as interceding on the mountain with God. But there is no word about prayer in the story, and the attitude of Moses is contrary to the idea that his occupation was intercession. He sat there, with the rod of God in his hand, and the rod of God was the symbol and the vehicle of divine power. When he lifted the rod Amalek fled before Israel; when the rod dropped Israel fled before Amalek. That is to say, the uplifted hand was not the hand of intercession, but the hand which communicated power and victory. And so, when the conflict is over, Moses builds this memorial of thanksgiving to God, and piles together these great stones—which, perhaps, still stand in some of the unexplored valleys of that weird desert land—to teach Israel the laws of conflict and the conditions of victory. These laws and conditions are implied in the name which he gave to the altar that he built—Jehovah Nissi, 'the Lord is my Banner.'

Now, then, what do these stones, with their significant name, teach us, as they taught the ancient Israelites? Let me throw these

lessons into three brief exhortations.

I. First, realise for whose cause you fight.

The Banner was the symbol of the cause for which an army fought, or the cognizance of the king or commander whom it followed. So Moses, by that name given to the altar, would impress upon the minds of the cowardly mob that he had brought out of Egypt—and who now had looked into an enemy's eyes for the first time—the elevating and bracing thought that they were God's soldiers, and that the warfare which they waged was not for themselves, nor for the conquest of the country for their own sake, nor for mere outward liberty, but that they were fighting that the will of God might prevail, and that He might be the King now of one land—a mere corner of the earth—and thereby might come to be King of all the earth. That rude altar said to Israel: 'Remember, when you go into the battle, that the battle is the Lord's; and that the standard under which you war is the God for whose cause you contend—none else and none less than Jehovah Himself. You are consecrated soldiers, set apart to fight for God.'
Such is the destination of all Christians. They have a battle to fight, of which they do not think loftily enough, unless they clearly and constantly recognise that they are fighting on God's side.

I need not dwell upon the particulars of this conflict, or run into details of the way in which it is to be waged. Only let us remember that the first field upon which we have to fight for God we carry about within ourselves; and that there will be no victories for us over other enemies until we have, first of all, subdued the foes that are within. And then let us remember that the absorbing importance of inward conflict absolves no Christian man from the duty of strenuously contending for all things that are 'lovely and of good report,' and from waging war against every form of sorrow and sin which his influence can touch. There is no surer way of securing victory in the warfare within and conquering self than to throw myself into the service of others, and lose myself in their sorrows and needs. There is no possibility of my taking my share in the merciful warfare against sin and sorrow, the tyrants that oppress my fellows, unless I conquer myself. These two fields of the Christian warfare are not two in the sense of being separable from one another, but they are two in the sense of being the inside and the outside of the same fabric. The warfare is one, though the fields are two.

Let us remember, on the other hand, that whilst it is our simple bounden duty, as Christian men and women, to reckon ourselves as anointed and called for the purpose of warring against sin and sorrow, wherever we can assail them, there is nothing more dangerous, and few things more common, than the hasty identification of fighting for some whim, or prejudice, or narrow view, or partial conception of our own, with contending for the establishment of the will of God. How many wicked things have been done in this world for God's glory! How many obstinate men, who were really only forcing their own opinions down people's throats because they were theirs, have fancied themselves to be pure-minded warriors for God! How easy it has been, in all generations, to make the sign of the Cross over what had none of the spirit of the Cross in it; and to say, 'The cause is God's, and therefore I war for it'; when the reality was, 'The cause is mine, and therefore I take it for granted that it is God's.'

Let us beware of the 'wolf in sheep's clothing,' the pretence of sanctity which is only selfishness with a mask on. And, above all, let us beware of the uncharitableness and narrowness of view, the vehemence of temper, the fighting for our own hands, the enforcing of our own notions and whims and peculiarities, which have often done duty as being true Christian service for the Master's sake. We are God's host, but we are not to suppose that every notion that we take into our heads, and for which we may contend, is part of the cause of God.

And then remember what sort of men the soldiers in such an army ought to be. 'Be ye clean that bear the vessels of the Lord.' These bearers may either be regarded as a solemn procession of priests carrying the sacrificial vessels; or, as is more probable from the context of the original, as the armour-bearers of the great King. They must be pure who bear His weapons, for these are His righteous love, His loving purity. If our camp is the camp of the Lord, no violence should be there. What sanctity, what purity, what patience, what long-suffering, what self-denial, and what enthusiastic confidence of victory there should be in those who can say, 'We are the Lord's host, Jehovah is our Banner!' He always wins who sides with God. And he only worthily takes his place in the ranks of the sacramental host of the Most High who goes into the warfare knowing that, because He is God's soldier, he will come out of it, bringing his victorious shield with him, and ready for the laurels to be twined round his undinted helmet. That is the first of the thoughts, then, that are here.

II. The second of the exhortations which come from the altar and its name is, Remember whose commands you follow.

The banner in ancient warfare, even more than in modern, moved in front of the host, and determined the movements of the army. And so, by the stones that he piled and the name which he gave them, Moses taught Israel and us that they and we are under the command of God, and that it is the movements of His staff that are to be followed. Absolute obedience is the first duty of the Christian soldier, and absolute obedience means the entire suppression of my own will, the holding of it in equilibrium until He puts His finger on the side that He desires to dip and lets the other rise. They only understand their place as Christ's servants and soldiers who have learned to hush their own will until they know their Captain's. In order to be blessed, to be strong, to be victorious, the indispensable condition is that our inmost desire shall be, 'Not my will, but Thine be done.'

Sometimes, and often, there will be perplexities in our daily lives, and conflicts very hard to unravel. We shall often be brought to a point where we cannot see which way the Banner is leading us. What then? 'It is good that a man should both hope and quietly wait' for the salvation and for the guidance of his God. And we shall generally find that it is when we are looking too far ahead that we do not get guidance. You will not get guidance to-day for this day next week. When this day next week comes, it will bring its own enlightenment with it.

'Lead, kindly Light, . . .
. . .One step enough for me.'

Let us take short views both of duty and of hope, and we shall not so often have to complain that we are left without knowing what the Commander's orders are. Sometimes we are so left, and that is a lesson in patience, and is generally God's way of telling us that it is not His will that we should do anything at all just yet. Sometimes we are so left in order that we may put our hand out through the darkness, and hold on by Him, and say, 'I know not what to do, but mine eyes are towards Thee.'

And be sure of this, brethren, that He will not desert His own promise, and that they who in their inmost hearts can say, 'The Lord is my Banner,' will never have to complain that He led them into a 'pathless wilderness where there was no way.' It is sometimes a very narrow track, it is often a very rough one, it is sometimes a dreadfully solitary one; but He always goes before us, and they who hold His hand will not hold it in vain. 'The Lord is my Banner'; obey His orders and do not take anybody else's; nor, above all, the suggestions of that impatient, talkative heart of yours, instead of His commandments.

III. Lastly, the third lesson that these grey stones preach to us is, Recognise by whose power you conquer.

The banner, I suppose, to us English people, suggests a false idea. It suggests the notion of a flag, or some bit of flexible drapery which fluttered and flapped in the wind; but the banner of old-world armies was a rigid pole, with some solid ornament of bright metal on the top, so as to catch the light. The banner-staff spoken of in the text links itself with the preceding incident. I said that Moses stood on the mountain-top with the rod in his hand. Now that rod was exactly a miniature banner, and when he lifted it, victory came to Israel; and when it fell, victory deserted their arms. So by the altar's name he would say, Do not suppose that it was Moses that won the battle, nor that it was the rod that Moses carried in his hand that brought you strength. The true Victor was Jehovah, and it was He who was Moses' Banner. It was by Him that the lifted rod brought victory; as for Moses, he had nothing to do with it; and the people had to look higher than the hill-top where he sat.

This thought puts stress on the first word of the phrase instead of on the last, as in my previous remarks. 'The Lord is my Banner,'—no Moses, no outward symbol, no man or thing, but only He Himself. Therefore, in all our duties, and in all our difficulties, and in all our conflicts, and for all our conquests, we are to look away from creatures, self, externals, and to look only to God. We are all too apt to trust in rods instead of in Him, in Moses instead of in Moses' Lord.

We are all too apt to trust in externals, in organisations, sacraments, services, committees, outside aids of all sorts, as our means for doing God's work, and bringing power to us and blessing to the world. Let us get away from them all, dig deeper down than any of these, be sure that these are but surface reservoirs, but that the fountain which fills them with any refreshing liquid which they may bear lies in God Himself. Why should we trouble ourselves about reservoirs when we can go to the Fountain? Why should we put such reliance on churches and services and preaching and sermons and schemes and institutions and organisations when we have the divine Lord Himself for our strength? 'Jehovah is my Banner,' and Moses' rod is only a symbol. At most it is like a lightning-conductor, but it is not the lightning. The lightning will come without the rod, if our eyes are to the heaven, for the true power that brings God down to men is that forsaking of externals and waiting upon Him which He never refuses to answer.

In like manner we are too apt to put far too much confidence in human teachers and human helpers of various kinds. And when God takes them away we say to ourselves that there is a gap that can never be filled. Ay! but the great sea can come in and fill any gap, and make the deepest and the driest of the excavations in the desert to abound in sweet water.

So let us turn away from everything external, gather in our souls and fix our hopes on Him; let us recognise the imperative duty of the Christian warfare which is laid upon us; let us docilely submit ourselves to His sweet commands, and trust in His sufficient and punctual guidance, and not expect from any outward sources that which no outward sources can ever give, but which He Himself will give—strength to our fingers to fight, and weapons for the warfare, and covering for our heads in the day of battle.

And then, when our lives are done, may the only inscription on the stone that covers us be 'Jehovah Nissi: the Lord is my banner' ! The trophy that commemorates the Christian's victory should bear no name but His by whose grace we are more than conquerors. 'Thanks be to God who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.'

Exodus 18:3-4:
GERSHOM AND ELIEZER

‘The name of the one [of Moses’ sons] was Gershom . . .and the name of the other was Eliezer. . ..’— Exodus 18:3, 4

In old times parents often used to give expression to their hopes or their emotions in the names of their children. Very clearly that was the case in Moses’ naming of his two sons, who seem to have been the whole of his family. The significance of each name is appended to it in the text. The explanation of the first is, ‘For he said, I have been an alien in a strange land’; and that of the second, ‘For the God of my fathers, said he, was mine help, and delivered me from the sword of Pharaoh.’ These two names give us a pathetic glimpse of the feelings with which Moses began his exile, and of the better thoughts into which these gradually cleared. The first child’s name expresses his father’s discontent, and suggests the bitter contrast between Sinai and Egypt; the court and the sheepfold; the gloomy, verdureless, gaunt peaks of Sinai, blazing in the fierce sunshine, and the cool, luscious vegetation of Goshen, the land for cattle. The exile felt himself all out of joint with his surroundings, and so he called the little child that came to him ‘Gershom,’ which, according to one explanation, means ‘banishment,’ and, according to another (a kind of punning etymology), means ‘a stranger here’; in the other case expressing the same sense of homelessness and want of harmony with his surroundings. But as the years went on, Moses began to acclimatise himself, and to become more reconciled to his position and to see things more as they really were. So, when the second child is born, all his murmuring has been hushed, and he looks beyond circumstances, and lays his hand upon God. ‘And the name of the second was Eliezer, for, he said, the God of my fathers was my help.’

Now, there are the two main streams of thought that filled these forty years; and it was worth while to put Moses into the desert for all that time, and to break off the purposes and hopes of his life sharp and short, and to condemn him to comparative idleness, or work that was all unfitted to bring out his special powers, for that huge scantling out of his life, one-third of the whole of it, in order that there might be burnt into him, not either of these two thoughts separately, but the two of them in their blessed conjunction; ‘I am a stranger here’; ‘God is my Help.’ And so these are the thoughts which, in like juxtaposition, ought to be ours; and in higher fashion with regard to the former of them than was experienced by Moses. Let me say a word or two about each of these two things. Let us think of the strangers, and of the divine helper that is with the strangers.

I. ‘A stranger here.’

Now, that is true, in the deepest sense, about all men; for the one thing that makes the difference between the man and the beast is that the beast is perfectly at home in his surroundings, and gets all that he needs out of them, and finds in them a field for all that he can do, and is fully developed to the very highest point of his capacity by what people nowadays call the ‘environment’ in which he is put. But the very opposite is the case in regard to us men. ‘Foxes have holes,’ and they are quite comfortable there; ‘and the birds of the air have roosting-places,’ and tuck their heads under their wings and go to sleep without a care and without a consciousness. ‘But the Son of man,’ the ideal Humanity as well as the realised ideal in the person of Jesus Christ, ‘hath not where to lay His head.’ No; because He is so ‘much better than they.’ Their immunity from care is not a prerogative—it is an inferiority. We are plunged into the midst of a scene of things which obviously does not match our capacities. There is a great deal more in every man than can ever find a field of expression, of work, or of satisfaction in anything beneath the stars. And no man that understands, even superficially, his own character, his own requirements, can fail to feel in his sane and quiet moments, when the rush of temptation and the illusions of this fleeting life have lost their grip upon him: ‘This is not the place that can bring out all that is in me, or that can yield me all that I desire.’ Our capacities transcend the present, and the experiences of the present are all unintelligible, unless the true end of every human life is not here at all, but in another region, for which these experiences are fitting us.

But, then, the temptations of life, the strong appeals of flesh and sense, the duties which in their proper place are lofty and elevating and refining, and put out of their place, are contemptible and degrading, all come in to make it hard for any of us to keep clearly before us what our consciousness tells us when it is strongly appealed to, that we are strangers and sojourners here and that this is not ‘our rest, because it is polluted.’ Therefore it comes to be the great glory and blessedness of the Christian Revelation that it obviously shifts the centre for us, and makes that future, and not this present, the aim for which, and in the pursuit of which, we are to live. So, Christian people, in a far higher sense than Moses, who only felt himself ‘a stranger there,’ because he did not like Midian as well as Egypt, have to say, ‘We are strangers here’; and the very aim, in one aspect, of our Christian discipline of ourselves is that we shall keep vivid, in the face of all the temptations to forget it, this consciousness of being away from our true home.

One means of doing that is to think rather oftener than the most of us do, about our true home. You have heard, I dare say, of half-reclaimed gipsies, who for a while have been coaxed out of the free life of the woods and the moors, and have gone into settled homes. After a while there has come over them a rush of feeling, a remembrance of how blessed it used to be out in the open and away from the squalor and filth where men ‘sit and hear each other groan’ and they have flung off ‘as if they were fetters’ the trappings of ‘civilisation,’ and gone back to liberty. That is what we ought to do—not going back from the higher to the lower, but smitten with what the Germans call the heimweh , the home-sickness, that makes us feel that we must get clearer sight of that land to which we truly belong.

Do you think about it, do you feel that where Jesus Christ is, is your home? I have no doubt that most of you have, or have had, dear

ones here on earth about whom you could say that, ‘Where my husband, my wife is; where my beloved is, or my children are, that is my home, wherever my abode may be.’ Are you, Christian people, saying the same thing about heaven and Jesus Christ? Do you feel that you are strangers here, not only because you, reflecting upon your character and capacities and on human life, see that all these require another life for their explanation and development, but because your hearts are knit to Him, and ‘where your treasure is there your heart is also’; and where your heart is there you are? We go home when we come into communion with Jesus Christ. Do you ever, in the course of the rush of your daily work, think about the calm city beyond the sea, and about its King, and that you belong to it? ‘Our citizenship is in heaven’ and here we are strangers.

II. Now let me say a word about the other child’s name.

‘God is Helper.’ We do not know what interval of time elapsed between the birth of these two children. There are some indications that the second of them was in years very much the junior. Perhaps the transition from the mood represented in the one name to that represented in the other, was a long and slow process. But be that as it may, note the connection between these two names. You can never say ‘We are strangers here’ without feeling a little prick of pain, unless you say too ‘God is my Helper.’ There is a beautiful variation of the former word which will occur to many of you, I have no doubt, in one of the old psalms: ‘I am a stranger with Thee , and a sojourner, as were all my fathers.’ There is the secret that takes away all the mourning, all the possible discomfort and pain, out of the thought: ‘Here we have no continuing city,’ and makes it all blessed. It does not matter whether we are in a foreign land or no, if we have that Companion with us. His presence will make blessedness in Midian, or in Thebes. It does not matter whether it is Goshen or the wilderness, if the Lord is by our side. So sweetness is breathed into the thought, and bitterness is sucked out of it, when the name of the second child is braided into the name of the first; and we can contemplate quietly all else of tragic and limiting and sad that is involved in the thought that we are sojourners and pilgrims, when we say ‘Yes! we are; but the Lord is my Helper.’

Then, on the other hand, we shall never say and feel ‘the Lord is my Helper,’ as we ought to do, until we have got deep in our hearts, and settled in our consciousness, the other conviction that we are strangers here. It is only when we realise that there is no other permanence for us that we put out our hands and grasp at the Eternal, in order not to be swept away upon the dark waves of the rushing stream of Time. It is only when all other props are stricken from us that we rest our whole weight upon that one strong central pillar, which can never be moved. Learn that God helps, for that makes it possible to say ‘I am a stranger,’ and not to weep. Learn that you are strangers, for that stimulates to take God for out help. Just as when the floods are out, men are driven to the highest ground to save their lives; so when the billows of the waters of time are seen to be rolling over all creatural things, we take our flight to the Rock of Ages. Put the two together, and they fit one another and strengthen us.

This second conviction was the illuminating light upon a perplexed and problematic past. Moses, when he fled from Egypt, thought that his life’s work was rent in twain. He had believed that his brethren would have seen that it was God’s purpose to use him as the deliverer. For the sake of being such, he had surrendered the court and its delights. But on his young ambition and innocent enthusiasm there came this douche of cold water, which lasted for forty years, and sent him away into the wilderness, to be a shepherd under an Arab sheikh, with nothing to look forward to. At first he said, ‘This is not what I was meant for; I am out of my element here.’ But before the forty years were over he said, ‘The God of my father was my help, and He delivered me from the sword of Pharaoh.’ What had looked a disaster turned out to be a deliverance, a manifestation of divine help, and not a hindrance. He had got far enough away from that past to look at it sanely, that is to say gratefully. So we, when we get far enough away from our sorrows, can look back at them, sometimes even here on earth, and say, ‘The mercy of the Lord compassed me about.’ Here is the key that unlocks all the perplexities of providence, ‘The Lord was my Helper.’

And that conviction will steady and uphold a man in a present, however dark. It was no small exercise of his faith and patience that the great lawgiver should for so many years have such unworthy work to do as he had in Midian. But even then he gathered into his heart this confidence, and brought summer about him into the mid-winter of his life, and light into the midst of darkness; ‘for he said’—even then, when there was no work for him to do that seemed much to need a divine help—‘the Lord is my Helper.’

And so, however dark may be our present moment, and however obscure or repulsive our own tasks, let us fall back upon that old word, ‘Thou hast been my Help; leave me not, neither forsake me, O God of my salvation.’

When Moses named his boy, his gratitude was allied with faith in favours to come; and when he said ‘was,’ he meant also ‘will be.’ And he was right. He dreamt very little of what was coming, but this confidence that was expressed in his second child’s name was warranted by that great future that lay before him, though he did not know it. When the pinch came his confidence faltered. It was easy to say ‘The Lord is my Helper,’ when there was nothing very special for which God’s help was needed, and nothing harder to do than to look after a few sheep in the wilderness. But when God said to him, ‘Go and stand before Pharaoh,’ Moses for the moment forgot all about God’s being his helper, and was full of all manner of cowardly excuses, which, like the excuses of a great many more of us for not doing our plain duty, took the shape of a very engaging modesty and diffidence as to his capacities. But God said to him, ‘Surely I will be with thee.’ He gave him back ‘Eliezer’ in a little different form. ‘You used to say that I was your

helper. What has become of your faith now? Has it all evaporated when the trial comes? Surely I will be with thee.' If we will set ourselves to our tasks, not doubting God's help, we shall have occasion in the event to be sure that God did help us.

So, brethren, let us cherish these two thoughts, and never keep them apart, and God will be, as our good old hymn has it—

Our help while troubles last,
And our eternal home.

Exodus 18:21:
THE IDEAL STATESMAN

'Thou shalt provide out of all the people able men, such as fear God, men of truth, hating covetousness; and place such over them.'— Exodus 18:21

You will have anticipated my purpose in selecting this text. I should be doing violence to your feelings and mine if I made no reference to the event which has united the Empire and the world in one sentiment. The great tree has fallen, and the crash has for the moment silenced all the sounds of the forest. Wars abroad and controversies at home are hushed. All men, of all schools of opinion, creeds, and parties, see now, in the calm face of the dead, 'the likeness to the great of old'; and it says something, with all our faults, for the soundness of the heart of English opinion, that all sorts and conditions of men have brought their sad wreaths to lay them on that coffin.

But, whilst much has been said, far more eloquently and authoritatively than I can say it, about the many aspects of that many-sided life, surely it becomes us, as Christian people, to look at it from the distinctively Christian point of view, and to gather some of the lessons which, so regarded, it teaches us.

My text is part of the sagacious advice which Jethro, the father-in-law of Moses, gave him about the sort of men that he should pick out to be his lieutenants in civic government. Its old-fashioned, simple phraseology may hide from some of us the elevation and comprehensiveness of the ideal that it sets forth. But it is a grand ideal; and amongst the great names of Englishmen who have guided the destinies of this land, none have approached more nearly to it than he whose death has taken away the most striking personality from our public life.

So let me ask you to look with me, first, at the ideal of a politician that is set forth here.

The free life of the desert, far away from the oppressions of surrounding military despotisms, that remarkable and antique constitution of the clan, with all its beautiful loyalty, had given this Arab sheikh a far loftier conception of what a ruler of men was than he could have found exemplified at Pharaoh's court; or than, alas! has been common in many so-called Christian countries. The field upon which he intended that these great qualities should be exercised was a very limited one, to manage the little affairs of a handful of fugitives in the desert. But the scale on which we work has nothing to do with the principles by which we work, and the laws of perspective and colouring are the same, whether you paint the minutest miniature or a gigantic fresco. So what was needed for managing the little concerns of Moses' wanderers in the wilderness is the ideal of what is needed for the men who direct the public affairs of world-wide empires.

Let me run over the details. They must be 'able men,' or, as the original has it, 'men of strength.' There is the intellectual basis, and especially the basis of firm, brave, strongly-set will which will grasp convictions, and, whatever comes, will follow them to their conclusions. The statesman is not one that puts his ear down to the ground to hear the tramp of some advancing host, and then makes up his mind to follow in their paths; he is not sensitive to the varying winds of public opinion, nor does he trim his sails to suit them, but he comes to his convictions by first-hand approach to, and meditation on, the great principles that are to guide, and then holds to them with a strength that nothing can weaken, and a courage that nothing can daunt. 'Men of strength' is what democracies like ours do most need in their leaders; a 'strong man, in a blatant land,' who knows his own mind, and is faithful to it for ever. That is a great demand.

'Such as fear God'—there is the secret of strength, not merely in reference to the intellectual powers which are not dependent for their origin, though they may be for the health and vigour of their work, upon any religious sentiment, but in regard to all true power. He that would govern others must first be lord of himself, and he only is lord of himself who is consciously and habitually the servant of God. So that whatever natural endowment we start with, it must be heightened, purified, deepened, enlarged, by the presence in our lives of a deep and vital religious conviction. That is true about all men, leaders and led, large and small. That is the bottom-heat in the greenhouse, as it were, that will make riper and sweeter all the fruits which are the natural result of natural capacities. That is the amulet and the charm which will keep a man from the temptations incident to his position and the weaknesses incident to his character. The fear of God underlies the noblest lives. That is not to-day's theory. We are familiar with the fact, and familiar with the doctrine formulated out of it, that there may be men of strong and noble lives and great leaders in many a department of human activity without any reference to the Unseen. Yes, there may be, but they are all fragments, and the complete man comes only when

the fear of the Lord is guide, leader, impulse, polestar, regulator, corrector, and inspirer of all that he is and all that he does.

'Men of truth'—that, of course, glances at the crooked ways which belong not only to Eastern statesmanship, but it does more than that. He that is to lead men must himself be led by an eager haste to follow after, and to apprehend, the very truth of things. And there must be in him clear transparent willingness to render his utmost allegiance, at any sacrifice, to the dawning convictions that may grow upon him. It is only fools that do not change. Freshness of enthusiasm, and fidelity to new convictions opening upon a man, to the end of his life, are not the least important of the requirements in him who would persuade and guide individuals or a nation.

'Hating covetousness'; or, as it might be rendered, 'unjust gain.' That reference to the 'oiling of the palms' of Eastern judges may be taken in a loftier signification. If a man is to stand forth as the leader of a people, he must be clear, as old Samuel said that he was, from all suspicion of having been following out his career for any form of personal advantage. 'Clean hands,' and that not only from the vulgar filth of wealth, but from the more subtle advantages which may accrue from a lofty position, are demanded of the leader of men.

Such is the ideal. The requirements are stern and high, and they exclude the vermin that infest 'politics,' as they are called, and cause them to stink in many nostrils. The self-seeking schemer, the one-eyed partisan, the cynic who disbelieves in ideals of any sort, the charlatan who assumes virtues that he does not possess, and mouths noble sentiments that go no deeper than his teeth, are all shut out by them. The doctrine that a man may do in his public capacity things which would be disgraceful in private life, and yet retain his personal honour untarnished, is blown to atoms by this ideal. It is much to be regretted, and in some senses to be censured, that so many of our wisest, best, and most influential men stand apart from public life. Much of that is due to personal bias, much more of it is due to the pressure of more congenial duties, and not a little of it is due to the disregard of Jethro's ideal, and to the degradation of public life which has ensued thereby. But there have been great men in our history whose lives have helped to lift up the ideal of a statesman, who have made such a sketch as Jethro outlined, though they may not have used his words, their polestar; and amongst the highest of these has been the man whose loss we to-day lament.

Let me try to vindicate that expression of opinion in a word or two. I cannot hope to vie in literary grace, or in completeness, with the eulogies that have been abundantly poured out; and I should not have thought it right to divert this hour of worship from its ordinary themes, if I had had no more to say than has been far better said a thousand times in these last days. But I cannot help noticing that, though there has been a consensus of admiration of, and a practically unanimous pointing to, character as after all the secret of the spell which Mr. Gladstone has exercised for two generations, there has not been, as it seems to me, equal and due prominence given to what was, and what he himself would have said was, the real root of his character and the productive cause of his achievements.

And so I venture now to say a word or two about the religion of the man that to his own consciousness underlay all the rest of him. It is not for me to speak, and there is no need to speak, about the marvellous natural endowments and the equally marvellous, many-sided equipment of attainment which enriched the rich, natural soil. Intermeddling as he did with all knowledge, he must necessarily have been but an amateur in many of the subjects into which he rushed with such generous eagerness. But none the less is the example of all but omnivorous acquisitiveness of everything that was to be known, a protest, very needful in these days, against the possible evils of an excessive specialising which the very progress of knowledge in all departments seems to make inevitable. I do not need to speak, either, of the flow, and sometimes the torrent, of eloquence ever at his command, nor of the lithe and sinewy force of his extraordinarily nimble, as well as massive, mind; nor need I say more than one word about the remarkable combination of qualities so generally held and seen to be incompatible, which put into one personality a genius for dry arithmetical figures and a genius for enthusiasm and sympathy with all the oppressed. All these things have been said far better than I can say them, and I do not repeat them.

But I desire to hammer this one conviction into your hearts and my own, that the inmost secret of that noble life, of all that wealth of capacity, all that load of learning, which he bore lightly like a flower, was the fact that the man was, to the very depths of his nature, a devout Christian. He would have been as capable, as eloquent, and all the rest of it, if he had been an unbeliever. But he would never have been nor done what he was and did, and he would never have left the dint of an impressive and lofty personality upon a whole nation and a world, if beneath the intellect there had not been character, and beneath character Christianity.

He was far removed, in ecclesiastical connections, from us Nonconformists, and he held opinions in regard to some very important ecclesiastical questions which cut straight across some of our deepest convictions. We never had to look for much favour from his hands, because his intellectual atmosphere removed him far from sympathy with many of the truths which are dearest to the members of the Free Evangelical Churches. But none the less we recognise in him a brother in Jesus Christ, and rejoice that there, on the high places of a careless and sceptical generation, there stood a Christian man.

In this connection I cannot but, though I have no right to do so, express how profoundly thankful I, for one, was to the present Prime Minister of England that in his brief eulogium on, I was going to say, his great rival, he ended all by the emphatic declaration that Mr.

Gladstone was, first and foremost, a great Christian man. Yes; and there was the secret, as I have already said, not of his merely political eminence, but of the universal reverence which a nation expresses to-day. All detraction is silenced, and all calumnies have dropped away, as filth from the white wings of a swan as it soars, and with one voice the Empire and the world confess that he was a great and a good man.

I need not dwell in detail on the thoughts of how, by reason of this deep underlying fear of God, the other qualifications which are sketched in our ideal found their realisation in him; how those who, all through his career, smiled most at the successive enthusiasms which monopolised his mind, and sometimes at the contrasts between these, are now ready to admit that, whether the enthusiasms were right or wrong, there is something noble in the spectacle of a man ever keeping his mind, even when its windows were beginning to be dimmed by the frosts of age, open to the beams of new truth. And the greatest, as some people think, of his political blunders, as we are beginning, all of us, to recognise, now that party strife is hushed, was the direct consequence of that ever fresh and youthful enthusiasm for new thoughts and new lines of action. Innovators aged eighty are not too numerous.

Nor need I say more than one word about the other part of the ideal, 'hating covetousness.' The giver of peerages by the bushel died a commoner. The man that had everything at his command made no money, nor anything else, out of his long years of office, except the satisfaction of having been permitted to render what he believed to be the highest of service to the nation that he loved so well. Like our whilom neighbour, the other great commoner, John Bright, he lived among his own people; and like Samuel, of whom I have already spoken, he could stretch out his old hands and say, 'They are clean.' One scarcely feels as if, to such a life, a State funeral in Westminster Abbey was congruous. One had rather have seen him laid among the humble villagers who were his friends and companions, and in the quiet churchyard which his steps had so often traversed. But at all events the ideal was realised, and we all know what it was.

Might I say one word more? As this great figure passes out of men's sight to nobler work, be sure, on widened horizons corresponding to his tutored and exercised powers, does he leave no lessons behind for us? He leaves one very plain, homely one, and that is, 'Work while it is called to-day.' No opulence of endowment tempted this man to indolence, and no poverty of endowment will excuse us for sloth. Work is the law of our lives; and the more highly we are gifted, the more are we bound to serve.

He leaves us another lesson. Follow convictions as they open before you, and never think that you have done growing, or have reached your final stage.

He leaves another lesson. Do not suppose that the Gospel of Jesus Christ cannot satisfy the keenest intellect, nor dominate the strongest will. It has come to be a mark of narrowness and fossilhood to be a devout believer in Christ and His Cross. Some of you young men make an easy reputation for cleverness and advanced thought by the short and simple process of disbelieving what your mother taught you. Here is a man, probably as great as you are, with as keen an intellect, and he clung to the Cross of Christ, and had for his favourite hymn—

'Rock of Ages, cleft for me,
Let me hide myself in Thee.'

He leaves another lesson. If you desire to make your characters all that it is in them to be made, you must, like him, go to Jesus Christ, and get your teaching and your inspiration from that great Lord. We cannot all be great men. Never mind. It is character that tells; we can all be good men, and we can all be Christian men. And whether we build cottages or palaces, if we build on one foundation, and only if we do, they will stand.

Moses leaves another lesson, as he glides into the past. 'This man, having served his generation by the will of God, fell on sleep, and was gathered to his fathers, and saw corruption'; but He 'whom God hath raised up saw no corruption.' The lamps are quenched, the sun shines. Moses dies, 'The prophets, do they live for ever?' but when Moses and Elias faded from the Mount of Transfiguration 'the apostles saw no man any more, save Jesus only,' and the voice said, 'This is My beloved Son; hear ye Him.'

Exodus 20:1-11
THE DECALOGUE: I—MAN AND GOD

An obscure tribe of Egyptian slaves plunges into the desert to hide from pursuit, and emerges, after forty years, with a code gathered into 'ten words,' so brief, so complete, so intertwining morality and religion, so free from local or national peculiarities, so close fitting to fundamental duties, that it is to-day, after more than three thousand years, authoritative in the most enlightened peoples. The voice that spoke from Sinai reverberates in all lands. The Old World had other lawgivers who professed to formulate their precepts by divine inspiration: they are all fallen silent. But this voice, like the trumpet on that day, waxes louder and louder as the years roll. Whose voice was it? The only answer explaining the supreme purity of the commandments, and their immortal freshness, is found in the first sentence of this paragraph, 'God spake all these words.'

I. We have first the revelation, which precedes and lays the foundation for the commandments; 'I am the Lord thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt.'

God speaks to the nation as a whole, establishing a special relation between Himself and them, which is founded on His redeeming act, and is reciprocal, requiring that they should be His people, as He is their God. The manifestation in act of His power and of His love precedes the claim for reverence and obedience. This is a universal truth. God gives before He asks us to give. He is not a hard taskmaster, 'gathering where He has not strawn.' Even in that system which is eminently 'the law,' the foundation is a divine act of deliverance, and only when He has won the people for Himself by redeeming them from bondage does He call on them for obedience. His rule is built on benefits. He urges no mere right of the mightier, nor cares for service which is not the glad answer of gratitude. The flashing flames which ran as swift heralds before His descending chariot wheels, the quaking mountain, the long-drawn blasts of the trumpet, awed the gathered crowd. But the first articulate words made a tenderer appeal, and sought to found His right to command on His love, and their duty to obey on their gratitude. The great gospel principle, that the Redeemer is the lawgiver, and the redeemed are joyful subjects because their hearts are touched with love, underlies the apparently sterner system of the Old Testament. God opens His heart first, and then asks for men's.

This prelude certainly confines the Decalogue to the people of Israel. Their deliverance is the ground on which the law is rested, therefore, plainly, the obligation can be no wider than the benefit. But though we are not bound to obey any of the Ten Commandments, because they were given to Israel, they are all, with one exception, demonstrably, a transcript of laws written on the heart of mankind; and this fact carries with it a strong presumption that the law of the Sabbath, which is the exception referred to, should be regarded as not an exception, but as a statute of the primeval law, witnessed to by conscience, republished in wondrous precision and completeness in these venerable precepts. The Ten Commandments are binding on us; but they are not binding as part, though the fundamental part, of the Jewish law.

Two general observations may be made. One is on the negative character of the commandments as a whole. Law prohibits because men are sinful. But prohibitions pre-suppose as their foundation positive commands. We are forbidden to do something because we are inclined to do it, and because we ought to do the opposite. Every 'thou shalt not' implies a deeper 'thou shalt.' The cold negation really rests on the converse affirmative command.

The second remark on the law as a whole is as to the relation which it establishes between religion and morality, making the latter a part of the former, but regarding it as secured only by the prior discharge of the obligations of the former. Morality is the garb of religion; religion is the animating principle of morality. The attempts to build up a theory of ethics without reference to our relations to God, or to secure the practice of righteousness without such reference, or to substitute, with a late champion of unbelief, 'the service of man' for the worship of God, are all condemned by the deeper and simpler wisdom of this law. Christians should learn the lesson, which the most Jewish of the New Testament writers had drawn from it, that, 'pure and undefiled service' of God is the service of man, and should beware of putting asunder what God has joined so closely.

II. The first commandment bears in its negative form marks of the condition of the world when it was spoken, and of the strong temptation to polytheism which the Israelites were to resist.

Everywhere but in that corner among the wild rocks of Sinai, men believed in 'gods many.' Egypt swarmed with them; and, no doubt, the purity of Abraham's faith had been sadly tarnished in his sons. We cannot understand the strange fascination of polytheism. It is a disease of humanity in an earlier stage than ours. But how strong it was and is, all history shows. All these many gods were on amicable terms with one another, and ready to welcome newcomers. But the monotheism, which was here laid at the very foundation of Israel's national life, parted it by a deep gulf from all the world, and determined its history.

The prohibition has little force for us; but the positive command which underlies it is of eternal force. We should rather think of it as a revelation and an invitation than as a mere command. For what is it but the declaration that at the centre of things is throned, not a rabble of godlings, nor a stony impersonal somewhat, nor a hypothetical unknowable entity, nor a shadowy abstraction, but a living Person, who can say 'Me,' and whom we can call on as 'Thou,' and be sure that He hears? No accumulation of finite excellences, however fair, can satisfy the imagination, which feels after one Being, the personal ideal of all perfectness. The understanding needs one ultimate Cause on which it can rest amid the dance of fleeting phenomena; the heart cannot pour out its love to be shared among many. No string of goodly pearls will ever give the merchantman assurance that his quest is complete. Only when human nature finds all in One, and that One a living Person, the Lover and Friend of all souls, does it fold its wings and rest as a bird after long flight.

The first commandment enjoins, or rather blesses us by showing us that we may cherish, supreme affection, worship, trust, self-surrender, aspiration, towards one God. After all, our God is that which we think most precious, for which we are ready to make the greatest sacrifices, which draws our warmest love; which, lost, would leave us desolate; which, possessed, makes us blessed. If we search our hearts with this 'candle of the Lord,' we shall find many an idol set up in their dark corners, and be startled to discover

how much we need to bring ourselves to be judged and condemned by this commandment It is the foundation of all human duty. Obedience to it is the condition of peace and blessedness, light and leading for mind, heart, will, affections, desires, hopes, fears, and all the world within, that longs for one living Person even when it least knows the meaning of its longings and the reason of its unrest.

III. The second commandment forbids all representations, whether of the one God or of false deities.

The golden calf, which was a symbol of Jehovah, is condemned equally with the fair forms that haunted the Greek Olympus, or the half-bestial shapes of Egyptian mythology. The reasons for the prohibition may be considered as two,—the impossibility of setting forth the glory of the Infinite Spirit in any form, and the certainty that the attempt will sink the worshipper deeper in the mire of sense. An image degrades God and damages men. By it religion reverses its nature, and becomes another clog to keep the soul among the things seen, and an ally of all fleshly inclinations. We know how idolatry seemed to cast a spell over the Israelites from Egypt to Babylon, and how their first relapse into it took place almost before the voice which 'spake all these words' had ceased.

In its grosser form, we have no temptation to it. But there are other ways of breaking the commandment than setting up an image. All sensuous worship in which the treacherous aid of art is called in to elevate the soul, comes perilously near to contradicting its spirit, if not its letter. The attempt to make of the senses a ladder for the soul to climb to God by, is a great deal more likely to end in the soul's going down the ladder than up it. The history of public worship in the Christian Church teaches that the less it has to do with such slippery help the better. There is a strong current running in England, at all events, in the direction of bringing in a more artistic, or, as it is called, a 'less bare,' form of service. We need to remember that the God who is a Spirit is worshipped 'in spirit,' and that outward forms may easily choke, and outward aids hinder, that worship.

The especial difficulty of obedience to this commandment is marked by the reason or sanction annexed. That opens a wide field, on which it would be folly to venture here. There is a glimpse of God's character, and a statement of a law of His working. He is a 'jealous' God, We need not be afraid of the word. It means nothing but what is congruous with the loftiest conception of a loving God. It means that He allows of no rival in our hearts' affection, or in our submission for love's sake to Him. A half trust in God is no trust. How can worship be shared, or love be parted out, among a pantheon? Our poor hearts ask of one another and get from one another, wherever a man and a woman truly love, just what God asks,—'All in all, or not at all.' His jealousy is but infinite love seeking to be known as such, and asking for a whole heart.

The law of His providence sounds hard, but it is nothing more than stating in plain words the course of the world's history, which cannot be otherwise if there is to be any bond of human society at all. We hear a great deal in modern language about solidarity (and sometimes it is spelled with a final 'e,' to look more philosophical) and heredity. The teaching of this commandment is simply a statement of the same facts, with the addition that the Lawgiver is visible behind the law. The consequences of conduct do not die with the doers. 'The evil that men do, lives after them.' The generations are so knit together, and the full results of deeds are often so slow-growing, that one generation sows and another reaps. Who sowed the seed that fruited in misery, and was gathered in a bitter harvest of horrors and crimes in the French Revolution? Who planted the tree under which the citizens of the United States sit? Did not the seedling go over in the Mayflower ? As long as the generations of men are more closely connected than those of sheep or birds, this solemn word must be true. Let us see that we sow no tares to poison our children when we are in our graves. The saying had immediate application to the consequences of idolatry in the history of Israel, and was a forecast of their future. But it is true evermore and everywhere.

IV. The third commandment must be so understood as to bring it into line with the two preceding, as of equal breadth and equally fundamental.

It cannot, therefore, be confined to the use of the name of God in oaths, whether false or trivial. No doubt, perjury and profane swearing are included in the sweep of the prohibition; but it reaches far beyond them. The name of God is the declaration of His being and character. We take His name 'in vain' when we speak of Him unworthily. Many a glib and formal prayer, many a mechanical or self-glorifying sermon, many an erudite controversy, comes under the lash of this prohibition. Professions of devotion far more fervid than real, confessions in which the conscience is not stricken, orthodox teachings with no throb of life in them, unconscious hypocrisies of worship, and much besides, are gibbeted here. The most vain of all words are those which have become traditional stock in trade for religious people, which once expressed deep convictions, and are now a world too wide for the shrunk faith which wears them.

The positive side underlying the negative is the requirement that our speech of God shall fit our thought of God, and our thought of Him shall fit His Name; that our words shall mirror our affections, and our affection be a true reflection of His beauty and sweetness; that cleansed lips shall reverently utter the Name above every name, which, after all speech, must remain unspoken; and that we shall feel it to be not the least wonderful or merciful of His condescensions that He 'is extolled with our tongues.'

V. The series of commandments referring to Israel's relations with God is distinctly progressive from the first to the fourth,

which deals with the Sabbath.

The fact that it appears here, side by side with these absolutely universal and first principles of religion and worship, clearly shows that the giver of the code regarded it as of equal comprehensiveness. If we believe that the giver of the code was God, we seem shut up to the conclusion that, though the Sabbath is a positive institution, and in so far unlike the preceding commandments, it is to be taken as not merely a temporary or Jewish ordinance. The ground on which it is rested here points to the same conclusion. The version of the Decalogue in Deuteronomy bases it on the Egyptian deliverance, but this, on the divine rest after creation. As we have already said, we do not regard the Decalogue as binding on us because given to Israel; but we do regard it as containing laws universally binding, which are written by God's finger, not on tables of stone, but on 'the fleshly tables of the heart.' All the others are admittedly of this nature. Is not the Sabbath law likewise? It is not, indeed, inscribed on the conscience, but is the need for it not stamped on the physical nature? The human organism requires the seventh-day rest, whether men toil with hand or brain. Historically, it is not true that the Sabbath was founded by this legislation. The traces of its observance in Genesis are few and doubtful; but we know from the inscriptions that the seventh, fourteenth, twenty-first, and twenty-eighth days of the moon were set apart by the Assyrians, and scholars can supply other instances. The 'Remember' of this commandment can scarcely be urged as establishing this, for it may quite as naturally be explained to mean 'Remember, as each successive seventh day comes round, to consecrate it.' But apart from that, the law written on body, mind, and soul says plainly to all men, 'Rest on the seventh day.' Body and mind need repose; the soul needs quiet communion with God. No vigorous physical, intellectual, or religious life will long be kept up, if that need be disregarded. The week was meant to be given to work, which is blessed and right if done after the pattern of God's. The Sabbath was meant to lift to a share in His rest, to bring eternity into time, to renew wasted strength 'by a wise passiveness,' and to draw hearts dissipated by contact with fleeting tasks back into the stillness where they can find themselves in fellowship with God.

We have not the Jewish Sabbath, nor is it binding on us. But as men we ought to rest, and resting, to worship, on one day in the week. The unwritten law of Christianity, moulding all outward forms by its own free spirit, gradually, and without premeditation, slid from the seventh to the first day, as it had clear right to do. It was the day of Christ's resurrection, probably of His ascension, and of Pentecost. It is 'the Lord's Day.' In observing it, we unite both the reasons for the Sabbath given in Exodus and Deuteronomy,—the completion of a higher creation in the resurrection rest of the Son of God, and the deliverance from a sorer bondage by a better Moses. The Christian Sunday and its religious observance are indispensable to the religious life of individuals and nations. The day of rest is indispensable to their well-being. Our hard-working millions will bitterly rue their folly, if they are tempted to cast it away on the plea of obtaining opportunities for intellectual culture and enjoyment. It is

'The couch of time, care's balm and bay,'

and we shall be wise if we hold fast by it; not because the Jews were bid to hallow the seventh day, but because we need it for repose, and we need it for religion.

Exodus 20:12-21:
THE DECALOGUE: 2 —MAN AND MAN

I. The broad distinction between the two halves of the Decalogue is that the former deals with man's relations to God, and the latter with His relations to men. This double division is recognised in the New Testament summary of 'all the law,' as found in two commandments, and is probably implied in the two tables on which it was inscribed. Commentators have been much exercised, however, about how to divide the commandments between these two parts. The fifth, which is the first in this division, belongs in substance to the second half, but its form connects it with the first table. It is like the preceding ones in having a reason appended, and in naming 'the Lord thy God'; while the following are all bare, curt prohibitions. The fact seems to be that it is a transition commandment, and meant to cast special sacredness round the parental relationship, by paralleling it, in some sense, with that to God, of which it is a reflection. Other duties to other men stand on a different level from duties to parents. 'Honour,' which is to be theirs, is not remote from the reverence due to God. They are, as it were, His shadows to the child. The fatherhood of God is dimly revealed in that parting off the commandment from the second table, and assimilating it in form to the laws of the first.

II. The connection of the two halves of the Decalogue teaches some important truth.

Josephus said a wise thing when he remarked that, 'whereas other legislators had made religion a department of virtue, Moses made virtue a department of religion.' No theory of morals is built upon the deepest foundation which does not recognise the final ground of the obligation of duty in the voice of God. Duty is debitum -debt. Who is the creditor? Myself? An impersonal law? Society? No, God. The practice of morality depends, like its theory, on religion. In the long-run, and on the wide scale, nations and periods which have lost the latter will not long keep the former in any vigour or purity. He who begins by erasing the first commandment will sooner or later make a clean sweep of all the ten. And, on the other hand, wherever there is true worship of the one God, there all fair charities between man and man will flourish and fruit. The two tables are one law. Duties to God come first,

and those to man, who is made in the image of God, flow from these.

III. The order of these human duties is significant.

We have, next after the law of parental reverence, three commandments, which, in a descending series of importance, forbid crimes against life, marriage, and property. Then the law passes from deeds to the more subtle, and, as men think, less grave, offences of the tongue. Next it crosses the boundary which divides human from divine law, and crimes from sins, to take cognisance of unspoken and unacted desires. So the order of progress in the first table is exactly the reverse of that in the second. There we begin with inward devotion, and travel outwards by deed and word to the sabbatical institution; here we begin with overt acts, and travel inwards, through words, to the hidden desire. The end touches the beginning. For that which we 'covet' is our God; and the first commandment is only obeyed when our hearts hunger after Him, and not after earth. The sequence here corresponds to the order of progress in our knowledge and practice of our human duties. The first thing that the rudest state of society has to do is to establish some kind of security for life and property and woman's honour. The worst men know that much as their duty, however foul may be their lips, and hot their passions. Then the recognition of the sanctity of the great gift of speech, and the supreme obligations of veracity, grow upon men as they get above the earlier stage. Most children pass through a phase when they tell lies as pastime, and most rude societies and half-moralised men have a similar epoch. Last of all, when actions have been bridled and the tongue taught the law of truth, comes the full recognition that the work is not done till the silent longing of a hungry heart is stilled, and that unselfish love of our neighbour is only perfect when we can rejoice in his good and wish none of it for ourselves. The second table is a chart of moral progress.

IV. The scope of these laws has often been violently stretched so as to include all human duty; but without tugging at them so as to make them cover everything, we may note briefly how far they extend.

We are scarcely warranted in taking any of them but the last, as going deeper than overt acts, for, though our Lord has taught in the Sermon on the Mount that hatred is murder, and impure desire adultery, that is His deepening of the commandment. But it is quite fair to bring out the positive precept which, in each case, underlies the stern, short prohibition.

The fifth commandment shares with the fourth the distinction of being a positive command. It enjoins 'honour,' not 'love,' partly because, in olden times, the father was a prince in his house in a sense that has long since ceased to be true, partly because there was less need to enjoin the affection which is in some degree instinctive, than the submission and respect which the children are tempted to withhold, partly in order to suggest the analogy with reverence to God. A strange change has passed over the relations of parents and children, even within a generation. There is more, perhaps, of frank familiar intercourse, which, no doubt, is an improvement on the old style. But there is a great deal less of what the commandment enjoins. City life, education, the general impairing of the idea of authority, which we see everywhere, have told upon many families; and many a father who, by indulgence or by too much engrossment in business, lets the children twitch the reins out of his hands, might lament, as his grown-up children spurn control, 'If then I be a father, where is mine honour?' There is no one of the commandments which it is more needful to preach in England than this.

The promise attached to it has another side of threatening. It is a plain fact that when the paternal relation is corrupted, a powerful solvent has been introduced which rapidly tends to disintegrate society. The most ancient empire in the world today, China, has, amid many vices and follies, been preserved mainly by the profound reverence to ancestors which is largely its real working religion. The most vigorous power in the old world, Rome, owed its iron might not only to its early simplicity of life and its iron tenacity, but to the strength of paternal authority and the willingness of filial obedience. No more serious damage can be inflicted on society or on individuals than the weakening of the honour paid to fathers and mothers.

'Thou shalt not kill' forbids not only the act of murder, but all that endangers life. It enjoins all care, diligence, and effort to preserve it. A man who looks on while another drowns, or who sends a ship out half manned and overloaded, breaks it as really as a red-handed murderer. But the commandment was not intended to touch the questions of capital punishment or of war. These were allowed under the Jewish code, and cannot therefore be supposed to be prohibited here. How far either is consistent with the deepest meaning of the law, as expanded and reconsecrated in Christianity, is another question. Their defenders have to execute some startling feats of gymnastics to harmonise either with the New Testament.

'Curus kind o' Christian dooty,
This 'ere cuttin' folks's throats.'

The ground of the commandment is not given, seeing that conscience is expected to admit its force as soon as stated. But its place at the head of the second table brings it into connection with the first commandment, and suggests that man's life is sacred because he is the image of God. As Christians, we are bound to interpret it on the lines which Christ has laid down; according to which, hatred is murder, and love is the fulfilling of this as of all other laws. So Luther's comprehensive summing up of the duties enjoined may be accepted: 'Patience, gentleness, kindliness, peaceableness, pity, and, of all things, a sweet, friendly heart, without any hate, anger, bitterness, toward any, even enemies.'

In like manner, the seventh commandment sanctifies wedded life, and is the first step in that true reverence of woman which marked the Jewish people through all their history, and was in such contrast to her position in all other ancient societies. Purity in all the relations of the sexes, the control of passion, the reverence for marriage, are subjects difficult to speak of in public. But modern society sorely needs some plain speaking on these subjects—abundance of bread and idleness, facilities for divorce, the filth which newspapers lay down on every breakfast-table, the insidious sensuality of much fiction and art, the licence of the stage. The opportunities for secret profligacy in great cities conspire to loosen the bonds of morality. I would venture to ask public teachers seriously to consider their duty in this matter, and to seek for opportunities wisely to warn budding youth of the pitfalls in its path.

What is 'stealing'? As Luther says, 'It is the smallest part of the thieves that are hung. If we are to hang them all, where shall we get rope enough? We must make all our belts and straps into halters.'

Theft is the taking or keeping what is not 'mine.' But what do we mean by 'mine'? Communists tell us that 'property is theft.' But that is the exaggeration of the scriptural teaching that all property is trust property, that possessions are 'mine' on conditions and for purposes, that I cannot 'do what I will with mine own,' but am a steward, set to dispense it to those who want. The Christian doctrine of stewardship extends this commandment over much ground which we seldom think of as affected by it. All sharp practice in business, the shopkeeper's false weights and the merchant's equivalents of these, adulterations, pirating trademarks, imitating a rival's goods, infringing patents, and the like, however disguised by fine names, are neither more nor less than stealing. Many a prosperous gentleman says solemnly every Sunday of his life, 'Incline our hearts to keep this law,' who would have to live in a much more modest fashion if his prayer were, by any unfortunate accident, answered.

False witness is not only given in court. The sins of the tongue against the law of love are more subtle and common than those of act. 'Come, let us enjoy ourselves, and abuse our neighbours,' is the real meaning of many an invitation to social intercourse. If some fairy could treat our newspapers as the Russian censors do, and erase all the lies about the opposite side, which they report and coin, how many blank columns there would be! If all the words of ill-natured calumny, of uncharitable construction of their friends which people speak, could be made inaudible, what stretches of silence would open out in much animated talk! 'A man that beareth false witness against his neighbour is a maul, and a sword, and a sharp arrow.'

But deed and word will not be right unless the heart be right; and the heart will be wrong unless it be purged of the bitter black drop of covetousness. The desire to make my neighbour's goods mine is the parent of all breaches of neighbourly duty, even as its converse 'love' is the fulfilling of it all; for such desire implies that I am ruled by selfishness, and that I would willingly deprive another of goods, for my own gratification. Such a temper, like a wild boar among vineyards, will trample down all the rich clusters in order to slake its own thirst. Find a man who yields to his desires after his neighbour's goods, and you find a man who will break all commandments like a hornet in a spider's web. Be he a Napoleon, and glorified as a conqueror and hero, or be he some poor thief in a jail, he has let his covetousness get the upper hand, and so all wrong-doing is possible. Nor is it only the second table which covetousness dashes to fragments. It serves the first in the same fashion; for, as St. Paul puts it, the covetous man 'is an idolater,' and is as incapable of loving God as of loving his neighbour. This final commandment, overleaping the boundary between conduct and character, and carrying the light of duty into the dark places of the heart, where deeds are fashioned, sets the whole flock of bats and twilight-loving creatures in agitation. It does what is the main work of the law, in compelling us to search our hearts, and in convincing of sin. It is the converse of the thought that all the law is contained in love; for it closes the list of sins with one which begets them all, and points us away from actions and words which are its children to selfish desire as in itself the transgression of all the law, whether it be that which prescribes our relations to God or that which enjoins our duties to man.