



Social Evangelism

A SERIES OF STUDIES



REV. DAVID LINDSAY



To

Rev. Joseph Gay
with every good wish
from
David Lindsay.

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Yours Very Truly
David Lindsay

SOCIAL EVANGELISM

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By

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SOCIAL EVANGELISM.

1.

ARE CHANGES NEEDED IN OUR METHODS OF CHURCH WORK?

We are living in a transition period socially, politically, religiously. Many things are contributing to this : the advance of science and education ; the extremes of poverty and wealth ; the extended facilities for travel and pleasure ; the unsettlement of religious beliefs and convictions ; the growth of materialism, and a colossal apathy to the claims of God. It is well, therefore, for the Church to review her position and see whether, in the light of these tendencies, fresh adaptations are not called for on her part.

Concentrate attention, then, for a moment upon the average Baptist Church as we know it. Think of its methods, recognised by us all. In reference to these, let it be asked : Are we making the best of them? Might not our results be enormously

increased if even our present methods were more resolutely, intelligently, and conscientiously worked? Does it not appear that what some Churches need most is not new contrivances, but a quickened conscience; not changed methods, but changed men? Not merely men, but *workmen*; men and women ready and willing to consecrate their time and talent to the deepening and broadening of the Church's influence in its own immediate vicinity. Here the ideal of Church membership needs to be exalted; its duties, privileges, and responsibilities need to be more keenly realised. May the time soon come when "member" and "worker" shall be synonymous terms! Existing methods, which only thoughtlessness would despise, may then have a chance.

A method is a mode of action or procedure; an orderly movement or system. Nature herself is our great illustration. She is not haphazard or revolutionary in her methods, but evolutionary; not full of bluster and noise in her operations, but silent and sure in the unfoldings of her mighty plan, working steadily towards her supreme and ultimate ends. In the distinct realm of religion John Wesley is a striking instance of method.

Let us, then, generously recognise and endeavour to conserve the good, actual and potential, in our present methods. And yet we are free to believe that, along certain lines, modifications are necessary; perhaps even drastic change.

I.

WHAT ABOUT OUR MINISTRY?

Is this satisfactory? Is this equal to all the demands that are made upon it? and these appear to be increasing every year. Changed times bring changed customs. Tennyson is right :—

The old order changeth, yielding place to new,
And God fulfils Himself in many ways.

This is the day of the expert. He is ubiquitous. He is in every branch of knowledge, commerce, and even in sport. And the pew to-day is more alert and critical than ever. Outworn dogmas and the echoes of the past will not suffice. The spheres of recognised Christian activity have also greatly widened and increased. And within the Church itself, within recent years, many fresh organisations and forms of operation have sprung up, all attempting a more or less useful work. The minister is supposed to keep in touch with all, if not to direct them, to be directed by them. Moreover, he is expected to meet all men on their own merits; nay, indeed, to live in advance. How can this be done? It cannot. Hence the danger to a conscientious man of ministerial disheartenment, the dissipation of physical, mental, moral, and spiritual energy. The Church is then bound to suffer. "The lake spread out has no moving power; it turns the mill-wheel only when contracted into the narrow stream," and pours "over the fall."

What, then, is to be done? Liberate the minister from the multiplicity of externals. Set him free from the mere mechanics of religion. Give him a chance to fulfil his true vocation. Let him concentrate upon his main functions—preaching, teaching, and pastoral work. Let there be less preaching, but better. More teaching is necessary, especially among our young people. The Bible, with its sublime ethical and spiritual principles; Baptist and Nonconformist history generally, with its inspiring story; social duty, with its urgent and imperative call; the Church, its nature and functions, and much more—all need definite and explicit unfolding. Too many are growing up in our midst quite ignorant of these things. This is an ill-omen.

Judicious visitation is required, too. This is exhausting, but good work. I have no sympathy with the pretentious "intellectual" who talks superciliously about pastoral visitation, especially when I think of such giants as Thomas Boston and John Watson; nor have I any sympathy with the unreasonable Church member who expects the pastor to be always on his doorstep. Let the minister be enfranchised to follow his real work. And if, under present conditions, he cannot, then I see nothing for it but either short pastorates or frequent exchanges. Why not? A long pastorate is not necessarily always creditable to either man or Church. And a short pastorate is not necessarily a disgrace. And, at present, there is

too much competition among the Churches of the same denomination. One, indeed, is not averse to rejoice at the expense of another. Some Churches have ministers that ought not. It is not good for man or people. Small Churches might permit themselves to be grouped under one man and approved helpers. Competition should be sternly condemned. Co-operation should be gladly fostered and encouraged. And since ministers have differing gifts, it would be a good thing if, say, in the same district, the various Churches could enjoy the benefit of preacher and teacher, pastor, evangelist, and organiser.

II.

WHAT ABOUT OUR WEEK-EVENING MEETINGS?

Take the week-night service. I hold that this should be the chief meeting in the week, that nothing should be allowed to compete with it, and that its spiritual resources should be developed to the highest point. But this would in many cases involve change, perhaps radical change. Should not such a service be varied? Why not make it oftener an "open" meeting for prayer and praise, testimony and experience, when the affectionate invitation would be given, "Ye men and brethren, if ye have any word of exhortation for the people, say on." Or, again, take the monthly business meeting. Is this quite satisfactory? Is it

always a fit place for young converts? Is it not sometimes positively a demoralising influence? Is it ever packed for party purposes? How strange that the prospect of trouble can draw more to the business meeting than ever attend a prayer or fellowship meeting! What a revelation this is! A change is somewhere needed.

Or, again, take the auxiliaries, their nature and number. These may be splendid helps or splendid hindrances. If they are a medley of competitive institutions, dividing the forces, clashing in interests, or, as sometimes happen, in antagonism to spiritual ideals, they are housed in the wrong place. The Church must not compromise her principles or surrender her authority, even to please or retain a certain type of adherent. She is not merely a preventive, but also a definitely constructive force. Let her not succumb to the impatient clamours of immaturity, and in the end make religion too cheap to be respected.

Nor must the Church suffer herself to be lost in the multitude of her institutions. Some Churches have too few; some too many. Clothes are good things, but to be overclad is not desirable, since movement may be impeded. Organisations are good things, but too many, un-coordinated and overlapping, are a grave hindrance. The Church herself, which should be the goal of activity, is apt to be neglected and undervalued, and her services subordinated to competing claims; whereas she should ever re-

main the mother, source, centre, guide, and inspiration of all.

Of course, we shall recognise the complex nature of our being. Man has a social as well as a religious side. His mind also must be stimulated and refreshed. Certain forms of recreation therefore are welcome. But these have their limits in the Church. I may not as a person be opposed to dramatic entertainments, dance parties, whist drives and smoking concerts as such; but I do assert that the Church has no call to organise, supervise, or provide them. Even as methods these ultimately fail. They bring upon us the world's cynicism and sneer. They are a lowering of the Church's dignity, a compromise with the world, an implicit scepticism in the efficacy of our message.

Let us remember that it is easy to create appetites that we cannot control; tastes that we cannot satisfy; and in the meeting of which the world is altogether more expert than the Church. It is recognised, I know, that we cannot make saints by means of socials; Christians by means of cards; bad men better by means of bagatelle and billiards. It is claimed that these are *media* for the expression of sympathy. Very well, all I have to say is, let us take care of our *media*. Our expedients must not be allowed to become an end in themselves; and the subordinate must not be permitted to usurp the place of the supreme. And this is our danger.

III.

THE DIVINE METHOD OF A WORLD'S REDEMPTION
IS IN THE CROSS OF CHRIST.

Let the good tidings of a crucified, risen, reigning Christ be unfalteringly and faithfully proclaimed. Let individual experience reinforce the grandeur of the message. Let doubt be gone. "The Gospel is the power of God unto salvation" or it is not. If it is, believe it, preach it, be not ashamed of it, put it in the forefront, expect results in conversions and transformed lives. If it is not, then say so. End the make-believe, the farce; and let your pious sentiments, orthodox shibboleths, and religious nostrums be decently buried. But if the Gospel be as we conceive it, then, honouring that, make the circle of method and service as wide as you can. "Include anything which helps to make mankind one realm over which the law of the Saviour shall at last prevail."

With this working principle in mind let us welcome Institutional Churches. But do not go away with the notion that yours ought to be one. We have still much of the child's imitativeness about us. Before we inaugurate serious changes of method we must study the nature and environment of our Churches. In some districts the Institutional Church is neither needed nor wanted. Inspirational Churches are needed everywhere. Can we make our Church one of

these? Let men get comfort and help in the great conflicts and competitions of life. Let them fall passionately in love with Jesus Christ. "Then," as Dr. Ambrose Shepherd says, "put at their disposal the whole apparatus of moral, ethical, economic, and spiritual resource that they may strengthen into a saved society. . . . Once we are prepared to pay the price of the Cross, the victory is assured."

Our problem is not so much that of defective methods as that of defective men. Is not "the arrested progress of the Church," if such there be, the arrested progress of the Christian? Or, have we been hurried or frightened into false positions? Let us think. Let the Churches unequivocally emphasise the necessity of character, the need of regeneration, the cultivation of the devout life. A spiritual nature is God's supreme remedy for human selfishness. Every social reform that has blessed human life has been the outcome of the Spirit's movement in the souls of men. A decadent spirituality means an impoverished social ideal. Christian ripeness means Church reaping. Secure this and you will simplify your programmes, and reduce, too, that ever anxious financial expenditure on the mere "mechanics" of religion.

You will thus create an atmosphere wholly favourable to spiritual harmony, aspirations, and ideals, in which the best material will no longer fight shy of office or responsibility; but in which

there will be an eager willingness—volunteers; and in which our young men and women, because of their supreme love for the person of Christ, instead of being catered for like children, will chivalrously vie with each other in enthusiastic labour for their Lord in the service of the Church and their fellows. United, aggressive Evangelism will become a fact. Personal Evangelism, too, a lost art to-day, will become a reality. Our people, out of the fulness of a glad experience of Divine love and the power of an inward impulse, will cry, “We cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard.” When discipleship becomes real the Church will be resurgent. The abundance of its rich, spiritual life will cut its own channels of usefulness and blessing, men, under God, being supreme, and methods subordinate.

2.

A PLEA FOR CONVERSION IN RELATION
TO OUR PRESENT PROBLEMS.

At the present moment we, as Baptists, are much concerned about our Denominational polity in particular and our Denominational statistics in general. We believe that there is an important connection between these two things. That there is, I suppose, no intelligent observer of our Denominational life will deny. In this opinion, I presume, we are all agreed. So, at the present time, our Baptist Union and the various County Associations are alike attempting to evolve some scheme, affecting both ministers and Churches, whereby our Denominational chaos may be turned into a Denominational cosmos. In these attempts let us give them our sympathy and wish them well. Let us hope that the good Spirit will brood over the deep of their deliberations. If our Denominational methods are outworn and antiquated, let them be thrown upon the scrap-heap, with gratitude for their past services, but without a pang of remorse for the present, and let new and more up-to-date machinery be installed. Yet I cannot help asking : Is not the question deeper than that of mere machinery? Are we endeavouring to shift the blame and the responsibility from re-

ligious manhood to religious mechanism? A bad shearer has a bad hook, a bad writer has a bad pen, a declining Church has a poor minister, a weakened denomination has an antiquated and obsolete system of Church government and polity.

Let there be a spiritual ebb in the land, and our Denomination is one of the first to feel its effects. And the reason for this is, that our Churches are so utterly dependent for their vitality, strength, and numbers upon the strong character, the moral fibre, the fervent evangelical zeal, in a word, the spirituality, of their nature and fellowship. Now I do not regret this; I rather glory in it. But such knowledge must be more minutely realised, for it involves on our individual and collective part an unremitting vigilance and a ceaseless warfare. Let our Denomination be compared or contrasted with other Denominations. Unlike the sacerdotalist, for example, we have nothing in our system or services whereby we may assert our authority, appeal to the imagination, or even to the æsthetic taste or instinct. Nor have we such a well-regulated and co-ordinated Denominational government as Presbyterianism or Methodism to fall back upon, and keep things going in the winter of our spirituality. For the perpetuation of our principles and the prosperity of our piety we are completely and always dependent upon the health of our soul, and not upon our machinery. This is a thought which I would like to burn into the average Baptist conscience.

What, then, is our duty? I humbly suggest that our prime duty is to cultivate and maintain a steady and lofty spirituality. Let it always burn like the lamp in the Temple. Let us not be frightened by the demand.

I.

Ought we not in the first place to insist on the necessity and reality of Conversion? Some time since, at an important conference, the minister of a large Church of our own persuasion doubted whether the half of our membership were really "born again." That, even admitting the elements of pessimism and exaggeration, is serious. And, therefore, in this connection, I would ask: Has the doctrine of conversion its true place in the pulpit of to-day? Does that distinctively spiritual phenomenon called conversion receive that attention which is due to it in modern teaching and preaching? If not, this may explain much, and throw needed light upon falling statistics, shallow religious experience, unreliable and ineffective Christian service.

Unhappily, the doctrine of conversion is minimised to-day in at least two different quarters. There is, for instance, the thorough-going materialist, who denies the reality of all spiritual experience. It is little good to argue with him in a mental mood like that. His intellectual percep-

tions of religion are more unsatisfactory than even those of the convinced agnostic; for the agnostic admits a "maybe," a possibility, whereas the materialist denies it altogether. There is also the moral evolutionist, who speaks of conversion in terms of the gradual development of the race. I, too, believe in the gradual development of the race. I, too, believe that there is—

"One far-off divine event,
To which the whole creation moves."

But I also believe that the initial and necessary impulse comes from the grace of God as displayed supremely in the incarnate, risen, and crowned Christ; that, like the leaven, the uplifting influence of Christianity is permeating all human institutions and nations; and that the truest development can only come through the individual units of the race turning unto Him in lowly trust, reverence, and love.

The argument of the evolutionist proceeds upon a wrong assumption. It is defective because of its serious omission. It does not begin at the beginning, since it assumes the non-existent. That can only be evolved which is first involved. "That which is born of the flesh is flesh," says John, "and that which is born of the Spirit is Spirit." So, if life can only come from life, natural from natural, spiritual from spiritual, then there, on the very threshold of our thinking and

activity, we are confronted with the vital necessity of this doctrine of conversion.

And what is conversion? It is certainly a Bible doctrine. When Isaiah cries, "Look unto Me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth : for I am God, and there is none else," he insists on conversion. When Ezekiel cries, "Turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways ; for why will ye die, O house of Israel?" he insists on conversion. When our Lord graciously says, "Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest," He insists on conversion. And when John records the Master's words to Nicodemus, "Ye must be born again," he also insists on conversion.

Conversion, then, denotes a moral change, a moral turning, a right-about face. It implies a turning from darkness to light, from death to life, from sin and selfishness to goodness and God. Or, as Prof. James puts it, "It denotes the process, gradual or sudden, by which a self hitherto divided, and consciously wrong, inferior, and unhappy, becomes unified and consciously right, superior, and happy, in consequence of its firmer hold upon religious realities." In one aspect conversion is regeneration viewed from the human standpoint. In conversion the appeal is made to the human will, wherein man's freedom, responsibility, and power are recognised. In regeneration the work of the Divine Spirit is witnessed and emphasised.

Of course, in the New Testament there are different types of conversion, and these present a wonderfully fascinating study. Take three cases almost haphazard. There is Matthew, the publican, for example, 'who, while sitting at the receipt of custom, was quietly called by our Lord, and immediately responded. There is Saul of Tarsus, after years of weary and deluded struggling against the inward monitor, convicted and convinced on the Damascus road by the brightness above the Syrian sun, and the voice of Jesus from the exceeding glory. There is also the Philippian jailor who, by reason of earthquake without and terror within, was nearly frightened into the Kingdom.

Thus the means of man's conversion are not uniform ; they are many and varied. Into the city of God there are twelve different gates that weary and sin-laden souls may find a ready entrance from east and west, north and south. The entrance may be sudden or slow, silent or tumultuous, like the opening of the flower in the morning sun, or like the storm that roars and runs as though the fountains of the great deep were being broken up. But whatever the particular means employed or process experienced, the experience is, and must be there, a vital and prime necessity. Conversion, therefore, considered thus, is no mere passing whim or mawkish religious sentimentality. It is a radical and Divine change in the very heart and centre of man's life,

and in the principles and motives of his actions. He becomes an altered—indeed, another personality. The man that was dies, and a new man, a better man, a man after the pattern of Jesus Christ, the Divine man, rises in his stead. From death life springs. Conversion is thus, and is intended to be, the beginning and basis of Christianity. It is the foundation of Christian character and conduct in the individual; and of joy, and peace, in the Church and nation.

II.

What, then, is the atmosphere of our Churches like, in regard to this matter? Is it favourable to conversions? What is the attitude of the modern pulpit in regard to this? Is our message directed towards this end? Do we expect conversions, or have we ceased to believe in them? Has unbelief paralysed the pulpit's power? Is our fervour frozen? Are we ambassadors for Christ or merely pulpit professionals? If so, then, no wonder comparative failure is written across one aspect of our work, and this aspect of transcendent importance. You will never harvest an unsown field. Not grain, but weeds, grow spontaneously and luxuriantly. Fruitage implies planting. To see the stars the telescope must be set aright. To secure accessions to the Church of God conversion must continue to be a vital doctrine. Neither education, nor refinement, renders it obsolete or unnecessary. A holy wisdom dictates that we shall aim at it, and work for

it, in the love which God's love provokes, and in the evangelical enthusiasm which He inspires.

We have great examples in Edwards and Brainerd, Finney and McCheyne, Moody and Spurgeon. For, let it be clear, if the Church fails here she fails all along the line. Let, then, the note of the modern pulpit be unequivocal on this matter. The note need not be warring; let it be wooing. Its time need not be devoted to the crudities of a Higher Criticism which nobody wants; nor to the vapourings of a Sociology which is not understood; nor to a dilettantism in literature which is only a weariness to the flesh, and like offering a stone to a hungry soul. I say the pulpit need not indulge in these things; but it must insist on conversion. Let it thrill with this Divine imperative. And, if need be, let it wither and burn and scorch the conscience. For the grace that changed Saul of Tarsus, an Augustine, a Bunyan, a Thomas Halyburton, and a Thomas Chalmers flows on in undiminished power and force to-day, and what has been may be again.

III.

But further: What about our Sunday Schools and conversions? Here, surely, is our most promising field. Are we succeeding herein as we ought? In many quarters, and not unsympathetic ones, a negative reply is given. Many are deeply disappointed with the paucity of evident conver-

sions coming from the Sunday Schools. They do not expect *too* much, but they expect *so* much. I need not trouble you with statistics. Let me simply remind you of what Sir William Robertson Nicoll has recently said : " There are some seven millions of scholars in our Sunday Schools ; and, as it is computed, only about one-fifth of these become identified with organised Christianity." Why is this? Is there something wrong with our schools? Why are these young folks not captured for Christ and His Church? Their nature is plastic and impressionable. Habits have not yet bound their fetters around them. A rationalistic Press cannot yet have warped their judgment. They are open to be led. They are at the most favourable period of life to conversion. You recollect what Prof. Starbuck says : " Conversion is a distinctively adolescent phenomenon. It belongs exclusively to the years between 10 and 25." He also ventures the arresting remark, viz., " that if conversion has not occurred before 20, the chances are small that it will ever be experienced." In our Sunday Schools, then, we see that both Physiology and Psychology are handmaids of the teacher, aiding him to achieve at least the initial stage of character transformation, spiritual development, and ultimate perfection of the spirit-life. They are, if I may borrow Ben Ezra's words,—

" Machinery just meant
To give thy soul its bent.
'Tis thee and turn thee forth sufficiently impressed."

Why, then, are we failing to realise our immense possibilities? Is it because we have incompetent teachers? Is it because Sunday School work is engaged in as a hobby, like photography, and the like? Or is it because we are more concerned about the machinery than the power that drives it? Hudson Taylor, whose faith and zeal entitle him to a respectful hearing, once said : " We have given too much attention to methods and machinery and to resources, and too little to the Source of Power—the filling with the Holy Ghost." We have all seen beautiful engines in our exhibitions ; but without the steam they were of no practical use. And so our Sunday Schools are not mere show-places, where the different sections are well-graded ; they are workshops for eternity. A fig for your fine buildings and smart organisations, if you are missing the end of both ; or have not consecrated characters behind all, engaged in a solemn pact with God to capture the scholars for Christ !

We are very clever in these days, I know, but I venture to submit that we have not yet learned the art of making all our scattered efforts tend to, and culminate in, the conversion of the young. Mr. Ruskin is both statesman and seer when he says : " Every day I am more sure of the mistake made by good people universally in trying to pull fallen people up, instead of keeping the yet safe ones from tumbling after them, and always spending their pains on the worst instead of the best

material." Convert the young and you have less trouble with the adult derelict. The Sunday School affords an incomparable opportunity, and holds immense possibilities for good. Conversion, I am persuaded, is the key, not only to individual, Church, and denominational, but also to national and international perplexities and problems. Hence, if our Churches are to be healthy, effective, progressive, strong, and to play their part in the uplift of the world, their initial and primary duty is to insist upon a regenerated membership—upon the necessity and reality of conversion, to work and labour and pray for this, and to adopt the best and wisest means for the accomplishment of this end.

IV.

I do not pretend that conversion will solve every problem. Much besides must be done both before and after that. But if you succeeded in securing the soul's allegiance to Jesus Christ you have broken the back of all problems. I wish that our social and Sunday School reformers alike would endeavour to remember this! Mr. Ruskin again says: "Let us reform our schools"—and I think for the moment about our Sunday Schools—"and we shall find little reform needed in our prisons." But a school must be definitely religious, and not a mere institution for pleasant pastimes and sundry sorts of collections! A re-

formed school, from my point of view, is a school wherein everything is so arranged as to create an atmosphere wherein decision for Christ is easy and almost inevitable. Here is the key in large measure to the solution of many of our present-day difficulties. Not less legitimate pleasure, but more authentic religion. The soul moulded by this is the creator and maker of society, the purifier and uplifter of life in all its manifold ramifications. "Men," declares Goethe, "are creative in poetry and in art only as long as they are religious: without religion they are merely imitative and lack originality."

Such an opinion encourages me to believe that the people who adhere to the unique meaning and aims of our evangelical religion, who allow themselves to be guided and influenced by the voice of the living Spirit, will never lack understanding, adaptability, energy, success. Nor will they allow themselves to be hurried or frightened into unwise ways suggested often by unspiritual aggressiveness. Believing in God, led and fed by His Spirit, struggling to realise His will, seeking the moral and spiritual emancipation of the race, they will not make haste. That prematureness which is begotten by materialistic conceptions of religion and a faithless timidity is ruinous to many a bright prospect and many a hopeful cause. But that invincible faith in God, on the other hand, which holds its head erect and manfully tackles the day's work, possessing a serene

quietness and an unhastening understanding of the times, most surely advances the Kingdom of God. It escapes, too, the perils of both Catholicism and Protestantism. "Catholicism," as Mr. Boyd Scott remarks in his recent book, "has its wretched manifestations in several directions—in continued grossness of superstition, in a debasing world-politics, in a blind suspicion of new ideas. But Protestantism has its developments no less wretched—in barren rationalism, in shallow evangelisms, in evacuated pieties."

If, then, we are to escape these unhappy blemishes, we must insist upon conversion, the ethical, emotional, and spiritual nature of which is neither material nor epicurean, but "righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost." We have many allies in this noble undertaking, or, at least, ought to have, the home and parental influence, for example. Ah, the home! How one is tempted to speak here! But as I do not want the particular theme of this address to be overlaid unduly or obscured, I have laid the main emphasis upon our own character, the Church, the pulpit, and the Sunday Schools. Let these challenge the cry: "Ye must be born again." And surely the realisation of this will yield the chief solution of our present problems, stay any arrested progress that there may be, and issue in a heartening accession to the Church, possibly from that vast company who now stand, like the young scribe, trembling on the edge of the Kingdom—near, but

not in. Thus, may it not be that our winter shall change into spring, and, in the words of another, "every spring swell into the eternal summer of an eternal and all-conquering love?"

Our God is able to turn our very defeats into glorious victories. Our duty is to remain faithful : faithful to inward conviction and spiritual ideals. And in so far as our insistence upon conversion is concerned, as a Divine solvent of social, moral, and spiritual needs, a heartening and inspiring precept-promise, which we may well appropriate, is this—"Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life." "And they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament ; and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever."

3.

A WATCHMAN'S REPORT.

"For thus hath the Lord said unto me, Go, set a watchman, let him declare what he seeth."—Isaiah xxi., 6.

Thus the prophet speaks of himself. He feels inwardly constrained to ascend the watch-tower, mark and describe "the signs of the times." It is not our intention to deal at present with this particular historic situation. We are simply thinking of the prophet's attitude and purpose. Not a few ardent souls in these days have been as watchmen, endeavouring to understand the portents and promises of passing events. They have been looking into the sky, away across to the horizon, and into the plains of religious life, thought, and activity. They would fain set down what they have seen. They are responsible only for their own vision; but their desire is to warn and encourage.

I.

Is it true, for instance, that the "New Theology" has taken a greater grip of the modern mind than many good people permit themselves to think? If this be so, and it looks like it, then are we not under a sacred obligation to discover

the reason? What are the elements of its strength? Wherein is its fascination? It will not do for us to regard an aspect of religious thought which, as is alleged, threatens to destroy spirituality and evangelicalism as a mere fad or passing whim; or to dismiss it with an airy wave of the hand as a mere "farrago of nonsense." The New Theology, as a religious and social phenomenon, may not have come to stay; but it has come to demand attention. If it be an authentic voice from heaven, it is morally wrong to oppose it; but if, on the other hand, it be only the shrill cry of an ambitious surplus of erring energy, then it is our duty to arrest it and set it right. The need of the hour is courage. We must face, and not evade, the demand.

Certain aspects of modern life have been peculiarly favourable to the preaching of the New Theology. The movement was sprung upon us at a psychological moment. Since then, however, things have been gradually adjusting themselves. We have made a discovery, though only in a sense. It is the assumed implications of the New Theology that are so arresting, and not the particular theological or philosophical doctrines from which these are supposed to be the logical and practical outcome. In a word, what commends the New Theology to many thinking and sympathetic natures is its insistence upon a higher type of ethical life and social service.

Let us touch upon a threefold consideration.

There is a great deal of spiritual coldness and dissatisfaction existing to-day. The Churches themselves, notwithstanding all their excellencies, are an ample proof of this. It is infinitely pathetic to think that they are more than half empty, that the morning service in many places is but a conventional gathering of the few, and that a hearty prayer service is next to an impossibility. There is an apparent loss of the spiritual appetite. Conscience has become benumbed. No wonder, therefore, that the "homely" virtues and the "minor" moralities are growingly disregarded. The land is strewn with fragments of broken family altars. The ethic of the unbeliever often puts to shame that of the believer. The great crowds wandering up and down, like sheep without a shepherd, are practically untouched and uninfluenced by modern Christian organisation. Preaching, too, has lost its spiritual thrill and note of urgency. It is like the milk in Northern Siberia—served up in frozen form. "There is no heat, no fire, no passion, nothing but the shimmer of a light that chills."

Moreover, there is a great deal of social unrest. No man with a conscience can defend the existing order of things. There is no such thing yet as "equality of opportunity." The wrongs, the inequalities, the tragedies of life are palpable. Hence the sympathy which the socialistic declaimer receives. On its negative or destructive side his programme is attractive to not a few in our midst. The Labour movement, with certain of its social

ideals, has touched the pulse of England, and stirred the workers as never before. Democracy is awakening from its long slumber. It is growing conscious of its power. Its influence is stretching out on every side. It has entered our Houses of Parliament and Houses of Prayer, and neither our politicians nor our preachers can afford to ignore it. But let this be recognised: a democracy thoroughly aroused, conscious of its wrongs and realising its power, if unregulated by the highest principles, will be a standing menace to human order and society.

Furthermore, there is the rapid spread of education. The last few decades have witnessed enormous progress in almost every sphere of knowledge. Travel is now common. Facilities are abundant. The world is smaller since travel is greater. The heavens are nearer since astronomy is surer; and earth better understands the secrets of sun, moon, and stars. In truth, a steady, if silent, revolution is going on. Science is being rapidly and extensively popularised, and some of its text-books are more fascinating than the latest novel. The applied sciences are working wonders. Universities and colleges are increasing. Public libraries are invading the sequestered village as well as the large town and city. Enterprising publishers are providing us with cheap editions of the masters in literature. Even the halfpenny picture postcard is playing its part in the public taste. Now all this is significant and is bound to

tell. We heard two working men the other evening, as they were wending their homeward way, discussing the merits of John Stuart Mill as a political economist.

Here, then, are certain facts to which we dare not be blind, and the Christian teacher least of all. He must realise that the advance of education is affecting both religion and theology. Under these circumstances fresh adaptations are called for, perhaps not so much in the core of our message, as in the manner of its presentation, and the method of our work. In the light of physical science, Biblical criticism, and comparative religion, educated and thoughtful laymen are feeling this increasingly, and these see as clearly as some of their teachers the pressing necessity for a re-setting of certain cardinal religious doctrines. These are men of high social and ethical ideals; men, too, of keen spiritual instincts, and there are astonishing numbers of them inside and outside our Churches. If we believe that there is no antagonism between reason and revelation, intellectual attainment and Christian thought, let us be patient and try to meet them, for we have everything to gain. If the New Theology only brings this home more poignantly to our hearts and consciences, and, even indirectly, leads us to grapple more intelligently with these changing conditions, it shall have become a blessing in disguise. At any rate, these men must not be allowed to drift; they must be won. It is among such

that the exponents of the New Theology discover their finest material, and secure their firmest foothold. A duty, therefore, seems clear.

II.

What is that duty? This question must be answered in the light of what we have already said. Need we tarry to say that undue anxiety, prejudice, or preaching a Gospel of love in a loveless language will not help us? There is no need for nervous anxiety; the ark is yet safe. Nor is there any necessity for prejudice; that is the foe of all progress. We must be prepared to recognise and welcome the truth even though an enemy should preach it. Here, again, let us suggest a threefold consideration.

Let us frankly accept the established results of Biblical criticism. It is foolishness to reject light, historical or spiritual, when truly discovered; and it is equally foolish to claim for the Bible more than the Bible claims for itself. This, however, gives no license to rashness; nor does it mean that we should accept every new proposition, if only it be advanced with sufficient confidence. We must remember that the critics have frequently to criticise themselves, and to correct their own conclusions. But we are speaking now simply of well-established, well-authenticated conclusions, and our plea amounts to this: a prayerful cautiousness, coupled with intellectual honesty.

The Bible is not only a Divine revelation; it is also a human record. It is not merely an external authority; it is a witness to the Spirit. It is the product of an evolutionary thought. It shows us a people in the making. It reveals their development through history—their strength and weakness. We see God's hand upon them, and His energy in them. The Bible is, therefore, a divinely-human Book, and is contemporaneous with the ages. It never grows old. We have not yet reached the heights of its holy idealism. Every peak we ascend shows another still in front. In its wonderful pages God still speaks to the human soul, and the music of His voice is still the inspiration of the loftiest living, the sublimest faith, and the highest heroism.

Further, let us watch our emphasis. Next to a valid conception of the Holy Book this is vital. We must safeguard our teaching from under, as well as over, emphasis. Large tracts of truth, like large tracts of land, are cultivated either too much or too little. The truth, and its implications, must be preserved and taught, as a well-balanced whole; and no part when apprehended should be allowed to fall into desuetude. Is not the neglect of this principle the cause of much weakness and mischief? It is just possible, for instance, that evangelicals have not laid sufficient stress upon the ethical and social. And it is also possible for liberal theologians to emphasise these to the neglect of that which ever must be their

inspiration and cause. This question of emphasis is tremendously important. For example, "sin is selfishness," "sin is between man and man." But when you have said that you have not said all. God comes in, the moral and spiritual laws of the universe come in.

Sin is the flouting of God's will, the breaking of God's law. Sin against man is sin against God; and it is this—this sin against the holy love of God that lends such deep aggravation to man's sin against man. Again, "the atonement is love." Unquestionably that is its palpitating heart and centre. But whose love? Man's to man? Ultimately, yes. But there is a prior love which makes that love possible; the boundless love of an infinitely holy God for wicked and wilful men. Without that love there could have been no atonement at all. Hence the necessity for safeguarding ourselves against exaggerated statements. We must not preach a part as if it were the whole. Let us preserve an equitable emphasis, and try to declare God's will in all its wondrous completeness in practice as in doctrine. It is just here where some have gone astray. Some have under-emphasised or neglected certain aspects of truth; others have come to the needful rescue of these, but their danger has been an unhappy exaggeration.

Finally, let us put first things first. This is essential. The building must have its foundation. You cannot have fruits without roots. The ethical

and social are the outcome of the spiritual. Therefore, let us cherish and safeguard the spiritual element in our own hearts and also in our Churches. An unspiritual believer is like an eagle with broken wing—he is earth-bound : he cannot rise. An unspiritual Church is like a carcass, cumbering the ground. It may be beautiful, but it is impotent, to say the least of it. The distinctly spiritual must have the supreme place. We dare not shunt it on to a siding. It is the driving power of Christianity and the secret of human betterment. It is this that has been behind every movement, every reform, every revival that has elevated human life or brought help and healing to the sons of men. This is the secret of the martyr's heroism, the prophet's zeal, and the missionary's endurance.

But the word " spiritual " is ill-used, and even friends caricature the idea which it holds. It does not stand for a dreamy " religiosity," a decorous ceremonial, a vapid sentimentality, a sickly pietism, a kill-joy profession, a star-gazing exercise, a narrow parochialism. It stands for something infinitely more exalted, energetic and august. It is as a broad river of life Divine flowing into, and filling the souls of men with new energies and ambitions—widening their thoughts, purifying their motives, deepening their affections, expanding their activities, enabling them to realise their universal brotherhood, and linking them up with the needs of their fellows

everywhere in the redeeming purpose of God. A spiritual religion is, therefore, in its very essence catholic, ethical, social, and potent.

These are the notes, then, which evangelicals require to emphasise to-day. And are they not in harmony with the New Testament? They are indeed its very marrow. Is not the Sermon on the Mount the Christian's charter? Do we not read there of the Higher Righteousness and the Higher Love? What manner of men therefore ought we to be in character and conduct? How the "fruit of the Spirit" should mark our lives! Remember the Apostle Paul's word: "The kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost." Observe the order. Righteousness first. This is the condemnation of all selfishness and smallness, meanness and contemptibleness. Righteousness should be the distinguishing feature of Christian life, individual and corporate; as it is the only valid basis for peace and joy. These can grow nowhere else.

And this righteousness is not for the Sunday only; it is forever and always. It must be carried into the State, the city, the Church, the shop, the mill, and the home. It ought to be a regulative principle in human life between nation and nation, capital and labour, rich and poor, master and servant, man and man. It is only thus that our religion can be effective; only thus that it can prove the divinity of its origin; and only thus

that Jesus Christ can enter into His own as the Holy Master of men.

" For to this end Christ both died and rose, and revived, that He might be Lord both of the dead and living." Our spiritual religion then, let it be clear, is essentially ethical and social, a Divine dynamic, finding its ideal in Calvary, and its abiding incentive in the sacrifice, resurrection, and ascension of our Lord.

This is the only Gospel that is worth preaching. It supplies not only ideals, but the power to reach out towards them. It is the only Gospel that is adequate to the world's needs, or can lead to its regeneration. It is more than Bible, Church, or Sacraments. It is life—more abundant life, Christ's life. Hence our need of Him, and the mad folly of minimising His blessed Saviourhood. This Gospel brings to its recipients everywhere pardon and peace, purity and power, freedom and joy ; and means ultimately a complete and eternal victory through Jesus Christ our Lord.

4.

THE SONG OF THE SERAPHIM.

"And one cried unto another and said, Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts: the whole earth is full of His glory."
—Isaiah vi., 3.

The principles of a Divine Kindergarten may be gleaned from the pages of Holy Writ. The communications of Heaven come to the soul of man, not only through eye-gate, but also through ear-gate. In the voices of earth we may hear the deep thunder tones of the Eternal, and in the phenomena of nature we can trace the marks of His majesty and might. Moreover, our very necessities indicate what we are, and even what God is, and all our contrivances, secular and sacred, may become altar-stairs, whereon revelations are made, and we are linked to the Eternal Light and Love.

This chapter is the unfolding of teaching like that. Or, to be more accurate perhaps, it is the suggestion and the germ. The background of the prophet's vision is the Jerusalem temple. But in his quickened spirituality that falls away, and there arises in its place a Divine palace or temple, whose walls are co-extensive with the world. And in that palace the inner eye of the prophet discovers the throned King, the skirts of

whose glory-gilt garments touch the uttermost extremity. Then he sees the flaming attendants hovering round the throne, all reverence, all humility, all readiness, to run on any errands which the King may commission. But the ear, too, becomes an avenue of enlightenment, a medium of knowledge. He hears the Seraph's sanctus, "Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of Hosts: the whole earth is full of His glory."

How many Seraphim there were is quite a speculative point, and need not detain us, since we cannot tell. What we seem to know is that their hymn was responsive. In the earthly temple Isaiah would have listened to something similar many a time. In the alternate singing of the priests, more than likely, the prophet gets his suggestion, and perhaps the very words employed. And as these celestial messengers of fiery nature and flaming brightness utter their expressions of praise to the Ineffable Holiness "the posts of the door moved, and the house was filled with smoke."

Victor Hugo has made us familiar with the Notre Dame. And the nearest approach to the Seraph's song that I ever heard was in that sacred shrine. I had just left the morgue. The sad sight of three unclaimed bodies had impressed me greatly. I was full of peculiar thoughts and feelings. In that mood I entered the famous cathedral, and presently listened to the chanting of the priests. One priest, like an Eastern Sheik,

black-bearded and cassock-clad, chanted his part in a superb baritone voice—a voice of great depth, too, and of peculiar richness and flexibility. And as he chanted the empty building seemed to ring, and to my consciousness every molecule of matter in the sacred edifice seemed, as it were, to vibrate and sway. I can never think of that without recalling this, “And the posts of the door moved at the voice of him that cried.”

But this morning I am thinking more about the matter than the manner of the Seraph's song. It is not the musical cadence, but the majestic contents that arrest my attention. I want to know the exact meaning, if possible, of the three-fold ascription, “Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of Hosts,” to which the celestial choirs, likely enough, responded in unison, “The whole earth is full of His glory.”

Now, at this point, there is room perhaps for curiosity, for a speculative dialectic as well as for a spiritual discernment, though of the former it may be that we have had more than enough. On the meaning of this very ascription, however, some appear to me to insist on the unpermissible. I cannot think (if my temerity may be forgiven) that we have here an anticipatory reference to the elements of a Pythagorean philosophy. Pythagoras was one of the founders of the science of mathematics, but his philosophy was almost as mysterious as himself. He taught that number was the universal principle, just as Thales,

earlier, taught that water was. Nor, indeed, can I think that we have here a reference to the Sacred Trinity, though such an authority on this Book as Professor Delitzsch writes thus :—" Three is the number of disclosed unity. . . . That the three is the number of unfolded and self-enclosed unity has its ultimate ground in this, that it is the number of the threefold being of God, and that being admitted, the Trisagion of the Seraphim . . . applied . . . to God the Triune, and is called in the language of the Church, not without right, Hymnus Trinitatis."

While giving respectful weight to the words of such teachers, I am yet inclined to the opinion that the words were used simply for emphasis' sake; and the Old Testament furnishes us with ample illustrations of this very thing. Let us remember our own habits of thought and speech. They are frequently "trinitarian," a word being thrice repeated to enforce the thought, feeling or fact. Let us also remember that the Hebrews repeated themselves in order to express the superlative degree, and that in their idiom a threefold repetition always meant emphasis. For instance, take two passages from Jeremiah. In vii., 4, we read: "Trust ye not in lying words, saying, The Temple of the Lord, The Temple of the Lord, The Temple of the Lord, are these." And in xxii., 29, we read: "O earth, earth, earth, hear the word of the Lord." Let us further remember that the Seraphim were not doctors of divinity,

moving about in the shades of some theological academy, giving instruction on specific religious dogmas; but an order of celestial intelligencies, hovering around the blazing throne of boundless light, seeking to express the majesty, the awful grandeur, and the overwhelming holiness of "the Lord of Hosts." In that sense, then, their thrice-uttered "Holy" stands, not for doctrinal precision, but for spiritual emphasis.

But let us endeavour, in few words, to understand the bearing of the prophet's vision. It was vouchsafed to him not for his own private benefit or delectation. He was intended to be the instrumental cause of the nation's moral cleansing and spiritual quickening. Israel had sadly gone astray. Her inner life was putrid and sore. Her heart was hollow and alien from God. Not only so: her attitude was positively hostile, notwithstanding the persistence of the Divine pity, patience, and providence. The results were twofold. Social life became shot through with the elements of unreality. The upper strata of society, not only neglected, but oppressed the poor. The widow and the orphan were fleeced and flung aside. And the favoured classes flaunted their finery in the faces of friends and foes. They lived in a world of flowing drapery and dashing colours; in a "vanity fair" of showy externalism and gaudy display.

The women were the acme of haughtiness. They dressed in the most ostentatious fashions.

Their overloaded jewellery flashed in the sunlight, and the hot air was filled with their odours and scents. With outstretched necks and leering looks, with mincing strides and tinkling steps, they trod the streets, and advertised their social and religious corruption. The buried city at the base of Vesuvius was bad, but not worse than this. Do not think the picture overdrawn. I have but followed the language of the prophet. Read the closing verses of Chapter III., where you have a miniature picture of Israel's appalling social condition.

But what about her religious life? It corresponded with the social. It was sensuous and not spiritual; material and not moral. God was lost in a godless ritualism; and their reeking sacrifices obliterated the clean Heavens from human view. The whole business was a pompous display of ceremonial mechanics, religious delusiveness, and moral putridity. Spirituality was gone; while costly oblations and sweet-smelling incense, fashionable assemblies and ostentatious feasts were the order of the day. The prophet, therefore, was being prepared by this supersensuous vision of the awful holiness of God, to teach the nation this—the infinite chasm that separated them from God; and that if their life or worship was to be acceptable it must be cleansed and characterised by moral rectitude, rather than by a mechanical ritualism, however costly or elaborate. “He that hath clean hands and a pure heart; who hath not

lifted up his soul unto vanity, nor sworn deceitfully. He shall receive the blessing, and righteousness from the God of his salvation."

So, in the Seraph's song, we have a description given to the prophet of the essential character of God. And it was given that he might be able to concentrate the flashlight of God's holiness upon Israel's moral darkness. But if we are to appreciate the Divine character, we must understand the meaning of holiness. What does it mean in this connection? What is its significance here? Thus, we are limited in our inquiry straight away. Carlyle, analysing the German word for holiness, gives us an excellent definition—whole, all of one part; but Isaiah's conception is not so full-orbed as that. In this particular connection, and for the moment, let us think of the Old Testament conception of holiness rather than that of the New. And in that conception the first and leading idea is of a negative quality, denoting "separateness," "apartness," "aloofness." And God, by the sublime splendour of His moral being, by the august perfection of His moral nature, by the flawless grandeur of His moral purity, is absolutely unrivalled and alone. "There is none like unto the God of Jeshurun, who rideth upon the heaven in thy help, and in His excellency on the sky." Let none, therefore, presume upon the Divine Majesty, or think unworthily of His peerless character.

God is not a mere glorified man, and we must

not degrade the Thrice-holy One by making Him correspond with our low thoughts, wayward and wicked lives, impoverished and impotent ideals. He is the flaming Fount of light, Who makes the darkness His pavilion. He is a consuming Fire, Who withers, scorches, and burns everything antagonistic to His own hallowed and hallowing nature. Sin cannot live in His presence; it is blighted by His approach and annihilated by His touch. So, in a sentence, the cure of all human imperfections, whatever their name, nature or degree, lies in a true conception of, and adjustment to, the Divine character; and also, in so far as we are concerned, in the incoming of the Holy One to our hearts and lives, in the person and power of Jesus Christ, to exercise there regal dominion and sway.

But in the Seraph's song we have not only a revelation of the Divine nature; we have also a prophecy of the Divine purpose. "The whole earth is full of His glory." As a statement of fact this is true, and ever has been; but does it not imply also a promise, pointing to the universal triumph of the holiness of God? Sin, and every creatural imperfection, must ultimately be extinguished. Even now, in sea and sky, mountain and river, bird and beast, field and flower, we trace the glory of God. And in the gentle zephyr, no less than in the roaring tornado; in the summer's lullaby, and in the whispering woods, no less than in "the music of the spheres," do we believe that

radiant fact to be declared. Yet, the glory mentioned seems to be, if not another kind, of a higher quality. It is directly connected with the inner nature of God. It is the fruit of which holiness is the root. It is the outward expression of the inward essence. It is the human side of the Divine nature; the outward manifestation of the inward life. In other words, as the seed is to the flower, or perhaps better, as beauty is to health, so God's glory is to God's holiness, and this shall yet diffuse, penetrate and inter-penetrate universal creation.

Thus the Seraph's song was at once a revelation and an inspiration, an ideal and an aim. And it is the same for you and me. In our several ways we are permitted, by the grace of God, to engage in the Divine enterprise of flooding the world with the glory of Jehovah, and to prevent every created thing from becoming "common or unclean." The sunlit glory of the Divine nature must fall upon, and transfigure everything that evil has touched. And, despite the colossal wrongs and the terrible discords in the music of life, things are tending in that way. The world is surely, if slowly, moving up "the steeps of light." And if there be a personal salvation, there is a cosmic salvation, too, and this the apostle surely had in mind when he declared, "The whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now." Brethren, the complete moral and spiritual transformation of the world through the Cross

of Christ and the immanent Spirit of God is the glorious purpose of the Divine energy and love.

Let that come to pass, and our prophecy shall have reached its fulfilment; the kingdoms of this world shall have become the kingdoms of our God and His Christ. Let that come to pass, and the Seraphim and the Cherubim will no longer lead the music of Heaven, but redeemed men. They shall sing a loftier, a nobler, a sublimer song. It shall be the anthem of free grace and redeeming love, "Unto Him that loved us, and loosed us from our sins in His own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and His Father; to Him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen."

5.

CHRIST IN THE CHURCH.

"For where two or three are gathered together in My name, there am I in the midst of them."—Matt. xviii., 20.

We have been accustomed to look upon this text as giving a sanction to the Congregational conception of the Church. If this conception be interpreted as a "communion of saints," and not as an ecclesiastical polity, then I heartily concur. Understood thus, the text becomes at once the ground of a valid Churchmanship, and the guarantee of an authentic fellowship. The Church, constituted thus is not limited by national barriers, denominational boundaries, creedal or ecclesiastical conceptions. Does a soul anywhere bow in lowly adoration before Jesus Christ, and own His Divine Sonship and Saviourhood? Then we cannot unchurch him, and I hope have no desire, whether he be black or white, Romanist, Anglican, Dissenter, or no denominationalist at all. He is a member of the mystical Body of Christ. On the other hand, let two or three devout souls gather together in the Divine name, and there you have a Church—local and visible—and Jesus may be as consciously present to these as He was to the disciples of yore in the Upper Room at Jerusalem. The essential feature in the constitu-

tion of a Christian Church is the spiritual presence of our risen Lord. It is upon this great principle that our Churches are built and maintained. This is the bond of their union, the secret of their strength, the spring of all their joy and hope. Without this living Presence their vitality is gone, and their influence as a distinctively religious society is *nil*.

The word Church, let me remind you, is pre-eminently an apostolic word. In their day the word was used in current speech, but the apostles transferred it to Christian use, and filled it with a new, a richer, and a nobler content. The word that was on our Lord's lips most frequently was Kingdom. This suggests a vaster, grander, and more august idea than Church. And the Kingdom that our Lord contemplates, that He came to establish, that He loved to speak about, was not national, but universal; not material, but spiritual; not temporal, but eternal; not human, but Divine. The Church was to be, as it were, the stepping-stone to the realisation of that Kingdom.

Now in regard to this, our Lord laid down no rules of mechanical organisation. Yet it would be a profound mistake to imagine that He left no guiding words or principles. Their exact nature, however, must be understood. They are inward rather than outward. They have to do with religious manhood rather than with religious mechanism. They concern the inward moral and

spiritual life rather than the outward movements of ecclesiastical polity. And there is deep reason for this. Let the inward life of an individual or a community be real, healthy, and well regulated, and the outward movements must correspond. The outward is the index of the inward, just as outward beauty is the expression of inward health. Hence, the path of wisdom for us is to let our Lord, and the moral and spiritual ideals which He enunciated, rule and govern in our lives, and also in our Churches, and then we shall have no need to fear or falter in these days of distressing social problems, and conflicting denominational policies.

In the text before us I find the suggestion and the germ of what I am now trying to say. To me the text is infinitely important. Let us look at it in a threefold light.

I.

The text, then, is significant in regard to the person and presence of our Lord. As you see from the context our Lord is addressing not a promiscuous crowd, but the immediate circle of His disciples. He knows full well their present mood, thoughts, and ambitions. But He is thinking of their future and not only of their present. He knows in a way that they do not the things that lie before them, the experiences that await them, and the need that will be theirs. He would therefore assure them now that they will not be left

alone to their own slender resources, that He will continue among them, like the light, a potent and all pervading Presence, to answer all the cries of their heart and all the needs of their life.

Now this is a stupendous claim. It is inconceivable that such a promise should fall from mere mortal lips. And so, as it seems to me, the only reasonable alternatives with which we are faced are simply these: that the Author of this text, with its marvellous implications, is either the deluded or the deliverer, a fanatic and a fraud, or the Divine Son of God, and Saviour of the world.

I know, of course, that the genuineness of this text has been denied. But on what ground? Not because it lacks the best documentary support. But because it will not square with a certain humanitarian conception of our Lord. Deny our Lord's divinity, and the rest is easy. Set out with a presupposition in favour of His exclusive humanity, and it is no insuperable task to reduce the promise to an absurdity, and make its fulfilment an impossibility. But that is essentially unscientific. You have no right to deny the passage on mere *a priori* grounds. And, indeed, such denial appears to-day singularly shallow in the light of apostolic Christianity, in the light of Christian history throughout the centuries, and in the light of our own Christian experience. These things, I submit, can only be satisfactorily explained on the assumption of the glorious facts and truths stated and implicated in our text. Had

there been no living Christ perpetuating Himself throughout the centuries, and reproducing Himself, at least, in degree, in the lives of men and women owning His Divine Saviourhood and Lordship, then there would have been no Christian Church. Nor would there have been any healing streams of moral beauty, Christian energy, effort, and love flowing down the centuries, and expressing themselves, as in our day, in far-reaching measures of social and political reform. It is only simple truth to say that Jesus Christ is the Key to all our good; the explanation of all our progress in the highest realms of life, and without Him all would be chaos, confusion, and midnight darkness.

When men therefore clamour for a democracy as the ideal of human society, let us be careful, and inquire first of all what that means. For we, as the disciples of Jesus Christ, as believers in a social, ethical, and spiritual Christianity, must be content with nothing less than an absolute Christocracy. And the Church is the divinely-appointed and divinely-equipped instrument to achieve this end. Christ "in the midst" is the spring of all its energies, the secret and justification of its life and existence.

The Christian Church, therefore, does not depend for its validity upon the building, whether it be Gothic, with pointed spire and resounding aisle, or upon the creed, whether it be ancient or modern, exact or inexact; or upon the service,

whether it be elaborate or simple, æsthetic or plain; or upon the consecration of human hand, whether it be by bishop or archbishop, cardinal or pope. But for its validity it depends upon whether Jesus Christ is there, the Light of its light, and the Life of its life. Where Christ is, there the Church is, and nowhere else. The Church, then, may be in the green fields, with no canopy save the blue heavens or the glittering stars; or it may be in caves and dens of the earth, where Covenanters and Huguenots lifted up their hearts to God in great and solemn praise; or it may be in the empty barn, the labourer's cottage, or the shepherd's hut. It is Christ in His people that constitutes the Church, and not the human accidentals, whether they be great or few, favourable or unfavourable.

II.

Our text is significant in regard to the question of worship—Christian or public worship. "For where two or three are gathered together in My name, there am I in the midst of them."

Here the emphasis is laid upon the unity of worship. It is true that the single soul may have his moments of rapture, and experience the beatific vision of God. It is also true that religion in its beginnings is an intensely individualistic affair, and that no man (though many try) can be a Christian by proxy. But that which is individual

in its beginnings speedily enters into collective relations, duties, privileges, and responsibilities. And the present text deals not with the unit, but with the unity of the units. Where two or three are gathered together in the Divine name, there our risen Lord promises to manifest Himself in some special and peculiar way. That is to say, united Christian worship has a blessing all its own.

I want to make this clear, for to-day there is an unhappy tendency to religious isolation, and the neglect of public worship. There is the man who says : " I don't need to go to Church ; I can worship God at home. I can read my Bible there, and enjoy it. I can read, too, the best sermons by the masters of pulpit eloquence. And if I am tired of sitting in the house, I can go out into the fields and worship God in the beauty of Nature." Perhaps you can. But is not this specious talk a mere excuse for negligence?

Now I would like to point out this morning that this position is not so broad-minded as some would like it to appear ; and that it betrays an unacquaintance with religious history, and the deep needs of our religious nature. Isolation, my brethren, is impossible. Like the palm trees, we thrive best together. No man can live the religious life alone. He can only realise his true and best self in happy associations with others. Social worship is an instinct of the human heart ; a law of the living spirit of God. And in obedience hereto all

superficial divisions and distinctions are forgotten. History grandly confirms this. For from the day of Pentecost until the last authentic revival that men know of a joyful spirituality has broken down every human barrier, swept away all caste, social and intellectual, and brought together in one glorious union ploughman and peer, to worship and adore. And in seeking thus to express the aspirations of their religious nature, they have braved the fiercest opposition from civic hatred and ecclesiastical bigotry.

The man, then, who asserts that he can worship best alone may be very modest, but his utterance is very conceited, and lacking in the wider knowledge and outlook. In no realm of life can we live alone. Each needs each. The whole structure of organised society is a proof of this. It is in contact with our fellows that we find ourselves, and it is in fellowship with them that we express ourselves. This is pre-eminently so in religion. "And they that love the Lord speak often one to another." There is a hunger in the heart for Christian communion. An inward impulse drives the devout soul to the Sanctuary. Sunday is a day he looks forward to, when the claims of business are laid aside, and when, anew, he bathes his sword in Heaven, and gathers fresh strength for the trials and conflicts of the coming days.

Let a man come to the House of God thus, and he gets more than he gives. But he realises also

that he comes not only to get, but to give. Many come to the Sanctuary with the wrong motive. They have yet to learn the true meaning of worship. Their ideas are wrong. They are essentially selfish. No surprise, therefore, if nothing appeals to them but the collection-box, and they go away un comforted and unblessed. In Divine worship egoism must be suppressed. We must think supremely of Him whose matchless worth is the growing wonder of our souls. We must think also of our kindred in Christ, and throw around them the protecting shield of our example and encouragement.

It is to a united company like this that our Lord promises His Presence. He stands not on the outskirts, but in their very midst, laying a healing hand upon each devout head, and whispering some message of grace and goodwill. What an inspiration and encouragement to worship this is! Let the small "Bethels" and mission halls take heart of hope. Crowds do not determine the Presence of Christ. Our Lord visits where the popular preacher may refuse to go. My brethren, numbers may be a delusion and a snare. It is possible to mistake bigness for greatness, and to confound crowds with Christ. And in order to attract crowds there is a terrible temptation to lower Christian standards, to minimise responsibilities, and to choke the eternal springs of inspiration with the sensational news of the passing day.

If the crowds can be legitimately attracted, that is an enormous gain. But if not, let us not despise the small companies. For, after all, it is not from great crowds that mighty movements spring ; but, as a rule, from the apparently insignificant twos and three. Pentecost took its rise among an hundred and twenty in an Upper Room. Our own Missionary Society was inaugurated by a handful of Godly ministers in the Midlands. So, while not forgetful of crowds, let us be more anxious about Christ.

III.

Our text is significant in regard to the question of Christian power or influence. Let us think of this in the light of what I have just said. For the spiritual Presence of Jesus Christ in our midst ; and the gladsome worship of His Holy Name in the Sanctuary are the sources and inspiration of our witness and work. In other words, the imminent Spirit of Christ is the power-station of our Christian energies and boundless possibilities. Consider what this means, not simply for twos and threes, but for the whole Church of God. What a multiplied force for the world's regeneration is made possible here ! It is for us to keep up the vital connection. We must not suffer it to be cut off by unbelief, frozen by coldness, or clogged by evil. The conducting rods of a Divine energy are faith and fellowship, love and

hope, sanctity and service. Keep these clean, clear, and sweet. Then the potency of God must be ours. Days of enlargement must come. The wail of an enervating pessimism must pass away. The miraculous will not then be questioned, nor the supernatural denied. The Church like a mighty army will be invincible in her march to moral and spiritual conquest. The dark and bitter forces of the world will be beaten down, and the emancipation of the race immensely hastened.

But meanwhile, my brethren, we must remember what the Church is. It is not a political institution, or a secular society, with a covering of philanthropy. It is, in apostolic phrase, "an habitation of God through the Spirit." And we must remember also what the Church stands for. It stands pre-eminently for worship, for fellowship, for service, for brotherhood. Do we realise this as we ought? Or have we forgotten alike the constitution and the mission of the Church? Is this why the Churches are held so lightly? Is this the explanation of our apparent helplessness in the face of so much sin, sorrow, and suffering?

If so, let us return to our Lord with shame and penitence. Let us confess our mistakes, our coldness, apathy, and unbelief; and let us anew make a passage in our hearts for the streaming forth of a holy energy, influence, and love. Tyranny, falsehood, dishonesty, and all sin's evil brood must perish. Nothing alien to ineffable holiness must remain in our midst. Our witness is needed,

our work is essential, an ample power is at hand. The Church, therefore, must make it possible for men to love her, or hate her ; but not to treat her with patronage, indifference, or contempt. And she must ever remember that her supreme and ultimate business is to win the whole wide world for Christ. He has come in the glory and power of His Divine Spirit for this very purpose. Let the onward sweep of a Spirit-filled Church hasten this glorious day. Let the Church rise in the newness and freshness of her Divine life. Let her put on her beautiful garments. And in her endeavour to establish the Kingdom of God, let her come forth as the morning, " fair as the moon, clear as the sun, and terrible as an army with banners."

6.

THE TRUE CIVIC IDEAL.

"And the name of the city from that day shall be, The Lord is there."—Ezek. xlviii., 35.

(MAYORAL SERMON*).

Among modern painters two distinct schools of art are recognised—the realistic and the idealistic. The one deals with facts as it finds them, seeks to make vivid to the eye the present actual, endeavours to unfold its subject, of whatsoever sort it be, in its normal condition, whether that condition contains the aspects of tragedy or comedy, pathos or humour. The other sets forth the yet unattained, the unrealised, though perhaps realisable, and would thus appeal to the imagination, and thereby both create and stimulate hope and effort, aspiration and ambition. In some of the old masters these two schools have received happy illustration and combination. And what we observe in some of the old masters we also observe in some of the old prophets. In not a few of their prophetic utterances they place before us both the real and the ideal. They speak of the pre-

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sent, while they predict the future. They describe the actual, while they portray the ideal.

It is this we have strikingly brought before us in the Book of Ezekiel. In earlier chapters the prophet speaks of the Temple City of Jerusalem. But the speech is not flattering, for the inhabitants had reddened the sacred soil with human blood, and polluted every place with unblushing wickedness. As a result, therefore, the city was laid in ruins, the Temple was destroyed, the land was desolated, and the people themselves carried off into the bondage of Babylon. The closing chapters of the Book, however, present us with another picture—a veritable transformation scene. The city is rebuilt, the Temple re-erected, the land retaken, and the people restored. “And,” says the prophet, “the name of the city from that day shall be, The Lord is there.”

It is not necessary to believe that Jerusalem or any other earthly city ever answered completely to this sublime description. There may have been—there doubtless were and are—partial approximations thereto. Yet the picture is ideal; and it supplies a pattern for ourselves—a pattern which, when translated into other words, simply means: The Lord in our city, and our city for the Lord. And so, while I believe that the vision here can only come to its complete fulfilment in that other vision which the banished seer of Patmos saw, and which he describes as “the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven,”

yet I would hasten to say that our business meanwhile should be to endeavour to actualise the ideal and to make the city in which we may live as like the holy city as possible.

The thought of the "new Jerusalem" should serve to stimulate our activity and not to act as a soporific. Let people—especially Christian people—frankly recognise that the ideal is set forth not to induce indolence, but to inspire imitation; and let all of us who profess to be followers of Jesus Christ be swift to learn that our sublime privilege is to make Heaven while yet on our way to Heaven.

The main thought, then, that I would venture to press home upon you this morning is: Have an ideal for your city, and let it be a sufficiently exalted one. Remember that the city does not consist of its exchange, or cathedral, or university, or municipal buildings, or tramway system, or many villas and parks, and so on; but rather, it consists of the moral tone and quality of its citizens. And the men who are most needed as the representatives of a people are the men who have most vividly present to their own consciousness this high notion of citizenship. From this position do not let us get away: and decline to believe that it is either utopian, subordinate, or impracticable. Indeed, instead of being impracticable, it is a prime requirement of good government, whether we consider that government in its local or national aspect.

"Hitch your waggon to a star," says Emerson; and by that expression he simply means this, that we should cultivate higher ideals in every sphere; for low ideals lead to low efforts, and the successes thus achieved are infinitely worse than noble failures. So, though it may be hard, yet let those who represent the people, by the judicious use of the prerogatives they already possess, make it as difficult as possible for any to do wrong, and as easy as possible for all to do right.

As we look out upon city life to-day, we cannot say that all is being done that might be done. Yet it would be sheer ingratitude not to acknowledge the vast amount of work for good that has been done and is being done. We need only point to our own city, by way of example. And, indeed, in every large civic corporation there are noble-minded men, whose labours, not for personal gain or party profit, but for the commonweal, are most incessant and self-sacrificing. Sometimes their beneficent intentions are misunderstood by the very public whom they seek to serve: and their eager efforts are sometimes retarded, even by colleagues who would turn a council chamber into an arena for party political dialectics or mere empty debate, and for the furtherance of limited interests and side issues. But despite of these unfortunate hindrances solid and substantial progress is made.

Still, there is room for more. For no corporation, I imagine, will be sufficiently conceited as

to think that it has reached the acme of civic perfection. Such a thought would be a disastrous one, and there are too many sad and sorrowful facts against it. But it is not sufficient to hold high ideals simply after an intellectual or sentimental fashion. These must be translated into the realm of action and practice. For ideals without efforts for their embodiment and visible manifestation are poor things. Therefore, if your city is to be as noble as you would like it to be and as your best thoughts have pictured it, you must labour for that end. You must learn from experience what "the fatigue of the ideal" means, as many of our great artists, poets, statesmen, and inventors have. In this very direction I believe that English Christendom may well take a lesson from Buddhistic Japan. That clever little folk have come to be the wonder of the world. No European potentate will venture to-day to shake his mailed fist in their face without thinking twice. And why? Because they have been idealists in the best sense. That is to say, they have strenuously cultivated ideals—social, educational, military, ethical—in a word, national ideals. But more than that: they have learned to pursue them with an unswerving fidelity and with all their best powers. In some things they have therefore shown a superiority to our Western nations; and for the realisation of their ideals they have been ready to toil and suffer and bleed and die.

It is this determined pursuit of the highest ideal, and in the larger and deeper interests of the community, that should be seen as the dominating feature of all our public and representative bodies. This is the sanest kind of patriotism—home patriotism, if you please—and, as Dr. Hunter well says: "It can be shown in fever den and slum, in attacking injustice and fraud and oppression and kindred evils, in saving men's lives at home as well as destroying men's lives abroad." "Peace hath her victories no less renowned than war."

But this morning I take a step further and say that even your highest ideal will be an imperfect ideal unless God be enshrined at its heart and centre. In other words, the city cannot be prosperous, as it should be, unless it answers to the description, "The Lord is there."

This simple statement has received manifold illustration, and secular historians have been the first to admit it. We think, for example, not simply of the cities, but of the great empires of the past, and we ask: "What of them, where are they gone, and why?" And the answer comes ringing through the centuries: "They have passed away because they crushed God out of their life and thought, and left no room for Him in their methods and movement. And God cannot thus ever be treated with impunity. A fatal Nemesis always overtakes the nations that try. It may be slow, but it comes.

Recollect ancient Greece—the land of flowing

fountains and many arts and eloquence. Recollect also the Roman Empire, with her legions and her law. These world forces were crushed under the weight of their own corruption; and therefore, despite all their human achievement, while at the height of their fame began to decline. No nation can be preserved simply by her arts or eloquence, intellect or arms. In the Roman Empire, for example, selfishness, sensuality, vice, viciousness seized upon the body politic, and its heart ceased to beat. It died of moral inanity, of moral poverty. Perhaps I ought to say it committed moral suicide. At any rate, it lacked the preserving virtues. Possessing everything, it possessed nothing. It was egotistic to a degree, and not altruistic; and the spirit of holy optimism, of real sympathy, of sacrifice, it treated with scorn.

And so, what happens to nations happens also to cities. The greater includes the less. The only guarantee, therefore, for continued and useful existence is to make a niche somewhere for the Lord, to have Him indeed enshrined at the city's heart. For, for this loss no amount of external beauty, art, elegance, culture can atone. God is still the supreme need of the corporate, as of the individual soul. Be careful, therefore, of civic procedure. Do not be frightened of the leavening influences of Christianity. Provide means of healthy recreation certainly. Have your schools, parks, art galleries and museums. But, whatever you do, do not make it impossible for the

people to get into touch with God. Do not permit temptations over which you have corporate power to allure the people into vice, and thus to lower their self-respect, weaken the freshness of their will, and enervate their moral manhood. Rather endeavour, however difficult it may be, to put them in a position whereby they will feel the throb of God at the city centre.

Do this, and certain consequences must inevitably follow. For instance, the city will be sanctified. What was the first step that led to the restored city of our text? It was a moral reform, a spiritual regeneration of the people (Ch. 36, 25-28). Such, then, is the root spring and foundation principle of all true civic prosperity to-day. By all means make the environment as sweet and healthy as possible. Demolish insanitary and slum areas and provide better dwellings. Control the liquor trade, which, with its allies and victims, costs our nation £1,000,000 per day, Sunday excepted; and strenuously prevent social pests from carrying on their nefarious traffic in public street and open space. Relax no effort whatsoever to change contaminated surroundings. But then, when you have done everything you can in that direction, I venture to assert experience will demonstrate that, in the end, the best and most economic way to change the unhappy environment is to change the inward heart. And so, I say, it will be a happy day for England when Christian Churches and civic authorities

frankly and fearlessly recognise this principle, and together work hand in hand for its realisation.

To-day, unquestionably, the dangers to which some social reformers are liable are the dangers of an exclusive externalism. Scientific socialism, *e.g.*, is frankly and aggressively external; and hence you have schemes, organisations, unions, offices and officials galore. And seldom does it proclaim the vital necessity of a changed character; or even what Smiles called, "Self-Help," *i.e.*, prudence, thrift, patience, self-restraint. And here, I say, a serious caution is called for. While you may do your best for the *without*—and it is only right to do so—yet, if you stop there you are doomed to failure and bitter disappointment. But on the other hand, if the Lord be in the city, while the *without* will not be overlooked, emphasis will be laid upon the *within*—upon the worth and necessity of personal character; and the pure in heart will seek for a pure home and also a pure city.

Other two consequences are these. The city will be served (v. 19). There will be no lack of public spirit. The city will be served voluntarily, enthusiastically, unitedly, and, like Jerusalem by the old Jew, even affectionately. It will be served by men of principle, and not expediency; character, and not cunning. Men will then refuse to take all the benefits without a return in patriotic service. Such men are needed now. Men of conscience; for this is the voice of God in the

soul : men of courage ; for this is conviction reduced to action : men of capacity ; for this is the guarantee of efficiency : and men of character ; for, as Emerson says, " Men of character are the conscience of the society to which they belong."

The city will also be secure : secure from external foes and secure from internal dissensions. Her soil will never be crimsoned as in Russia with the blood of brave men fighting for that freedom which is their natural birthright ; nor will it ever be disgraced by the organised murder of helpless women and innocent children. Such a spectacle of inhuman conduct and fiendish barbarity can never take place where God is, and where the religion of the pitiful Christ has taken root. So this morning, I say, think of the ideal, and build according to it. *You* may know best how to reduce it to practice and to give it detailed expression in our city life.

Every beneficent measure adopted will be a step nearer its realisation. Remember you are God's ministers, responsible not only for the physical, but also for the moral health of the people. Great is your task and great your opportunity. Let vice therefore be repressed ; let social justice be done ; let honest men, if poor, have room to live ; let old age be cared for, and let the hungry be fed. Refuse, too, to let a gross, vulgar materialism fetter the folks. Remember, you are building not only for time, but for eternity ; and recall what George Eliot makes old Stradivari say :—

"Not God Himself can make man's best'
Without best men to help Him."

And if in this world of the actual your vision of the ideal should occasionally grow dim, then climb some mountain-top of quiet meditation and look once more at "the holy city, new Jerusalem," "lying dreamlike across the opal wave, or gilded with unsetting lights," and as you discern afresh the towers and turrets of that city of God, resolutely say again, with William Blake:—

"I will not cease from mortal fight,
Nor shall my sword sleep in my hand,
Till we have built Jerusalem
In England's green and pleasant land."

7.

INTERNATIONAL PEACE.

"O that thou hadst hearkened to my commandments! then had thy peace been as a river, and thy righteousness as the waves of the sea."—Isaiah xlviii., 18.

One can almost hear the wail of the Divine Father in every syllable of this Scripture. It is the cry of a wounded heart—of disappointed love. The nearest parallel to it that I can think of is Jesus, standing on the Mount of Olives, beholding the City of Jerusalem, and, remembering its sins and sorrows and privileges, He wept, and cried: "If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes."

In this text God is thinking of Israel in its bondage and weakness in Babylon. And He cannot think about this without pain; for His people have brought to Him such a disappointment. He had pictured for them a high destiny. He had lavished the wealth of His love upon them. He had conceded to them great and peculiar privileges. But they had fallen below their privileges, and wandered from the divinely-ordained path. Ever and anon they proved themselves a wicked and rebellious people, ready to forsake God, and to enter into alien alliances with anti-Israelitish

nations and idols. All this could only have one end—the blighting of peace and the blasting of prosperity; and this Israel, like the prodigal in the far country, painfully discovered. Now they are reminded of this in the Father's apostrophe: "O that thou hadst hearkened to my commandments! then had thy peace been as a river, and thy righteousness as the waves of the sea."

The lesson, then, which is "writ large" upon this text is true to universal history, and is this—the secret of peace and prosperity lies in obedience to the Divine will as revealed to us in the manifold revelation of God. And this is true not only for nations, but for individuals also. We are living in a moral universe, governed by moral law, just as truly as we are living in a physical universe; and the laws of the moral universe can be no more broken by man, either individually or collectively, without consequence, than the laws of the physical universe. The consequences of the violation of moral law may not always perhaps be so prompt in their action or evident in their manifestation as those of the physical, but ultimately they are as sure and certain—as sure and certain as gravitation to-day, or the ebb and flow of the tide. We may therefore be warned. But we may also take comfort to our hearts and endeavour to live in harmony with the articulate thought of God. And if we have wandered from "the paths of righteousness," let us retrace our steps, urged by the appeal of our prophet elsewhere: "Let the

wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him return unto the Lord, and He will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon."

But now I turn from this text, not, however, from its central principle, to speak to you on the great question of the moment, namely, International Arbitration. (I shall, of course, assume the sincerity of our statesmen, and believe that their suggestions in regard to arbitration are not a mere political ruse to divert the attention of the nation from our alarmingly increasing naval expenditure).

Now I make no apology for speaking to you on this topic; for, fundamentally, it is a question which affects—profoundly affects—religion and humanity, for weal or for woe; and the pulpit that has not liberty to deal with such a question, particularly from the ethical and religious standpoint, is in a sorry case. Certainly, the subject has its political and commercial aspects (and at bottom these are ethical), but the politician will deal with the one, and the business man with the other, while the Christian teacher will direct his attention to the specifically religious.

What Christian man, then, may I put it, can defend war if the issues at stake can be honourably settled otherwise? In such circumstances war is the devil's engine, and in twentieth century civilisation no railroad should be provided for it. Let the religious sentiment of the nations, and

of the various denominations, make this clear and plain, and much will be done to rehabilitate the Church of God upon earth for its sincerity, insight, consistency, and grace. We have now, as Christian Churches, a fine opportunity to demonstrate the fact that we are the followers of the Prince of Peace, and to strike a blow for rationality as against barbarism, and righteousness as against riot.

The prospects of international arbitration are brighter to-day than ever they were before. The Taft proposals have thrilled some of us with new hope. We pray for their prosperity. We see in them the possibilities of a new era for the world's welfare. But we must not forget that a quarter of a century ago substantially the same proposals were made and, alas, rejected by America. It is true the majority was small, but the rejection was effective. At that time we had a man among us of imagination, vision, and prophetic instinct. Like his Lord, he was a carpenter. He believed in the solidarity of the race. In the light of the Divine Fatherhood he read our human brotherhood. He deprecated war as fratricidal strife, and toiled with a passionate earnestness and a self-sacrificing zeal for its abolition. This was the late Sir Randal Cremer, who was among the first to represent his class in the British House of Commons. Many things, however, have happened since that apostle of peace made his proposals in the United States

for an arbitration treaty, "unlimited and unrestricted," and which the American authorities rejected.

The proposals this time have come from America, and from no less a person than the President, in whom, let us hope, the whole nation speaks. Surely this is a happy augury. For, in addition, President Taft is a man of intense moral convictions, and though he may not display the restless energy of some—of a Theodore Roosevelt, for instance—he nevertheless knows how to persevere in a great cause. This, I say, is a happy augury. And almost equally happy is the fact that at the present time our Foreign Secretary is Sir Edward Grey. He is greatly respected as a painstaking and conscientious statesman. He enjoys, generally speaking, the confidence of all parties. As God raised up great leaders—prophets and statesmen, such as Joseph, Moses, Elijah, Isaiah, Paul, for the furtherance of His eternal purposes, may it not be that Sir Edward Grey has come to the kingdom for such a time as this? Yet, in this connection, I would not forget the helpful and encouraging, not to say courageous words, that fell spontaneously, as it were, from the lips of Mr. Balfour at the conclusion of Sir Edward Grey's speech in the House of Commons. In this peculiar combination of circumstances hope is quickened.

But there are those who imagine that international arbitration is impossible and impracticable.

The venture is regarded as chimerical. This is positively affirmed. I oppose the suggestion. Whatever is the will of God is both possible and practical, and I am perfectly certain that whatever rational method may be evolved for the abolition of war will be in accordance with the Divine mind, and therefore possible and practical. Arbitration does not necessarily mean the surrender of all force. It recognises force of two kinds, moral and military, but prefers the former, while condemning the latter, as the instrument for settling international disputes. As national honour excites nations to war now, it may prevent them in coming days; and, under the influence of higher thought, cause them to faithfully accept all awards, however hard some may seem. The solvent will surely come in the evolution of thought and experience. Readjustments will be settled as they arise. Everything is not going to be done in a day. But a beginning must be made somewhere; and we are at the beginning of things. At any rate, I am perfectly certain of this, that the arbitrament of the sword is not in accordance with the mind of God. Indeed, it is out of harmony with the most enlightened public opinion. War is hateful. War is brutal and brutalising. War appeals to the lowest passions of mankind. War is irrational, stupid, organised and scientific murder.

But for the time being, perhaps, the best answer to those who affirm that arbitration is impossible

and impracticable is that arbitration is a fact already. At the present moment our country, in conjunction with thirteen other countries, is under treaty obligations to settle disputes other than by war, while the other nations of the world, not including our own, have 150 treaties, and mostly having the same end in view. I cannot therefore agree with those who allege that arbitration is impossible and impracticable.

But this is nearly always said about things people do not want. It was said, and by good men, too, in regard to the question of slavery, the higher elevation and equality of women, and, indeed, in regard to nearly all the upward movements of the social and intellectual life of democracy. When Mr. Lloyd George propounded his immortal Budget, with its pensions for the aged toilers, one prophet of despair predicted "the end of all things." But we must not be deterred by such political Jeremiahs. We are Christians first, and in these great movements for the social emancipation of the people, and the elevation and purifying of human customs, duty leaves us no alternative but to support them, for we see in them the evidence of the Spirit of God at work.

And this question of international arbitration we ought to hail with unspeakable delight. It is likely, if adopted, to usher in the dawn of a new day for the world. At the present time Europe is groaning under its mountainous load of taxation. Poverty is rampant everywhere, and side

by side with huge aggregates of capital. We hear the thunder of a muffled protest which is gathering in distinctness. Discontent is finding expression, not in a mere academic socialism, but in lawless anarchy, and in an increasing reckless impatience. The omens are disquieting. Governments are menaced. The gulf between the extremes of society is widening. Yet the nations are piling up vast expenditures on armaments. It is said that the best way to preserve peace is to be ready for war. I personally suspect this statement as being a specious instance of the devil's logic. I believe rather that the best way to produce war is to be in readiness for it. What is the use of preparing for something that nobody wants? The common people do not want war. What have they to gain by it? What did they gain by the South African War? Nothing. Others gained, while they lost.

It seems so strange that the nations of the world pre-eminent for their arts, science, civilisation, and religion should be leading the way in the insane competition in armaments! Think of it: engines of human destruction with which to blow our fellow-men, our human brothers, immortal souls, into eternity, with never a sob and never a prayer! Science, which ought to be used in the beneficent interests of humanity, is used for its destruction; and to produce an instrument of murderous force and deadliest precision in its action is regarded as an achievement worthy of national

honours ! Moreover, so expert is modern science that Dreadnoughts to-day, which involve the expenditure of millions, may be antiquated to-morrow, and deemed only fit for the nation's scrap-heap. This is bad national economy and worse Christianity, and cannot possibly be in harmony with the Spirit of Him whom we call Lord, and who preached the immortal Sermon on the Mount. It does not take a prophet to see the time when, unless the alarming expenditure on armaments be arrested, nothing on earth shall hinder internal revolution in the nations perhaps as destructive and sanguinary as anything that has ever happened.

I therefore welcome with unfeigned joy the Taft-Grey proposals. I hope you do too. I pray God to send them success. Let Christendom unite in the prayer. In this grave matter we must rise above narrow peddling views. This is essentially a question of humanity, religion, and the world's progress. And what more fitting than that America and England should lead the way?—not for defensive purposes against another power or powers, but by way of example and incentive to all the world powers. Thank God, some of these are already looking upon the project with favour, such as France and Japan. This is the thing which will hasten the day when international disputes shall be settled not by the law of force, but by force of law. And it will be to the everlasting credit of the two countries named

—countries which have sprung from the same loins, speak the same tongue, and possess the same ideals—if they shall stimulate this aim.

One thing, however, is necessary, here and elsewhere—public opinion must be quickened. Statesmen cannot legislate in advance of public opinion. The Foreign Secretary, in his never-to-be-forgotten speech, threw out the hint in no uncertain terms. Let us take it up as a nation, and especially the Christian section of it. Let the Statute Book be the reflection of the nation's best thought. Let the Christian Church be the conscience of the State. This is the only way of national preservation and prosperity. The Divine commandments of love, mercy, truth, and justice are the eternal principles which ever regulate a nation's life. Neither powerful navies nor mighty armies can preserve a nation ultimately from which righteousness is excluded, and to which altruistic love is a stranger. The nation lacking these is ultimately doomed, and must go the way of Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Greece and Rome. So I say, unless God be enthroned in our national life, and His commandments, and not the sword, be the final arbiter, then we, too, notwithstanding all our mighty achievements and heroic deeds, must pass away like the nations of the past, and another people will be raised up to discharge the task in which we failed, because we failed in trustful obedience to the sovereign will of God. If righteousness alone can exalt a nation, only un-

righteousness can humiliate it. I would ask you to remember this fundamental principle of national being and well-being, preservation and prosperity ; and, in the light of it, especially now, I would urge you to educate and agitate

“ Till the war-drum throbs no longer, and the battle flags
are furled,
In the parliament of man, the federation of the world.”

8.

THE PROMISE OF GRACE.

"And He said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for My strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me."—2 Cor. xii., 9.

This is God's answer to Paul's prayer. But in order to appreciate this answer we must examine and understand the context. In verse 7 we read, "Lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh." Now, what was this thorn in the flesh? For my own part I believe that no one can tell, though conjectures have been many and varied. Like Moses' sepulchre, its exact nature is unknown to this day, and this despite the fact that learned theologians and commentators have written lengthy disquisitions concerning it. But what has been the practical good of all their writings? How much nearer to actual and definite facts have we got? Not any nearer than this: that his personal presence was unattractive. Strauss calls the Apostle "an ugly little Jew."

A number of modern conjectures are these: that the Apostle was subject to epilepsy, or acute ophthalmia, or malarial fever. Possibly the "thorn

in the flesh" indicates the Apostle's humiliating consciousness of some personal passion—perhaps temper, or some excruciatingly painful physical infirmity. Two remarks, at any rate, we are justified in making from the Apostle's own words. And the first is this: that it was some hidden secret trial, unknown to others perhaps, but particularly known to God and himself. The very word "thorn" is suggestive of this. And the Apostle thought that this gnawing thorn constituted an invisible hindrance to his soul's development and handicapped him in his Christian activities. And who among us has not at some period or other in his life been more or less conscious of a similar thorn in the flesh?

Who among us has not at some time or other been more or less conscious of something crippling our spirituality and hindering the glad, free spontaneity of our service? True, our fellows may not have known it. Our brethren in Christ may never have suspected it. But we ourselves have been painfully conscious of its clog and its burden. We could say of it as the father says of the elder son in the parable, it is ever with us. And who knows the agony it has cost us? Who can tell how much we have battled against it? And yet it is there still—persistently persistent, jarring the harmony of our lives, darkening our fairest pictures, and frustrating our noblest hopes.

The second remark that I would make from Paul's words is this: that it was not only some

secret trial, but something that he regarded as essentially evil. It was "the messenger of Satan to buffet" him. Now whether this "messenger of Satan" was some recreant passion, or some physical malady, we cannot regard it *per se* as a good thing. Neither sin nor pain is in itself a good thing. It can only be good within limits, and in so far as it is over-ruled by the power of the Highest for wise, just, holy, and beneficent ends. And this the Apostle appeared to recognise, though, like his Divine Master in a time of mental torture and special anguish, he prayed three times for its removal. If the Apostle had believed that that "agony of impalement," or whatever its precise nature, had been a good thing for him as a servant of God, never would he have prayed for its removal.

He was too grandly and heroically Christian for that. But because he believed it was a hindrance to him, fettering his heart and trammelling his hands, and because he regarded it as essentially evil, he implored God on three specific occasions to free him from it. But we are told the great purport of it was "lest he should be exalted above measure," because of the abundance of revelations granted unto him. So then, a more important question for Christian edification is, not what was the "thorn in the flesh," but *why* was it permitted at all. And the definite answer to that question lies to hand. It was permitted in order that the Apostle, who had been in the third heavens of

special exaltation and heard unutterable utterances, might be kept humble.

See, therefore, how wondrously and wisely God answers our petitions. He answers us in an infinitely richer, wiser, and fuller way than we ever dare to think or imagine. Sometimes when our knocking at the gates of Divine mercy seems futile, and our crying to the kindly Heavens appears useless, in that very moment our prayer is being blessedly and gloriously answered. The difficulty for us is we do not always immediately recognise the answer. God does not always use our prescribed channels. He does not always respond precisely in our way. But the answer comes in God's way, along His channels, and in the end we discover that His way after all is the best way.

“ Oft when of God we ask
For fuller, happier life,
He sets us some new task,
Involving care and strife.”

Brethren, when the Apostle prayed that God might take from him the “thorn,” he prayed ignorantly, yet substantially, that God might take away his humility, and his humility, humanly speaking, was the essential factor in his unique success as an apostle of Jesus Christ, as the founder of Christian Churches, and as the herald and missionary of life-bestowing, freedom-breathing truth. If the Apostle had been immune from this special trial, the probabilities are that

he would have become proud, arrogant, imperious, boastful, and intolerant—a religious autocrat; and then all the charm of his life would have gone, his influence would have evaporated, and the spell of his matchless message would have lost its magnetic power.

The thorn, therefore, was a blessing in disguise. God permits nothing unnecessarily. He does not allow anything to take place without some wise end in view, even though in the process our faith should be sorely strained, and the sun in our religious sky suffer a partial eclipse.

If God did not (for the reason mentioned) remove Paul's thorn, He sent him a compensating blessing: He gave him a sufficiency of grace; and this enabled him to undertake all duties and face every difficulty with high hope and courage. The "thorn" must remain, but "My grace is sufficient for thee: My strength is made perfect in weakness." Hence the paradox of our special experience: "When I am weak, then am I strong." Divine power is perfected in human weakness, and as a dark background throws the picture into greater relief, so our weakness makes more manifest the potency of God.

In this way God gave His servant even more than he actually asked, and the Apostle came to a point when he gratefully and wisely recognised it. And is it not thus that God acts in regard to many of us in these modern days? Is this not a fundamental principle in the economy of Divine love?

Was it not thus that God acted in reference to the piercing cry of His well-beloved Son? You remember the agony-cry of our Lord in the garden of Gethsemane: "Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me?" The father answered that petition, so tremulous with grief and melting with emotion; but how? By removing it? No; but by granting to our Lord that all-sufficiency of grace that enabled Him to drink the crimson cup even to its deepest dregs.

And do we not see illustrations of this very principle every day of our life? God does not always remove the cause or causes of our sorrows and griefs and trials, even though we cry unto Him with a breaking heart. There is a Christian man, *e.g.*, with rare gifts, or, perhaps, a Christian young woman. But she feels crippled because a wasting disease has laid hold upon her. She prays for deliverance, but it never comes. She is destined to invalidism for her remaining days. But presently a wondrous sweetness and contentment enter her life. At first she felt her trial keenly. She was restless and impatient. She felt how much good she could do were she well. She prayed for the return of health, but it never came. But something else came, and it stole into her inner being as noiselessly as the dawn creeps over the mountains, flushing the new day with light—and that something was the compensating grace of God. That is the secret of her new-found contentment, increasing sweetness and patience.

That is why people feel it a benediction to converse with her in the quiet of her sick chamber. She is fulfilling her ministry along God's line, and though the thorn remains, the extra grace to carry it is given. In this way thorns become roses, and instead of smarting under the prick of the thorn such elect souls inhale with quiet spirit and uncomplaining happiness the fragrance of the rose. And so, in this way, not unseldomly, God preserves that priceless virtue of humility which is the charm of Christian character, and the secret of effectiveness in Christian service.

This morning, then, let us look upon our text as our Heavenly Father's promise to you and me. "My grace is sufficient for *thee*." The individuality of the promise is an encouraging thought, and the Author of it is the guarantee of its fulfilment. God's promises are not like pie-crust, made to be broken. You can put absolute reliance upon His word. We may well, therefore, stretch out the hand of faith and appropriate this message to ourselves. You say sometimes with surprise in your tone regarding a Christian friend who has experienced reverses through sickness or misfortune, "But he always seems so happy." "But she always seems so cheery." Ah, yes. You have forgotten meanwhile the personal nature of this promise—"My grace is sufficient for *thee*." It is not only for *thee*—it is *sufficient* for *thee*.

An old lady was once taken to the seaside for

the first time, and when she looked across the seemingly unending stretch of water, she exclaimed : " Thank God, here is something at last of which there is a sufficiency." His grace is *sufficient* for *thee*. There can never be any shortage. The supplies will never give out. We cannot exhaust the Divine resources. Everything material is uncertain. Health, friends, and fortune may slip away by many a subtle turn, leaving us very helpless and very lonely, with withering hearts and unalluring prospects. But here is something which in spite of all is constant, adequate, available ; and which may atone in large measure for earthly reverses and misfortunes. " My grace is sufficient for thee."

And what a noble thing " grace " is ! It is the great word of the Bible. How spacious ! How rich in idea, suggestion, and encouragement ! " The law was given by Moses, but *grace* and truth came by Jesus Christ." " We know the *grace* of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that ye through His poverty might be rich." " By *grace* are ye saved." " And God is able to make all *grace* abound towards you ; that ye, always having all-sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work."

Grace, then, has its origin in God. It is something to which we have no original title. It is the spontaneous outflow of the Father's heart, reaching us supremely through His Son Jesus

Christ. It is God's natural possession; but He is pleased to impart it to us as a glowing light, leading us in the paths of righteousness; as a sacred energy, sustaining us in hours of weariness and trouble; as a holy fire, enthusing us to bear our witness for God, and to work for the emancipation of our race from every alien force that would enthrall, distort, or blight its progress.

In other words, grace is a Divine power operating on human individuals, enlightening their understanding, enabling them to see and estimate things correctly, giving them that clear, clean moral perception which enables them to distinguish between things and principles good and bad. It is a Divine influence affecting heart and mind and will, giving depth to affection, clearness to understanding, intensity to energy, enthusiasm to courage, and sweetness to patience. And this is what the human soul needs, conscious of its infirmities, and battling with recurring duties and difficulties. This is heavenly strength for human weakness. This is the perennial fountain, inexhaustible, ever-flowing, strengthening, stimulating, and refreshing. This, then, is for you and me. And surely, in the light of this, whatever be the nature of life's demands upon us in home, church, business, or State, we should be able to say with the modesty of the Apostle himself, "I can do all things through Christ, who strengtheneth me."

But I must tarry to point out that the promise

of our text is not absolutely unconditional. Two things are necessary.

First, we must realise our need. The text implies our sense of dependency, the recognition of God's potency and our own impotency. As the engine is useless without the steam-power, so are we without the grace of God. "Apart from Me ye can do nothing" is a word true still. The man who is puffed up with his own importance, and relying upon his own self-sufficiency in the sphere of the higher life, is in a perilous and precarious condition. He cannot then be trusting upon God's all-sufficiency. Nature abhors a vacuum; but nature cannot fill a space that is already filled. And God cannot fill us with His own gladsome energy and victory-giving strength if we are already filled with the sense of our own human strength. God does not come where He is not wanted, and He forbears to give what is not desired; for to do so would only encourage human pride and ingratitude.

We must then realise our own need, and, as a consequence, look to Him for its supply. Not to ourselves, or our friends, or even exclusively to the Church, though the Church and its ministry are appointed channels through which aid and succour come. Yet above and before all these we must look to God Himself. And this is our unspeakable privilege; for we need no priest or mediator. We ourselves have a perfect access, and a standing welcome to approach the throne

of grace. This Daniel did at stated intervals every day, even whilst forbidden as an exile in a hostile country. And this the Psalmist did when he made the law of his Lord his meditation day and night; and the success of their example is our encouragement.

Shall we imitate them? Shall we thus avail ourselves of God's redeeming and sustaining love. The river of Divine grace is flowing freely by our sides day and night. Shall we stoop down and drink? Or are we incredulous? Does this message seem as nothing? How slow and loth we are to believe such heartening promises of God, with all the splendours of eternal truth stamped upon them, and confirmed by multitudes in their daily lives! How slow! Instead of taking God at His word and resolutely acting upon it,

"The hardest toil to undertake
With joy at His command,"

we are peculiarly liable to hang our harps upon the willows, as the Hebrew exiles did, and sit down upon the banks of the river of time to weep, because we see not the promise, but rather our own weakness and isolation. We forget that

"In every condition—in sickness and health,
In poverty's vale, or abounding in wealth,
At home and abroad, on the land, on the sea,
As thy days may demand, shall thy strength ever be."

Rev. John McNeill tells us that when he was

a railway clerk, and looked at his own isolated self, he felt small, weak, and insignificant enough. But when he looked at himself in conjunction with the great railway concern, and felt that he had a share in it, and was part of it, he began to feel his own strength and significance. And so it is. When we look at our isolated, individual life we see poor weak mortal beings indeed; but when we look at ourselves in vital relation with God, and draw from Him an all-sufficiency of daily grace, our own weakness disappears, and the strength of eternal omnipotence opens to our immediate view—the strength of eternal love, the enabling grace of God; and it is ours for the taking. My brethren, since we so absolutely need it for our Christian life and work and witness, shall we take it and use it?

