

THE EPISTLE TO THE PHILIPPIANS

INTRODUCTION

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The Epistle to the Philippians is a letter of commendation by St. Paul, in grateful acknowledgment of money sent him by this church to relieve his necessities during his imprisonment in Rome. It furthermore testifies to his fervent loyalty to Christ, his passion for Christian perfection, his eager interest in the welfare of his readers. He seems to pour out his heart to these people, confident of their affectionate sympathy. He also urges them to abound in the display of the Christian graces and virtues.

Doctor Rainy's exposition is in accord with the spirit of this congratulatory epistle. It throws light on the congenial relationships which should exist between a pastor and his people.

PREFATORY NOTE

NOT much need be said by way of preface, in addition to what is suggested in the introductory chapter.

It may be observed, however, that the Apostle's teaching repeatedly touches on the question, How the problem of practical human life on this earth is to be conceived and dealt with under the light and the influences of Christianity. The thought occurred that some expository passages might be superseded by an appendix summing up in one view the principles

conceived to underlie the Apostle's way of dealing with such topics, which could be referred to on each separate occasion; and such a statement was prepared. It was, however, finally judged more suitable to the nature of an exposition to keep as close as possible to the Apostle's turn of thought in each of the cases in which he approaches the subject, rather than to try to secure brevity by a more summary treatment.

A few sentences have been transferred from a lecture on the Apostle Paul, published some years ago.

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CHAPTER 1.

INTRODUCTORY; THE SALUTATION.

THE sixteenth chapter of the Acts of the Apostles contains the account of the Apostle Paul's first intercourse with the Philippians, and of the "beginning of the gospel" there. The date may be fixed as A.D. 51. After the council at Jerusalem (Acts 15.), and after the dissension between Paul and Barnabas (ver. 39), the Apostle of the Gentiles, accompanied by Silas, took his journey through Syria and Cilicia. "Confirming the Churches," he went over a good deal of ground which he had traversed before. At Lystra he assumed Timothy as an additional companion and assistant; and he passed on, guided in a very special manner by the Holy Spirit, until he arrived at Troas. Here a Divine warning, in a dream, determined him to break ground in a new field. The little company, to which Luke was now added, passed on to Macedonia, and, having landed at Neapolis, where they do not seem to have made any stay or found any opportunity of preaching, they came to Philippi. This, therefore, was the first city in Europe in which, so far as we have any distinct intimation, the gospel of the grace of God was declared.

Philippi was a city of some importance, and had the position and privileges of a Roman colony. It was situated in a fruitful district, was near to gold mines, and was also near enough to the sea to serve as a depot for a good deal of Asiatic commerce.

It is hardly necessary to remind readers of the Scripture how Lydia and others received the word; how the preachers were followed by the damsel with the spirit of divination; how, when that damsel had been silenced by Paul, her masters raised a tumult against Paul and Silas, and got them scourged and cast into prison; how the earthquake, which followed during the night, resulted in the conversion of the jailor, and in Paul and Silas being sent forth from the city with honour. Perhaps Luke and Timothy remained behind at Philippi, and continued to edify the believers. At any rate, Paul himself had by this time continued there "many days." Two short visits of the Apostle to Philippi at a subsequent time are known to us (~~441~~ Acts 20:2, 6).

The Church thus founded proved to be an interesting one, for it possessed much of the simplicity and earnestness of true Christianity. Both in the

Epistles to the Corinthians and in this Epistle, the Philippians are singled out, above all Churches, for their cordiality of feeling towards the Apostle who had brought to them the knowledge of the truth. They made liberal contributions for the furtherance of his work in other regions, beginning shortly after he left Philippi, and repeating them from time to time afterwards. They seem to have been remarkably free from some of the defects incidental to those early Churches, and to the churches at all periods. The Apostle's commendations of them are peculiarly warm and glowing; and scarcely anything had to be noticed in the way of special warning, except a tendency to disagreement among some of their members. It does not appear that there was any great number of Jews at Philippi, and we find no trace of a synagogue. This may account in some measure for their freedom from the Judaizing tendency, for we find the Philippians exhorted, indeed, to beware of that evil, but not reprehended as if it had taken any strong hold among them. On the other hand, they seem to have remained in a good measure free from evils to which Gentile Churches were most exposed, and which, at Corinth for example, produced much that was disheartening and perplexing.

Eleven years, probably, had now passed since Paul had brought to Philippi the knowledge of Christ Jesus. During that time he had undergone many vicissitudes, and now he had been for some time a prisoner at Rome. Probably he had already written the Epistles to the Ephesians, the Colossians, and to Philemon. Comparing these with our Epistle, we may conclude that his prospects as a prisoner had not improved, but rather darkened, since the date of those letters. At this time, then, Epaphroditus arrived, apparently after a dangerous journey, bearing with him a supply for the Apostle's wants, bringing tidings of the state of the Philippian Church, and assuring him of their sympathy and their prayers on his behalf. It is no wonder that, in these circumstances, the Epistle bears marks of having been written by the Apostle with a special flow of tenderness and of affection.

The scope of the letter may be briefly stated. After the usual inscription and salutation, the Apostle expresses (as he does so often in his Epistles) his thankfulness for what the Philippians had attained, and his desire that they might grow to yet higher things. He goes on to tell them how matters stood with himself, and opens up, as to those whom he reckons trusted friends, the manner in which his mind was exercised under these providences. Returning to the Philippians, and aiming at this, that they and he might have growing fellowship in all Christian grace, he goes on to set before them Christ, specially in His lowliness and self-sacrifice. This is the

grand end; attainment to His likeness is work for all their lives. Paul sets forth how earnestly his heart is set on this object, and what means he is taking to advance it. After a brief digression relating to his circumstances and theirs, he returns again to the same point. In order that defects may be removed, dangers avoided, progress made, Christ must be their joy, their trust, their aim, their very life. They, like the Apostle himself, must press on, never content till the consummate salvation is attained (^{<3012>}Philippians 3:21). If this should be so, his desires for them would be fulfilled. So he closes (^{<3012>}Philippians 4:2) with directions rising out of this central view, and with renewed expression of the comfort he had derived from their affectionate remembrance. Their good will to the cause in which his life was spent, and to himself, had cheered his heart. And he took it as God's blessing to him and to them.

Such is a brief outline of the course of thought. But the Epistle, while perfect in the unity of its feeling and of its point of view, is remarkable for the way in which it alternates between matters proper to the Philippians, including the instruction Paul saw fit to impress upon them, and matters personal to himself. The Apostle seems to feel sure of affectionate sympathy in both regions, and in both equally; therefore in-both his heart utters itself without difficulty and without restraint. ^{<3013>}Philippians 1:3-11, 1:27-2:16, 3:1-4:9, are occupied with the one theme, and ^{<3012>}Philippians 1:12-26, 2:17-30, 4:10-21, with the other. In short, more than any other Epistle, if we except, perhaps, that to Philemon, the Epistle to the Philippians has the character of an outpouring. The official aims and obligations of the Christian instructor are fused, as it were, in the "glowing affection of the personal friend. He is sure of his place in the hearts of his correspondents, and he knows how glad they will be to be assured of the place they hold in his.

Let us now attend to the inscription and salutation. Those who send the Epistle are Paul and Timothy. Yet plainly we are not to regard it as a joint Epistle proceeding from both equally; for it is Paul who speaks throughout, in his own name and by his own authority. Timothy only joins, as Sosthenes and Silas do in other cases, in heartily commending to the Church at Philippi whatever the Epistle contains. As there was harmony between the two labourers when they laid the foundation at Philippi, so there is also in the building up. Timothy is joined in the love and care; but the authority is Paul's. Both alike are called "servants of Jesus Christ"; for to this Church no further commendation and no rehearsal of a special right to speak and teach are needed. And yet, to understanding hearts, what

commendation could be more weighty? If these two men are called, and allowed by Christ to be His servants, if they are loyal and faithful servants, if they come on an errand on which Christ has sent them, if they deliver His message and do His work, what more need be said? This is honour and authority enough — to be, in our degree, Christ’s servants. But the word is stronger: it means bondservants, or slaves, — such as are the master’s property, or are at his absolute disposal. So Paul felt; for we are not to reckon this to be, on his part, a mere phrase. Already, in this word, we recognise the sense of entire consecration to his Master and Lord; in which, as we shall see, he felt he could count upon the hearty sympathy of his Philippian friends.

Those who are addressed are, in the first place, “all the saints in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi.” The saints, or holy ones, is a common expression in the Scriptures. The word “sanctify” is applied both to persons and to things. Bible-readers will have noticed that the term seems to vibrate or vacillate between two meanings, — signifying on the one hand the production of personal intrinsic holiness, and on the other merely consecration, or setting apart of anything to God’s service. Now the connection of both meanings will appear, if we mark how both meet in the word as it is applied to the children of God. For such are separated, set apart for God from sin and from the world; not, however, by a mere outward destination, devoting them to a certain use and service, but by an internal hallowing, which makes the man really in his inward nature holy, fit for God’s service and God’s fellowship. This is done by the regeneration of the Spirit, and by His indwelling thereafter. Hence, to distinguish this consecration from the mere outward ceremonial sanctification, which was so temporary and shadowy, we find the Apostle Peter (1:2) saying that God’s children are chosen “by sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus.” For the ancient Israel was sanctified to obedience in another manner (⁻⁰²⁴⁶Exodus 24:6).

Now because this real consecration takes place when we are grafted into Christ by faith, because the Spirit comes to us and abides in us as the Spirit of Christ, because whatever the Spirit does, as our Sanctifier, has its rise from Christ’s redeeming work, because He unites us to Christ and enables us to cleave to Christ and hold fellowship with Him, therefore those who are thus sanctified are called saints *in* Jesus Christ. It is the Spirit who sanctifies; but He does so inasmuch as he roots us *in* Christ and builds us up in Christ. Therefore saints are sanctified *by*, or *of*, the Spirit; but they are sanctified (or holy) *in* Christ Jesus.

This expression, “saints,” or some phrase that is equivalent, occurs commonly in the Epistles as the designation of the parties addressed. And two things are to be observed in connection with it. First, when the Apostle addresses “all the saints,” in any Epistle, he is not shutting out any professed members of the Church, any professed believers in the Lord. He never speaks at the outset of an Epistle as if he meant to make deliberate distinction between two several classes of members of the Church: as who should say, “I write now to some part of the Church, viz., the saints; as for the rest, I do not now address them.” Hence we find the term used as equivalent to the Church — “to the Church of God which is at Corinth, with all the saints which are in all Achaia,” and again “to them... that are called to be saints.” We shall see presently the lesson which this is fitted to teach. But, secondly, on the other hand, the Apostle’s use of the word makes it clear that he uses it in the full sense which we have explained, of a real saint-ship. He does not restrain the sense to some merely external saintship, as if his meaning were “professing Christians whether they are real or not.” The word stands, in the inscriptions, as equivalent to “sanctified in Christ Jesus,” “faithful in Christ Jesus,” “beloved of God”; or as in 2 Peter 1., “them that have obtained like precious faith with us,” and in 1 Peter, “Elect according to the foreknowledge of God unto obedience.” Thus then we are to take it: — The Apostle wrote to the visible, or the professed and accepted followers of the Lord, on the understanding that they were what they professed to be. He was not to question it: he assumed that they were saints of God, for to profess the faith of Christ is to claim that character. He rejoiced to hope that it would prove to be so, and gladly took note of everything which tended to assure him that their holiness was real. He proclaims to them, in the character of saints, the privileges and the obligations that pertain to saints. It was the business of every man to look well to the reality of his faith, and to try the grounds on which he took his place with those addressed as beloved of God and called to be saints. There might be some who had but a name to live (⁴⁷¹³⁶2 Corinthians 13:5). If so, it was not the Apostle’s part, writing to the Church, to allow that possibility to confuse or lower the style of his address to Christ’s Church. He wrote to all the saints in Christ Jesus who were at Philippi.

This is evident from the strain of all the Pauline Epistles, and it is important to observe it and apply it. Otherwise we shall readily fall into this way of reasoning, — “Since there must have been some in these Churches who were only nominally and not really believers, the word *saints* must include such; therefore it can imply only an outward separation of men, apart from

any determination of their inward state.” If we do so, then everything the Apostle says to saints, their standing, their privileges, their obligations, and their hopes, will come to be strained and lowered in the interpretation, so as to mean only that such privileges and blessings are somehow attainable, and if attained may also on certain terms be secured. The interpretation of the Apostle’s teaching on these subjects will, in short, be what it *must* be, if it is taken to apply at once, in his intention, to those who are indeed saints and to those who are not. This line, in point of fact, has been taken, in the interpretation of the Epistles, so as to resolve everything the Apostle says about the eternal life of saved men, as actually theirs, from their election downwards, into a mere matter of outward privileges. This view, no doubt, involves a straining of plain words. Yet it will always seem to force itself upon us, unless we hold fast (what is indeed demonstrably true) that when the Apostle speaks to saints, he says what should be said to those who are indeed saints, and on the understanding that those whom he addresses are such.

In like manner, on the other side, we have a lesson to learn from the unhesitating way in which the Apostle writes to the saints and sends the letter to the members of a Christian Church as the parties intended. He may have some things to reprehend; he may even have to express fears, when things have gone amiss, that some in the Church may yet prove to be no saints. Yet writing to the Church, he writes to saints. Let us learn from this what those lay claim to who become members of Christ’s Church, and what responsibilities they take on. They claim, in Christ, the salvation which makes men saints — *i.e.*, persons set apart under the influence of the Holy Spirit to enjoy Christ’s forgiveness and to walk in His ways. Christ does this for us, if He does a Saviour’s work. It is a thing incongruous, a thing, in the Apostle’s view, not to be taken for granted, that any one shall hold his place in Christ’s Church who is worldly, earthly, unholy. There may be such, but Paul will not assume it; he will not measure the Christianity of Christ’s Church by any such standard. Neither will he go about to determine whether perhaps it is so or not in the case of any who are professing Christ in the ordinary way. *If* any have entered Christ’s Church who are content to continue in worldliness and sin, not seeking in Christ the grace which saves, that is solely their own personal sin, and in it they lie unto the Lord. But not for that will the Apostle come down to speak to Christ’s Church as if it should be thought of as a company to which holy and unholy may equally well belong. If any be there who are in no vital sense saints, their intrusion will not hinder Paul from speaking to the Church of God in its own proper character and according to its calling.

But let it be remarked at the same time, that this same fact shows us that the Apostle was wont to judge of men and Churches charitably; yes, with a very large charity. We may be very sure that there was a good deal in all those Churches, and a great deal in some, that needed to be judged charitably. They were not all clear, eminent, conspicuous saints; so far from that, there might well be some whole Churches in which saintship was, so far as man's inspection could perceive, faint and questionable. But the Apostle was far from thinking of shutting out the man whose faith was weak, whose attainments were small, whose regard to Christ was but a struggling and germinating thing. Far from being disposed to shut him out, no doubt the Apostle's whole desire was to shut such an one in, among the saints in Jesus Christ.

To be accepted in the Beloved, to be sanctified in Christ Jesus, is a very great thing. No less than this great thing Christ offers, and no less we humbly claim in faith. Also it is no less than this that Christ bestows on those who come to Him. Let Christians, on the one hand, look to Christ, as able and willing to do no less than this even for them; on the other hand, let them look to themselves, that they neither deceive them; selves with false pretences, nor trifle idly with so great a gospel. And in the case of others, let hasty and needless adverse judgments be avoided. Let us be glad to think that Christ may see His own, where our dim sight can find but scanty tokens of His work.

Along with the saints the letter specifies, in particular, the bishops and deacons. The former were the officers who took the oversight, as the word implies; the deacons those who rendered service, especially in the Church's outward and pecuniary concerns. These two standing orders are recognised by the Apostle. It is obvious that this does not suggest diocesan Episcopacy, for that implies three orders, the highest being a single bishop, to the exclusion of others assuming the office in that place.

It is more important to observe that the Epistle is not directed to the bishops primarily, or as if they were entitled to come between the people and the message. It is directed to all the saints. To them the Epistle, to them all the Scriptures belong, as their own inheritance, which no man may take from them. In so far as the bishops and deacons are distinguished from other saints, the Scriptures pertain to them that they may learn their own duty, and also may help the people in the use and enjoyment of that which is already theirs.

Now follows the salutation — Grace be unto you and peace. This is the ordinary salutation, varied and amplified in a few of the Epistles. It may be said to express the sum of all Christian well-being in this life.

Grace is, first of all, the word which expresses the free favour of God, manifested towards the unworthy in Christ Jesus. But it is further extended in meaning to that which is the fruit of this favour, to the principles and dispositions in the mind which result from grace, which recognise grace, which in their nature correspond to the nature of grace. In this sense it is said “grow in grace.” Peace is the well-grounded tranquillity and sense of well-being which arise from the sight of God’s grace in Christ, from faith in it and experience of it. Grace and peace are the forerunners of glory. That is a blessed company to which so great a fulness of good is commended, as ordinarily theirs.

And from whom is this good expected to proceed? From God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. The Father who loved us, the Son who charged Himself with the burden of our salvation, impart a grace and a peace fragrant with that Divine love and charged with the efficacy of that blessed mediation. If any one wonders why the Holy Spirit is left out, a reason may be given for it. For if we look to the substance of the blessings, what are this grace and peace but the Holy Spirit Himself dwelling in us, revealing to us the Father and the Son from whom He comes, and enabling us to continue in the Son and in the Father?

CHAPTER 2.

THE APOSTLE'S MIND ABOUT THE PHILIPPIANS. — PHILIPPIANS 1:3-11 (R.V.).

AFTER the salutation, the first thing in the Epistle is a warm utterance of the feelings and the desires which Paul habitually cherishes in relation to his converts at Philippi. This is expressed in vv. 3-11.

Note the course of thought, in ver. 3 he declares his thankfulness and in ver. 4 his prayerfulness on their behalf; and he puts these two together, without as yet saying why he thanks and what he prays for. He puts them together, because he would mark that with him these are not two separate things; but his prayer is thankful, and his thankfulness is prayerful; and then, having so much to be thankful for, his prayers became, also, joyful. The reason why, he presently explains more particularly. For, ver. 5, he had to thank God, joyfully, for their fellowship in the gospel in the past; and then, ver. 6, knowing to what this pointed forward, he could pray joyfully — that is, with joyful expectation for the future. And thus he prepares the way for telling what special things he was led to pray for; but first he interposes vv. 7 and 8, to vindicate, as it were, the right he had to feel so warm and deep an interest in his Philippian friends. The matter of his prayer follows in vv. 9-11.

First he thanks God for grace bestowed upon the Philippians. As often as he remembered them, as often as he lifted up his heart in prayer to make request for them, he was cheered with the feeling that he could make request joyfully — *i.e.*, he could rejoice over mercies already given. We know that the Apostle, in his letters to the Churches, is found always ready to evince the same spirit; he is prompt to pour out his thanks for anything attained by those Churches, either in gifts or grace. We find it so in his letters to the Churches of Corinth and Ephesus and Colossus and Thessalonica. He does this, always, in a full and hearty way. He evidently counted it both duty and privilege to take note of what God had wrought, and to show that he prized it. Like John, he had no greater joy than to hear that his children walked in the truth; and he gave the glory of it to God in thanksgiving. In the case of this Church, however, the ground of thanksgiving was something that bound them to Paul in a peculiar manner, and touched his heart with a glow of tenderer love and gladness. It was,

ver. 5, “their fellowship in the gospel (or rather, unto the gospel) from the first day until now.” He means, that from their first acquaintance with the gospel, the Philippian Christians had, with unusual heartiness and sincerity, committed themselves to the cause of the gospel. They had made it their own cause. They had embarked in it as a fellowship to which they gave themselves heart and soul. There might be Churches, more distinguished for gifts than that of Philippi was, where less of this magnanimous spirit appeared. There might be Churches, where men seemed to be occupied with their own advantage by the gospel, their individual and separate advantage, but withheld themselves from the fellowship unto it, — did not readily commit themselves to it and to each other, as embarking wholly and for ever in the common cause. This misconception, this servility of spirit, is but too easy. You may have whole Churches, in which men are full of self-congratulation about attainments they make in the gospel, and gifts they receive by the gospel, and doctrines they buildup about it — but the loving “fellowship unto it” A large fails, measure of a better spirit had been given to the Philippians from the first. They were a part of those Macedonian Churches, who “first gave their own selves” to the Lord and His Apostles, and then also their help and service. It was an inward fellowship before it was an outward one. They first gave their own selves, so that their hearts were mastered by the desire to see the ends of the gospel achieved, and then came service and sacrifice. Trials and losses had befallen them in this course of service; but still they are found caring for the gospel, for their brethren in the gospel, for their father in the gospel, for the cause of the gospel. This fellowship — this readiness to make common cause with the gospel, out and out, had begun at the first day; and after trouble and trial it continued even until now.

The disposition here commended has its importance, very much because it implies so just a conception of the genius of the gospel, and so hearty a consent to it. He whose Christianity leads him to band himself with his fellow-Christians, to get good by their help, and to help them to get good, and along with them to do good as opportunity arises, is a man who believes in the work of the gospel as a vital social force; he believes that Christ is in his members; he believes that there are attainments to be made, victories won, benefits laid hold of and appropriated. He is in sympathy with Christ, for he is attracted by the expectation of great results coming in the line of the gospel; and he is one who looks not merely on his own things, but rejoices to feel that his own hope is bound up with a great hope for many and for the world. Such a man is near the heart of things. He has,

in important respects, got the right notion of Christianity, and Christianity has got the right hold of him.

Now if we consider that the Apostle Paul, “the slave of Jesus Christ,” was himself a marvellous embodiment of the spirit he is here commending to the Philippians, we shall easily understand with what satisfaction he thought upon this Church, and rejoiced over them, and gave thanks. Was there ever a man who, more than Paul, evinced “the fellowship of the gospel” from the first hour to the last? Was there ever one whose personal self was more swallowed up and lost, in his zeal to be spent for the cause, — doing all things, for the gospel’s sake that he might have part therein? Did ever man, more than he, welcome sufferings, sacrifices, toils, if they were for Christ, for the gospel? Was man ever possessed more absolutely than he with a sense of the worthiness of the gospel to be proclaimed everywhere, to every man — and with a sense of the right the gospel had to himself, as Jesus Christ’s man, the man that should be used and expended on nothing else but upholding this cause, and proclaiming this message to all kinds of sinners? The one great object with him was that Christ should be magnified in him, whether by life or by death (ver. 20). His heart, therefore, grew glad and thankful over a Church that had so much of this same spirit, and, for one thing, showed this by cleaving to him in their hearts through all the vicissitudes of his work, and following him everywhere with their sympathy and their prayers. Some Churches were so much occupied with themselves, and had so little understanding of him, that he was obliged to write to them at large, setting forth the true spirit and manner of his own life and service; he had, as it were, to open their eyes by force to see him as he was. This was not needed here: the Philippians understood him already: they did so, because, in a degree, they had caught the contagion, of his own spirit. They had given themselves, in their measure, in a fellowship unto the gospel, from the first day until now. They had claimed, and they still claimed, to have a share in all that befell the gospel, and in all that befell the Apostle.

Paul ascribed all this to God’s grace in them, and thanked God for it. True, indeed, much activity about the gospel, and much that looks like interest in its progress, may proceed from other causes besides a living fellowship with Jesus, and a true disposition to forsake all for Him. The outward activity may be resorted to as a substitute for the inward life; or it may express the spirit of sectarian selfishness. But when it appears as a consistent interest in the gospel, when it is accompanied by the tokens of frank good will and free self-surrender to the Church’s evangelical life,

when it endures through vicissitudes of time, under trial, persecution, and reproach, it must arise, in the main, from a real persuasion of the Divine excellence and power of the gospel and the Saviour. Not without the grace of God does any Church manifest this spirit.

Now to the Apostle who had this cause of gladness in the past, there opened (ver. 6) a gladdening prospect for the future, which at once deepened his thankfulness and gave expectancy to his prayers. "Being confident of this very thing, that He that hath begun a good work in you will perform it unto the day of Jesus Christ." "Being confident of this very thing" is equivalent to "Having no less confidence than this"; for he desires to express that his confidence is emphatic and great.

The confidence so expressed assumes a principle, and makes application of that principle to the Philippian saints.

The principle is that the work of saving grace clearly begun by the Spirit of God shall not be destroyed and come to nothing, but shall be carried on to complete salvation. This principle is not received by all Christians as part of the teaching of Scripture; but without entering now into any large discussion, it may be pointed out that it seems to be recognised, not merely in a few, but in many passages of Holy Writ. Not to recite Old Testament indications, we have our Lord's word (~~John~~ John 10:28): "I give unto them eternal life, and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of My hand." And there is hardly an Epistle of our Apostle in which the same principle is not presented to us, stated in express terms, or assumed in stating other doctrines, and applied to the comfort of believers (~~1~~ 1 Thessalonians 5:23, 24; ~~1~~ 1 Corinthians 1:8; ~~Romans~~ Romans 8:30). The ultimate salvation of those in whom a good work is begun, is, in this view, conceived to be connected with the stability of God's purposes, the efficacy of the Son's mediation, the permanence and power of the Holy Spirit's influence, and the nature of the covenant under which believers are placed. And the perseverance thus provided for is supposed to be made good through the faith, patience, fear, and diligence of those who persevere, and by no means without these. As to the place before us, whatever exceptions and whatever distinctions may be taken on the subject, it must be owned that, gladly recognising Christian character and attainment as a fact, he finds therein a warrant for emphatic confidence about the future, even to the day of Christ.

As to the application of this principle to the Philippians, the method in which the Apostle proceeds is plain. He certainly does not speak as by

immediate insight into Divine counsels about the Philippians. He is directed to utter a conclusion at which he had arrived by a process which he explains. From the evidence of the reality of their Christian calling, he drew the conclusion that Christ was at work in them, and the further conclusion that his work would be completed. It may be asked how so confident an application of the principle now in view could be reached on these terms? How could the Apostle be sure enough of the inward state of his Philippian friends, to enable him to reason on it, as here he seems to do? In answer, we grant it to be impossible for any one, without immediate revelation on the point, to reach absolute assurance about the spiritual state of other people. And therefore we are to keep in view, what has already been suggested, that the Apostle, speaking to “saints,” really remits to themselves and to their Lord the final question as to the reality of that apparent saintship. But then, we are taught by the Apostle’s example that where ordinary tokens, and especially where more than ordinary tokens of Christian character appear, we are frankly and gladly to give effect to those signs in our practical judgments. There may be an error no doubt there is, in unbounded charity; but there is error also when we make a grudging estimate of Christian brethren; when, on the ground of some failing, we allow suspicion to obliterate the impressions which their Christian faith and service might fairly have made upon us. We are to cherish the thought that a wonderful future is before those in whom Christ is carrying on His work of grace; and we are to make a loving application of that hope in the case of those whose Christian dispositions have become specially manifest to us in the intercourse of Christian friendship.

However, the Apostle felt that he had a special right to feel thus in reference to the Philippians — more, perhaps, than in regard to others; and instead of going on at once to specify the objects of his prayers for them, he interposes a vindication, as it were, of the right he claimed (ver. 7): “Even as it is meet for me to be thus minded with respect to all of you, because I have you in my heart, you who are all partakers of my grace, not only in the defence and confirmation of the gospel, but also in my bonds.” As if he would say, — There are special ties between us, which justify on my part special tenderness and vigilance of appreciation and approbation, when I think of you. A father has a special right to take note of what is hopeful in his son, and to dwell with satisfaction on his virtues and his promise; and friends who have toiled and suffered together have a special right to cherish, a deep trust in one another’s well-trying fidelity and nobleness. Let strangers, in such cases, set, if they will, a slight value on characters which they hardly know; but let them not dispute the right

which love has to scrutinise with delight the nobler qualities of those who are beloved.

The Philippians were sharers of Paul's grace, as sharing his enthusiasm for the successful advocacy and confirmation of the gospel. So they had their share in the grace that was so mighty in him. But besides that, the Apostle's heart had been cheered and warmed by the manifestation of their sympathy, their loving thoughtfulness in reference to his bonds. So he joyfully owned them as partakers in spirit in those bonds, and in the grace by which he endured them. They remembered him in his bonds, "as bound with him." Every way their fellowship with him expressed itself as full and true. No jarring element broke in to mar the happy sense of this. He could feel that though far away their hearts beat pulse for pulse with his, partakers not only of his toil but of his bonds. So he "had them in his heart": his heart embraced them with no common warmth and yielded to them no common friendship. And what then? Why, then, "it is meet that I should be thus minded," "should use love's happy right to think very well of you, and should let the evidence of your Christian feeling come home to my heart, warm and glowing." It was meet that Paul should joyfully *repute them to be sincere* — to be men cleaving to the gospel in a genuine love of it. It was meet that he should *thank* God in their behalf, seeing these happy attainments of theirs were so truly a concern of his. It was meet he should *pray* for them with joyful importunity, counting their growth in grace to be a benefit also to himself.

It would be a helpful thing if Christian friends cherished, and if they sometimes expressed, warm hopes and expectations in behalf of one another. Only, let this be the outcome of truly spiritual affection. Paul was persuaded that his feelings arose from no mere human impulse. The grace of God it was which had given the Philippians this place in his heart. God was his record that his longing after them was great, and also that it was in the mercies of Christ. He loved them as a man in Christ, and with Christlike affections. Otherwise, words like these assume a canting character and are undefying. Now at last comes the tenor of his prayer (ver. 9): "That your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and all discernment; so that ye may approve the things that are excellent," and so on.

Let this first be noted, that it is a prayer for growth. All that grace has wrought in the Philippian believers, everything in their state that filled his heart with thankfulness, he regards as the beginning of something better still. For this he longs; and therefore his heart is set on progress. So we find

it in all his Epistles. “As ye have received how ye ought to walk and to please God — so abound more” (^{<5240>}1 Thessalonians 4:1). This is a very familiar thought, yet let us spend a sentence or two upon it. The spiritual prosperity of believers should be measured not so much by the point they have reached, but by the fact and measure of the progress they are making. Progress in likeness to Christ, progress in following Him; progress in understanding His mind and learning His lessons; progress ever from the performance and the failures of yesterday to the new discipline of to-day, — this is Paul’s Christianity. In this world our condition is such that the business of every believer is to go forward. There is room for it, need of it, call to it, blessedness in it. For any Christian, at any stage of attainment, to presume to stand still is perilous and sinful. A beginner that is pressing forward is a happier and a more helpful Christian than he is who has come to a stand, though the latter may seem to be on the borders of the land of Beulah. The first may have his life marred by much darkness and many mistakes; but the second is for the present practically denying the Christian truth and the Christian call, as these bear on himself. Therefore the Apostle is bent upon progress. And here we have his account of that which suggested itself to him as the best kind of progress for these converts of his.

The life of their souls, as he conceived it, depended on the operation of one great principle, and he prays for the increase of that in strength and efficacy. He desires that their love may abound more and more. He was glad to think they had shown, all along, a loving Christian spirit. He wished it to grow to its proper strength and nobleness.

No one doubts that, according to the Scriptures, love is the practical principle by which the fruits of faith are brought forth. The Christian character peculiarly consists in a Christlike love. The sum of the law from which we fell is, Thou shalt love; and, being redeemed in Christ, we find the end of the commandment to be love, out of a pure heart, and a good conscience, and faith unfeigned. Redemption itself is a process of love, setting forth from heaven to earth to create and kindle love, and make it triumph in human hearts and lives. Every one that loveth is born of God and knoweth God. No point is so well settled. Nobody doubts it.

Yet, alas! how many of us are truly aware of the great meaning which apostolic words, which Christ’s words, carry, when this is spoken of? or how shall it be made inwardly and vividly present to us? In the heart of Christ, who loved us and gave Himself for us, was a great purpose to

awaken in human hearts a deep and strong affection, kindred to His own — true, tender, steadfast, all-prevailing, all-transforming. Apostles, catching the fire in their degree, were full of the wonder of it, of the glad surprise and yet the sober reality of it; and they carried about the gospel everywhere, looking to see men thrill into this new life, and become instances of its strength and gladness. And we? Let each man answer for himself. He is a happy man who can answer clearly. What is it to have love for the inspiration of the heart and the life: love submerging the lower cravings, love ennobling and expanding all that is best and highest, love consecrating life into a glad and endless offering? Which of us has that within him which could break into a song, like the thirteenth chapter of Corinthians, rejoicing in the goodness and nobleness of love? “That your love may abound.” In our tongue it is but one syllable. So much the easier for our perversity to slide over the meaning as we read. But all our earthly life is too short a space for learning how deep and how pertinent to ourselves this business of love is.

No doubt, the kindness the Philippians had shown to the Apostle, of which he had been speaking, naturally prepares the way for speaking of their love, as the verse before us does. But we are not to take the word as referring only to the love they might bear to other believers, or, in particular, to the Apostle. That is in the Apostle’s mind; but his reference is wider, namely, to love as a principle which operates universally — which first holds lowly fellowship with the love of God, and then also flows out in Christian affection towards men. The Apostle does not distinguish these, because he will not have us to separate them. The believer has been brought back in love to God, and having his life quickened from that source he loves men. The manward aspect of it is made prominent in the Bible for this reason, that in love towards men the exercise of this affection finds the most various scope, and in this way also it is most practically tested. The Apostle would not grant to any of us that our profession of love to God could be genuine, if love did not exert itself towards men. But neither would he suffer it to be restricted in any other direction. In the present case he gladly owned the love which his Philippian friends bore to himself. But he sees in this the existence of a principle which may signalise its energy in all directions, and is able to bear all kinds of good fruit. Therefore his prayer fixes on this, “that your love may abound.”

Now here we must look narrowly into the drift of the prayer. For the Apostle desires that love may abound and work in a certain manner, and if it shall, he assures himself of excellent effects to follow. Perhaps we may

best see the reason which guided his prayer, if we begin with the result or achievement he aimed at for his Philippian friends. If we can understand that, we may the better understand the road by which he hoped they might be carried forward to it.

The result aimed at is this (vv. 10, 11): “that ye may be sincere and without offence until the day of Christ; being filled with the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.” The last end is the glory and praise of God. This, let us be assured, is no mere phrase with the Apostle. All these things are real and vivid to him. If he were to come among us, knowing us to be professed believers, then, strange as some of us may think it, he would actually expect that a great degree of praise and glory to God should accrue out of our lives. The time he fixes on for the manifestation of this, the time when it should be seen how this has come to pass, is the day of Christ. The great day of revealing shall witness, in particular, the consummate glory of Christ’s salvation in His redeemed. And he prays that unto that day and at that day they may be sincere, without offence, filled with fruits of righteousness.

First, sincere: that signifies simplicity of purpose, and singleness of heart in following out that purpose. Sincere Christians cherish in their hearts no views, no principles, adverse to the Christian calling. The test of this sincerity is that a man shall be honestly willing to let light shine through him, to evince the true character of his principles and motives. Such a man is on the road to the final, victorious, and eternal sincerity. For the present there may be within him too much of that which hinders him, and mars his life. But if he is set on expelling this and welcomes the light which exposes it, in order that he may expel it, then he has a real, present sincerity, and his course is brightening towards the perfect day.

Second, without offence. This is the character of the man who walks without stumbling. For there are obstacles in the way, and they are often unexpected. Grant a man to be in a measure sincere — the call of the gospel has really won his heart. Yet as he goes, there fall in trials, temptations, difficulties, that seem to come upon him from without, as it were, and he stumbles; he fails to preserve the uprightness of his life, and to keep his eye fixed with due steadiness on the end of his faith. Suddenly, before he is well aware, he is almost down. So he brings confusion into his mind, and guilt upon his conscience; and in his bewilderment he is too likely to make worse stumbles ere long. He who would be a prosperous Christian has not only to watch against duplicity in the heart: he must give

diligence also to deal wisely with the various outward influences which strike into our lives, which seem often to do so cruelly and unreasonably, and which wear some false guise that we had not foreseen. Paul knew this in his own case; and therefore he “studied to keep a conscience void of offence.” We may have wisdom enough for our own practice as to this, if we know where to go for it.

Third, filled with fruits of righteousness — which is the positive result, associated with the absence of guile and the freedom from stumbling. A tree that bears any fruit is alive. But one that is filled with fruit glorifies the gardener’s care. “Herein is My Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be My disciples.” Distinct and manifold acts of faith and patience are the proper testimonies of the soul that is sincere and without offence,

This is the line of things which the Apostle desires to see running its course towards the day of Christ. Now let us ask, In what circumstances is the believer placed for whom Paul desires it?

He is placed in a world that is full of adverse influences, and is apt to stir adverse forces in his own heart. If he allows these influences to have their way — if he yields to the tendencies that operate around him, he will be carried off in a direction quite different from that which Paul contemplates. Instead of sincerity, there will be the tainted, corrupt, divided heart; instead of freedom from offence, there will be many a fall, or even a complete forsaking of the way; instead of fruits of righteousness filling the life, there will be “wild grapes.” On the other hand, if, in spite of these influences, the Christian is enabled to hold his course, then the discipline of conflict and trial will prove full of blessing. Here also shall the promise be fulfilled that all things work together for good to them that love God. Strong temptations are not overcome without sorrow and pain; but being overcome, they turn out ministers of good. In this experience sincerity clears and deepens; and the bearing of the Christian acquires a firmness and directness not otherwise attainable; and the fruits of righteousness acquire a flavour which no other climate could have developed so well. This hard road turns out to be the best road towards the day of Christ.

The effect, then, of the circumstances in which the believer is thus placed will be according to the way in which he deals with them. But plainly, to deal rightly with them, implies a constant effort of *judging* the things within him and without him, the world within and the world without, that he may “approve what is more excellent” — that he may choose the good and refuse the evil. Discerning, distinguishing, as to opinions, influences,

feelings, habits, courses of conduct, and so forth, so as to separate right and wrong, spiritual and carnal, true and false, must be the work in hand. There must be the prevailing practical mind to elect and to abide by the proper objects of choice, to cleave to the one and to put away the other.

So we can understand very well, if the Philippians were to be sincere, without offence, filled with fruits of righteousness, that they must, and ever more and more searchingly and successfully, “approve the things that are more excellent.” The phrase is also rendered “try the things which differ”; for the expression implies both. It implies such a putting to proof of that which is presented to us, as to make just distinctions and give to each its proper place — silver on the one side, dross on the other. What is the whole life and business of the Philippians, of any Christians, as Christians, but that of following out perpetually a choice, on given principles, among the multitude of objects that claim their regard? The fundamental choice, arrived at in believing, has to be reiterated continually, in a just application of it to a world of varying and sometimes perplexing cases.

When we have all this in view it is easy to understand the scope of the Apostle’s prayer about the growth and education of their love. *Out of love this needed discrimination must come.* For

1. No practical discriminations or determinations are of any worth in God’s sight except as they are animated by love, and, indeed, determined by it. If a Christian should choose anything, or reject anything, yet not in love, his choice as to the matter of fact may be right, but for all that the man himself is wrong.

2. Love alone will practically carry through such habitual discrimination, such faithful and patient choice. Love becomes the new instinct which gives life, spring, and promptitude to the process. When this fails, the life of approving the things that are more excellent will fail: the task will be repudiated as a burden that cannot be endured. It may still be professed, but it must inwardly die.

3. Nothing but love can enable us to see and to affirm the true distinctions. Under the influence of that pure love (that arises in the heart which God’s love has won and quickened) the things which differ are truly seen. So, and only so, we shall make distinctions according to the real differences as these appear in God’s sight. Let us consider this a little.

Evidently among the things that differ there are some whose characteristics are so plainly written in conscience or in Scripture, that to determine what

should be said of them is matter of no difficulty at all. It is no matter of difficulty to decide that murder and theft are wrong, or that meekness, benevolence, justice are right. A man who has never been awakened to spiritual life, or a Christian whose love has decayed, can make determinations about such things, and can be sure, as he does so, that as to the thing itself he is judging right. Yet in this case there is no just apprehension of the real difference in God's sight of the things that differ, nor a right mind and heart to choose or to reject so as to be in harmony with God's judgment.

And if so, then in that large class of cases where there is room for some degree of doubt or diversity, where some mist obscures the view, so that it is not plain at once into what class things should be reckoned — in cases where we are not driven to a decision by a blaze of light from Scripture or conscience — in such cases we need the impulse of the love which cleaves to God, which delights in righteousness, which gives to others, even to the undeserving, the brother's place in the heart. Without this there can be no detection of the real difference, and no assurance of the rectitude of the discrimination we make.

Now it is in such matters that the especial proof and exercise of religious life goes on. Here, for example, Lot failed. The beauty of the fair and prosperous valley so filled his soul with admiration and desire that it chilled and all but killed the affections that should have steadied and raised his mind. Had the love of the eternal and supreme maintained its power, then in that day when God on the one hand and Lot on the other looked down on the plain; they would have seen the same sight and judged it with the same mind. But it was otherwise. So the Lord lifted up His eyes and saw that the men of Sodom were wicked and sinners before the Lord exceedingly; and Lot lifted up his eyes and saw only that the plain was well watered everywhere, as the garden of the Lord, as the land of Egypt.

But the love of which the Apostle speaks is the breath of the upper world and of the new life. It cleaves to God, it embraces the things which God loves, it enters into the views which God reveals, — and it takes the right view of men, and of men's interest and welfare. The man that has it, or has known it, is therein aware of what is most material. He has a notion of the conduct that is congruous to love's nature. What love knows, it is the nature of love to practise, for it knows lovingly; and at every step the practice confirms, establishes, and enlarges the knowledge. So the genuine growth of love is a growth in knowledge (ver. 9) — the word implies the

kind of knowledge that goes with intently looking into things: love, as it grows, becomes more quick to see and mark how things really are when tried by the true standard. Conversing practically with the mind of God in the practice of life, love incorporates that mind and judges in the light of it. This prepares a man to detect the false and counterfeit, and to try the things that differ.

Not only in knowledge shall love grow, but “in all discernment,” or perception, as it might be rendered. There may be instances in which with our best wisdom, we find it hard to disentangle clear principles, or state plain grounds which rule the case; yet love, growing and exercised, has its percipiency: it has that accomplished tact, that quick experienced taste, that fine sensibility to what befriends and what opposes truth and right, which will lead to, right distinctions in practice. So you discriminate by the sense of taste things that differ, though you can give no reason to another, but can say only, “I perceive it.” In this sense “he that is spiritual judgeth all things.”

For all this the aid of the Holy Spirit is held out to us, as we may see in 1 John 2. He makes love to grow, and under that master influence unfolds the needed wisdom also. So comes the wisdom “from above, which is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be entreated, full of mercy and of good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy” (^{<SUB17>}James 3:17). It is hidden from many wise and prudent, but God has often revealed it unto babes.

CHAPTER 3.

HOW THE PHILIPPIANS SHOULD THINK OF PAUL AT ROME. — PHILIPPIANS 1:12-20 (R.V.).

HAVING poured out his feelings about those dear friends and children in the Lord at Philippi, the Apostle recognises corresponding feelings on their part towards him. These must naturally be feelings of anxiety to know how it was with him in body and spirit and how far he had been protected and sustained amid the dangers and sorrows of a prisoner's lot. On this then he is glad to be able to give them good tidings. He can do so, because he is in the hands of a wonder-working Lord, who turns the shadow of death into the morning." Hence his history as well as theirs (ver. 11) is moving towards the glory and praise of God.

The Apostle's affairs had seemed to be full of trial to himself, all the more that they bore so discouraging an aspect towards the cause to which he was devoted. He had been for years a prisoner. The work of preaching to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ had been stopped, except as the narrow opportunities of a prisoner's life offered scant outlets for it. He had, no doubt, his own share of experiences tending to depress and embitter: for in his day philanthropy had not yet done much to secure good treatment for men situated as he was. Still more depressing to an eager soul was the discipline of delay, the slow, monotonous months passing on, consuming the remainder of his life, while the great harvest he longed to reap lay outside, uncared for, with few to bring it in. Meanwhile even the work done in Christ's name was largely taking a wrong direction; those who under the Christian name preached another gospel, and perverted the gospel of Christ, had a freer hand to do their work. Paul, at least, had no longer the power to cross their path. Ground on which he might have worked, minds which he might have approached, seemed to be falling under their perverting influence. All this seemed adverse — adverse to Paul, and adverse to the cause for which he lived — fitted therefore to awaken legitimate concern; fitted to raise the question why God's providence should thus depress the heart and waste the life of an agent so carefully prepared and so incomparably efficient.

Most likely these things had tried the faith of Paul himself, and they might distress and perplex his loving friends at Philippi. It was right to feel that

these providences were trying; but one might be tempted also to conclude that they were in every sense to be lamented. So much the better it was, therefore, that the Apostle could testify how here also all things were working for good, and in particular were turning out to be for the furtherance of the gospel. This was taking place in two ways at least.

First, Paul's imprisonment had become the means of bringing to the knowledge of the gospel many who were not likely ever to hear of it in any other way; for his bonds had become manifest in Christ in the Praetorium, and in all other places. The precise meaning of the several words here used has become matter of discussion; but the general result is much the same whatever view is taken of the matters debated. The word translated "palace" in the Authorised Version (Marg. Caesar's Court) may perhaps refer to the quarters of the guard, in the immediate neighbourhood of the palace. Prisoners whose cases were in a special manner reserved to the Emperor were sometimes confined there. And Paul, whether actually confined there or not, must have come into contact with the troops stationed there, for we know he had been delivered to the captain of the guard (^{<42816>}Acts 28:16^{f1}). Then the "all others" (Marg. of A.V.) may probably mean the rest of the Emperor's household (comp. ^{<3022>}Philippians 4:22), and would naturally be connected with it in the minds of men, so that a mere indication like this was enough. For, in a military system such as that of the Empire was, the soldiers and officers of the guard formed an important part of the household. That household, however, was an immense affair, including hundreds or even thousands of persons — mostly freedmen or slaves, performing all sorts of functions.

Paul, then, in charge of the guard, coming in contact with individuals belonging to the various reliefs which successively had him in custody, spoken of as one reserved to the judgment of the Emperor himself, became known throughout the quarters of the guard, and to persons of the household of every rank and class. In point of fact we know and can prove from evidence external to the Bible that a few years later than this (perhaps even earlier than this) there were members of the household who were Christians. Before the end of the century a branch of the family which then occupied the imperial throne seems to have joined the Church, perhaps through the influence of a Christian nurse, who is commemorated in an inscription still preserved.

But how did his bonds "become manifest in Christ"? The words no doubt mean that he became known extensively as a man whose bonds, whose

imprisonment, was for his adherence to the name and doctrine of Jesus Christ. Let us consider how this would come about.

There might, at first, be universal indifference with reference to the cause of this prisoner's confinement. When his character and statements led to some curiosity about him, men might find it difficult to understand what the real nature of this mysterious case could be. For while the charge, whatever form it took, was not yet a common one, we may be very sure that the man struck people as profoundly different from ordinary prisoners. For ordinary prisoners the one thing desirable was release; and they employed every artifice, and exhausted every form of influence and intrigue, and were prepared to sacrifice every scruple, if only they could get free. Here was a man who pleaded for truth; his own freedom seemed to be quite secondary and subordinate. So at last men came to an understanding, more or less, of the real cause of his bonds. They were bonds for Christ. They were the result of his adherence to the faith of Christ's resurrection, and to the truths which that great event sealed. They were connected with a testifying for Christ which had brought him into collision with the authorities of his own nation, which had set on Jews "everywhere" to "speak against" him (~~482~~ Acts 28:22). And in his imprisonment he did not lay down his testimony, but preached with all his heart to every man who would hear him. This state of things dawned upon men's minds, so far as they thought about him at all; it became clear; it was "manifest in the Praetorium, and to all the others."

One influence was at work which would at least direct attention to the case. There were certain Jews in the household; there were also Jews in Rome who made it their business, for their worldly interest, to establish connections in the household; and about this time Jewish influence rose to the person, nearest to Nero himself. There was therefore a class of persons in the household likely to feel an interest in the case. And on these most likely the influence of Jewish religious authorities would be exerted to produce an unfavourable opinion of Paul. It would be felt desirable that the Jews of the household should think of Paul as no loyal Jew, as a seditious person, and of his opinions as not legitimately pertaining to Jewish religion — as a religious belief and practice which Judaism repudiated and denounced. Thus, while Paul's case might begin to influence the guard, because members of it were personally in contact with him, in the rest of the household there was a class of persons who would feel an interest in discussing his case. One way or another, some impression as to the peculiar character of it was acquired.

Now think how much was done when some view of the real nature of Paul's bonds had been lodged in the minds of these men. Think what an event that was in the mental history of some of these heathens of the old world. Paul was, in the first place, a man very unlike the ordinary type of movers of sedition. It seemed that his offence stood only in religious opinions or persuasions; and that itself, precisely in Nero's days, was a little singular to figure as the ground of political imprisonment. He was persecuted and endangered for his faith, and he neither denied nor disguised that faith, but spent all possible pains in proclaiming it. This was new. He had a faith, resting professedly on recent facts, which he proclaimed as indispensably necessary to be received by all men. This was new. He seriously told men, any man and every man, that their welfare must be attained through their being individually transformed to a type of character of the unworldliest type; he could press that alike on sordid Jews and gay young officers. This was new. He was a man who, in place of the ordinary anxieties and importunities of at prisoner, was ever ready-to speak and plead in behalf of Christ that singular young Jew who had died thirty years before, but whom Paul affirmed to be alive. And in all this, however it might strike one as foolish or odd, there were tokens of an honesty, a sanity, and a purity that could not be explained away. All this struck men who stood near the centre of a world falling many ways into moral ruin, as something strange and new. Paul's own explanation of it was in the one word "Christ." So his bonds were manifest in Christ.

A few of them might have heard previously of Christianity as a new and a malignant superstition. But another conception of it reached them through the bonds of Paul. This imprisoned man was a fact to be accounted for, and a problem to be solved. In him was an influence not wholly to be escaped, an instance that needed a new interpretation. Many of them 'did not obey the truth, some did; but at least something had become manifest that could not easily be got rid. of again, — the beginning, in their case, of that leaven which was eventually to revolutionise the thinking and feeling of the world. Remember also that most of these were men to whom Paul at liberty, speaking in synagogues and the like, would have found no access, nor would he have come near the circles to which their influence extended. But now, being imprisoned, his bonds became manifest in Christ.

Thus does it often come to pass that what seems adverse proves to be on our side. Fruit is not always borne most freely when the visible opportunities of labouring are most plentiful. Rather the question is, how

the opportunities given are employed, and how far the life of the labourer bears witness of the presence and power of Christ.

But besides the direct impression on those who were outside, arising from the fact of Paul's imprisonment, it became the means of stimulating and reinforcing the labours of other Christians (ver. 14). It is not hard to see how this might be. From Paul's bonds, and from the manner and spirit in which they were borne, these brethren received a new impression as to what should be done and what should be borne in the service of Christ. They were infected with the contagion of Paul's heroism. The sources of Paul's consecration and of his comfort became more real to them; and no discouragement arising from pain or danger could hold its ground against these forces. So they waxed confident. While dangers that threaten Christians are still only impending, are still only looming out of the unknown future, men are apt to tremble at them, to look with a shrinking eye, to approach with a reluctant step. Now here in the midst of those Roman Christians was Paul, in whom were embodied the trouble accepted and the danger defied. At once Christian hearts became inspired with a more magnanimous and generous spirit. Wherever dangers and hardships are endured, even apart from Christianity, we know how prompt the impulse is to rush in, to give help, and to share burdens. How much more might it be so here.

Not that the impulse to evangelistic earnestness, arising from Paul's presence in Rome, was all of this kind. It was not so. Some preached out of good will, in full sympathy with the spirit that animated Paul's own labours and sustained him in his trials. But some preached Christ out of envy and spite, and supposed to add affliction to his bonds. How are we to fit this into our notions of the Primitive Church?

The truth is that, ever since the gospel began to be preached, unworthy motives have combined with worthier in the administration and professed service of it. Mixture of motive has haunted the work even of those who strove to keep their motives pure. And men in whom lower motive and worse motive had a strong influence have struck into the work alongside of the nobler and purer labourers. So if has pleased God to permit; that even in this sacred field men might be tried and manifested before the judgment of the great day; and that it might be the more plain that the effectual blessing and the true increase come from Himself.

More especially have these influences become apparent in connection with the divisions of judgment about Christian doctrine and practice, and with

the formation of parties. The personal and the party feelings have readily allied themselves, in too many men, with a self-regarding zeal and with envy or spite. And where these feelings exist they come out in other forms besides their own proper colours and their direct manifestation. More often they find vent in the way of becoming the motive power of work that claims to be Christian — of work that ought to be inspired by a purer aim.

There were, as we all know, in the Church of those days powerful sections of professed believers, who contested Paul's apostleship, questioned his teaching, and wholly disliked the effects of his work. Perhaps by this time the strain of that conflict had become a little less severe, but it had not wholly passed away. We call these persons the Judaisers. They were men who looked to Jesus Christ as the Messiah, who owned the authority of His teaching, and claimed interest in His promises. But they insisted on linking Christianity to Jewish forms, and rules, and conditions of law-keeping, which were on various grounds dear and sacred to them. They apprehended feebly the spirituality and Divineness of Christ's religion; and what they did apprehend they wished to enslave, for themselves and others, in a carnal system of rules and ritual that tended to stifle and to bury the truth. With this there went a feeling towards Paul of wrath, fear, and antipathy. Such men there were in Rome. Possibly there might even be a Christian congregation in the city in which this type prevailed. At any rate, they were found there. Before Paul's coming no very remarkable nor very successful efforts to spread abroad the gospel in that great community had been going on. But Paul's arrival made men solicitous and watchful. And when it was seen that his presence and the enthusiasm that gathered round him were beginning to give impulse and effect to the speaking of the word, then this party too bestirred itself. It would not — could not — oppose the carrying of the message of Christ to men. But it could try to be first in the field; it could become active, energetic, dexterous, in laying hold of inquiring and susceptible persons, before the other side could do so; it could subject Paul to the mortification, *the deserved mortification*, of failure or defeat, so far as these would be implied in his seeing the converts going to the side which was not his side. Evangelistic zeal awoke on these terms, and bestirred itself. And sheaves that in other circumstances might have lain untended long enough, were gathered now.

This very same spirit, this poor and questionable zeal for Christ, still works, and does so plentifully. The activities of Churches, the alertness of mission societies and agencies, still partake, in far too many instances, of this sinister inspiration. We ought to watch against it in ourselves, that we

may overcome the evil and grow into a nobler temper. As regards others, we may, in special cases, see the working of such motives clearly enough, as Paul saw them at Rome. But usually we shall do well, when we can, to impute the work of others to the better side of their character; and we may do so reasonably; for as Christian work is far from being all of it so pure and high as we might desire, on the other hand, the lowly and loving temper of Christ's true followers is very often present and operative when it is not easy for us to see it. Let us believe it, because we believe in Him who worketh all in all.

Now the Apostle, looking at this, is glad of it. He is not glad that any men, professing Christ, give way to evil and unchristian tempers. But he is glad that Christ is preached. There were cases in which he vehemently contended with such persons — when they strove to poison and pervert Christians who had learned the better way. But now he is thinking of the outside world; and it was good that the making known of Christ should gather strength, and volume and extension. And the Apostle knew that the Lord could bless His own message, imperfectly delivered perhaps, to bring thirsty souls to Himself, and would not fail in His unsearchable wisdom to care for those who came, and to lead them in the ways He thought best. Let Christ be preached. The converts do not belong to the denominations, but first of all to Christ. Neither is it appointed that the denominations shall permanently hold those whom they bring in; but Christ can hold them, and can order their future in ways we cannot foretell.

It is not true that the preaching of Christ serves no purpose and yields no fruits, in cases where it is not carried on in the right or the best spirit. Indeed, God honours the pure, loving, lowly hearts, which He has Himself cleansed; they are appropriate agents for His work, and often receive a special blessing in connection with it. But God is not tied up to give no success to men acting under wrong motives: at least, if we are not to say He gives the success to them, yet in connection with them He is well able to take success to Himself. Through strange channels He can send blessings to souls, whatever He gives or denies to the unworthy workmen. But perhaps the success which attends such preachers is not remarkable nor very long continued. Souls truly gathered in will soon get beyond their teaching. At any rate, it is a poor business to be serving Christ upon the devil's principles. It cannot be good for us — whatever good may sometimes come thereby to others. Let us purge ourselves from such filthiness of the flesh and of the spirit.

“Christ is preached.” How glad the Apostle was to think of it! How he longed to see more of it, and rejoiced in all of it that he saw! One wonders how far the thoughts and feelings associated with these words in Paul’s mind find any echo in ours. Christ is preached. The meaning for men of that message, as Paul conceived it, grew out of the anguish and the wonder of those early days at Damascus, and had been growing ever since. What might Christ be for men? — Christ their righteousness, Christ their life, Christ their hope; God in Christ, peace in Christ, inheritance in Christ; a new creature, a new world; joy, victory — above all, the love of Christ, the love which passes knowledge and fills us with the fulness of God.

Therefore also this was the burning conviction in Paul’s soul — that Christ must be preached; by all means, on all accounts, Christ must be preached. The unsearchable riches of Christ must be proclaimed. Certainly, whoever might do or not do, *he* must do it. He was to live for nothing else. “I Paul am made a minister of it.” “Woe is unto me if I preach not the gospel.”

Lastly, as to this, not only does he rejoice that Christ is announced to men, but he has an assurance that this shall have a happy issue and influence towards himself also. What is so good for others shall also be found to contribute an added element of good to his own salvation; so good and rich is God, who, in working wide results of Divine beneficence, does not overlook the special case and interest of His own servant. This work, from which the workmen would shut Paul out, shall prove to pertain to him in spite of them; and he, as reaper, shall receive here also his wages, gathering fruit unto life eternal.

For it is characteristic of this Epistle (~~SC017~~Philippians 2:17; 4:10, 18) that the Apostle reveals to his Philippian friends not only his thoughts concerning the great objects of the gospel, but also the desires and hopes he had about his own experience of deliverance and well-being in connection with the turns and changes of progressive providences. Here, it is as if he said: “I confess I am covetous, not a little covetous, to have many children in Christ; I would fain be a link in many a chain of influences, by which all sorts of persons are reached and blessed in Christ. And here where I sit confined, and am also the object of envy and strife that are solicitous to baffle me, I can descry ties forming between my influence in my prison and results elsewhere with which I seem to have little to do. I can claim a something of mine, granted me by my Lord, in the Christianity of those who are kept far from me, and taught perhaps to doubt and dislike me. If I in my prison experience can but live Christ, then all sorts of effects and reactions, upon all sorts of minds, will have

something in them that accrues as fruit to Christ — and something also that accrues as my Lord's loving recognition of me. Only do you pray — for this is a great and high calling — pray, you who love me, and let the Lord in answer plentifully give His Spirit; and then, while I lie here in the imprisonment which my Lord has assigned to me, and in which He vitalises me, oh how fruitful and successful shall my life be; what gain and wealth of salvation shall be mine! There shall be fruit for an Apostle still, coming in ways I cannot follow; and in it, and with it, the confirmation and deepening of my own eternal life. It shall turn to my salvation.”

So the eager Apostle, caged and cabined, triumphed still in Christ, assured that there was a way of dealing with his Lord's will, discouraging as that might seem, in which it would reveal both enlargement for the Kingdom and the most loving enrichment also for himself.

This is a commonplace of Christianity. Christians trust in Christ to cause all to work for good. They know He can impart His most precious gifts through what seem adverse providences. But it is a memorable embodiment of this conviction that meets us in the Apostle's confidence, that when Christ's providence outwardly stops his work, it not the less pertains to Christ's wisdom to continue and extend his usefulness. The applications of the same principle to various cases in which Christians are trained through disappointment are innumerable. But mostly, even when, in a way, we are open to the lesson, we take it too easily. We forget that here also it is Christlike life and life in Christ that proves so fruitful and so happy. We do not apprehend how great a thing it is — what prayer it asks — what supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ. For the Apostle, as we learn from what presently follows, this blessing came in the line of “earnest expectation and hope.” It was not an exceptional effort of faith which awoke in him so firm a confidence about his circumstances at Rome, and was rewarded so manifestly. His whole life was set on the same key. He applied to that Roman experience the same mode of view which he strove to apply to every experience. This was his expectation — he was on the outlook for it — and this his hope, that not only in one great crisis, but all along his pilgrimage, his life should *eventuate* one way — should shape into glory to Christ. His whole life must turn out to be a loving, believing, effectual manifestation of the greatness and goodness of Christ. This was what rose before his mind as Success in Life. His thoughts, his prayers turned this way. As some men's minds turn spontaneously to money, and some to family prosperity, and some to fame, and some to various lines of recreation or of accomplishment, so Paul's turned to this. And in this world

of failure and disappointment, success welcomed him and gladdened him. His would have been the nobler life even if its expectation had been disappointed. But this is the life which cannot fail, because God is in it.

There is a great admonition here for all of us who profess to be followers of Christ. Our line of service may not be so emphatically marked out for distinction, for special and exceptional eminence of doing and suffering, as Paul's was. But for every believer the path of service opens, however commonplace and undistinguished its scenery may be. And in some of its stages it takes, for all of us, the peculiar character, it assumes the distinguishing features which mark it out as Christian. Here, in Paul, we see the spirit that should inspire service, should make thee strength, the peculiarity, the success of it, should be the quickening and gladdening influence of its efforts and its prayers. This ought to be for us also the longing outlook and the hope.

Let us note also, before we pass on, that the Lord's personal kindness to ourselves is matter of legitimate rejoicing and legitimate desire. That may be gathered from almost every verse. There have been persons who conceived that a true Christian is to be so occupied with the thought of God's glory and wills or so occupied with the weal of others, as to have no personal desires or interests at all. This is a mistake. One of the most intimate and special channels in which the glory of God and the revelation of it are secured, is in the expression of His good will to His child's own heart. This is the privilege of faith, to cherish the expectation that His glory and our good are to agree well together. Only, as to the latter, let us leave it to Him how it is to come to pass; and then it will come divinely and wonderfully. "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want."

CHAPTER 4.

THE CHOICE BETWEEN LIVING AND DYING. — PHILIPPIANS 1:21-26 (R. V.).

AT the close of the preceding section we see that the ruling principle of the Apostle — the earnest expectation and hope which inspired his life — came into special exercise at this time with reference to the possibility, and the likelihood, of an early and violent death. Dying for the name of the Lord Jesus, as well as enduring imprisonment for Him, might be near. He might not only be straitened in his labours, and secluded from the activities connected with his loved work on earth, but might be completely and finally withdrawn from it by Roman doom and execution. The Apostle's faith looked steadily at this final possibility. As at all times, so now also, Christ should be magnified in him, whether by life or by death.

Now, when some great alternative of the future rises before a Christian, — some possibility which God's providence may turn either way, — it is natural that he should look heedfully to it, that he may order aright his faith and patience as the day of decision draws near. And it is natural in particular that his thoughts should be occupied by the consideration how far the one way of it is in itself more attractive to him than the other. For in view of that he has to watch his heart, that as to what seems more attractive he may not desire it idolatrously, nor let his heart be "overcharged" with it if it is realised; and that as to what seems less attractive he may await God's will with submission and faith, and welcome it, if so it come to pass, with sincerity. So also the Apostle fixes his eye, ponderingly, on this alternative of life or death, so strongly suggested by his circumstances. But, as it were, with a smile he recognises that to a man standing, as he did, in the light of Christ, it was hard to say which should attract him most. Life and Death — what had they once been to him? what were they still to many? To live, self — self pleased, provided for, contended for, perhaps fighting for itself a losing battle with a bitter heart; to die, a dark, dire necessity, full of fear and doubt. But now, to live is Christ. In all life as it came to him, in all its various providences, he found Christ; in all life, as it fell to him to be lived, he found the circumstances set for him and the opportunity given to follow Christ; in all the attraction and all the pressure, the force and strain of life, he found the privilege of receiving Christ and employing Christ's grace, the opportunity for living by

the faith of the Son of God. That was all very real to him; it was not only a fine ideal, owned indeed but only distantly and dimly described; no, it was a reality daily fulfilled to him. To live was Christ, with a support, an elevation, and a love in it such as the world knows not. That was good, oh, how good! And then to die was better; to die was gain. For to die, also, was “Christ”; but with many a hindrance passed away, and many a conflict ended, and many a promise coming into fulfilment as here it could not do. For if, as to his own interest and portion, he lived by hope, then death was a long step forward into possession and realisation. By grace Paul was to show how he valued Christ; he was to show it in his life. And Christ was to show His care for Paul — in this life, no doubt, very lovingly; but more largely and fully at his death. To live is Christ — to die is gain; to be all for Christ while I live, to find at length He is all for me when I die!

Which should he prefer, which should he pray for (subject to God’s will), which should he hope for, life or death? The one would continue him in a labour for Christ, which Christ taught him to love. The other would bring him to a sinless and blessed fellowship with Christ, which Christ taught him to long for. Looking to the two, how should he order his desires?

It is because he speaks as one always does speak who is pondering something — the words rising, as it were, from what he sees before him — that he speaks so elliptically in ver. 22. “But if to live in the flesh come to me, as its fruit and reward bringing... “What? The Apostle sees, but does not say; something that might well reconcile him” to prolonged toil and suffering. But why produce the considerations on either side, why balance them against one another? It is too long, too difficult a process. And how can even an Apostle confidently judge as to better or best here? “And what I shall choose, really I do not know.” But this he knows, that so far as his own desires are concerned, so far as the possible futures draw his spirit, he is in a strait between two, having a desire to depart and to be with Christ, for that is far better; and yet that he should continue in the flesh is of more imperative necessity for the sake of friends like the Philippians.

Not every Christian is in the state of mind which would naturally express itself as a desire forthwith to depart and be with Christ. The great hope claims its place in every Christian heart; but not in every case so as to inspire the longing-to overleap all intermediate stages. Rather must we not say that there are periods of Christian experience, as there are also casts of character, for which it is more usual and natural to desire, if it be God’s

will, some further experience of life on earth? If this be immature Christianity, we will not, therefore, judge that it cannot be genuine.

Yet to be ready, and, subject to God's will, desirous to depart, is an attainment to be aimed at and made good. Sooner or later it should come. It lies in the line of ripening Christian affection and growing Christian insight. For this is better. It is not that life in this world is. not good; it is good, when it is life in Christ. It has its trials, its conflicts, and its dangers; it has also its elements of defect and evil; yet it is good. It is good to be a child of God in training for a better country; it is good to be one who carries the life of faith through the experiences of time. And, for some especially, there is a strong and not an unworthy attraction in the forms of exercise which open to us just in such a life as this, under the guarantee and the consecration of Christ. Knowledge opens its career, in which many a generous mind is drawn to prove its powers. Love, in all the "variety of its calmer and its more ardent affections, sends a glow through life which gladdens it with promise. The tasks which call for practical effort and achievement stir vigorous natures with a high ambition. And when all these spheres are illuminated by the light, and dominated by the authority, and quickened for us by the love of Christ, is not life on those terms interesting and good? True, it is destined to disclose its imperfection. Our knowledge proves to be so partial; our love is so sorely grieved, so often bereaved, sometimes it is even killed; and active life must learn that what is crooked cannot wholly be made straight, and that what is wanting cannot be numbered. So that life itself shall teach a Christian that his longings must seek their rest further on. Yet life in Christ here upon the earth is good; let us say no unkind word of those who feel it so, — "whose hearts, with true loyalty to Christ, would yet, if it be His will, put life fully to the proof before they go. Still, this must be said and pressed — let it be joyfully believed — that to depart is better. It is *far* better. It is better to be done with sin. It is better to be where all hopes are fulfilled. It is better to rise above a scene in which all is precarious, and in which a strange sadness thrills through our happiness even when we possess it. To be where Christ most fully, eminently, experimentally is, that is best. Therefore it is better to depart. Let mortality be swallowed up of life.

It is not only better, so that we may own it so to be as a certainty of faith; but also so that we may and ought to feel it warming and drawing the heart with delight and with desire. It is not needful that we should judge more hardly of life on earth; but we might attain a far more gladdening appreciation of what it must be to be with Christ. With no rebellion against

God's appointment when it keeps us here, and no grudging spirit towards earth's mercies and employments, we might yet have this thought of departing in God's time as a real and bright hope; a great element of comfort and of strength; a support in trouble; an elevating influence in times of gladness; an anchor of the soul, sure and steadfast, entering into that which is within the veil.

The hope of the gospel implies it. If that hope is ours and is duly cherished, must it not assert itself and sway the heart, so as more and more to command the life?

The earnest of the Spirit implies it. Of the very substance of the life eternal a foretaste comes, in the presence and grace of the Spirit of love and comfort. Can that be with us, can that heaven work duly in our hearts, and not awaken longing for the full entrance into so great a good? It may be expected of us Christians that we should lift up our heads because redemption is drawing nigh.

As for the Apostle, however, if the choice were his, he felt that it must fall in favour of still cleaving to the present life; for this, though less attractive to himself, was more necessary for the Churches, and, in particular, for his friends at Philippi. This was so clear to him that he was persuaded his life would, in fact, be prolonged by Him who appoints to all their term of ministry. Probably we are not to take this as a prophecy, but only as the expression of a strong persuasion. Work still lay before him in the line of training and cheering these believing friends, furthering and gladdening their faith. He hoped to see them yet, and to renew the old glad "fellowship" (^{<small>2006</small>Philippians 1:5). So there should be for the Philippians fresh matter of exultation, — exultation primarily in the great salvation of Christ, but yet receiving impulse and increase from the presence and ministry of Paul. Mainly, they would be exceeding glad of Christ; but yet, subordinately, exceeding glad of Paul also.}

It is a striking thing to see how confident the Apostle was of the resources given to him to wield. He knew how profitable and how gladdening his coming would be to the Philippian believers. He admits no doubt of it. God has set him in the world for this, that he may make many rich. Having nothing, he yet goes about, as one possessing all things, to impart his treasures to all kinds of people. To disguise this would be for him mock humility; it would be a denying of his Master's grace. When ministers of Christ come aright to this impression of their own calling, then they are also powerful. But they must come to it aright. For it was not the Apostle's

consciousness of himself, but his consciousness of his Master, that bred this superb confidence, this unabated expectation. In subordination to that faith the Apostle no doubt had specific reason to know that his own personal mission was of the highest importance, and was designed to accomplish great results. Ordinary ministers of Christ do not share this peculiar ground of confidence. But no one who has any kind of mission from Christ can discharge it aright if he is destitute of the expectancy which looks forward to results, and, indeed, to momentous results; for the reapers in Christ's harvest are to "gather fruit unto life eternal." To cherish this mood, not in the manner of a vain presumption, but in the manner of faith in a great Saviour, is the practical question for gospel ministers.

Alike in the utterance of his mind about his Philippian friends, and in his explanations about himself, it is remarkable how thoroughly the Apostle carries his faith through the whole detail of persons and things. The elements and forces of the Kingdom of God are not for him remote splendours, to be venerated from afar. To his faith they are embodied, they are vitally and divinely present, in the history of the Churches and in his own history. He sees Christ working in the Philippian believers; he sees in their Christian profession and service a fire of love caught from the love of Christ — the increase and triumph of which he anticipates with affectionate solicitude. The tender mercies of Christ are the element in which he and they are alike moving, and this blessedness it is their privilege assiduously to improve. So he was minded in regard to all the Churches. If in any of them the indications are feeble and dubious, only so much the more intently does he scrutinise them, to recognise, in spite of difficulty, that which comes and only could come from his Master's Spirit. If indications too significant of a wholly different influence have broken out, and demand the severest rebukes, he still casts about for tokens of the better kind. For surely Christ's Spirit is in His Churches, and surely the seed is growing in Christ's field towards a blessed harvest. If men have to be warned that naming the name of Christ they may be reprobates, that without the Spirit of Christ they are none of His, this comes as something sad and startling to be spoken to men in Christian Churches. So also in his own case — Christ is speaking and working by him, and all providences that befall him are penetrated by the love, the wisdom, and the might of Christ. In nothing is the Apostle more enviable than in this victoriousness of his faith over the earthly shows of things, and over the unlikelihoods which in this refractory world always mask and misrepresent the good work. We, for our part, find our faith continually abashed by those same unlikelihoods. We recognise the course of this world, which speaks for itself; but we are uncertain and

discouraged as to what the Saviour is doing. The mere commonplaceness of Christians, and of visible Christianity, and of ourselves, is allowed to baffle us. Nothing in the life of the Church, we are ready to say, is very interesting, very vivid, very hopeful. The great fire burning in the world ever since Pentecost is for us scarcely recognisable. We even take credit for being so hard to please. But if the quick faith and love of Paul the prisoner were ours, we should be sensitive to echoes and pulsations and movements everywhere, — we should be aware that the voice and the power of Christ are everywhere stirring in His Churches.

CHAPTER 5.

UNDAUNTED AND UNITED STEADFASTNESS. — PHILIPPIANS 1:27-30 (R. V.).

AT ver. 27 the letter begins to be hortative. Up to this point the Apostle has been taking the Philippians into his confidence, in order that they may share his point of view and see things as he sees them. Now he begins more directly to call them to the attitude and work which become them as Christians; but up to ver. 30 the sense of the dear tie between him and them is still very present, colouring and controlling his exhortations.

“Be assured,” he has been saying, “that by the grace of God, abounding amid trials, it is well with me; and I have very good hope of yet again enjoying this honour, that through my means it may be well with you; — *only* fix you on this, let this be your concern, to walk as it becomes the gospel: this is the ground on which you must win your victory; this is the line on which alone you can make any effectual contribution to our common welfare, and that of all the Churches.” So the Apostle urges. For, let us be assured of it, while we debate with ourselves by what efforts and in what lines we can do some stroke of service to the good cause, or to some special representative of it, after all the greatest and weightiest thing by far that we can do is to be thoroughly consistent and devoted in our own Christian walk, living lives answerable to the gospel.

The original suggests that the Apostle thinks of the Philippians as citizens of a state, who are to carry on their life according to the constitution and laws of the state to which they belong. That citizenship of theirs, as we shall afterwards see, is in heaven (~~in~~Philippians 3:20), where Christ their head is gone. The privilege of belonging to it had reached them through the call of God. And it was their business on the earth to act out the citizenship, to prove the reality of it in their conduct, and to manifest to the world what sort of citizenship it is. Now the standard according to which this is to be done is the gospel of Christ — the gospel, not only as it contains a code of rules for practice, but as it reveals the Saviour to whom we are to be conformed, and discloses a Divine order of holiness and grace to the influence of which our souls are to bow. And, indeed, if our thinking, and speaking, and acting held some proportion to the gospel we profess to believe; if they corresponded to the purity, the tenderness, the

Divine worth of the gospel; if from step to step of life we were indeed building ourselves on our most holy faith, what manner of persons should we be? This opens more fully in the next chapter.

But we are tried by circumstances; and the same Christianity will take different manifestations according to the circumstances in which it is unfolded. For every Christian and for every Christian community much depends on the shaping influence of the providences of life. The Apostle, there[fore, must have regard to the circumstances of the Philippians. We are all ready, commonly, to exert ourselves, as we say, to “improve our circumstances”; and, in one view, it is natural and fitting enough. Yet it is of more importance — much more — that in the circumstances as they stand we should bear ourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel. Some of us are ready to stir heaven and earth in order that certain unwelcome conditions of our lot may be altered or abolished. It would be more to the point to walk with God under them as long as they last. When they have passed away, the opportunity for faith, love, and service which *they* have furnished will have passed away for ever.

The Apostle, therefore, specifies what he wished to see or hear of in the Philippian Church, as proper to the circumstances in which they stood. He calls for steadfastness as against influences that might shake and overthrow, put in motion against them by the enemies of the gospel.

The words suggest the strain of the situation as it was felt in those small early Churches. It is difficult for us adequately to conceive it. There was the unfriendly aspect both of Roman law and of public opinion to unauthorised religious fraternities; there was the hostility of ardent Jews, skilful to stir into activity enmities which otherwise might have slumbered; there was the jealousy of religious adventurers of all kinds with whom that age was becoming rife. But besides, there was the immense pressure of general unbelief. Christianity had to be embraced and maintained against the judgment and under the cool contempt of the immense majority, including the wealth, the influence, the wisdom, the culture — all that was brilliant, imposing, and exclusive. This temper was disdainful for the most part; it became bitter and spiteful if in any instance Christianity came near enough to threaten its repose. It found, no doubt, active interpreters and representatives in every class, in every family circle. Christianity was carried forward in those days by a great spiritual power working with the message. It needed nothing less than this to sustain the Christian against the deadweight of the world’s adverse verdict, echoing back from every

tribunal by which the world gives forth its judgments. Then every feeling of doubt, or tendency to vacillate, created by these influences, was reinforced by the consciousness of faults and failings among the Christians themselves.

Against all this faith held its ground, faith clinging to the unseen Lord. In that faith the Philippians were to stand fast. Not only so; looking on "the faith" as if it were a spiritual personality, striving and striven with, they were to throw their own being and energy into the struggle, that the cause of faith might make head and win fresh victories. The faith is knocking at many doors, is soliciting many minds. But much depends on ardent and energetic Christians, who will throw their personal testimony into the conflict, and who will exert on behalf of the good cause the magic of Christian sympathy and Christian love. So they should be fellow-athletes contending on the side of faith, and in the cause of faith.

In our own day a livelier sense has awakened of the obligation lying upon Christians to spend and be spent in their Master's cause, and to be fellow-helpers to the truth. Many voices are raised to enforce the duty. Still, it cannot be doubted that in most cases this aspect of the Christian calling is too languidly conceived and too intermittently put in practice. And many in all the Churches are so little qualified to labour for the faith, or even stand fast in it, that their Christianity is only held up externally by the consent and custom of those about them.

At this point and in this connection the Apostle begins to bring forward the exhortation to peace and unity which goes forward into the following chapter. Apparently no steadfastness will, in his view, be "worthy of the gospel," unless this loving unity is added. If there was a common instinct of worldliness and unbelief, giving unity 'to the influences against which the Philippians had to contend, the operation of a mighty uniting influence was to be expected on the other side, an influence Divine in its origin and energy. The subject is brought forward, one can see, in view of tendencies to disagreement which had appeared at Philippi. But it was a topic on which the Apostle had intensely strong convictions, and he was ever ready to expatiate upon it.

We need not be surprised at the earnestness about peace and unity evinced in the Epistles, nor think it strange that such exhortations were required. Consider the case of these early converts. What varieties of training had formed their characters; what prejudices of diverse races and religions continued to be active in their minds. Consider also what a world of new

truths had burst upon them. It was impossible they could at once take in all these in their just proportions. Various aspects of things would strike different minds, and difficulty must needs be felt about the reconciliation of them. In addition to theory, practice opened a field of easy divergence. Church life had to be developed, and Church work had to be done. Rules and precedents were lacking. Everything had to be planned and built from the foundation. The very energy of the Christian faith tended to produce energetic individualities. If all these things are weighed, instead of being surprised at the rise of difficulties we may rather wonder how interminable disagreement was averted. The temper of “standing fast” might seem perhaps likely rather to aggravate than to alleviate some of these sources of discord.

On the other hand, to the Apostle’s mind a glorious unity was one especial mark of the triumph of the Kingdom of God. That expressed the victory in all the members of the new society of one influence proceeding from one Lord; it expressed the prevalence of that new life the chief element of which is the uniting grace, the grace of love. It should not be difficult to understand the value which the Apostle set on this feature in the life of Churches, how he longed to see it, how he pressed it so ardently on his disciples. Sin, dividing men from God, had divided them also from one another. It introduced selfishness, self-seeking, self-worship, self-assertion, everything that tends to divide. It rent men into separate interests, societies, classes, worships; and these stood over against one another isolated, jealous, conflicting. Men had long ago ceased to think it possible to have things otherwise ordered. They had almost ceased to desire it. How eminently then did the glory of the redemption in Christ appear in the fact that by it the dispersed out of all kinds of dispersion were gathered into one. They were bound to one another as well as to Christ; they became more conscious of oneness than ever they had been of separation. It testified to the presence and working of Him who made all, and from whom all, by different paths, had gone astray.

The means by which this unity was to be maintained was chiefly the prevalence of the Christian affections in the hearts of believers — the presence and power of that mind of Christ, of which more must be said in connection with the following chapter. Certainly the Apostle regards this as, at any rate, the radical security for unity in life and work, and without it he does not suppose the unity for which he cares can exist at all. In this connection it is worth observing that the unity he is thinking of is chiefly that which should bind together the members of those little communities

which were rising up in various places under his ministry. It is the harmony of those whose lot is cast in the same place, who can influence one another, whose plain business it was to confess Christ together. Wider unity was supposed indeed, and was rejoiced in; but the maintenance of it had not yet become so much a practical question. This continued to be the case for some time after the Apostolic period. Men were anxious to hold each local congregation together, and to avert local splits and quarrels. If that were done, it seemed as though nothing further were urgently needed.

Yet the same principles establish the unity of the visible Church throughout the world, and indicate the discharge of the duties which are necessary in order to the expression of it. Christians differ indeed among themselves upon the question how far the Church has received organic institutions fitted to give expression or embodiment to her unity; and diversity of judgment on that point is not likely soon to be removed. For the rest the main thing to observe is that Christ's Church is one, in root and principle. This applies not only to the Church invisible, but to the Church visible too. Only the latter, as she falls short in all service and attainment, falls short also in expressing her own unity and in performing the duties connected with it. On the one hand they err who think that because the state of the visible Church is marred by divisions, therefore unity in her case is a dream, and that the unity of the Church invisible is alone to be asserted. On the other hand they err who, on much the same grounds, conclude that only one of the organised communions can possess the nature and attributes of the visible Church of Christ. The visible Churches are imperfect in their unity as they are in their holiness. In both respects their state is neither to be absolutely condemned nor to be absolutely approved. And no one of them is entitled to throw upon the rest all the blame of the measure of disunion. Any one that does so becomes a principal fomentor of disunion.

This is too wide a subject to follow further. Meanwhile it may be gathered from what has been said that the most direct application of the Apostle's language must be, not to the mutual relations of great communions, but to the mutual relations of Christians in the same local society. There is great room for such an application of it. Exaggerated statements may sometimes be made as to the indifference of Christians in modern congregations to one another's weal or woe; but certainly very often self-will and bitter feeling are allowed to prevail, as if the tender ties and solemn obligations of Christian fellowship had been forgotten. And very often mutual ignorance, indifference, or silent aversion marks the relations of those who have worshipped God together for long years. Certainly there is either some

element lacking in the Christianity which is supposed to sustain Church life of this kind, or else the temperature of it must be low. Hence it comes, too that the edification of Christians has so largely dissociated itself from the fellowship of the Churches to which they still resort, and seeks support on other lines. It was not so in those earliest Churches. The life and growth of the Christians were nursed in the Church meetings. There they gathered to read and sing and pray and break bread; to strengthen one another against Pagan violence and seduction; to love one another, as bound together by ties which Pagans never knew; to endure together the scorn and wrong which Christ's name might bring upon them; and not impossibly, after they had thus fought side by side, to die together one triumphant martyr death. Similar conditions have more or less returned again whenever the Churches have been tolerably pure and united, and have at the same time been subjected to some sharp pressure of persecution.

They were to stand fast-then in one spirit, cherishing that "spirit of the mind" which is the immediate fruit of the working of the One Spirit of God, the common gift of the Father. It is supposed that Christians know what this is and can recognise it. But they might not be solicitous enough to maintain it, and they might be betrayed into preferring a spirit of their own. The Holy Spirit's influence, creating in each of them the new spirit of the mind, would be the key to right conduct in their common life. It would inspire a purer wisdom and a higher motive than the flesh supplies. Recognising it in one another, they would find themselves confirmed and cheered, established against external opposition and internal strife. Too easily we content ourselves with thoughts, words, and deeds which come only from our own private "spirit" and which are governed by that. We are too careless of living in a higher region. For the want of this some persons among us are infidels. They think they can account for all they see in Christians from the men's own spirit. Their cavil is by no means always true or fair; yet it finds too much plausible support.

The same unity in the one spirit, with its accompanying vitality, gladness, and courage, was to characterise their active labours in the gospel. Let it be remembered that men do not make this attainment in a moment by stepping across some definite line. They grow into it by sincerity of aim, and by steadfast endeavour in the strength of Christ. In this way the "fellowship unto the gospel" (ver. 5), already so happily characteristic of the Philippians, was to grow yet more in cordiality, devotedness, and power.

Meanwhile, what were they to make of the attacks directed against them by those who hated the gospel? This was no doubt a very practical question. Although persecution of the Christians had not yet revealed the energy it was afterwards to assume, their lot was often hard enough. The first burst of trial of this kind exerts a very depressing influence on some minds; with others the prolonged endurance of it, wearing out the spirit, is the more dangerous experience. Either way the dark cloud is felt, suddenly or gradually, shutting out the sky. This feeling of depression and dismay is to be steadfastly resisted. Enmity, unpleasant and ominous as it may be, is not to perturb or move you. It is not to be regarded as a reason for depression or an augury of defeat. Far otherwise: here should be discerned and grasped a token of salvation given by God Himself.

It has been said that earthly prosperity was the promise of the Old Covenant, but adversity that of the New. This is, at least, so far true that the necessity and benefit of chastening are very plainly set before us. Such discipline is part of the salvation secured for us; it is necessary to lead us aright to final well-being; and it will be administered to God's children as He sees fit. When it comes, it does not necessarily indicate special Divine displeasure, still less Divine ill will. It does indicate that we have lessons to learn, attainments to make, and faults to be purged out; it indicates also that God is taking loving pains with us for these ends. All these things ought to be very certain to Christians. Yet some Christians, when their own turn comes, find it very hard to believe so much. Pains, losses, and disappointments, coming in the very forms they most deprecate, wear such an unfriendly aspect that they can only feel scorched and affronted; and the hurt spirit breaks out in a querulous "Why?" To be so thrown off our balance is a failure of faith.

But Paul is occupied here with the spirit in which one special form of trial is to be dealt with. Antipathy, contempt, and persecution are bitter, very bitter to some sensitive souls; but when they come upon us as followers of Christ, and for His sake, they have a consolation proper to themselves. They are to be borne gladly, not only because all chastening is guided by fatherly love and wisdom, but because this kind of suffering is our glory. It comes to believers as part of their fellowship with Christ; and it is such a part of that fellowship as carries with it a peculiar power of assurance and confirmation. Christians share with Christ the enmity of the world's unbelief, because they share with Him the knowledge and love of the Father. If, indeed, by indulging self-will and passion (though perhaps under religious forms) we bring enmity on ourselves, then we suffer as evil-

doers. But if we suffer for righteousness, the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon us. Some share of suffering for Christ comes, therefore, as God's gift to His children, and ought to be valued accordingly.

As to the exact point of the Apostle's remark on the "token" of perdition and of salvation, two views may be taken. In the line of what has just been said, he may be understood to mean simply that when God allows believers to suffer, persecution for Christ's sake, it is a sign of their salvation; just as, on the contrary, to be found opposing and persecuting God's children is a sign and omen of destruction. As if he said: "It is not you but they who have cause to be terrified; for lo! thine enemies, O Lord, for lo! thine enemies shall perish."

This is a scriptural view. Yet both here and in ~~30106~~2 Thessalonians 1:6 it is perhaps more precise to say that for the Apostle the special sign of salvation on the one side, and destruction on the other, is the patience and calmness with which Christians are enabled to endure their trials. This patience, while it is a desirable attainment on their part, is also something secured for them and given to them by their Lord. It is very precious and should be earnestly embraced. In this view the Apostle says: "In no wise be terrified by your adversaries; and this tranquillity of yours shall be a sign, on the one part, of your salvation, and also, on the other part, if they repent not, of their destruction. For this tranquillity is a victory given to you by God, which endures when their malice is exhausted. Does it not tell of a power working for you which mocks their malice, a power which is well able to perfect your salvation as well as to overthrow the enemies of God? So you find coming into experience that which beforehand was given you by promise. It *was* given you to believe in Christ, and also to suffer for Him. Now that you find yourselves enabled to suffer for Him so calmly, will not that become a sign to confirm all you have believed? For the tranquillity of spirit into which faith rises under persecution is an evidence of the source from which it comes. Much may be borne by resolute men for any cause in which they have embarked. But very different from this striving of the human heart hardening itself to bear, in order that an enemy's malice may not spy out its weakness, are the calmness and patience given to God's children in the hour of trial. That bespeaks an inward support more mighty than all sorrow. The Divineness of it becomes still more conspicuous when it approves itself as the One Spirit, triumphing in persons of diverse tempers and characters. This has been a sign to many an unbeliever, filling him with rage and fear. And to the children of God it has been the Spirit witnessing with their spirit that they *are* His children.

The Apostle will not allow it to be overlooked that in this point as in others his Philippian friends and he are tied together in closest fellowship. This conflict of theirs is the same which they had heard of and seen as proceeding in his case too. Perhaps we may say of this that it admonishes us not to think too meanly of our own Christian experience, and of the questions and decisions which it involves. The Apostle knew that his Philippian friends regarded his conflict as something conspicuous and great. He was a standard-bearer, on whom much depended; and then, all the movements of his soul were magnanimous and grand. But their own experience might seem petty — almost mean; their trials not very serious, and their way of dealing with them at times so halting and half-hearted that it seemed an offence against humility to make much account of them. If this was the true view, then also it must be Christ's view; and so a very depressed way of looking at their calling and their encouragements might set in. The Apostle will not allow this. He thinks, and they are to think, that it is the same question that is being fought out in their case as in his — the same forces are arrayed against one another in both cases — and the victory in both cases will be equally momentous. So he would quicken their sense of the situation by the energy and vivacity of his own convictions. It is unquestionable that Christians suffer much loss by indulging a certain bastard humility, which leads them to underrate the solemnity of the interest attaching to their own history. This renders them inattentive to the serious eyes with which Christ their Master is looking down upon it.

CHAPTER 6.

THE MIND OF CHRIST. — PHILIPPIANS 2:1-4 (R.V.).

Is the verses last considered the Apostle had begun to summon his Philippian friends to Christian duty. But so far his words bear the character only of occasional exhortation, which falls naturally in as he dwells upon his own circumstances and on theirs. Associated as they have been and are, let there be no mistake as to the central bond between him and them. Let the Philippian believers partake increasingly in his own glowing apprehensions of the Christian calling. Let them abound in the loving, steadfast, energetic, expectant life in which men are united who have become acquainted with Christ.

But he thinks fit to press the theme in a more set and deliberate way. For it is no light thing to awaken in men's hearts a right impression of what it is to be a Christian; or, if it has been awakened, to nurse it to due strength. These Christians possessed some insight into the world of truth which held the mind of Paul; they had some experience of evangelical impression: in these things they had a happy fellowship with one another and with their great teacher. But all this must be affirmed and embodied, in the conflict and ministry of Christian life. It must prove strong enough for that. Deeds are the true confession of our faith; they are the verification of our religious experience. And in this practical form we must overcome, not the temptations of other people or other ages, but our own. There is no more dangerous working of unbelief than that in which it never questions the doctrinal theory, but renders our Christianity cold and slack, and leads us to indulge a preference for a religion that goes easy. Could we but see as we are seen, we should find this to be a matter of endless lamentation.

Temptations to rivalry and discord were working at Philippi. We are not obliged to think that they had gone very far; but one could see a risk that they might go further. The Apostle has it in his heart to expel this evil, by promoting the principles and dispositions that are opposed to it. And in this work the Philippians themselves must embark with all their might.

It has been remarked already that causes are easily found to account for rivalries and misunderstandings springing up in those primitive Christian congregations. The truth is, however, that in all ages and conditions of the Church these dangers are nigh at hand. Self-seeking and self-exaltation are

forms in which sin works most easily, and out of these come rivalry and discord by the very nature of the case. Eager grasping at our own objects leads to disregard of the rights and interests of others; and thence come wars. Danger in this direction was visible to the Apostle.

It may be asked how this should be, if the Philippians were genuine and hearty Christians, such as the Apostle's commendations bespeak them? Here a principle comes to light which deserves to be considered. Even those who have cordially embraced Christianity, and who have loyally given effect to it in some of its outstanding applications, are wonderfully prone to stop short. They do not perceive, or they do not care to realise, the bearing of the same principles, which they have already embraced, upon whole regions of human life and human character; they do not seriously lay to heart the duties Christianity imposes or the faults it rebukes in those departments. They are pleased to have won so much ground, and do not think about the Canaanites that still hold *their* ground. So, in whole regions of life, the carnal mind is allowed to work on, undetected and practically unopposed. This tendency is aided by the facility we have in disguising from ourselves the true character of dispositions and actions, when these do not quite plainly affront Christian rules. Self-assertion and bad temper, for example, can put on the character of honest firmness and hearty zeal. More particularly, when religious principles have led us into certain lines of action, we are apt to take for granted that all is right we do in those lines. Religious zeal leads a man to take trouble and incur responsibility in Church work. Under this notion, then, he readily persuades himself that all his Church work is conscientious and disinterested; yet it may be largely and deeply tainted with the impulses of the fleshly mind. In a measure it might be so here. The Philippians might be generally a company of sincerely Christian people. And yet the churchmanship of some of them might disclose sad tokens of selfishness and bitterness. Therefore they must be called to give heed to the principles and to give effect to the motives that expel those sins.

In all this we may feel ourselves in the region of commonplaces; we know it all so well. But the very point in hand is that for the Apostle these are not commonplaces. He is greatly in earnest about the matter, and his heart is full of it. We do not understand him until we begin to sympathise with his sorrow and his anxiety. This is for him no mere matter of expedencies or of appearances. He is striving for the victory of grace in the souls of his beloved friends; for the glory of Christ; for his own comfort and success as Christ's minister. All these are, as it were, at stake upon this question of

the life of the Philippian Church proving to be, under the influence of Christ, lowly, loving, and answerable to the gospel.

No one more than Paul appreciates the value of good theological principles; and no one more than he lays stress on the mercy which provides a gracious and a full salvation. But no one more than he is intent upon Christian practice; for if practice is not healed and quickened, then salvation ceases to be real, the promises wither unfulfilled, Christ has failed. We may well feel it to be a great question whether our own sympathy with him on such points is growing and deepening. The Kingdom of God within us must exist in a light and love for which goodness is a necessity, and evil a grief and heart-break. But if it is not so with us, where do we stand?

In four clauses the Apostle appeals to great Christian motives, which are to give strength to his main appeal — “If there be any comfort (or store of cheering counsel) in Christ Jesus, if any consolation of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any tender mercies or compassions”; in a fifth clause he draws a motive from the regard they might have for his own most-earnest desires — fulfil ye my joy; and then comes the exhortation itself, which is to unity of mind and heart — “that ye be of the same mind, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind.” This, in turn, is followed by clauses that fix the practical sense of the general exhortation.

It has been made a question whether the Apostle means to say, “If there be among you, Philippians, influences and experiences such as these,” or “If there be anywhere in the Church of God.” But surely he means both. He appeals to great practical articles of faith and matters of experience. The Church of God believes them and claims a part in them. So does the Church of Philippi, in its degree.” But there may be a great deal more in them than the Philippian believers are aware of — more in them as truths and promises; more in them as contemplated and realised by riper Christians, like Paul himself. He appeals, certainly, to what existed for the faith of the Philippians; but also to that “much more” which might open to them if their faith was enlarged.

The “comfort” or cheering counsel “in Christ” is the fulness of gospel help and promise. Great need of this is owned by all believers; and, coming as needed succour to them all, it may well bind them all together in the sense of common need and common help. As it comes from the good Shepherd Himself to all and each, so it is conceived to be ever sounding in the Church, passing from one believer to another, addressed by each to each as

common succour and common comfort. Hence, in the next place, there comes into view the mutual ministry of “consolation” which Christians owe to one another, since they “receive” one another, and are to do to one another as Christ has done to them. Here the consolation acquires a special character, from the individual affection and friendship breathed into it by the Christian, who carries it to his neighbour to encourage and cheer him on his way. This love of the Christian to his brother, which comes from God, is itself a means of grace; and therefore the “consolation of love” deserves to be distinctly named.

The “fellowship of the Spirit” (see ^{<471313>}2 Corinthians 13:13) is the common participation of the Holy Spirit of God in His gracious presence and working. Without this no one could have a real share in Christian benefits. The Spirit reveals to us the Son and the Father, and enables us to abide in the Son and in the Father. He brings us into communion with the mind of God as revealed in His word. He makes real to us the things of the Kingdom of God; and it is He who opens to us their worth and sweetness, especially the lovingkindness which breathes in them all. Through Him we are enabled to exercise Christian affections, desires, and services. It is He, in a word, through whom we are participant in the life of salvation; and in that life He associates together all who share His indwelling. The Apostle supposes that no Christian could ever contemplate without, shall we say, a pang of gratitude, the condescension, the gentleness, and the patience of this ministration. And as all Christians are recipient together of so immense a benefit, they might well feel it as a bond between them all. But more especially, as the Holy Spirit in this dispensation evinces a most Divine love and kindness — for what but love could be the spring of it? — so also the upshot of all His work is the revelation of God in love. For love is at the heart of all God’s promises and benefits; they are never understood until we reach the love that is in them. And God is love. So the love of God is shed abroad in the hearts of believers through the Holy Spirit given to them. Hence this is the leading view of that which the Spirit comes to do: He comes to make us members of a system in which love rules; and He inspires all loving affections and dispositions proper to make us congruous members of so high and good a world.

Therefore, in the fourth place, it is to be supposed that “tender mercies and compassions” in human breasts are abundant where the fellowship of the Spirit is. How abundant they might be; surely also in some measure they must be present; they must abound amid all human infirmities and mistakes. All kinds of gentle, friendly, faithful, wise, and patient dispositions might

be expected. They are the fruits of the country in which Christians have come to dwell.

To all these the Apostle appeals. Perhaps a pathos is audible in the form of his appeal. "If there be any." Alas! is there then any? Is there some at least, if not much? For if all these had been duly present to the faith and in the life of the Church, they would have spoken their lesson for themselves, and had not needed Paul to speak for them.

The form of appeal, "Fulfil ye my joy," brings up one more motive — the earnest desires of one who loved them wisely and well, and whom they, whatever their shortcomings, loved in turn. It is worth observing that the motive power here does not lie merely, in the consideration "Would you not like to give me pleasure?" The Philippians knew how Paul had at heart their true welfare and their true dignity. That which, if it came to pass, would so gladden him, must be something great and good for them. If their own judgment of things was cold might it not take fire from the contagion of his? The loving solicitude of a keener-sighted and a more single-hearted Christian, the solicitude which makes his heart throb and his voice tremble as he speaks, has often startled slumbering brethren into a consciousness of their own insensibility, and awakened them to worthier outlooks.

In regard to all these considerations, the main point is to catch sight of the moral and spiritual scenery as the Apostle saw it. Otherwise the words may leave us as dull as they found us. For him there had come into view a wonderful world of love. Love had come forth preparing at great cost and with great pains a new destiny for men. Love had brought Paul and the other believers, one by one, into this higher region. And it proved to be a region in which love was the ground on which they stood, and love the heaven over their heads, and love the air they breathed. And here love was coming to be their own new nature, love responsive to the love of Father, Son, and Spirit, and love going out from those who had been so blessed to bless and gladden others. This was the true, the eternal goodness, the true, the eternal blessedness; and it was theirs. This was what faith embraced in Him "who loved me and gave Himself for me." This was what faith claimed right to be and do. If this was not so, Christianity was reduced to nothing. If a man have not love, he is nothing (1 Corinthians 13.). "Is there any truth at all in this glorious faith of ours? Do you believe it at all? Have you felt it at all? Fulfil then my joy." Unity of mind and of heart is the thing inculcated. Under the influence of the great objects of faith and of the motive forces of Christianity this was to be expected. Their ways of

thinking and their ways of feeling, however different, should be so moulded in Christ as to reach full mutual understanding and full mutual affection. Nor should they rest contented when either of these failed; for that would be contentment with defeat; but Christ's followers are to aim at victory.

It is obvious to say here that cases might arise in which turbulent or contentious persons might make it impossible for the rest of the Church, however well disposed, to secure either one accord or one mind. But the Apostle does not suppose that case to have arisen. Nothing had occurred at Philippi which Christian sense and Christian feeling might not arrange. When the case supposed does occur, there are Christian ways of dealing with it. Still more obviously one might say that conscientious differences of opinion, and that even on matters of moment, must inevitably occur sooner or later; and a general admonition to be of one mind does not meet such a case. Perhaps it may be said in reply that the Church and the Christians have hardly conceived how much might be attained in the way of agreement if our Christianity were sincere enough, thorough enough, and affectionate enough. In that case there might be wonderful attainment in finding agreement, and in dismissing questions on which it is not needful to agree. But if we are not to soar so "high as this, it may at least be said that, while conscientious diversities of judgment are not to be disguised, they may be dealt with, among believers, in a Christian way, with due emphasising of the truth agreed upon, and with a prevailing determination to speak truth in love. Here again, however, the Apostle recognises no serious difficulty of this kind at Philippi. The difficulties were such as could be got over. There was no good reason why the Philippians should not in their Church life exhibit harmony; it would be so, if Christian influences were cordially admitted into minds and hearts, and if they made a fit estimate of the supreme importance of unity in Christ. The same thing may be said of innumerable cases in later times in which Christians have divided and contended. It is right to say, however, that these considerations are not to be applied without qualification to all kinds and degrees of separation between Christians. It is a cause for sorrow that denominational divisions are so many; and they have often been both cause and consequence of unchristian feeling. Yet when men part peaceably to follow out their deliberate convictions, to which they cannot give effect together, and when in doing so they do not unchurch or condemn one another, there may be less offence against Christian charity than in cases where a communion, professedly one, is the scene of bitterness and strife. In either case indeed there is something to regret and probably something to blame; but the former of the two cases is by no means necessarily the worse.

In following out the line of duty and privilege set before them by the Apostle, Christians have to get the better of arrogance and selfishness (vv. 3, 4).

In the Church of Christ no man has a right to do anything from a spirit of strife or vainglory. Strife is the disposition to oppose and thwart our neighbour's will, either from mere delight in contest, or in order to assert for our own will a prevalence which will gratify our pride; and this is the animating principle of "faction." "Vainglory" is the disposition to think highly of ourselves, to claim for ourselves a great place, and to assert it as against the claims of others. In the jostle of the world it may perhaps be admitted that forces acting on these lines are not without their use. They compensate one another, and some measure of good emerges from their unlovely energies. But such things are out of place among Christians, for they are right against the spirit of Christianity; and Christianity relies for its equipoise and working progress on principles of quite another kind. Among Christians each is to be lowly-minded, conscious of his own defects and of his ill-desert. And this is to work in the way of our esteeming others to be better than ourselves. For we are conscious of our own inward and deep defect as we cannot be of any other person's. And it is abundantly possible that others may be better than we are and safe for us to give full effect to that possibility. It is said, indeed, that we may possibly have conclusive reason to believe that certain other persons, even in Christ's Church, are worse than we are. But, apart from the precariousness of such judgments, it is enough to say it is not for us to proceed on such a judgment or to give effect to it. We all await a higher judgment; until, then it becomes us to take heed to our own spirit and walk in lowliness of mind.

Selfishness ("looking to its own things," ver. 4), as well as arrogance, needs to be resisted; and this is an even more pervading and inward evil. In dealing with it we are not required to have no eye at all to our own things; for indeed they are our providential charge, and they must be cared for; but we are required to look *not only* on our own, but every man on the things of others. We have to learn to put ourselves in another's place, to recognise how things affect him, to sympathise with his natural feelings in reference to them, and to give effect in speech and conduct to the impressions hence arising. So a Christian man is to "love his neighbour as himself" — only with a tenderer sense of obligation and a consciousness of more constraining motive than could be attained by the Israelite of old. Lovingly to do right to a brother's claims and to his welfare should be as cogent a principle of action with us as to care for our own.

Arrogance and selfishness — perhaps disguised in fairer forms — had bred the disturbance at Philippi. The same baleful forces are present everywhere in all the Churches to this day, and have often run riot in the House of God. How shall the ugliness and the hatefulness of the every-day selfishness, the every-day self-assertion, the every-day strifes of Christians, be impressed upon our minds? How are we to be awakened to our true calling in lowliness and in love?

CHAPTER 7.

THE MIND OF CHRIST (CONTINUED). — PHILIPPIANS 2:5-11 (R.V.).

IT proves hard to make us aware of the sin and the misery involved in the place commonly allowed to Self. Some of the conspicuous outrages on Christian decency we do disapprove and avoid; perhaps we have embarked in a more serious resistance to its domination. Yet, after all, how easily and how complacently do we continue to give scope to it! In forms of self-assertion, of arrogance, of eager and grasping competition, it breaks out. It does so in ordinary life, in what is called public life, and, where it is most offensive of all, in Church life. Hence we fail so much in readiness to make the case of others our own, and to be practically moved by their interests, rights, and claims. There are certainly great differences here; and some, in virtue of natural sympathy Or Christian grace, attain to remarkable degrees of generous service. Yet these also, if they know themselves, know how energetically self comes upon the field, and how much ground it covers. Many among us are doing good to others; but does it never strike us that there is a distant and arrogant way of doing good? Many in Christian society are kind, and that is well; but undoubtedly there are self-indulgent ways of being kind.

Having to deal with this evil energy of self, the Apostle turns at once to the central truth of Christianity, the person of Christ. Here he finds the type set, the standard fixed, of what Christianity is and means; or rather, here he finds a great fountain, from which a mighty stream proceeds; and before it all the forms of self-worship must be swept away. In bringing this out the Apostle makes a most remarkable statement regarding the Incarnation and the history of our Lord. He reveals, at the same time, the place in his own mind held by the thought. of Christ coming into the world, and the influence that thought had exerted on the formation of his character. He bids us recognise in Christ the supreme exemplification of one who is looking away from his own things — whose mind is filled, whose action is inspired by concern for others. This is so at the root of the interposition of Christ to save us that the principle becomes imperative and supreme for all Christ's followers.

We have to consider the facts as they presented themselves to the mind of Paul, according to the wisdom given to him, that we may estimate the motive which he conceives them to reveal, and the obligation which is thus laid upon all who name the name of Christ and take rank among His followers.

The Apostle, let us first observe, speaks of the Incarnation as that reveals itself to us, as it offers itself to the contemplation of men. To involve himself in discussion of inner mysteries concerning the Divine nature and the human, and the manner of their union, as these are known to God, is not, and could not, be his object. The mysteries must be asserted, but much about them is to continue unexplained. He is to appeal to the impression derivable, as he maintains, from the plainest statement of the facts which have been delivered to faith. This being the object in view, determines the cast of his language. It is the *manner* of being, the *manner* of living, the *manner* of acting characteristic of Christ at successive stages, which is to occupy our minds. Hence the Apostle's thought expresses itself in phrases such as "*form of God,*" "*form of a servant,*" and the like. We are to see one way of existing succeeding another in the history of Christ.

First, our Lord is recognised as already existing before the beginning of His earthly history; and in that existence He contemplates and orders what His course shall be. This is plain; for in the seventh verse He is spoken of as emptying Himself, and thus assuming the likeness of men. For the apostle, then, it was a fixed thing that He who was born in Nazareth pre-existed in a more glorious nature, and took ours by a notable condescension. This preexistence of Christ is the first thing to consider when we would make clear to ourselves how Christ, being true man, differs from other men. In this point Paul and John and the writer to the Hebrews unite their testimony in the most express and emphatic way; as we hear our Lord Himself also saying, "Before Abraham was, I am," and speaking of the glory which He had before the world was. But what manner of existence this was is also set forth. He "existed in the form of God." The same word "form" recurs presently in the expression "the form of a servant." It is distinguished from the words "likeness," "fashion," which are expressed by other Greek terms.

Frequently we use this word "form" in a way which contrasts it with the true being, or makes it denote the outward as opposed to the inward. But according to the usage which prevailed among thinking men when the Apostle wrote, the expression should not be understood to point to

anything superficial, accidental, superimposed. No doubt it is an expression which describes the Being by adverting to the attributes which, as it were, He wore, or was clothed with. But the word carries us especially to those attributes of the thing described which are characteristic; by which it is permanently distinguished to the eye or to the mind; which denote its true nature because they rise out of that nature; the attributes which, to our minds, express the essence. So here. He existed, how? In the possession and use of all that pertains to the Divine nature. His manner of existence was, what? The Divine manner of existence. The characters through which Divine existence is revealed were His. He subsisted in the form of God. This was the manner of it, the glorious “form” which ought to fix and hold our minds.

If any one should suggest that, according to this text, the pre-existent Christ might be only a creature, though having the Divine attributes and the Divine mode of life, he would introduce a mass of contradictions most gratuitously. The Apostle’s thought is simply this: For Christ the mode of existence is first of all Divine; then, by-and-by, a new form rises into view. Our Lord’s existence did not begin (according to the New Testament writers) when He was born, when He was found in fashion as a man, sojourning with us. He came to this world from some previous state. One asks from what state? Before He took the form of man, in what form of existence was He found? The Apostle answers, In the form of God.

To Him, therefore, with and in the Father, we have learned to ascribe all wisdom and power, all glory and blessedness, all holiness and all majesty. Specially through Him the worlds were made, and in Him they consist. The fulness, the sufficiency, the essential strength of Godhead were His. The exercise and manifestation of all these were His form of being. One might expect, then, that in any process of self-manifestation to created beings in which it might please Him to go forth, the expression of His supremacy and transcendence should be written on the face of it.

The next thought is expressed in the received translation by the words “thought it no robbery to be equal with God.” So truly and properly Divine was He that equality with God could not appear to Him or be reckoned by Him as anything else than His own. He counted such equality no robbery, arrogance, or wrong. To claim it, and all that corresponds to it, could not appear to Him something assumed without right, but rather something assumed with the best right. So taken, these words would complete the Apostle’s view of the original Divine pre-eminence of the Son of God.

They would express, so to say, the equity of the situation, from which all that follows should be estimated. Had it pleased the Son of God to express only, and to impress on all minds only, His equality with God, this could not have seemed to Him encroachment or wrong.

I think a good deal can be said for this. But the sense which, on the whole, is now approved by commentators is that indicated by the Revised Version. This takes the clause not as still dwelling on the primeval glory of the Son of God, and what was implied in it, but rather as beginning to indicate how a new situation arose, pointing out the dispositions out of which the Incarnation came. "He counted it not a prize to be on an equality with God." To hold by this was not the great object with Him. In any steps He might take, in any forthgoings He might enter on, the Son of God might have aimed at maintaining and disclosing equality with God. That alternative was open. But this is not what we see; no holding by that, no solicitude about that appears. His procedure, His actings reveal nothing of this kind. What we see filling His heart and fixing His regard is not what might be due to Himself or assumed fitly by Himself, but what might bring deliverance and blessedness to us.^{f2}

On the contrary, "He emptied Himself, taking the form of a servant, being made in the likeness of men." In the Incarnation our Lord assumed the "form" of a servant, or slave; for in the room of the authority of the Creator now appears the subjection of the creature. He who gave form to all things, and Himself set the type of what was highest and best in the universe, transcending meanwhile all created excellence in His uncreated glory, now is seen conforming Himself to the type or model or likeness of one of his creatures, of man. He comes into human existence as men do, and He continues in it as men do. Yet it is not said that He is now merely a man, or has become nothing but a man; He is in the likeness of men and is found in fashion as a man.

In taking this great step the Apostle says, "He emptied Himself." The emptying is perhaps designedly opposed to the thought of accumulation or self-enrichment conveyed in the phrase "He counted it not a prize." However this may be, the phrase is in itself a remarkable expression.

It seems most certain, on the one hand, that this cannot import that He who was with God and was God could renounce His own essential nature and cease to be Divine. The assertion of a contradiction like this involves the mind in mere darkness. The notion is excluded by other scriptures; for He who came on earth among us is Immanuel, God with us: and it is not

required by the passage before us; for the “emptying” can at most apply to the “form” of God — the exercise and enjoyment of Divine attributes such as adequately express the Divine nature; and it may, perhaps, not extend its sense even so far; for the writer significantly abstains from carrying his thought further than the bare word “He emptied Himself.”

On the other hand, we are to beware of weakening unduly this great testimony. Certainly it fixes our thoughts on this, at least, that our Lord, by becoming man, had for His, truly *for His*, the experience of human limitation, human weakness and impoverishment, human dependence, human subjection, singularly contrasting with the glory and plenitude of the form of God. This became His. It was so emphatically real, it became at the Incarnation so emphatically the form of existence on which He entered, that it is the thing eminently to be regarded, reverently to be dwelt upon. This emptiness, instead of that fulness, is to draw and fix our regard. Instead of the form of God, there rises before us this true human history, this lowly manhood — and it took place by His emptying Himself.

Various persons and schools have thought it right to go further. The word here used has appeared to them to suggest that if the Son of God did not renounce His Godhead, yet the Divine nature in Him must have bereaved itself of the Divine attributes, or withheld itself from the use and exercise of them; so that the all-fulness no longer was at His disposal. In this line they have gone on to describe or assign the mode of self-emptying which the Incarnation should imply.

It does not appear to me that one can lay down positions as to the internal privations of One whose nature is owned to be essentially Divine, without falling into confusion and darkening counsel. But perhaps we may do well to cherish the impression that this self-emptying on the part of the eternal Son of God, for our salvation, involves realities which we cannot conceive or put in any words. There was more in this emptying of Himself than we can think or say.

He emptied Himself when He became man. Here we have the eminent example of a Divine mystery, which, being revealed, remains a mystery never to be adequately explained, and which yet proves full of meaning and full of power. The Word was made flesh. He through whom all worlds took being, was seen in Judea in the lowliness of that practical historical manhood. We never can explain this. But if we believe it all things become new for us; the meaning it proves to have for human history is inexhaustible.

He emptied Himself, “taking the form of a servant,” or bonds slave. For the creature is in absolute subjection alike to God’s authority and, to His providence; and so Christ came to be, He entered on a discipline of Subjection and obedience. In particular He was made after the likeness of men. He was born as other children are; He grew as other children grow; body and mind took shape for Him under human conditions.

And so He was “found in fashion as a man.” Could words express more strongly how wonderful it is in the Apostle’s eyes that He should so be found? He lived His life and made His mark in the world in human fashion — His form, His mien, His speech, His acts His way of life declared Him man. But being so, He humbled Himself to a strange and great obedience. Subjection, and in that subjection obedience, is the part of every creature. But the obedience which Christ was called to learn was special. A heavy task was laid upon Him. He was made under the law; and bearing the burden of human sin, He wrought redemption. In doing so many great interests fell to Him to be cared for; and this was done by Him, not in the manner of Godhead which speaks and it is done, but with the pains and labour of a faithful servant. “I have a commandment,” He said, as He faced the Jews, who would have had His Messianic work otherwise ordered (~~4124~~ John 12:49).

This experience deepened into the final experience of the cross. Death is the signature of failure and disgrace. Even with sinless creatures it seems so. Their beauty and their use are past; their worth is measured and exhausted; they die. More emphatically in a nature like ours, which aims at fellowship with God and immortality, death is significant this way, and bears the character of doom. So we are taught to think that death entered by sin. But the violent and cruel death of crucifixion, inflicted for the worst crimes, is most significant this way. What it comprehended for our Lord we cannot measure. We know that He looked forward to it with the most solemn expectation; and when it came the experience was overwhelming. Yes, He submitted to the doom and blight of death, in which death He made atonement and finished transgression. The incarnation was the way in which our Lord bound Himself to our woeful fortunes, and carried to us the benefits with which He would enrich us; and His death was for our sins, endured that we might live. But the Apostle does not here dwell on the reasons why Christ’s obedience must take this road. It is enough that for reasons concerning our welfare, and the worthy achievement of the Father’s Divine purposes, Christ bowed Himself to so great lowliness. A dark and sad death — a true obedience unto death — became the portion

of the Son of God. "I am the Living One, and I was dead." So complete was the self-emptying, the humiliation, the obedience.

"Therefore God also hath highly exalted Him, and given Him the Name that is above every name." For still we must think of Him as One that has come down into the region of the creatures, the region in which we are distinguished by names, and are capable of higher and lower in endless degrees. God, dealing with Him so situated, acts in a manner rightly corresponding to this great self-dedication, so as to utter God's mind upon it. He has set Him on high, and given Him the Name that is above every name; so that Divine honour shall be rendered to Him by all creation, and knees bowed in worship to Him everywhere, and all shall own Him Lord — that is, partaker of Divine Sovereignty. All this is "to the glory of the Father," seeing that in all this the worthiness and beauty of God's being and ways come to light with a splendour heretofore unexampled.

So then we may say, perhaps, that as in the humiliation He who is God experienced what it is to be man, now in the exaltation He who is man experiences what it is to be God.

But the point to dwell on chiefly is this consideration — What is it that attracts so specially the Father's approbation? What does so is Christ's great act of self-forgetting love. That satisfies and rests the Divine mind. Doubtless the Son's pure and perfect character, and the perfection of His whole service, were on all accounts approved, but specially the *mind* of Christ revealed in His self-forgetting devotion. *Therefore* God has highly exalted Him

For in the first place, Christ in this work of His is Himself the revelation of the Father. All along the Father's heart is seen disclosed. It was in fellowship with the Father, always delighted in Him, that the history was entered on; in harmony with Him it was accomplished. Throughout we have before us not only the mind of the Son, but the mind of the Father that sent Him.

And then, in the next place, as the Son, sent forth into the world, and become one of us, and subject to vicissitude, accomplishes His course, it is fitting for the Father to watch, to approve, and to crown the service; and He who has so given Himself for God and man must take the place due to such a "mind" and to such an obedience.

Let us observe it then: what was in God's eye, and ought to be in ours, is not only the dignity of the person, the greatness of the condescension, the

perfection of obedience and patience of endurance, but, in the heart of all these, *the mind of Christ*. That was the inspiration of the whole marvellous history, vivifying it throughout. Christ, indeed, was not One who could so care for us, as to fail in His regard to any interest of His Father's name or kingdom; nor could He take any course really unseemly, because unworthy of Himself. But carrying with Him all that is due to His Father, and all that befits His Father's Child and Servant, the wonderful thing is how His heart yearns over men, how His course shapes itself to the necessities of our case, how all that concerns Himself disappears as He looks on the fallen race. A worthy deliverance for them, consecrating them to God in the blessedness of life eternal — this is in His eye, to be reached by Him through all kinds of lowliness, obedience, and suffering. On this His heart was set; this gave meaning and character to every step of His history. This was the mind of the good Shepherd that laid down His life for the sheep. And this is what completes and consecrates all the service, and receives the Father's triumphant approbation. This is the Lamb of God. There never was a Lamb like this.

How all this was and is in the Eternal Son in His Divine nature we cannot suitably conceive. In some most sublime and perfect manner we own it to be there. But we can think of it and speak of it as the "mind of Christ": as it came to light in the Man of Bethlehem, who, amid all the possibilities of the Incarnation, is seen setting His face so steadily one way, whose life is all of one piece, and to whom we ascribe grace. "Ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ." Therefore God has highly exalted Him; and given Him the Name that is above every name. This is the right way. This is the right life.

Are we followers of Christ? Are we in touch with His grace? Do we yield ourselves to His will and way? Do we renounce the melancholy obstructiveness which sets us at odds with Christ? Do we count it our wisdom now to come into His school? Then, let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, this lowly, loving mind. Let it. Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others. Do nothing through strife or vainglory. In lowliness of mind let each esteem the other better than himself. Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and envy, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice, and be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you. If there is any comfort in Christ, if any consolation of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any tender mercies

and compassions, let this be so. Let this mind be in you; and find ways of showing it. But, indeed, if it be in you, it will find ways to show itself.

The Church of Christ has not been without likeness to its Lord, and service to its Lord, yet it has come far short in showing to the world the mind of Christ. We often “show the Lord’s death.” But in His death were the mighty life and the conclusive triumph of Christ’s love. Let the life also of Christ Jesus be manifest in our mortal body.

We see here what the vision of Christ was which opened itself to Paul, — which, glowing in his heart, sent him through the world, seeking the profit of many, that they might be saved. This was in his mind, the wonderful condescension and devotion of the Son of God. “It pleased God to reveal His Son in me.” “God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ Jesus.” “Ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, how that though He was rich yet for our sakes He became poor, that we through His poverty might be made rich.” “He loved me and gave Himself for me.” And in various forms and degrees the manifestation of this same grace has astonished, and conquered, and inspired all those who have greatly served Christ in the Church in seeking to do good to men. Let us not separate ourselves from this fellowship of Christ; let us not be secluded from this mind of Christ. As we come to Him with our sorrows, and sins, and wants, let us drink into His mind. Let us sit at His feet and learn of Him.

A line of contemplation, hard to follow yet inspiring, opens up in considering the Incarnation of our Lord as permanent. No day is coming in which that shall have to be looked upon as gone away into the past. This is suggestive as to the tie between Creator and creature, as to the bridge between Infinite and finite, to be evermore found in Him. But it may suffice here to have indicated the topic.

It is more to the point in connection with this passage to call attention to a lesson for the present day. Of late great emphasis has been laid by earnest thinkers upon the reality of Christ’s human nature. Anxiety has been felt to do full right to that humanity which the Gospels set before us so vividly. This has been in many ways a happy service to the Church. In the hands of divines the humanity of Christ has sometimes seemed to become shadowy and unreal, through the stress laid on His proper Godhead; and now men have become anxious to possess their souls with the human side of things, even perhaps at the cost of leaving the Divine side untouched. The recoil

has carried men quite naturally into a kind of humanitarianism, sometimes deliberate, sometimes unconscious. Christ is thought of as the ideal Man, who, just because He is the ideal Man, is morally indistinguishable from God, and is in the closest fellowship with God. Yet He grows on the soil of human nature, He is fundamentally and only human. And this, it is implied, is enough; it covers all we want. But we see this was not Paul's way of thinking. The real humanity was necessary for him, because he desiderated a real incarnation. But the true original Divine nature was also necessary. For so he discerned the love — the grace, and the gift by grace; so he felt that the Eternal God had bowed down to bless him in and by His Son. It makes a great difference to religion when men are persuaded to forego this faith.

CHAPTER 8.

WORKING AND SHINING. — PHILIPPIANS 2:12-18 (R.V.).

AFTER his great appeal to the mind of Christ, the Apostle can pursue his practical object; and he can do so with a certain tranquillity, confident that the forces he has just set in motion will not fail to do their work. But yet that same appeal itself has tended to broaden and deepen the conception of what should be aimed at. He had deprecated the arrogant and the selfish mind, as these are opposed to lovingkindness and regard for others. But now, in presence of the great vision of the Incarnation and obedience of Christ, the deeper note of lowliness must be struck in fit accord with that of love; not only lowliness in the way of doing ready honour to others, but deep and adoring lowliness towards God, such as is due both from creatures and from sinners. For if Christ's love fulfilled itself in such a perfect humility, how deeply does it become us to bear towards God in Christ a mind of penitence and gratitude, of loving awe and wonder, such as shall at the same time for ever exclude from our bearing towards others both pride and self-seeking. In this way the one practical object suggested by the circumstances at Philippi — namely, loving unity — now allies itself naturally with ideas of complete and harmonious Christian life; and various views of that life begin to open. But each aspect of it still proves to be connected with the gracious and gentle mind of Christ, in the lowly form of that mind which is appropriate for a sinner who is also a believer.

So then they are to apply themselves to the "calling wherewith they are called," in a spirit of "fear and trembling." The phrase is a common one with the Apostle (~~4013~~ 1 Corinthians 2:3; ~~4075~~ 2 Corinthians 7:15; ~~4086~~ Ephesians 5:6). He uses it where he would express a state of mind in which willing reverence is joined with a certain sensitive anxiety to escape dangerous mistakes and to perform duty well. And it is fitly called for here, for

1. If lowliness so became the Divine Saviour, who was full of grace, wisdom, and power, then what shall be the mind of those who in great guilt and need have found part in the salvation, and who are going forward to its fulness? What shall be the mind of those who, in this experience, are looking up to Christ — looking up to lowliness? Surely not the spirit of strife and vainglory (ver. 3), but of fear and trembling — the mind that

dreads to be presumptuous and arrogant, because it finds the danger to be still near.

2. The salvation has to be wrought out. It must come to pass in your case in the line of your own endeavor. Having its power and fulness in Christ, and bestowed by Him on you, yet this deliverance from distance, estrangement, darkness, unholiness, is given to believers to be wrought out; it comes as a right to be realised, and as a power to be exercised, and as a goal to be attained. Think of this, — you have in hand your own salvation — great, Divine, and wonderful — to be wrought out. Can you go about it without fear and trembling? Consider what you are — consider what you believe — consider what you seek — and what a spirit of lowly and contrite eagerness will pervade your life! This holds so much the more, because the salvation itself stands so much in likeness to Christ — that is to say, in a loving lowliness. Let a man think how much is in him that tends, contrariwise, to self-assertion and self-seeking, and he will have reason enough to fear and tremble as he lays fresh hold on the promises, and sets his face to the working out of this his own salvation.

3. This very working out, from whom does it come? Are you the explanation and last source of it? What does it mean? Wherever it takes place, it means that, in a very special sense, God's mighty presence and power are put forth in us to will and to do. Shall not this thought quell our petulance? Where is room now for anything but fear and trembling — a deep anxiety to be lowly, obedient, compliant?

Whether, therefore, we look to the history of the Saviour, or to the work to which our own life is devoted, or to the power that animates that work and on which it depends — in all alike we find ourselves committed to the lowly mind; and in all alike we find ourselves beset with a wealth of free beneficence, which lays obligation on us to be self-forgetting and loving. We are come into a wonderful world of compassionate love. That is the platform on which we stand — the light we see by — the music that fills our ears — the fragrance that rises on every side. If we are to live here, there is only one way for it — there is only one kind of life that can live in this region. And, being as we are, alas! so strangely coarse and hard — even if this gospel gladdens us, there may well thrill through our gladness a very honest and a very contrite “fear and trembling.”

“Now all this is by the Apostle persuasively urged upon his Philippian children (ver. 12): “As ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence.” For, indeed, it proves easy

comparatively for our human indolence to yield to the spell of some great and forcible personality when he is present. It is even pleasant to allow ourselves to be borne on by the tide of his enthusiastic goodness. But when the Apostle was at Philippi, it might come easier to many of them to ‘feel the force and scope of their calling in Christ. And yet now that he was gone, now was the time for them to prove for themselves, and evince to others, the durable worth of the great discovery they had made, and the thoroughness of the decision which had transformed their lives. Now, also, was the time to show Paul himself, that their “obedience” was of the deep and genuine quality which alone could give content to him.

Such in general seems to be the scope of these two verses. But one or two of the points deserve to be considered a little before we go on.

Mark how emphatically the Apostle affirms the great truth, that every good thing accompanying salvation which comes to pass in Christians is of the mighty power and grace of God. Therefore Christianity must stand so much in asking and in thanking. It is God that worketh in you. He does it, and no other than He; it is His prerogative. He worketh to will and to do. The inclination of the heart and the purpose of the will are of Him; and the striving to bring forth into act and deed what has been so conceived — that also is of Him. He quickens those who were dead in trespasses and sins; He gives the renewing of the Holy Ghost; He makes His children perfect, working in them that which is well pleasing in His sight through Jesus Christ. All this He does in the exercise of His proper power, in the “exceeding greatness of His power to us-ward who believe” — “according to the working of His mighty power, which wrought in Christ when He was raised from the dead.” Apparently we are to take it that in the children of God there is the new heart, or new nature, in respect of which they are new creatures; and also the indwelling of God by His Spirit; and also the actual working of the same Spirit in all fruits. of righteousness which they bring forth to the glory and praise of God. And these three are so connected that regard should be had to all of them when we contemplate each.

He worketh to will and to do. From Him all godly desires and purposes proceed — from Him, every passage in our lives in which the “salvation that is in Christ Jesus” is by us received, put to proof, wrought out into the transactions of our lives. It must be so, if we will only think of it. For this “salvation” involves. an actual, and in principle a complete agreement with

God, affirmed and embodied in each right thought, and word, and deed. Whence could this. flow but from Himself?

In their statements and explanations about this. Christians have differed. The difference has been mainly on the point, how to make it clear that men are not dealt with as inert nor as irresponsible; that they must not hold themselves. excused from working on the ground that God works all. For all agree that men are called to the most serious earnestness of purpose and the most alert activity of action; but the theorising of this activity occasions debate. It is from the motive of trying to make more room for these indispensable elements on the human side, that modes of statement have been suggested which limit or explain away the Apostle's statement here. The motive is commendable, but the method is not commonly successful. All efforts. to divide the ground between God and man go astray. In the inward process of salvation, and especially in this "willing and doing," God does all, and also man does all. But God takes. precedence. For it is He that quickeneth the dead, and calleth things that are not as though they were. Here we may say, as the Apostle does. in another case, "This is a great mystery." Let us recognise it as a mystery bound up with any hope we ourselves have of proving to be children of God. And under the sense of it, with fear and trembling let us work, for it is God that worketh in us to will and to do.

He worketh in us to will. When I trace back any of my actions to the fountain where it takes. its rise as mine, I find that fountain in my will. The materials which I take up into my act, the impressions which gather together to create a situation for me, may all have their separate, history going back in the order of cause and effect to the beginning of the world; but that which makes it mine, is that I will, I choose, and thereupon I do it. Therefore also it is that I must answer for it, because it is mine. I willed it, and in. willing it I created something which pertains to me and to no other; something began which is. mine, and the responsibility for it cleaves only to me. But in the return to God through Christ, and it/ the working out of that salvation, there are acts of mine, most truly mine; and yet in these another Will, the Will of Him who saves, is most intimately concerned. He worketh in us to will. It is not an enslaving, but an emancipating energy. It brings about free action, yet such as fulfils a most gracious Divine purpose. So these "willings" embody a consent, a union of heart and mind and will, His and mine, the thought of which is enough to bow me to the ground with "fear and trembling." This is He who gathereth the dispersed of Israel into one.

On the other hand, the salvation is to be wrought out by us. To have faith in the Son of God in exercise and prevalence; to have heart and life formed to childlike love of God, and to the fulfilment of His will; to carry this out against the flesh and the world and the devil, — all this is a great career of endeavour and attainment. It is much to make the discoveries implied in it, finding out at each stage the meaning of it, and how it should take shape. It is much to have the heart brought to beat true to it, to love it, consent to it, be set upon it. It is much to embody it in faithful and successful practice in the rough school of life, with its actual collision and conflict. Now the nature and working of God's grace at each stage are of this kind, that it operates in three ways at least. It operates as a call, an effectual call, setting a man on to arise and go. It operates also in a way of instruction, setting us to learn lessons, teaching us how to live, as it is said in ^{<5021>}Titus 2:11, 12. And it operates as a power, as help in time of need. He that sits still at the call — he that will not be considerate to learn the lesson — he that will not cast himself on the strength perfected in weakness, that he may fulfil and do the Father's will — he is a man who despises and denies the grace of God.

Now what has been said of the believer's relation to the saving God prepares the way for referring to his office towards the world. Here the moral and practical theme which is in the Apostle's mind all through proves again to be in place: the lowly and loving mind will best discharge that office towards the world, which the arrogant and distempered mind would hinder. "Do all things without murmurings and disputings, that ye may be blameless and harmless."

A murmuring and disputatious temper — murmuring at what displeases us, and multiplying debate about it — is simply one form of the spirit which Paul deprecates all through this context. It is the sign of the disposition to value unduly one's own ease, one's own will, one's own opinion, one's own party, and to lie at the catch for opportunities to bring that feeling into evidence. Now observe the harm which the Apostle anticipates. It is your office to serve God by making a right impression on the world. How shall that come to pass? Chiefly, or at least primarily, the Apostle seems to say, by the absence of evil. At least, that is the most general and the safest notion of it with which to begin. Some, no doubt, make impressions by their eloquence, or by their wisdom, or by their enterprising and successful benevolence — though all these have dangers and drawbacks attending them, in so far as the very energy of action provides a shelter for unperceived self-will. Still, let them have their place and their praise. But

here is the line that might suit all. A man whose life stands clear of the world's deformities, under the influence of a light and a love from which the world is estranged, gradually makes an impression.

Now murmuring and disputing are precisely adapted to hinder this impression. And sometimes they hinder it in the case of people of high excellence — people who have much sound and strong principle, who have large benevolence, who are capable of making remarkable sacrifices to duty when they see it. Yet this vice, perhaps a surface vice, of murmuring and disputing, is so suggestive of a man's self being uppermost, it so unpleasantly forces itself in as the interpretation of the man, that his real goodness is little accounted of. At all events, the peculiar purity of the Christian character — its blamelessness and harmlessness, its innocence — does not in this case come to light. People say: "Ah, he is one of the mixed ones, like ourselves. Christian devoutness suits some people; they are sincere enough in it, very likely; but it leaves them, after all, pretty much as it found them."

I say no more about murmuring and disputing as these reveal themselves in our relations to others. But the same spirit, and attended in its operations with the same evil effects, may manifest itself in other ways besides that of unkindness to men. As frequently, perhaps, it may show itself in our behaviour towards God; and in that case it interferes at least as seriously with the shining of our light in the world.

Just as in the camp of Israel of old on many memorable occasions there arose a murmuring of the people against God, when His ways crossed their will, or seemed dark to their wisdom; just as, on such occasions, there broke out among the people the expression of doubt, dislike, and disputation, and they criticised those Divine dealings which should have been received with trust and lowliness, — so is it also, many a time, in the little world within us. There are such and such duties to be discharged and such and such trials to be encountered — or else a general course of duty is to be pursued under certain discouragements and perplexities. And, you submit, you do these things. But you do them with murmuring and disputing in your heart. Why should it be thus? "How is it fit," you say, "that such perplexities or such burdens should be appointed? Is it not reasonable, all things considered, that I should have more indulgence and greater facilities; or, at least, that I should be excused from this conflict and this burden-bearing for the present?" Meanwhile our conscience is satisfied because we have not rebelled in practice; and it takes no strict account of

the fretfulness which marred our act, or the grumbling which well-nigh withheld us from compliance. You are called, perhaps, to speak to some erring friend, or you have to go on a message of mercy to some one in affliction. Indolently you postpone it; and your heart begins to stretch out its arms and to cling to the careless temper it has begun to indulge. At last conscience stirs, conscience is up, and you have to do something. But what you do is done grudgingly, with a heart that is murmuring and disputing. Again, you are called to deny yourself some worldly pleasure; in Christian consistency you have to hold back from some form of dissipation; or you have to take up a position of singularity and separation from other people. Reluctantly you comply; only "murmuring and disputing." Now this inward temper may never come to any man's knowledge, but shall we suppose it does not tell on the character and the influence of the life? Can you, in that temper, play your part with the childlike, the cheerful, the dignified bearing, with the resemblance to Christ in your action, which God calls for? You cannot. The duty as to the husk and shell of it may be done; but there can be little radiation of Christ's likeness in the doing of it.

Notice the Apostle's conception of the function which believers are to discharge in the world. They are set in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation. These words were applied to the children of Israel of old on account of the stubborn insubordination with which they dealt with God; and they were applicable, for the same reason, to the Gentiles, among whom the gospel had come, but who had not bowed to it. Judged by the high and true standard, these Gentiles were crooked and perverse in their ways with one another, and still more so in their ways with God. Among them the Christians were to show what Christianity was, and what it could do. In the Christians was to appear, embodied, the testimony proposed to the crooked and perverse nation, a testimony against its perverseness, and yet revealing a remedy for it. In the persons of men, themselves originally crooked and perverse, this was to become plain and legible. Now, how? Why, by their being blameless and harmless, the sons of God without rebuke.

It has been remarked already that the special way in which we are to manifest to the world the light of Christianity is here represented as the way of blamelessness. That man aright represents the mind of Christ to the world, who in the world keeps himself unspotted from the world, — in whom men recognise a character that traces up to a purer source elsewhere. As years pass, as cross-lights fall upon the life, even in its most common and private workings, if it still proves that the man is cleansed by

the faith he holds, if the unruly working of interest and passion and will, give way in him to motives of a higher strain, men will be impressed. They will own that here is something rare and high, and that some uncommon cause is at the bottom of it. For the world knows well that even the better sort of men have their weaker side, often plainly enough revealed by the trials of time. Therefore steadfast purity makes, at last, a deep impression.

Innocence indeed is not the whole duty of a Christian; active virtue is required as well. The harmlessness called for is not a mere negative quality — it is supposed to be exhibited in an active life which strives to put on Christ Jesus. But the Apostle seems to lay stress especially on a certain quiet consistency, on a lowly and loving regard to the whole standard, which gives evenness and worthiness to the life. If you will do a Christian's office to the "perverse nation," you have to seek that they may have nothing against you except concerning the law of your God; you have to seek that your reproach may be exclusively the reproach of Christ, so that if at any time the malice of men seeks to misconstrue your actions, and lays to your charge things which you know not, your well-doing may silence them; and having no evil thing to say of you, they may be-ashamed that falsely accuse your good conversation in Christ.

Strong appeals are made in our day to members of the Christian Church to engage actively in all kinds of Christian work. They are summoned to go forth aggressively upon the world's misery and sin. This has become a characteristic note of our time. Such appeals were needed. It is a shame that so many Christians have absolved themselves from the obligation to place at their Lord's service the aptitudes and the energies with which He has endowed them. Yet in this wholesale administration diversities are apt to be overlooked. Christians may be undervalued who do not possess qualities fitting them for the special activities; or, attempting these without much aptitude, and finding little success, they may be unduly cast down. It is important to lay stress on this. There are some, perhaps we should say many, who must come to the conclusion, if they judge aright, that their gifts and opportunities indicate for them, as their sphere, a somewhat narrow round of duties, mostly of that ordinary type which the common experience of human life supplies. But if they bring into these a Christian heart; if they use the opportunities they have; if they are watchful to please their Lord in the life of the family, the workshop, the market; if the purifying influence of the faith by which they live comes to light in the steady excellence of their character and course, — then they need have no sense of exclusion from the work of Christ and of His Church. They, too,

do missionary work. Blameless, harmless, unrebuked, they are seen as lights in the world. They contribute, in the manner that is most essential of all, to the Church's office in the world. And their place of honour and reward shall be far above that of many a Christian busybody, who is too much occupied abroad to keep the light clear and bright at home.

Blameless, then, harmless, unspersed, must the children of God, His redeemed children, be. So will the light of Christian character come clearly out, and Christians will be "luminaries, holding forth the word of life."

The word of life is the message of salvation as it sets forth to us Christ, and goodness and blessedness by Him. Substantially it is that teaching which we have in the Scriptures; although, when Paul wrote, the New Testament was not yet a treasure of the Churches, and the "word of life" only echoed to and fro from teacher to taught, and from one disciple to another. Still, the teaching rested on the Old Testament Scriptures understood in the light of the testimony of Jesus; and it was controlled and guided by men speaking and writing in the Spirit. What it was therefore was very well known, and the influence of it as the seed of life eternal was felt. It was for Christians to hold by it, and to hold it out, — the expression used in ver. 16 may have either meaning; and virtually both senses are here. In order to give light there must be life. And Christian life depends on having in us the word, quick and powerful, which is to dwell in us richly in all wisdom and spiritual understanding. This must be the secret of blameless Christian lives; and so those who have this character will give light, as holding forth the word of life. The man's visible character itself does this. For while the word and message of life is to be owned, professed, in fit times proclaimed, yet the embodiment of it in the man is the main point here, the character being formed and the practice determined by the "word" believed. So also we are said to live by the faith of the Son of God. The life of faith on Him is the life of having and holding forth His word.

Here, as everywhere, our Lord goes first. The Apostle John, speaking in his Gospel of the Eternal Word, tells us that in Him was life, and the life was the light of men. It was not merely a doctrine of light; the life was the light. As He lived, in His whole being, in His acting and suffering, in His coming and staying and departing, in His Person and in His discharge of every office, He manifested the Father. Still we find it so; as we contemplate Him, as His words lead us to Himself, we behold the glory, the radiance of grace and truth.

Now His people are made like Him.. They too, through the word of life, become partakers of true life. This life does not dwell in them as it does in their Lord, for He is its original seat and source; hence they are not the light of the world in the same sense in which He is so. Still they are luminaries, they are stars in the world. By manifesting the genuine influence of the word of life which dwells in them, they do make manifest in the world what truth and purity and salvation are. This is their calling; and, in a measure, it is their attainment.

The view of the matter given here may be compared with that of ~~2~~2 Corinthians 3:4. Christ, the Father's Word, may also be regarded as the Father's living Epistle. Then those who behold Him, and drink in the significance of this message, are also themselves, in their turn, Epistles of Christ, known and read of all men.

So to shine is the calling of all believers, not of some only; each, according to his opportunities, may and ought to fulfil it. God designs to be glorified, and to have His salvation justified, in this form. Christ has said in the plainest terms, "Ye are the light of the world." But to be so implies separateness from the world, in root and in fruits; and that is for many a hard -saying. "Ye are a holy nation, a peculiar people, that ye should show forth the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvellous light."

In the sixteenth and following verses comes in again Paul's own share in the progress and victory of the Christian life in his friends. "It would be exceeding well," he seems to say, "for you; how well, you may partly gather from learning how well it would be for me." He would have cause to "rejoice in the day of Christ" that he had "not run in vain, neither laboured in vain." What might be said on this has been anticipated in the remarks made on ~~20~~Philippians 1:20 fol. But here the Apostle is thinking of something more than the toil and labour expended in the work. More than these was to fall to his lot. His life of toil was to close in a death of martyrdom. And whether the Apostle was or was not enabled to foresee this certainly, doubtless he looked forward to it as altogether probable. So he says: "But if I be offered (or poured out as a drink-offering) in the sacrifice and service of your faith, I joy and rejoice with you all; and do ye also likewise joy and rejoice with me."

To see the force of this expression we must remember that it was an ancient custom to seal and complete a sacrifice by the pouring out of a libation on the altar or at the foot of it. This might be intended as the

crowning testimony of the abundant freewill with which the service had been rendered and the sacrifice had been offered. To some such rite the Apostle alludes when he speaks of himself — that is to say, of his own life — as poured forth at the sacrifice and service of their faith. And it is not hard to understand the idea which dictates this mode of speech.

We read in Romans 12. an exhortation to the saints to yield themselves a living sacrifice, which sacrifice is their reasonable service. They were to do so in the way of not being conformed to the world, but transformed by the renewing of their minds. So here the course of conduct which the Apostle had been exhorting the Philippians to pursue was an act of worship or service, and in particular it was a sacrifice, the sacrifice of their faith, the sacrifice in which their faith was expressed. Each believer in offering this sacrifice acts as a priest, being a member of the holy priesthood which offers to God spiritual sacrifices (~~cf.~~ 1 Peter 2:5). Such a man is not, indeed, a priest to make atonement, but he is a priest to present offerings through Christ his Head. The Philippians, then, in so far as they were, or were to be, yielding themselves in this manner to God, were priests who offered to God a spiritual sacrifice.

Here let us notice, as we pass, that no religion is worth the name that has not its sacrifice through which the worshipper expresses his devotion. And in Christian religion the sacrifice is the consecration of the man and of his life to God's service in Christ. Let us all see to it what sacrifices we offer.

This doctrine, then, of the priesthood and the sacrifice was verified in the case of the Philippians; and, by the same rule, it held true also in the case of Paul himself. He, as little as they, was priest to make atonement. But certainly when we see Paul so cordially yielding himself to the service of God in the gospel, and discharging his work with such willing labour and pains, we see in him one of Christ's priests offering himself to God a living sacrifice. Now is this all? or is something more to be said of Paul? More is to be said; and although the point now in view is not prominent in this passage, it is present as the underlying thought. For the whole sacrifice of holy life rendered by the Philippians, and by his other converts, was, in a sense, the offering of Paul also; not theirs only, but his too. God gave him a standing in the matter, which he, at least, was not to overlook. God's grace, indeed, had wrought the work, and Paul was but an instrument; yet so an instrument that he had a living and abiding interest in the result. He was not an instrument mechanically interposed, but one whose faith and love had wrought to bring the result to pass. To him it had been given to

labour and pray, to watch and guide, to spend and to be spent. And when the Apostle saw the lives of many true followers of Christ unfold as the result of his ministry, he could think that God owned his place too in bringing all this tribute to the temple. “God grants me a standing in the service of this offering. The Philippians bring it, each for himself, and it is theirs; but I also bring it, and it is my offering too. God takes it at their hand, but also at my hand, as something which with all my heart I have laboured for and won, and brought to His footstool. I also have my place to present to Christ the sacrifice and service of faith of all these men who are living fruits of my ministry. I have been minister of Christ to these Gentiles, ministering the gospel of the grace of God, that the offering up of these Gentiles might be acceptable, being sanctified by the Holy Ghost. I have therefore whereof I may glory through Jesus Christ.” (^{<61516>}Romans 15:16, 17).

There remains but one step to be made, to reach the seventeenth verse. Consider the Apostle’s heart glowing with the thought that God counted the holy fruits of those believing lives to be sacrifice and service of his, as well as theirs, and accepted it not only from their hands, but from Paul’s too. Consider the gladness with which he felt that after all his toil and pains he had this great offering to bring, as his thank-offering to his Lord. And then imagine him hearing a voice which says: “Now then, seal your service, crown your offering; be yourself the final element of sacrifice; pour out your life. You have laboured and toiled, spent years and strength, very willingly, and most fruitfully; that is over now; one thing remains; die for the worthy name of Him who died for you.” It is this he is contemplating: “If I be poured out at the sacrifice and service of your faith; if I am called to go on and complete the sacrifice and service; if one thing more alone is left for Paul the aged and the prisoner, and that one thing be to lay down the life whose labours are ending; if the life itself is to run out in one final testimony that my whole heart, that all I am and have are Christ’s, — shall not I rejoice? will not you rejoice with me? That will be the final identification of my life with your sacrifice and service. It will be the expression of God’s accepting the completed gift. It will be the libation that crowns the service. I am not to be used, and then set aside as having no more interest in the results. On the contrary, your Christianity and mine, in the wonderful relation they have to one another, are to pass to God together as one offering. If, after running and labouring, all issues of my life be finally poured out in martyrdom, that, as it were, identifies me finally and inseparably with the sacrifice and service which have filled your lives, and also my life. It becomes one complete offering.

It may give cause for thought to ministers of the gospel that the Apostle should so vitally and vividly connect himself with the results of his work. It was no languid, no perfunctory ministry that led up to this high mood. His heart's blood had been in it; the strength and passion of his love to Christ had been poured out and spent on his work and his converts. Therefore he could feel that in some gracious and blessed way the fruits that came were still his — given to him to bring to the altar of the Lord. How well shall it be with the Churches when the ministry of their pastors burns with a flame like this! What an image of the pastoral care is here expressed!

But may not all Christian hearts be stirred to see the devotedness and the love which filled this man's soul? The constraining power of the love of Christ so wrought in him that he triumphed and rejoiced both in bringing and in becoming an offering, — breaking out, as it were, into sacrifice and service, and pouring out his life an offering to the Father and the Son. All hearts may be stirred; for all, perhaps, can imagine such a mood. But how many of us have it as a principle and a passion entering into our own lives?

CHAPTER 9.

TIMOTHY AND EPAPHRODITUS. — PHILIPPIANS 2:19-30 (R. V.).

THE outpouring of his thoughts, his feelings, and his desires towards the Philippians has so far spent itself. Now he turns to mention the steps he is taking, in response to their communication, to express practically his love and his care for their welfare. Yet we must carry along with us what has just been said of the Christian service and sacrifice, and of the tie between the Apostle and his converts; for these thoughts are still in the Apostle's mind, and they gleam through the passage which now comes before us.

Paul had been contemplating the possibility of dying soon in his Master's cause; no doubt it was an alternative often present to his mind; and we see with what a glory of high association it rose before him. Still he, like ourselves, had to await his Master's will, had meanwhile to carry on the business of his life, and indeed (^{<30125>}Philippians 1:25) was aware that the prolongation of his life might very likely be a course of things more in the line of God's purpose, and more serviceable to the Churches at Philippi and elsewhere. So, while he has expressed the mood in which both they and he are to face the event of his martyrdom, when it comes, he does not hesitate to express the expectation that he may be set free and may see them again. Meanwhile he has made up his mind ere long to send Timothy. Timothy will bring them news of Paul, and will represent the Apostle among them as only a very near and confidential friend could do; at the same time he will bring back to Paul an account of things at Philippi, no doubt after doing all that with God's help he could to instruct, correct, and edify the Church during his stay.. In this way a sustaining and gladdening experience for the Philippian Christians would be provided; and, at the same time, Paul too ("I" also, ver. 19) would be gladdened by receiving from so trustworthy a deputy a report upon men and things at Philippi. In connection with this declaration of his intention, the Apostle reveals some of the reflections which had occupied his mind; and these suggest several lessons.

1. Notice the spirit of self-sacrifice on Paul's part. Timothy was the one thoroughly trusted and congenial friend within his reach. To a man who was a prisoner, and on whom the burden of many anxieties fell, it was no

small ease to have one such friend beside Him. Our Blessed Lord Himself craved for loving human fellowship in His time of sorrow; and so must Paul do also. Yet all must give way to the comfort and well-being of the Churches. As soon as Paul can descry how it is to go with him, so that plans may be adjusted to the likelihoods of the situation, Timothy is to go on his errand to Philippi.

2. Notice the importance which may justly attach to human instrumentalities. One is not as good as another. Some are far more fit for use than others are. The Apostle thought earnestly on the point who was fittest to go, and he was glad he had a man like Timothy to send. It is true that the supreme source of success in gospel work is God Himself; and sometimes He gives unexpected success to unlikely instruments. But yet, as a rule, much depends on men being adapted to their work. When God prepares fresh blessing for His Church, He commonly raises up men fitted for the service to be rendered. Therefore we do well to pray earnestly for men eminently qualified to do the Lord's work.

3. Timothy's special fitness for this mission was that he had a heart to care for them, especially to care for their true and highest interests. So far he resembled Paul himself. He had the true pastoral heart. He had caught the lessons of Paul's own life. That was the main thing. No doubt he had intellectual gifts, but his dispositions gave him the right use of gifts. The loving heart, and the watchfulness and thoughtfulness which that inspires, do more to create pastoral wisdom than any intellectual superiority. Timothy had a share of the "mind" of Christ (ver. 5), and that made him meet to be a wise inspector and adviser for the Philippians, as well as a trustworthy reporter concerning their state and prospects.

4. What is most fitted to impress us is the difficulty which Paul experienced in finding a suitable messenger, and the manner in which he describes his difficulty. He was conscious in himself of a self-forgetting love and care for the Churches, which was part, and a great part, of his Christian character. He was ready (<461033> 1 Corinthians 10:33) to please all men in all things, not seeking his own profit, but the profit of many, that they might be saved. He looked out for men among his friends whose hearts might answer to him here, but he did not find them. He had no man likeminded. One indeed was found, but no more. As he looked round, a sense of disappointment settled on him.

One asks of whom this statement is made — that he finds none like-minded — that all seek their own? Probably not of Epaphroditus, for Epaphroditus

goes at any rate, and the question is about some one in addition, to be, as it were, Paul's representative and commissioner. Nor are we entitled to say that it applies to Tychicus, Aristarchus, Marcus, and Jesus, mentioned in Colossians 4. For these men might not be with the Apostle at the precise moment of his writing to the Philippians; and the character given to them in the Epistle to the Colossians seems to set them clear of the inculcation in this passage: unless we suppose that, even in the case of some of them, a failure had emerged near the time when the Epistle was written, which vexed the Apostle, and forced him to judge them unprepared at present for the service. It will be safest, however, not to assume that these men were with him, or that they are here in view.

Still, the sad comment of the Apostle must apply to men of some standing and some capacity, — men of Christian profession, men who might naturally be thought of in connection with such a task. As he surveyed them, he was obliged to note the deplorable defect, which perhaps had not struck himself so forcibly until he began to weigh the men against the mission he was planning for them. Then he saw how they came short; and also, how this same blight prevailed generally among the Christians around him. Men were not "likeminded"; no man was "likeminded." All seek their own, not the things which are Jesus Christ's. Is not this a sad saying? What might one expect at the outset of a noble cause, the cause of Christ's truth and Church? What might one count upon in the circle that stood nearest to the Apostle Paul? Yet this is the account of it, — All seek their own, not the things which are Jesus Christ's.

Is it any wonder that the Apostle pleads earnestly with Christians to cherish the mind of "not looking each of you to his own things" (ver. 4); that he presses the great example of the Saviour Himself; that he celebrates elsewhere (1 Corinthians 13.) the beauty of that love which seek-eth not his own and beareth all things? For we see how the meaner spirit beset him and hemmed him in, even in the circle of his Christian friends.

What does his description mean? It does not mean that the men in question broke the ordinary Christian rules. It does not mean that any Church could have disciplined them for provable sins. Nay, it does not mean that they were destitute of fear of God and love to Christ. But yet, to the Apostle's eye, they were too visibly swayed by the eagerness about their own things; so swayed that their ordinary course was governed and determined by it. It might be love of ease, it might be covetousness, it might be pride, it might be party opinion, it might be family interests, it might even be

concentration on their own religious comfort: — however it might be, to this it came in the end, All seek their own. Some of them might be quite unsound, deceivers or deceived; especially, for instance, if Demas (2 Timothy 4:10) was one of them. But even those of whom the Apostle might be persuaded better things, and things that accompany salvation, were so far gone in this disease of seeking their own that the Apostle could have no confidence in sending them, as otherwise he would have done, on a mission in which the mind and care of Christ were to be expressed to Christ's Church. He could not rely on a "genuine care."

You mistake if you suppose this faulty state implied, in all these cases, a deliberate, conscious preference of their own things above the things of Jesus Christ. The men might really discern a supreme beauty and worth in the things of Christ; they might honestly judge that Christ had a supreme claim on their loyalty; and they might have a purpose to adhere to Christ and Christ's cause at great cost, if the cost must finally be borne. And yet meanwhile, in their common life, the other principle manifested itself far too victoriously. The place which their own things held — the degree in which their life was influenced by the bearing of things on themselves, was far from occupying that subordinate place which Christ has assigned to it. The things of Jesus Christ did not rise in their minds above other interests, but were jostled, and crowded, and thrust aside by a thousand things that were their own.

You may not cherish any avowed purpose to seek your own; you may have learned to love Christ for the best reasons; you may have the root of the matter in you; you may have made some sacrifices that express a sense of Christ's supreme claims, and yet you may be a poor style of Christian, an inconsistent Christian, a careless, unwatchful Christian. Especially you may habitually fail to make a generous estimate of the place to be given to the things of Jesus Christ. You may not be reckoned so defective either in general judgment or in your own esteem, because you may come up very well to what is usually expected. And yet you may be allowing any Christianity you have to be largely stifled and repressed by foreign and alien influences, by a crowd of occupations and recreations that steal heart and life away. You may be taking no proper pains, no loving pains, to be a Christian, in Christ's sense of what that should be. Though only at the beginning of the conflict, you may be living as if there was scarcely a conflict to be fought. And so in practice, in the history of your hours, you may be seeking your own things to an extent that is even disgraceful to Christian religion. You may allow your course of thought and action to be

dictated by that which is of self, by gain, self-indulgence, or frivolity, to a degree that would even be appalling if your eyes were opened to discern it. We all know that in religious exercises formality may usurp a large place, even in the case of men who have received power for reality. Just so in the Christian course, and under the Christian name and calling, what is “your own” may be suffered to encroach most lamentably on the higher principle; so that an Apostle looking at you must say: “They all seek their own, not the things that are Jesus Christ’s.” You are not faithful enough to apply Christ’s standard to your heart and ways, nor diligent enough to seek His Spirit. Perhaps if you were strongly tempted to deny Christ, or to fall into some great scandalous sin, you would awaken to the danger and cling to your Saviour for your life. But as things go commonly, you let them go. And the consequence is, you are largely losing your lives. What should be your contribution to the good cause, and so should be your own gladness and honour, never comes to pass. Some of you have thoughts in your minds upon this point, why you do not seem to find any doorways into Christian usefulness. You do wish to see Christ’s cause prosper. Yet somehow it never seems to come to your hands to do anything effectually or fruitfully for the cause. What can the reason be? Alas! in the case of how many the reason is just what it was in the case of Paul’s friends: you are so largely seeking your own things, not the things that are Jesus Christ’s, that you are not fit to be sent on any mission. If the Apostle could say this to the Christians of his day, how great must be the danger still! Now if we look at it as part of the experience of Paul the Apostle, to find this temper so prevailing around him, we learn another lesson. We know Paul’s character, his enthusiasm, the magnanimous faith and love with which he counted all to be loss in comparison of Christ. And yet, we see what he found among the Christians around him. This has been so in every age. The unreasonableness, faintheartedness, and faithlessness of men, the unchristlikeness of Christians, have been matter of experience. If our hearts were enlarged to plan and endeavour more generously for Christ’s cause, we should feel this a great trial. All large-hearted Christians have to encounter it. Let it be remembered that it is not peculiar to any age. The Apostle had full experience of it. “Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world... Alexander the coppersmith did me much evil... At my first answer no man stood with me, but all men forsook me” (2 Timothy 4:10-16). Let us be assured, that if Christ’s work is to be done, we must be prepared not only for the opposition of the world, but for the coldness and the disapprobation of many in the Church — of some whom we cordially believe to be, after all, heirs of the kingdom.

Timothy is to go to Philippi, and is to bring to Paul a full report. But, at the same time, the Apostle finds it necessary to send Epaphroditus, not, apparently, with a view to his returning to Rome again, but to resume his residence at Philippi. It seems, on all accounts, reasonable to believe that Epaphroditus belonged to the Philippian Church, and was in office there. In this case he is to be distinguished from Epaphras (⁵¹⁰⁴¹²Colossians 4:12), with whom some would identify him, for no doubt Epaphras belonged to Colossae. Epaphroditus had come to Rome, bearing with him the gifts which assured Paul of the loving remembrance in which he was held at Philippi, and of the abiding desire to minister to him which was cherished there. His own Christian zeal led Epaphroditus to undertake the duty, and he had borne himself in it as became a warmhearted and public-spirited Christian. He had been Paul's brother and fellow-workman and fellow-soldier. But, meanwhile, the Apostle was aware how valuable his presence might be felt to be at Philippi. And Epaphroditus himself had conceived a longing to see the old friends, and to resume the old activities in the Philippian Church. For he had been sick, very sick, almost dead. Amid the weakness and inactivity of convalescence, his thoughts had been much at Philippi, imagining how the brethren there might be moved at the tidings of his state, and yearning, perhaps, for the faces and the voices which he knew so well. Paul was accustomed to restrain and sacrifice his own feelings; but that did not make him inattentive to the feelings of other people. Trying as his position at Rome was, he would not keep Epaphroditus in these circumstances. He had had great comfort in his company, and would be glad to retain it. But he would be more glad to think of the joy at Philippi when Epaphroditus should return. So he gives back Epaphroditus. As he does so he admonishes his friends to value adequately what they are receiving. Paul was sending to them a true-hearted and large-hearted Christian; one who allowed nothing — neither difficulties nor risks — to stand in the way of Christian service and Christian sympathy. Let such men be had in reputation. It is a lawful and right thing to make a high estimate of Christian character where it eminently appears, and to honour such persons very highly in love. If they are not honoured and prized, it is too likely that others will be whom it is not so fit and so wholesome to admire. And the ground of admiration in the case of Epaphroditus sets once more before us the theme of the whole chapter. Epaphroditus was to be had in reputation because he had approved himself to be one seeking not his own, one willing to lay down his life for the brethren.

CHAPTER 10.

NO CONFIDENCE IN THE FLESH. — PHILIPPIANS 3:1-8 (R.V.).

THE third chapter contains the portion of this Epistle in which, perhaps, one is hardest put to it to keep pace with the writer. Here he gives us one of his most remarkable expositions of true Christian religion as he knew it, and as he maintains it must essentially exist for others also. He does this in a burst of thought and feeling expressed together, so that, if we are to take his meaning, the fire and the light must both alike do their work upon us; we must feel and see both at once. This is one of the pages to which a Bible reader turns again and again. It is one of the passages that have special power to find and to stir believing men.

Yet it seems to find its place in the letter almost incidentally.

It would seem, as some have thought, that in the first verse of this chapter the Apostle begins to draw his letter to a close. Cheerful words of farewell begin to shape themselves. At the same time a closing reference is in view to some practical danger that required to be guarded against. Almost suddenly things take a new turn, and a flood of great ideas claim and take their place.

“Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord.” Rejoice, be of good cheer, was the common formula of leave-taking. The same word is translated “farewell” in ^{<471311>}2 Corinthians 13:11 (Authorised and Revised Versions). But the Apostle, especially in this Epistle, which is itself inspired by so much of the Christian gladness, cannot but emphasise the proper meaning of the customary phrase. Rejoice, yes, rejoice, my brethren, in the Lord. The same turn of thought recurs again in ^{<510404>}Philippians 4:4. What it is fitted to suggest will be equally in place when we reach that point.

Now he seems to be on the point of introducing some subject already referred to, either in this or in a previous Epistle. It concerned the safety of the Philippians, and it required some courteous preface in touching on it once again; so that, most likely, it was a point of some delicacy. Some have thought this topic might be the tendency to dissension which had appeared in Philippi. It is a subject which comes up again in chap. 4.; it may have been upon the point of coming up here. The closing words of ver. 1 might

well enough preface such a reference. The theme was not so pleasant as some of those on which he had written: it might be delicate for him to handle, and it might call for some effort on their part to take it well. Yet it concerned their safety that they should fully realise this element of the situation, and should take the right view of it. Therefore also the Apostle would not count it irksome to do his part in relation to it. People entangled in a fault are in circumstances not favourable to a right estimate of their own case. They need help from those who can judge more soundly. Yet help must be tendered with a certain considerateness.

But at this point a new impulse begins to operate. Perhaps the Apostle was interrupted, and, before he could resume, some news reaches him, awakening afresh the indignation with which he always regarded the tactics of the Judaisers. Nothing indicates that the Philippian Church was much disposed to Judaize. But if at this juncture some new disturbance from the Judaisers befell his work at Rome, or if news of that kind reached him from some other field, it might suggest the possibility of those sinister influences finding their way also to Philippi. This is, of course, a conjecture merely; but it is not an unreasonable one. It has been offered as an explanation of the somewhat sudden burst of warning that breaks upon us in ^{<small>1012</small>}Philippians 3:2; while, in the more tranquil strain of chap. 4., topics are resumed which easily link themselves to ^{<small>1011</small>}Philippians 3:1^{f3}

Still, even if this denunciation of Judaising comes in rather unexpectedly, it does not really disturb the main drift of the Epistle, nor does it interfere with the lessons which the Philippians were to learn. It rather contributes to enforce the views and deepen the impressions at which Paul aims. For the denunciation becomes the occasion of introducing a glowing description of how Christ found Paul, and what Paul found in Christ. This is set against the religion of Judaising. But at the same time, and by the nature of the case, it becomes a magnificent exposure and rebuke of all fleshly religionising, of all the ways of being religious that are superficial, self-confident, and wordly-minded. It also becomes a stirring call to what is most central and vital in Christian religion. If then there was at Philippi, as there is everywhere, a tendency to be too easily contented with what they had attained; or to reconcile Christianity with self-seeking; or to indulge a Christianised arrogance and quarrelsomeness; or in any other shape, “having begun in the spirit to be made perfect in the flesh,” — here was exactly what they needed. Here, too, they might find a vivid representation of the “one spirit” in which they were to “stand fast,” the “one soul” in which they were to “labour” together (^{<small>1017</small>}Philippians 1:27). That “one

spirit” is the mind which is caught, held, vitalised, continually drawn upwards and forwards, by the revelation and the appropriation of Christ.

The truth is that a remiss Christianity always becomes very much a Judaism. Such Christianity assumes that a life of respectable conventions, carried on within sacred institutions, will please God and save our souls. What the Apostle has to set against Judaism may very well be set against that in all its forms.

“Keep an eye on the dogs, the evil workers, on the concision.” The Judaisers are not to occupy him very long, but we see they are going to be thoroughly disposed of. Dogs is a term borrowed from their own vocabulary. They classed the Gentiles (even the uncircumcised Christians) as dogs, impure beings who devoured all kinds of meats and were opened to all kinds of uncleanness. But themselves, the Apostle intimates, were the truly impure, shutting themselves out from the true purity, the heart’s purity, and (as Dr. Lightfoot expresses it) “devouring the garbage of carnal ordinances.” They were also evil workers, mischievous busybodies, pertinaciously busy, but busy to undo rather than to build up what is good, “subverting men’s souls” (~~41524~~ Acts 15:24). And they were the concision, not the circumcision according to the true intent of that ordinance, but the concision, the mutilation or gashing. Circumcision was a word which carried in its heart a high meaning of separation from evil and of consecration to the Lord. That meaning (and therefore also the word which carried it) pertained to gospel believers, whether outwardly circumcised or not. For the Judaising zealots could be claimed only a circumcision which had lost its sense, and which no more deserved the name, — a senseless gashing of the flesh, a concision. All these terms seem to be levelled at certain persons who are in the Apostle’s view, and are not unknown to the Philippians, though not necessarily resident in that city.

For any full statement of the grounds of the Apostle’s indignation at the Judaising propaganda, the reader must be referred to the expository writings on other Epistles, especially on those to the Corinthians and to the Galatians’ Here a few words must suffice. Judaising made the highest pretensions to religious security and success; it proposed to expound the only worthy and genuine view of man’s relation to God. But in reality the Judaisers wholly misrepresented Christianity, for they had missed the main meaning of it. Judaising turned men’s minds away from what was highest to what was lowest — from love to law, from God’s gifts to man’s merits, from inward life and power to outward ceremonial performance, from the

spiritual and eternal to the material and the temporary. It was a huge, melancholy mistake; and yet it was pressed upon Christians as the true religion, which availed with God, and could alone bring blessing to men. Hence, as our Lord denounced the Pharisees with special energy — sometimes with withering sarcasm (^{<21147>}Luke 11:47) — so, and for the same reasons, does Paul attack the Judaisers. The Pharisees applied themselves to turn the religion of Israel into a soul-withering business of formalism and pride; and Paul's opponents strove to pervert to like effect even the gracious and life-giving gospel of Christ. To such he would give place, no, not for an hour.

Two things may be suggested here. One is the responsibility incurred by those who make a religious profession, and in that character endeavour to exert religious influence upon others. Such men are taking possession, as far as they can, of what is highest and most sacred in the soul's capacities; and if they misdirect the soul's life here, if consciously or unconsciously they betray interests so sacred, if they successfully teach men to take false coin for true in the matter of the soul's dealings with God and -with its own welfare, their responsibility is of the heaviest.

Another point to notice is the energy with which the Apostle thinks it right to denounce these evil workers. Denunciation is a line of things in which, as we know very well, human passion is apt to break loose — the wrath of man which worketh not the righteousness of God. The history of religious controversy has made this very plain. Yet surely we may say that zeal for truth must sometimes show itself in an honest indignation against the wilfulness and the blindness of those who are misleading others. It is not always well to be merely mild and placable. That may arise in some cases from no true charity, but rather from indifference, or from an amiability that is indolent and selfish. It is good to be zealously affected in a good thing. Only, we have reason to take heed to ourselves and to our own spirit, when we are moved to be zealous in the line of condemning and denouncing. Not all who do so have approved their right to do it, by tokens of spiritual wisdom and single-hearted sincerity such as marked the life and work of Paul.

The Judaisers put abroad the false coin, and believers in Christ, whether circumcised or not, had the true. "We are the circumcision, who worship by the Spirit of God, and who glory in Christ Jesus, and who put no confidence in the flesh." Such are truly Abraham's children (^{<1129>}Galatians

3:29). To them belong whatever relation to God, and interest in God, were shadowed forth by circumcision in the days of old.

No doubt, the rite of circumcision was outward; and no doubt it came to be connected with a great system of outward ordinances and outward providences. Yet circumcision, according to the Apostle, pointed not outwards, but inwards (~~◀8128~~Romans 2:28, 29). Elsewhere he lays stress on this, that circumcision, when first given, was a seal of faith. In the Old Testament itself, the complaint made by the prophets, speaking for God, was that the people, though circumcised in flesh, were of uncircumcised heart and uncircumcised ears. And God threatens to punish Israel with the Gentiles — the circumcised with the uncircumcised — because all the house of Israel are uncircumcised in heart.

The true circumcision then must be those, in the first place, who have the true, the essentially true worship. Circumcision set men apart as worshippers of the true God: hence Israel came to be thought of as a people “instantly serving (or worshipping) God day and night.” That this worship must include more than outward service in order to be a success — that it should include elements of high spiritual worth, was disclosed in Old Testament revelation with growing clearness. One promise on which it rested was: “The Lord thy God will circumcise thine heart, and the heart of thy seed, to love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, that thou mayest live.” The true circumcision, those who answer to the type which circumcision was meant to set, must be those who have the true worship. Now that is the worship “by the Spirit”; on which we shall have a word to say presently.

And again, the true circumcision must be those who have the true glorying. Israel, called to glory in their God, were set apart also to cherish in that connection a great hope, which was to bless their line, and, through them, the world. That hope was fulfilled in Christ. The true circumcision were those who welcomed the fulfilment of the promise, who rejoiced in the fulness of the blessing, because they had eyes to see and hearts to feel its incomparable worth.

And certainly, therefore, as men who had discovered the true foundation and refuge, they must renounce and turn from the false trust, they must put no confidence in the flesh. Is this, however, a paradox? Was not circumcision “outward, in the flesh.”? Was it not found to be a congruous part of a concrete system, built up of “elements of this world”? Was not the temple a “worldly sanctuary,” and were not the sacrifices “carnal

ordinances"? Yes; and yet the true circumcision did not trust in circumcision. He who truly took the meaning of that remarkable dispensation was trained to say, "Doth not my soul wait on God? from Him cometh my salvation." And he was trained to renounce the confidences in which the nations trusted. Hence, though such a man could accept instruction and impression from many an ordinance and many a providence, he was still led to place his trust higher than the flesh. And now, when the true light was come, when the Kingdom of God shone out in its spiritual principles and forces, the true circumcision must be found in those who turned from that which appealed only to the earthly and the fleshly mind, that they might fasten on that in which God revealed Himself to contrite and longing souls.

The Apostle, therefore, claimed the inheritance and representation of the ancient holy people for spiritual believers, rather than for Judaising ritualists. But apart from questions as to the connection between successive covenants, it is worth our while to weigh well the significance of those features of Christian religion which are here emphasised.

"We," he says, "worship by the Spirit of God." The Holy Spirit was not absent from the old economy. But in those days the consciousness and the faith of His working were dim, and the understanding of the scope of it was limited. In the times of the New Testament, on the contrary, the promise and the presence of the Spirit assume a primary place. This is the great promise of the Father which was to come into manifestation and fulfilment when Christ had gone away. This, from Pentecost onwards, was to be distinctive of the character of Christ's Church. According to the Apostle Paul, it is one great end of Christ's redemption, that we may receive the promise of the Spirit through faith. So, in particular, Christian worship is by the Spirit of God. Therefore it is a real and most inward fellowship with God. In this worship it is the office of the Holy Spirit to give us a sense of the reality of Divine things, especially of the truths and promises of God; to touch our hearts with their goodness, on account especially of the Divine love that breathes in them; to dispose us to decision, in the way of consent and surrender to God as thus revealed. He takes the things of Christ, and shows them to us. So he brings us, in our worship, to meet with God, mind to mind, heart to heart. Although all our thoughts, as well as all our desires, come short, yet, in a measure, a real consent with God about His Son and about the blessings of His Son's gospel comes to pass. Then we sing with the Spirit, when our songs are filled with confidence and admiration, arising out of a sense of God's glory

and grace; and we pray in the Holy Ghost, when our supplications express this loving and thankful close with God's promises. It is our calling and our blessedness to worship by the Spirit of God. Much of our worship might fall silent, if this alone should be upheld; yet this alone avails and finds God. Whatever obscures this, or distracts attention from it, whether it be called Jewish or Christian, does not aid worship, but mars it.

It is true that the presence of the Spirit of God is not discernible otherwise than by the fruits of His working. And the difficulty may be raised, how can we, in practice, be secure of having the Spirit whereby to worship God? But, on the one hand, we know in some degree what the nature of the worship is which He sustains; we can form some conception of the attitude and exercise of soul towards Christ and God which constitute that worship. We do therefore know something as to what we should seek; we are aware of the direction in which our face should be set. On the other hand, the presence of the Spirit with us, to make such worship real in our case, is an object of faith. We believe in God for that gracious presence, and ask for it; and so doing, we expect it, according to God's own promise. On this understanding we apply ourselves to find entrance "and progress in the worship which is by the Spirit.

All appliances which are supposed to aid worship, which are conceived to add to its beauty, pathos, or sublimity are tolerable only so far as they do not tend to divert us from the worship which is by the Spirit. Experience shows that men are extremely prone to fall back from the simplicity and intentness of spiritual worship; and then they cover the gap, which they cannot fill, by outward arrangements of an impressive and affecting kind. Outward arrangements can render real service to worshippers, only if they remove hindrances, and supply conditions under which the simplicity and intentness of the worship "by the Spirit" may go on undisturbed. Very often they have tended exactly in the contrary direction; not the less because they have been introduced, perhaps, with the best intentions. And yet the chief question of all is not the more or less, the this or that, of such circumstantialities; but rather what the heart fixes on and holds by.

Again, we "glory in Christ Jesus." Christians are rich and great, because Christ Jesus assumes a place in their mind and life, such as makes them partakers of all spiritual blessing in Him. They glory, not in what they are, or do, or become, or get, but in Christ. Glorifying in anything implies a deep sense of its wonderfulness and worth, along with some persuasion that it has a happy relation to ourselves. So Christ is the power and wisdom of

God, the revelation of the Father, the way to the Father, the centre of blessing, the secret of religious restoration, attainment, and success, and He is ours; and He sets the type of what we through Him shall be. To glory and triumph in Christ is a leading characteristic of Christian religion.

And so, then, we “put no confidence in the flesh.” If in Christ, under the revelation which Centres in Him, we have found the way to God and the liberty to serve God, then all other ways must be for us *ipso facto* exposed and condemned; they are seen to be fallacious and fruitless. All these other ways are summoned up in “the flesh.” For the flesh is human nature fallen, with the resources which it wields, drawn from itself or from earthly materials of some kind. And in some selection or combination of these resources, the religion of the flesh stands. The renunciation of trust in such ways of establishing a case before God is included in the acceptance of Christ’s authority and Christ’s salvation. This condemns alike the confidence in average morality, and that in accredited ecclesiastical surroundings. It condemns confidence in even the holiest Christian rites, as if they could transfer us, by some intrinsic virtue, into the Kingdom of God, or could accredit our standing there. The same holds of confidence in doctrines, and even of confidence in sentiments. Rites, doctrines, and sentiments have their place of honour, as lines in which Christ and we may meet. Otherwise they all fall into the category of the flesh. Many things the flesh can do, in worship as in other departments; but it cannot attain to the worship that is by the Spirit of God. Much it can boast of; but it cannot replace Immanuel; it cannot fill the place of the reconciliation and the life. When we learn what kind of confidence is needed towards God, and find the ground of it in the Christ of God, then we cease to rely on the flesh.

At this point the Apostle cannot but emphasise his own right to speak. He appeals to his remarkable history. He knows all about this Judaic religion, which glories in the flesh, and he knows also the better way. The experience which had transformed his life entitled him to a hearing; for, indeed, he, as no man else, had searched out the worth of both the ways of it. So he is led into a remarkable testimony regarding the nature and the working forces of true Christian religion. And this, while it serves the purpose of throwing deserved disgrace on the poor religion of Judaising, serves at the same time a higher and more durable purpose. It sets the glory of the life of faith, love, and worship, against the meanness of all fleshly life whatever; and thus it vividly impresses on all hearers and readers the alternatives with which we have to deal, and the greatness of the choice which we are called to make.

If Paul decries the Jewish glorying in the flesh, it is not because he lacked ground, that had enabled him to cherish it and might enable him still to do so. "I also have material enough of fleshly confidence: — if any other thinks to have confidence in the flesh, I more." Then comes the remarkable catalogue of the prerogatives which had once meant so much for Saul of Tarsus, filling his heart with confidence and exultation. "Circumcised the eighth day" — for he was no proselyte, but born within the fold "of the stock of Israel" — for neither had his parents been proselytes: in particular, for he was one whose pedigree was ascertained and notorious, "of the tribe of Benjamin": "an Hebrew of Hebrews" nursed and trained, that is to say, in the very speech and spirit of the chosen people; not, as some of them, bred up in a foreign tongue, and under alien influences; "concerning the law, a Pharisee" — that is, "of the strictest sect of our religion" (~~4015~~ Acts 26:5); for, as a Pharisee, Saul had given himself wholly to know the law, to keep the law, to teach the law. More yet — "as to zeal, a persecutor of the Church"; in this clause the heat of the writer's spirit rises into pathetic irony and self-scorn: "This appropriate outcome of carnal Judaism, alas, was not lacking in me: I was not a Judaiser of the half-hearted sort." The idea is that those who, trusting in fleshly Judaism, claimed also to be Christians, knew neither their own spirit, nor the proper working of their own system. Saul of Tarsus had been no such incoherent Jew; only too bloodily had he proved himself thorough and consistent. Lastly, as to "law righteousness," the righteousness of compliance with rules, he had been unchallengeable; not a pharisaic theorist only, but a man who made conscience of his theory. Ah! he had known all this; and more, he had been forced in a great crisis of his life to measure and search out the whole worth of it.

"But what things were gain to me" — the whole class of things that ranked themselves before my eyes, and in my heart, as making me rich and strong — "those I have esteemed" (in a mass) "to be loss for Christ." They ceased to be valuable when they began to be reckoned as elements of disadvantage and of loss in comparison of Christ. Nor these things only, but even all things — "Yea, doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord." "All things" must include more than those old elements of fleshly confidence already enumerated. It must include everything which Paul still possessed, or might yet attain, that could be separated from Christ, weighed against Him, brought into competition with Him — all that the flesh could even yet fake hold of, and turn into a ground of separate confidence and boasting. So the phrase

might cover much that was good in its place, much that the Apostle was glad to hold in Christ and from Christ, but which yet might present itself to the unwatchful heart as material of independent boasting, and which, in that case, must be met with energetic and resolute rejection. “All things” may include, for instance, many of those elements of Christian and Apostolic eminence which are enumerated in 2 Corinthians 11.; for which he thankfully received many such things, and lovingly prized them “in Christ Jesus,” yet as they might become occasions to flatter or seduce even an Apostle — betraying him into self-confidence, or into the assertion of some separate worth and glory for himself — they must be rejected and counted to be loss.

The difficulty for us here is to estimate worthily the elevation of that regard to Christ which had become the inspiration of the life of Paul.

At the time when he was arrested on the road to Damascus, God revealed His Son to him and in him. Paul then became aware of Jesus as the Messiah of his people, against whom his utmost energies had bent themselves — against whom he had sinned with his utmost determination. That discovery came home to him with a sense of great darkness and horror; and, no doubt, at the same time, his whole previous conceptions of life, and his judgments of his own life, were subverted, and fell in ruins around him. He had had his scheme of life, of success, of welfare; it had seemed to him a lofty and well-accredited one; and, with whatever misgivings he might occasionally be visited, on the whole he thought of himself as working it out hopefully and well. Now on every side were written only defeat, perplexity, and despair. But ere long the Son of God was revealed in his heart (⁸⁰¹¹⁶Galatians 1:16) as the Bearer of righteousness and life to sinners — as the embodiment of Divine reconciliation and Divine hope. In this light a new conception of the world, a new scheme of worthy and victorious life, opened itself to Paul — new and wonderful. But the reason of it, the hopefulness of it, the endless worth of it, lay chiefly here, that God in Christ had come into his life. The true relation of moral life to God, and the ends of human life as judged by that standard, were opening before him; but, if that had stood alone, it might only have completed the dismay of the paralysed and stricken man. What made all new was the vision of Christ victoriously treading the path in which we failed to go, and of Christ dying for the unrighteous. So God came into view, in His love, redeeming, reconciling, adopting, giving the Holy Spirit — and He came into view “in Christ Jesus.” God was in Christ. The manifold relation of the living God to His creature man began to be felt and verified in the manifold relation of

Christ the Son of God, the Mediator and Saviour, to the broken man who had defied and hated Him. Christ henceforth became the ground, the meaning, and the aim of Paul's life. Life found its explanation, its worth, its loving imperative here. All things else that once had value in his eyes fell away. If not entirely dismissed, they were now to have only such place and use as Christ assigned to them, only such as could fit the genius of life in Christ. And all new prerogatives and attainments that might yet accrue to Paul, and might seem entitled to assume value in his eyes, could only have the same subordinate place: — Christ first, whose light and love, whose power to fix and fill and attract the soul, made all things new; Christ first, so that all the rest was comparatively nowhere; Christ first, so that all the rest, if at any time it came into competition with Him, if it offered itself to Paul as a source of individual confidence and boasting, is recognised as mere loss, and in that character resolutely cast away.

This had become the living and ruling principle with Paul; not so, indeed, as to meet with no opposition, but so as to prevail and bear down opposition. Enthusiastically accepted and embraced, it was a principle that had to be maintained against temptation, against infirmity, against the strong tides of inward habit and outward custom. Here lay the trial of Paul's sincerity and of Christ's fidelity and power.

That trial had run its course: it was now not far from its ending. The opening of heart and mind to Christ, and the surrender of all to Him, had not been the matter merely of one hour of deep impression and high feeling. It had continued, it was in full force still. Paul's value for Christ had borne the strain of time, and change, and temptation. Now he is Paul the aged, and also a prisoner of Christ Jesus. Has he abated from the force or cooled from the confidence of that mind of his concerning the Son of God? Far otherwise. With a "Yea, doubtless" he tells us that he abides by his first conviction, and affirms his first decision. Good right he had to testify. This was not a matter of inward feeling only, however sincere and strong. He had been well proved. He has suffered the loss of all things; he has seen all his treasures — what are counted for such — swept away from him as the result of unflinching faith and service; and he counts all to be well lost for Christ.

This passage sets before us the essential nature of Christianity — the essential life of a Christian, as revealed by the effect it has on his esteem for other things. Many of us, one supposes, cannot consider it without a sense

of deep disgrace. The view here given awakens many thoughts. Some aspects of the subject must be dwelt upon for a moment.

Those things that were gain, all things that can be gain, such are the objects Paul here reckons with. The believing mind concerning Christ carries with it a changed mind as regards all these.

Apparently, in some deep sense, there arises for us in this world an inevitable competition between Christ on the one hand and all things on the other. If we should say *some* things, we might be in danger of sliding into a one-sided puritanism. But we escape that risk by saying, emphatically, *all* things. A decision upon this has to be reached, it has to be maintained, it is to be reaffirmed in particulars, in all particulars. For we must remember that the heart of Paul, in this burst of loyalty, is only echoing the call of Christ: "He that loveth father or mother more than Me, is not worthy of Me. Let us repeat it, this applies to all things. Because a certain way of feeling and thinking about these things, and especially about some of them, is present with us all, which asserts itself against this principle, therefore Christian life, however rich and full, however gracious and generous its character truly is, must include a negative at the base of it. "Let a man deny (or renounce) himself, and take up his cross."

That life should be subjected to this severe competition seems hard: we may repine at it, and count it needless. We may ask, "Why should it be so? Why might not Christ take His place in our regard — His first, His ideal, His incomparable place — and, at the same time, all the other things take their place too, each in due order, as the true conception of human life may imply, and as the claims of loyalty to Christ may dictate? Why should not each take its place, more prominent or more subordinate, on a principle of harmony and happy order? Why should life be subjected to conflict and strain?" We may dream of this; but it will not be. We are such persons, and the world about us is so related to us now, that the "all things" are found continually claiming a place, and striving to make good for themselves a place in our heart and life, that will not consist with the regard due to Christ. They can be resisted only by a great inward decision, maintained and renewed all along our life, for Christ and against them. The nearest approach the believer makes in this life to that happy harmony of the whole being which was spoken of just now, is when his decision for Christ is so thorough and joyful, that the other elements — the "all things" — fall into their place, reduced into obedience by an energy that breaks resistance.

Then, too, in that place, they begin to reveal their proper nature as God's gifts, their real beauty and their real worth.

But then, in the next place, though the decision cannot be escaped, yet, let us be assured, there is in this no real hardship. To be so called to this decision is the greatest blessedness of life. There is that in Christ for men, on account of which a man may gladly count all else but loss, may count it abundantly well worth his while to make this choice. Christ as binding us to God, Christ as the living source of reconciliation and sonship, Christ as the spring of a continually recruited power to love and serve and overcome, Christ as assuring to us the attainment of His own likeness, Christ as the revealer of a love which is more and better than all its own best gifts — Christ discloses to us a world of good, for the sake of which it is well done to cast, if need be, all else away. It proves reasonable to reject the importunate claim which other things make to be reckoned indispensable. It proves natural, according to a new nature, to hold all else loosely, that we may hold this one interest fast.

Yet this is not to be done or endeavoured by dismissing out of life all that gives character and movement to human existence. Not so; for indeed it is human life itself, with its complex of relations and activities, that is to receive the new inspiration. The decision is to be made by accepting the principle that life, throughout, must be life in Christ, life for Christ; and by setting ourselves to learn from Him what that principle means. Of the "all things" many must continue with us; but if so, they must continue on a new principle: no longer as competitors, certainly not as allowed competitors, but as gifts and subjects of Christ, accepting law and destination from Him. Then, also, they may continue to carry with them many a pleasant experience of our Master's providential goodness. The effort to comply with Paul's example by mutilating human life of some of its great elements has often been a sincere and earnest effort. But it implies a distorted, and eventually a narrowed view of the Christian's calling. For, short of suicide, we can never deal with *all* things on that principle of simple amputation. Now the Apostle says all things: "I count all things to be loss."

Let this, however, be noted, that loyalty requires something more than merely a new valuation of things in our minds, however sincere that valuation might be. It demands also actual sacrifice, when duty or when faithful service calls for it. Paul's Christianity was prompt to lay down, as circumstances in the course of following Christ might demand, everything, anything, even that which, in other circumstances, might retain its place in

life, and be counted, in its own place, seemly and welcome. Not only shall a man count all to be loss for Christ: he shall actually, when called upon, suffer the loss of anything or of all things. No Christian life is without its occasions when this test has to be accepted. Most Christian lives include lessons in this department at the very outset. Some Christian lives are very full of them, — full, that is, of experiences in which contented submission to privation, and cheerful acceptance of trouble and danger, must approve the sincerity of the esteem for Christ our Saviour which is the common profession of us all. So it was with Paul. He had suffered the loss of all things.

It is because the “all things,” in their infinite variety of aspect and influence, tend so constantly to come into competition with Christ, to our great hurt and danger, that they must be so emphatically repudiated, and counted to be “loss.” They are loss indeed, when they succeed in taking the place they claim, for then they impoverish our life of its true treasure. We may suffer this encroachment to take place stealthily — all but unconsciously. All the more fit it is that we should learn to assert loyalty to our lord with a magnanimous vigilance. It becomes us to set His worth and claims emphatically, with a “yea, doubtless,” against the poor substitutes for which we are tempted silently to exchange Him. If not, we are likely to come back to that sad stage which has been already brought before us (chap. 2.), the condition of those Christians who “all seek their own, not the things which are Jesus Christ’s.”

Let us own, however, that men are trained in different lines of discipline to the same great result. The lesson broke into the life of Paul with astounding force at one great crisis. Some, on the contrary, begin their training in little instances of early life, and under influences working too gently to be afterwards recalled. Gradually they grow into a clearer perception of the gifts Christ offers and of the claims He makes; and each step of decision paves the way to new attainments. The experience of all Christians, however diversified their training may be, is harmonised in the fidelity of each to the light he has, and of all to the Lord who calls them all to follow Him.

CHAPTER 11.

THE KNOWLEDGE OF CHRIST. — PHILIPPIANS 3:8-18 (R.V.).

MR. ALEXANDER KNOX, in a letter to a friend,^{f4} makes the following remark: “Religion contains two sets of truths, which I may venture to denominate ultimate and mediatory: the former refer to God as an original and end; the latter to the Word made flesh, the suffering, dying, rising, ruling Saviour; the way, the truth, the life. Now I conceive these two views have almost ever been varying, in the minds even of the sincerely pious, with respect to comparative consequence; and while some have so regarded the ultimate as in some degree to neglect the mediatory, others have so fixed their views on the mediatory as greatly and hurtfully to lose sight of the ultimate.” This writer refers to Tillotson on one side, and Zinzendorf on the other, as instances of these extremes; and indicates that perhaps his own leaning might be a little too much in the former direction.

It can hardly be doubted that there is something in this suggestion. In the guidance and training of the soul some aim mainly at right dispositions towards God and His will, without much dwelling on what Knox calls mediatory truths; because they assume that the latter exist only with a view to the former; and if the end has been brought into view and is coming to be attained, there is no special need of dwelling on the means. Others aim mainly at receiving the right impressions about Christ dying and rising, and at complying with the way of salvation as it is set forth to us in Christ; because they are persuaded that here the secret lies of all deliverance and progress, and that the end cannot otherwise be reached. And Mr. Knox suggests, with truth most likely, that such persons have often so occupied themselves with what may be called the means of salvation that they lose sight in a great degree of the end to which all tends — life in God, life in fellowship with His loving goodness and His holy will.

What application these views may have to divergences of our own day it would take too long to consider. Mr. Knox’s remark has been referred to here in order to throw light on the mental attitude of Paul. Paul will hardly be accused of losing sight of the ultimate truths; but certainly he delights to view them through the mediatory truths; and he strives to reach the ultimate victory, through the most realising application to his heart and life

of what those mediatory truths embody and disclose. Through the mediatory truths the ultimate ones reveal themselves to him with a wealth and an intensity otherwise unattainable. And the eternal life comes into experience for him as he takes into his soul the full effect of the provision which God has made, in Christ, to bestow eternal life upon him. That order of things which is mediatory is not regarded by Paul only as a fitting introduction, on God's part, to His ultimate procedure; it is also in the same degree fitted to become for the individual man the medium of vision, of assurance, of participation. In other words, Paul finds God and makes way into goodness through Christ; and not through Christ merely as an embodied ideal, but through union to Christ Divine and human, Christ living, dying, rising, redeeming, justifying, sanctifying, glorifying. He never pauses in any of these, so as to fail in looking onward to God, the living God, But neither does he pass on to that goal so as to disregard the way unto the Father. If he could have foreseen the method of those who are striving in our day to bring men to the blessedness which Christianity holds out by dwelling exclusively on Christian ethics, he might have sympathised with their ethical intensity; but he would surely have wondered that they failed to find in Christianity more pregnant springs of motive and of power. Perhaps he would even be moved to say, "O foolish Galatians (or Corinthians), who hath bewitched you?" Not less, it must also be said, might he wonder at many a gospel preacher, who rehearses the "way of salvation" until the machinery clanks and groans, unable apparently to divine — unable, at least, to bring out — that glory of God in it, that wonderful presence and influence of infinite holiness, goodness, and pity, which make the gospel the power of God.

We, meanwhile, shall do well to imitate the charity of Mr. Knox, who cordially owned the Christian piety of those who might go too far either way. Few of us, indeed, can dispense with the charity that is tender to partial and imperfect views. But if we are to understand Paul, we must find our way into some sympathy with him here; not only as he is seen on this line to have attained so far in saintship, but as he is seen to be sure that this way lay much more — that on this line his road lay to the glory that should be revealed. He could contemplate the practice and growth of piety in many lights; yet it came home to him most evidently as growth in the knowledge and in the appropriation of Jesus Christ.

He has cast away for the sake of Christ the treasures so much valued by the Jews, and many a treasure more. But what he would chiefly impress on the minds of those to whom he writes is not so much the amount of what he

has cast away, but rather the worth of that which he has found, and more and more is finding. The mass of things set down for loss is a mere steppingstone to this central theme. But though he tells us what he thought and felt about it, most of us learn but slowly how much it meant for him. When we sit down beside the Apostle to learn his lesson, we become conscious that he is seeing what we cannot descry; he is sensitive to Christ through spiritual senses which in us are torpid and undeveloped. Christ holds him all through. It is faith, and love, and gratitude; it is self-devotion, and obedience, and wonder, and worship; and, through all, the conviction glows that Christ is his, that "in Christ all things have changed for him. In Christ we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sin. He hath made me accepted in the Beloved. I live; yet not I, but Christ. In Christ, old things have passed away, all things are made new. Christ is made of God unto us wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?" The intense heat of this conception of Christ, it must once more be said, gives its distinctive character to the religious life of Paul. May we not say that the lamentable distinction of a great deal of current Christianity is the coldness of men's thoughts about their Saviour? The views of many may be characterised as "correct, but cold." Only what can be more incorrect, what can more effectually deny and controvert the main things to be asserted, than coldness towards our Saviour, and cold thoughts of His benefits? This we "should hold to be unpardonable. We never should forgive it to ourselves.

"For the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus." Christ had come into the life of Paul as a wonderful knowledge. Becoming thus known to him, He had transformed the world in which Paul lived, and had made him conscious of a new order of existence, so that old things passed away and all became new. The phrase employed combines two ideas. In the first place, Paul felt Christ appealing to him as to a thinking, knowing nature. Various influences were reaching him from Christ which bore on heart, will, conscience: but they all came primarily as a revelation; they came as light. "God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ Jesus." In the next place, this discovery came with a certain assuredness. It was felt to be not a dream, not a fair imagination only, not a speculation, but a knowledge. Here Paul felt himself face to face with the real — indeed, with fundamental reality. In this character, as luminous knowledge, the revelation of Christ challenged his decision, it demanded his appreciation and adherence. For since Christ claims so

fundamental a place in the moral world, since He claims so intimate and fruitful a relation to the whole state and prospects of the believing man, acquaintance with Him (at least, if it be acquaintance in Paul's style) cannot pause at the stage of contemplation: it passes into appropriation and surrender. Christ is known as dealing with us, and must be dealt with by us. So this knowledge becomes, at the same time, experience.

Hence, while in ver. 8 the Apostle speaks of himself as encountering all earthly loss that he may know Christ, in ver. 9 it is that he may gain Christ and may be found in Him. Christ so came into the field of his knowledge as to become the treasure of his life, replacing those things which heretofore had been gain, and which now figured as loss. When Paul turned from all else to know Christ, he turned, at the same time, to have Christ, "gaining Him," and to be Christ's, "found in Him."

Christ, in fact, comes to us with commandments, "words" (~~414-423~~ John 14:23), which are to be kept and done. He comes to us, also, with promises, the fulfilment of which, in our own case, is a most practical business. Some of these promises concern the world to come; but others apply to the present; and these, which lie next us, either are neglected, or are embraced and put to proof, every day of our lives. Besides all this, Christ comes to us to fix and fill our minds, and to endear Himself to us, in virtue simply of what He is. So viewed, He is to be owned as our best Friend, and indeed henceforth, with reverence be it said, by far our nearest Relation. This is to be, or else it is not to be. Each day asks the question, Which? Paul's Christianity was the answer to that question. How his answer rings in all our ears! Our Christianity also is making its reply.

Both as to knowledge and as to experience the type was fixed from the first: there could be no doubt about either. But both were to deepen and widen as life went on. Christ was apprehended at first as a wonderful Whole of good; but so that indefinite fields of progress were continually to open up. In the very first days a knowledge dawned, for the sake of which all else was counted loss; yet a world of truths remained to know, as well as of good to experience, for the sake of which also all else should continue to be counted but loss. This, in fact, is only one way of saying that Christ and His salvation were realities, divinely full and worthy. Being real, the full acquaintance with all they mean for men can only arise in a historical way. Paul therefore emphasises this, that real Christianity, the right kind of Christianity, just because it has found a treasure, is set on going on to find that same treasure still further and still more (comp.

<000>Philippians 1:9). If the treasure is real and the man is in earnest, that will be so. Such had been the course of his own Christian life from the first. Now, though many years have disciplined him, though changing experiences have given him new points of view, still, no less than at the first, his rejoicing in the present goes hand in hand with reaching onward to the future. The one, in fact, is the reason of the other. Both are rational, or neither. He has counted all to be loss for the excellency of the knowledge which has broken upon his soul: and still he presses on, that he may know; for the same strong attraction continues and grows.

Before passing to details, something more should perhaps be said of this magnificent generality, “the knowledge of Christ.”

Christ is first of all known historically; so He is presented to us in the Gospels. His story is part of the history of our race. He passes through youth to manhood. We see Him living, acting, enduring; and we hear Him teaching — wonderful words proceed from His mouth. We contemplate Him in His humiliation, under the limits to which He submitted that He might share our state and bear our burdens. In the pathways of that Jewish life He discloses a perfect goodness and a perfect dignity. We see especially that He cherishes a purpose of good will to men which He bears to them from the Father. It overflows in all His words and works, and in the prosecution of it He moves on to lay down His life for us. This is the beginning of the knowledge of the Only Begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth. Much may as yet be undefined; many questions may crowd on us that receive as yet no precise answer; nay, much may seem to us as yet to be strangely entangled in the particulars of an individual and of a provincial existence. But this presentation of Christ can never be dispensed with or superseded; and, for its essential purpose, it never can be surpassed. For this is the Life. “The Life was manifested, and we have seen it, and show unto you that Eternal Life, which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us.”

This vision, which the Gospels set before us, was also before the mind of Paul. And words of our Lord, delivered in His earthly ministry, and preserved by those who heard Him, were treasured by the Apostle of the Gentiles, and reproduced to guide the Churches as need required. Yet there is a sense in which we may say that it is not exactly the Christ of the Gospels who comes before us in the Pauline writings. The Christ of Paul is the Lord who met him by the way. It is Christ dead, risen, and ascended; it is Christ with the reason and the result of His finished work made plain,

and with the relation unveiled which He sustains to men who live by Him; it is Christ with the significance of His wonderful history for believers shining out from Him — Christ *vestitus Evangelio*. Now He has gone up above all worlds. No longer is He hedged about by necessities of mortal life; no longer tied by earthly bonds to some places and some men and one nation. He is glorified; all fulness dwells in Him; all God's purposes are seen to centre in Him. And then, by His death and resurrection, the tie between Him and His people is unveiled to faith, as it could not be before. They are one with Him — in Him redeemed, endowed, triumphant, glorified. Every Christian privilege and attainment, every grace, every virtue and good gift, takes on a celestial character, as it is seen to be an element in our fellowship with Christ. The state of Christians is seen reflected in their Head. And, in turn, Christ is seen, as it were, through the medium of the relation which He sustains to them, and of the wealth of good arising to them by it. It is Christ as He is to His people, Christ as He is set in the centre of the world of good that radiates to them all, whom Paul wonders at and worships. And he finds all this to be rooted in our Lord's death upon the cross, which was the crisis of the whole redemption. All that follows took character and efficacy from that death.

A special insight into all this was included in the wisdom given to Paul. And yet this view of things does not turn out to be something diverse or alien from what the Gospels set before us. Rather it is the gospel story revealing its native significance and virtue along many lines which were not so distinct before.

But now all this, in turn, leads us to the third aspect of the case. What Christ is and what He does may be described; but there is a knowledge of it which is imparted practically, in the progressive history of the believer. According to the Christian teaching, we enter, as Christians, on a new relation; and in that relation a certain blessed well-being is appointed to us. This well-being is itself an unfolding or disclosure of Christ. Now this well-being comes home to us and is verified in the course of a progressive human experience. Life must become our school to teach us what it all means. Life sets us at the point of view now for one lesson, now for another. Life moves and changes, and brings its experiences; its problems, its conflicts, its anxieties, its fears, its temptations; its need of pity, pardon, strengthening; its experience of weakness, defeat, and disgrace; its opportunities of service, self-denial, fidelity, victory. For all those occasions Christ has a meaning and a virtue, which, in those occasions, is to become personal to ourselves. This makes knowledge indeed. This

becomes the vivid commentary upon the historical and the doctrinal instruction. Life, taken in Christ's way, along with prayer and thought, manifests Christ's meaning, and makes it real to us, as nothing else can. It furnishes the stepping-stones for passing onward, in the knowledge of Christ.

This also was Paul's condition, though he was an inspired man. He too was fain to improve his knowledge in this school. And when we take all three aspects together, we shall see how truly, for Paul and for us, the knowledge of Christ is, on the one hand, so excellent from the first, that it justifies the great decision to which it calls us; and, on the other hand, how it creates a longing for further insight and fresh attainment. The latter we see in the Apostle as plainly as the former. From the first, he knew in whom he believed, and was persuaded that for His sake all else was to be resigned. Yet to the end he felt the unsatisfied desire to know more, to gain more; and his heart, if we may apply here the Psalmist's words, was breaking for this longing which it had.

It was remarked above that the "excellency of the knowledge of Christ" in ver. 8 corresponds in the Apostle's thought to the "gaining" of Christ and being "found in Him" of ver. 9; and this may be the best place to say a word on these two phrases. To gain Christ, points to a receiving Christ as one's own; and the Apostle uses the phrase so as to imply that this finding of Christ, as One who is gained or won, was still going on; it was progressive. Clearly also the alternative is implied, that what is not gained is lost. The question in the Apostle's life, about which he was so decided, was about no less than losing or gaining Christ. The phrase "be found" points to the verification of Paul's relation to Christ in his history and in its results. That relation is contemplated as something that proves true. It turns out to be so. We shall best understand the phrase as referring, not to some one future date at which he should be so found, but rather to present and future alike. As men, or angels, or God, or Christ might view him, or as he might take account of his own state, this is what he would have found in regard to himself. Every way he would be found in Christ. The form of expression, however, is specially appropriate here, because it fits so well into the doctrine of righteousness through Christ, which the Apostle is about to emphasise. A similar remark applies to the expression "in Christ" so frequently occurring in the Pauline writings. This is usually explained by saying that the Apostle sets before us Christ as the sphere of his spiritual being — in whom he lived and moved — never out of relation to Him, and not so related to any other. Such explanations are true and

good: only we may say that the pregnant strength of the expression seems to be weakened even by the best explanations. The relation in view is too wonderful ever to be adequately described. The union between Christ and His Church, between Christ and the believing man, is a mystery; and like all objects of faith, it is dimly apprehended by us for the present. But the certainty of it, and its wonderfulness, we should never allow ourselves to overlook. Christ is able to bring men into fellowship with Himself, to assume responsibility for them, to represent their interests and to care for their good; and men may receive Christ into their lives; with a completeness on both sides which no explanations can adequately represent. The identification with Christ which the phrase suggests naturally fits what follows.

Now the Apostle goes more into detail. He tells us what were for him the main articles of this good state of being “found in Christ.” He indicates, with a certain eager gratitude, the main lines along which the benefits of that state had come into experience, and along which he was pressing on to know the fulness of Christ. First, in Christ he has and shall have not his own righteousness, which is that of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith. Then, secondly, he has in hand a practical knowledge of Christ, culminating in the complete deliverance of the resurrection. It includes two aspects or elements: Christ known in the power of His resurrection, and Christ known in the fellowship of His sufferings.

The first thing then which rises distinctly into view in connection with being found in Christ is the possession of the new righteousness. We have seen already that value for righteousness such as is of law, and hope of achieving it, had been associated with Paul’s old days of Jewish zeal. He then stood on the law, and gloried in the law. But that had passed away when he learned to count all things loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ. Ever after, the contrast between the two ways of seeking “righteousness” continued to be fundamental in Paul’s Christian thinking.

The law here in view was the whole revealed will of God touching man’s behaviour, coming as a will of authority, requiring obedience. The discussion in the earlier chapters of the Epistle to the Romans makes this plain. And Paul’s way of keeping the law, in those old days, though it was necessarily too external, had not been so merely external as is sometimes supposed. His obedience had been zealous and resolute, with as much heart

and meaning as he could put into it. But law-keeping for righteousness had been the principle of it. The Jew was placed under a law; obedience to that law should be his pathway to a destiny of incomparable privilege and gladness. That was the theory. So believing, Paul had given himself with zeal to the work, "living in all good conscience before God." A great change had now befallen him; but that could not imply on his part a renunciation of God's law. The law, better understood indeed, and far more inwardly apprehended, still retained for Paul its great outlines, and was revered as Divine. It was holy and just and good. "It was felt still to shed its steadfast light on human duty, awakening and illuminating the conscience; and therefore it revealed most authentically the moral situation, with its elements of failure, and danger, and need. The law stood fast. But the scheme of life which stood in keeping the law for righteousness had passed away for Paul, vanishing in the light of a new and better day.

Here, however, we must ask what the Apostle means when he speaks of the righteousness which is by the faith of Jesus Christ, the righteousness which is of God unto or upon faith. Great disputes have arisen over this question. We must endeavour to find the Apostle's main meaning, without involving ourselves too much in the mazes of technical debate.

CHAPTER 12.

THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF FAITH. — PHILIPPIANS 3:9 (R.V.).

RIGHTEOUSNESS is a term which is applied in different ways. Often it denotes excellence of personal character. So used, it suggests the idea of a life whose manifestations agree with the standard by which lives are tried. Sometimes it denotes rectitude or justice, as distinguished from benevolence. Sometimes a claim to be approved, or judicially vindicated, is more immediately in view when righteousness is asserted. Paul himself freely uses the word in different applications, the sense, in each passage, being determined by the context. Here we have the righteousness of faith, as distinguished from the righteousness of works, or righteousness by the law. The passage belongs to a large class in which righteousness is spoken of as accruing, through Christ, to those who are unrighteous, or whose own righteousness has proved unreliable. Let us try to fix the thought which the Apostle designed to inculcate in such passages.^{f5}

The Apostle, then, conceives of the righteousness, of which he has so much to say, as God's: it is the "righteousness of God" (<4017>Romans 1:17, 3:22, 10:3). Yet it is not God's in the sense of being an attribute of His own Divine nature: for (in the passage before us) it is called "the righteousness from God"; it arises for us by our faith in Jesus Christ; and so (<4021>2 Corinthians 5:21) "we are made the righteousness of God in Christ." It is, therefore, something that is from God to us believing, a "gift of righteousness" (<4017>Romans 5:17). At the same time it is not, on the other hand, an attribute or quality of the human mind, whether natural or imparted; for it is something "revealed" (<4017>Romans 1:17). Also, it is opposed to the wrath of God. Now, that wrath is indeed an element of our state as sinners, but not a feature of our character. Further, it could not be said of any internal character of our own, that we are to be "obedient," or are to "submit" to it (<4010>Romans 10:3).

In the latter part of Romans 5. we have set before us two counter conceptions: the one of sin and condemnation, deriving from Adam, antecedent to the personal action and offence of those who descend from him; the other of free gift unto justification, following from the righteousness or obedience of Christ, this being a gift of grace abounding

unto many. In either case the Apostle sees arising from one a relation which pertains to many, and which brings forth its results to them: on the one hand, sin and death; on the other, righteousness and life. In both cases a common relation is recognised, under which individuals are found existing; and in either case it traces up to the one — to Adam or to Christ. Whatever difficulties may be felt to attach to this passage, the Apostle's doctrine of the righteousness of faith must be understood so as to agree with the way of thinking which the passage expresses.

It appears, then, that the righteousness which is from God, unto or upon faith, expresses a relation between God and believers that is the proper basis for fellowship with God, confiding on their part, communicative of the best blessings on His. It is analogous to the relation conceived to arise when a perfectly righteous man is approved and set apart to weal; and like that it stands in contrast with the relation due to sin as it incurs wrath. It follows that this righteousness, if it exists or becomes available for those who have sinned, includes the forgiveness of sins. But it includes more than forgiveness, in so far as it is not merely negative. It is the concession to us of a standing which is a positive basis for experiences, pointing towards eternal life, and rising into it.

This relation to Himself God has founded for us sinful men in Christ, and specially in His atonement. It is part of what is divinely held out to us, as life or well-being in Christ. When we do awaken to it, our whole religious attitude towards God takes character from it, and is to be ordered accordingly. This way of being related to God is called God's righteousness, or righteousness "from God," because it is not set up by us, but by God's grace, through the redeeming work of Christ ("being justified freely by His grace, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus" — ~~<5124>~~Romans 3:24). On the other hand, it is righteousness "of faith," or "through faith of Christ," because faith subjects itself to the order of grace, revealed and made effectual in Christ, and therein finds the reconciliation. For the believing man the relation becomes effectual and operative. He is "accepted in the Beloved." He is "constituted righteous" (~~<5159>~~Romans 5:19), and his intercourse with his Heavenly Father regulates itself accordingly, he being justified "from — or upon — his faith." The harmony with God on which he has entered becomes, in some degree, matter of consciousness for himself (~~<5160>~~Romans 5:1). With this connection of things in view, the Apostle teaches that righteousness is imputed, or reckoned, to him who believes in Jesus (~~<5164>~~Romans 4:24).

Whatever opinion we may choose to entertain of this scheme, it ought not to be disputed that this, in general, is Paul's conception of the matter. However, let us emphatically note that it is as "in Christ," "found in Him," the Apostle possesses this form of well-being. If there be such a thing as a real union between the Saviour and Paul, then in the Saviour and with the Saviour Paul is thus righteous. The faith to which this righteousness arises is faith that unites to Christ, and not any other kind of faith. And so, if it be possible for Paul to fall from Christ, then also he must fall from the righteousness of faith. In Christ a relation to God appears, made good, maintained, and verified, in which He gathers to Himself and comprehends all true believers: "for which cause He is not ashamed to call them brethren." Hence also this Christian benefit, though it is distinguishable, is not separated radically from the other benefits. It is not possible to take the one and leave the rest; for Christ is not divided. But there is an order in His gifts; and, for Paul, this gift is primary. God is ours in Christ; therefore religion, true religion, may begin and go on. It is of weight with Paul that this righteousness of faith, arising for him who is "found" in Christ, is founded for us in the atonement. That is to say, the new relation is not represented as a relation created for us by a mere Divine fiat that it shall be so. It is represented as arising for sinful men out of the redemption of Christ; which redemption is represented as in its own nature fitted to fructify into this result, as well as into other fruits which are due to it. Christ's atonement is the way which grace has taken to bring in the righteousness of faith. In particular we are made righteous (in this sense) through Christ, in a manner corresponding to that in which He was made sin for us (Romans 5:21), Hence the blood, the sacrifice, the obedience of Christ are referred to on all occasions, in connection with the righteousness of faith, as explicative causes to which this is to be traced. The relation is first of all a relation completely grounded and made good in Christ; and then we are participant in it with Him, in virtue of our faith in Him. Clearly the Apostle thinks of this righteousness of faith as something very wonderful. It is for him fundamental. It is the first article in which he celebrates the worth of the knowledge of Christ; no doubt, because he felt it transforming his whole moral and spiritual experience; and, in particular, because it contrasted so vividly with the nugatory righteousness of earlier days.

In earlier days Paul sought righteousness — an approved and, accepted standing with God — by the works of the law. That project failed when the great discovery on the road to Damascus showed him to himself as all astray; in particular, when the law itself, coming home to him in the fulness

of its meaning, both revealed to him the beggarliness of his own performance, and, at the same time, stung into appalling activity ungodly elements within him. Then he saw before him the law rising from its deep foundations in eternal strength and majesty, imperative, unalterable, inexorable; and over against it his own works lay withered and unclean. But another vision came. He saw the Son of God in His life, death, and resurrection. Mere love and pity were the inspiration of His coming: obedience -and sacrifice were the form of it. So in that great vision one element or aspect that rose into view was righteousness, — righteousness grounded as deep as the law itself, as magnificent in its great proportions, as little subject to change or decay, radiant with surpassing glory. As he saw, and bowed, and trusted, he became conscious of a new access and nearness to God Himself; he passed into the fellowship of God's dear Son; he found acceptance in the Beloved. Here was the answer to that woeful problem of the law: righteousness in Christ for a world of sinners, coming to them as a free gift to faith. Here was the strong foundation on which faith found itself set to learn its lessons, and perform its service, and fight its battles. In Christ he received the reconciliation — merciful, and also righteous. As Paul thought of the ground on which he once had stood, and of the standing granted to him now, in Him, it was with a "yea, doubtless" he declared that he counted all to be loss for the gain of Christ, in whom he was found, not having his own righteousness, which was of the law, but that which is by the faith of Christ.

Righteousness of faith, as the Apostle conceives it, is to be distinguished from personal righteousness, or goodness, as an attribute of human character, but yet is most closely connected with it. Righteousness of faith opened what seemed to Paul the prosperous way into righteousness of daily living. In the very hour when he first believed for righteousness, he felt himself entering a kingdom of light, and love, and power, in which all things were possible; and ever after the same order of experience verified itself for him afresh. The righteousness of faith being the relation in which, through Christ, he found himself standing to God, fixed at the same time his relation to all Christian benefits, including, as a principal element, conformity to the likeness of Christ. To the man in Christ all these benefits pertained; in Christ he could claim them all: in Christ he found himself before doors that opened of their own accord to let him in; in Christ it proved to be a fit thing, grounded deep in the congruities of God's administration, that God should be for him; there fore, also, the pathway of holiness lay open before him. The fulness of blessing had not yet come into possession and experience. But in the righteousness of faith he

apprehended all blessings as stretching out their hands to, him, because through Christ they ought to be his. That he should find himself in a relation to God so simple and so satisfying was wonderful; all the more, when it was contrasted with the condemnation belonging to him as a sinner. This was the righteousness from God to faith, in the strength of which he could call all things his own.

If Paul had succeeded in the enterprise of his earlier days, when he sought righteousness by the law, he would, as he hoped, have found acceptance in the end; and various blessings would have followed. He would have emerged from his task a man stamped as righteous, and fit to be treated accordingly. That would have been the end. But now, in reference to his present enterprise, he has found, being Christ, acceptance at the beginning. So often as faith lifts him into the heavenly places where Christ is, he finds all things to be his; not because he has achieved righteousness, but because Christ has died and risen, and because God justifies him who believes in Jesus. The platform he hoped to reach by the efforts of a lifetime is already under his feet. Paul faces each arduous step in his new enterprise, strong in the conviction that his standing before God is rooted, not in his doings nor in his feelings, but in his Saviour in whom he holds the righteousness of faith.

We need not conceal from ourselves, however, that many find the doctrine thus ascribed to Paul unacceptable. If they do not count it positively misleading, as some do, they yet regard it as unprofitable theory.

Apart from objections drawn from theology or morals or texts, they argue, for example, that it is all in the air, away from real experience. Christian religion is a practical matter, — a question of improved dispositions, improved habits, and improved prospects. If, through Christ, such things as these arise for us, if, through Him, influences reach us that tend to such results, then those are the practical specimens which interpret to us a Saviour's kindness. To know Christ in these must be the true knowledge of Him. To carry us away beforehand into the region of a supposed relation to God is a precarious, and may be a delusive business; it is, at any rate, a dogmatic nicety rather than a vital element in religion. If we are to experience God's mercy or Christ's kindness in any practical form, then that is to be so; and it is shorter to say so at once. Let us fix on that, without interposing any doctrine of "righteousness by faith."

But it must be said, in reply, that to speak of this righteousness of faith as unpractical is a strange mistake. All religion aims at fellowship with God;

and in Christian religion that fellowship becomes real and authentic in Christ. Through all exercises and attainments of Christian religion that are genuine, this thread goes. We have access to God, and we abide in the Father and the Son. How imperfectly this takes place on our part need not be said. The imperfection on our part is, indeed, only exceeded by the condescension on His. Yet our faith is that this is real, otherwise Christianity would not be for us the opening of an eternal blessedness. How can it be judged unpractical, if God reveals to men, first, that in the room of those confused and melancholy relations to God which arise for us out of our own past history, He has constituted for us a relation, apprehensible by faith, in which we find ourselves pardoned, accepted, commended to God to be made partakers of life eternal; and, secondly, that this is grounded in the service and sacrifice of His Son, sent forth to save us; so that we enter this relation and hold it, not independently, but in fellowship with the Son of God, His sonship becoming the model of ours? Is this unpractical? Is it unpractical to be conscious of such a relation between God and men, for ever embodied and made accessible in His Son our Saviour? Is it unpractical to apprehend God in the attitude towards us which is due to such a relation, and to take, ourselves, the attitude of gratitude and penitence and trust which on our side corresponds to it? It cannot be unpractical. It may be pernicious, if it takes the form of a cold, presumptuous arrogance, or of a self-satisfied Pharisaism; that is to say, if God be not in it. But if God in Christ is reaching us along those lines, or if we, alive to His eternal character, and conscious of our guilt and need, are reaching out to real relations and real fellowship with Him through His Son our Lord, then it cannot be unpractical. And, indeed, however men may differ as to theological explanations, some sense of the worth of the thing intended has reached the hearts of all true Christians. Perhaps the state of the case will more clearly appear if we fix attention on one Christian benefit. Let us take the forgiveness of sins. Forgiveness of sins is the primary grace, and it sets the type of the grace to which we owe all benefits. Forgiveness, as it were, leads in all other blessings by the hand; or, each blessing as it advances into a Christian life, comes with a fresh gift of forgiveness in the heart of it. If this is so, then the tendency, which is observable in various quarters, to pass forgiveness by, as a matter of course, and to hurry on to what are reckoned more substantial, or more experimental benefits, must be attended with loss. It must, so far, damage our conceptions of the manner in which it befits God to bestow blessings on sinful men, and also our conception of the spirit in which we should receive them. But then, in the next place, the forgiveness of sins itself is

referred to the mediation of Christ, and the work accomplished in that mediation, as its known basis. Forgiveness of sins was to arise out of an order of grace, embodied in history—namely, in the history of the Incarnate Son of God; and we are not entitled to take for granted it could fitly arise otherwise. Apparently Christ Himself came into the inheritance which He holds for us, by an order of things which it was imperative on Him to regard, and by a history which He must fulfil. And we, believing in Him, find, in consequence, a new place and standing; we receive a “gift of righteousness” which contains the forgiveness of sins; we obtain, through Christ, a mode of access to God, of which forgiveness is a feature. So the place of forgiveness in the Divine administration is vindicated and safeguarded; and while forgiveness comes to us as a gift of the Father’s compassionate heart, it is found to be true also that “Christ washed us from our sins in His own blood.” “God sent His Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law.” “God hath sent Him forth for a propitiation, through faith in His blood, to declare His righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, . . . that He might be just, and the Justifier of him that believeth in Jesus.” Our forgiveness is a free gift of God’s goodness; yet also, it is our participation with Christ, sent to us from the Father, in a wonderful relation which He has come to hold to sin and to righteousness. If we overlook this, we conceal from ourselves great aspects of the work undertaken for us by the love of God.

But if forgiveness, which is itself a meeting with God in peace, refers itself to the mediation of Christ as preparing for us a blessed relation to God — a righteousness of faith — how should our whole fellowship with God, in grace, fail to presuppose the same foundation?

But argument upon this topic might lead us far. Let us close the chapter in another vein.

All religion, worth recognising in that character, implies earnestness, serious aspiration, and endeavour. It supposes human life to place itself under the influence of an order of motives that is to be comprehensive and commanding. And this is true also of Christian religion. But Christian religion, as we know, does not begin with a consciousness of ability to achieve success; it is not grounded in an expectation that by strenuous or apt effort of ours, we may achieve the aims and secure the benefits at which religion points. That is not the root of Christian religion. It begins with a consciousness and confession of weakness: the soul owns its incompetency to deal with the great interests that reveal themselves in the

light of Christ; it is without strength for tasks like these. And so the deepest and earliest exercise of Christian religion is Prayer. It asks great things from a great God. "This poor man cried," and the Lord heard him. Paul's Christianity began thus: "Behold, he prayeth."

Now just so Christian religion does not begin with a consciousness of deserving something, or an idea that by taking pains we may deserve something, may single ourselves out for at least some modest share of favourable recognition. Rather it often begins with the fading away of such ideas when they were present before. Christian religion roots itself in the confession of sin, and therefore of ill-desert; it signalises itself by a deepening sense of the seriousness of the situation in this respect. With this it comes face to face before God. "I will confess my transgressions unto the Lord." "God be merciful to me a sinner." We have nothing that is not sinful to bring before Him; so, at length, we come with that. It is all we have. Our prayer rises not merely out of the sense of weakness, but out of the consciousness of demerit. But in Christian religion we are aware, as of strength which can remedy our weakness, so of forgiveness which can put away our sins. There is forgiveness with Thee." "Through this Man is preached to us the forgiveness of sins." It is clear also that this forgiveness comes, wherever it comes, as full and free forgiveness, "forgiving you all trespasses." So that in Christian religion we listen at Christ's feet to the testimony directed to all penitent believers, that instead of reckoning in part or whole about the guilt of sins committed, we are to find God in Christ to be One who simply puts away our sin. That shall hold us apart from God no more. Rather, the putting of it away brings with it the strangest, lowliest access to God. "O God, thou art my God." "Who is a God like unto Thee?" Forgiveness is by no means mere immunity (least of all for Christian religion). Punishment, certainly, in the sense of the separation and evil which sin deserves, passes away. But forgiveness, "in Christian religion, is forgiveness with the Forgiver in it. We meet God in the forgiveness of sins. We abide with God in the forgiveness of sins.

Forgiveness, too, as we already foresee, is but the foundation and beginning of a history in which we are called to go forward. This history may have sad passages in it; but in going forward in it in faith we are assured that on God's part it is a history of most painstaking and most sublime benefaction: all of it ordered so as to be of a piece with His sending of His Son; all of it instinct with the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. Faith looking to Christ believes this, and receives it. And to faith upheld by Him on whom we trust all this is more and more made good, and

comes true. It is a history of progress in true goodness. And the end is life everlasting.

Now the words before us suggest, upon the one hand, very strongly, the simply gratuitous character of the Christian benefits, and the sense of undeserved kindness with which they are to be received. In Christian religion we begin as those who have no righteousness, who plead no merit, who owe and are to owe all to Divine mercy. From the base upwards Christian religion is a religion of grace; and “it is of faith, that it might be by grace.” Whatever activities, whatever successes may fall into the Christian’s career, whatever long possession of accustomed good may eventually mark his experience, all is to be informed and inspired by this initial and perpetual conviction, “Not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law.”

At the same time, the same words of the Apostle suggest very strongly the Divine stability of the good which meets us in Christ. A very strong foundation has been laid for those who flee for refuge to lay hold of the hope set before them in the gospel. To our sense, indeed, things may seem to be most mutable. But when faith reaches to the things not seen, it learns another lesson. In Christ believers are graced with entrance into an order of salvation divinely strong and durable. When God gave us Christ, He gave us, in a sense, “all things,” and indeed all things ordering themselves into an eternal expression of fatherly love and care. In Christ comes into view not goodness only, but goodness allying itself for us with Wisdom and Power and Right. It makes its way by incarnation and atonement and resurrection to a kingdom which, being first Christ’s, appointed to Him, is also His people’s, appointed to them. Now a relation to God which looks forward to all this, which is the basis for it and the entrance to it, descends on the believing man through Christ. It is due to Christ that it should come so. It is the Father’s loving will that it should be so. All that is needful to ground and vindicate that most gracious relation is found in Christ, who of God is made unto us righteousness; in whom we hold the righteousness which is of God on faith.

The Apostle’s course of thought has not led us to raise any question about the nature and the virtue of the faith which apprehends and receives the righteousness of God. It is a subject on which much has been said. What seems needful here may be soon spoken.

The only way of entering on new relations with God, or ourselves becoming new men, is the way of faith. This Christian way is the only way.

Every other is simply impossible. Let any man seriously try it, and he will find it so. But the question, What kind of faith? is best answered by saying, Such faith as is called for by the object of faith set before us, when that is honestly and intently regarded. As the gospel is, the faith must be; for the gospel is the instrument by which faith is evoked, sustained, and guided. The great object of faith is God, graciously revealing Himself through Christ. Every genuine aspect of this revelation takes its significance from its disclosure of God. The faith, so called, which misses this, is wrong faith; the faith which marks and welcomes this is right faith. And such faith is already, even in its earliest life, breaking forth into repentance and love and obedience. It must be, for God is in it.

So, to confine ourselves to the aspect of things which occupies this chapter, the faith which meets God in the forgiveness of sins through Christ, and genuinely accepts from Him the wonderful position of holding fellowship with God forgiving, is already, virtually, repentance as well as faith. The man who so meets with God, is therein agreed with God about his own sin: he feels God to be in the right and himself to be wholly in the wrong; he feels, in particular, God to be most sublimely and conclusively in the right in the holy pity of His forgiveness. The man who does not feel this, is not accepting forgiveness. He may be posturing as if he were, but he is not doing it.

There is just one difficulty in faith — the difficulty of being real. But when it is real, it makes all things new.

CHAPTER 13.

RESURRECTION LIFE AND DAILY DYING. — PHILIPPIANS 3:10, 11.

WE have still other aspects to consider of that “gain” which the Apostle descried in Christ, for the sake of which he had cast so much away.

To prize the righteousness of faith was an element in the true knowledge of Christ; but it was so far from exhausting that knowledge that it only opened a door of progress, and brought near the most stirring possibilities. For, indeed, to be found in Christ having that righteousness meant that God in Christ was his, and had begun to communicate Himself in eternal life. Now this must still reveal itself in further and fuller knowledge of Christ. According to the Apostle’s conception, that which Christ means to be to us, that which we may attain to be by Christ, opens progressively to the soul that has been won to this pursuit; it comes into view and into experience in a certain growing knowledge. It is a practical historical career; and the Apostle was set on achieving it, not by strength or wisdom of his own, but by the continual communication of grace, responding to desire and prayer and endeavour.

We must not forget, what has more than once been said, that this earthly life of ours is the scene in which the discipline goes on, in which the career is achieved. It is the calling here and now, not at some other stage of being, that the Apostle is thinking of for himself and for his disciples. And as earthly life is the scene, so earthly life also furnishes the occasions and opportunities by which the knowledge of Christ is to advance. Any other way of it is for us inconceivable. This life in all the various forms which it assumes for different men, in all the changing experiences which it brings to each of us — life on the earth we know so well — with its joy and sorrow, its labour and rest, its gifts and its bereavements, its friends and foes, its times and places, its exercise and interest for body and mind, for intellect and heart and conscience, with its temptations and its better influences, — life must furnish the opportunities for acquiring this practical knowledge of Christ. For that which falls to us, if we are in Christ, is a certain blessed well-being (itself an unfolding of Christ’s wisdom and grace). And this must impart itself, and reveal itself, in our actual

experience, but in an experience which we pass through under the guidance of Christ.

This familiar life, then, is the scene; it alone can furnish the opportunities. And yet what the Apostle apprehends, as coming into possession and experience, is a life of a higher style, a life set on a nobler key: it is a life that has its centre and source and true type elsewhere; it belongs to a higher region; indeed, it is a life whose perfect play pertains to another, coming world. Capacity for such a life is not something superhuman; it is congenital to man, made in the image of God. And yet, if these capacities unfold, man's life must, in the end, become other than we know it now; with a new proportioning of elements, with a new order of experience, with new harmonies, with aptitudes for love and service and worship that are beyond us now. Only now, they begin and grow; they are now to be aimed at, and realised in earnest and first-fruit, and embraced in hope. For they are elements in the knowledge of Christ, who is ours to know.

This is indicated in the Apostle's aspiration after knowing Christ in the power of His resurrection, and his yearning if by any means he might attain to the resurrection of the dead.

The resurrection of Christ marked the acceptance of His work by the Father, and revealed the triumph in which that work ended. Death and all the power of the enemy were overcome, and victory was attained. For one thing, the resurrection of Christ made sure the righteousness of faith. He rose again for our justification. So every passage of the Apostle's life which proved that his confidence in that respect was not vain, that God in Christ was truly his God, was an experience of the power of Christ's resurrection. But the resurrection of Christ was also His emergence — His due emergence — into the power and blessedness of victorious life. In the Person of Christ life in God, and unto God, had descended into the hard conditions set for Him who would associate a world of sinners to Himself. In the resurrection the triumph of that enterprise came to light. Now, done with sin, and free from death, and asserting His superiority to all humiliation and all conflict, He rose in the fulness of a power which He was entitled also to communicate. He rose, with full right and power to save. And so His resurrection denotes Christ as able to inspire life, and to make it victorious in His members.

When, then, Paul says that he would know Christ in the power of His resurrection, he aims at a life (already his, but capable of far more adequate

development) conformed to the life which triumphed in the risen Christ, one with that in principle, in character, and in destiny.

This was, in the meantime, to be human life on the earth, with the known elements and conditions of that life; including, in Paul's case, some that were hard enough. But it was to be transformed from within, inspired with a new meaning and aim. It was to have its elements polarised anew, organised by new forces and in a new rhythm. It was, and was to be, pervaded by peace with God, by the consciousness of redemption, by dedication to service. It was to include a recoil from evil, and a sympathy with goodness, — elements these which might be so far thought of as a reverting to the unfallen state. But it had more in it, because it was based on redemption, and rooted in Christ who died and rose again. It was baptised with the passion of gratitude; it was drawn into the effort to build up the Redeemer's kingdom; and it aimed at a better country.

So while the life we know so well was the sphere in which this experience fulfilled itself, the longings it included pointed to an existence higher up and further on — to an existence only to be reached by resurrection from the dead, an existence certainly promised to be so reached. All the effort and the longing pointed to that door of hope; Paul was reaching on to the resurrection of the dead. For that blessed resurrection would consummate and fulfil the likeness to Christ and the fellowship with Him, and would usher into a manner of being where the experience of both should be unimpeded. The life of "knowing Christ" could not be contented here, could not rest satisfied short of that consummation. For indeed to be with Christ and to labour for Christ here on earth was good; yet so that to depart and be with Christ was far better.

We have here to do with the active and victorious aspect of Christian life, the energy in it that makes it new and great. It holds by a title and it draws from a source which must be looked for, both of them, high up in heaven. Something in it has already triumphed over death.

It may be felt, however, that there is some danger here lest the great words of Paul may carry us off our feet, and divorce us from *terra firma* altogether. Some one may ask, But what does all this mean in practice? What sort of life is it to be? Apostles can soar, perhaps; but how about the man in the workshop or in the counting-house, or the woman busied in family cares? A life in "the power of a resurrection" seems to be something that transcends earthly conditions altogether. These are perfectly fair questions, and one should try to meet them with a plain reply.

The life in view is first of all goodness in its ordinary sense, or what we call common morality — common honesty, common truthfulness, common kindness. “Let him that stole steal no more, but rather let him labour”; “Not slothful in business”; “Lie not one to another, seeing ye have put off the old man with his deeds.” But then this common morality begins to have an uncommon heart or spirit in it, by reason of Christ. So a new love for goodness and a new energy of rejection of evil begin to work; also a new sensitiveness to discern good, where its obligation was not felt before, and to be aware of evil which, before, was tolerated. Moreover, in the heart of this “common morality” the man carries about a consciousness of his own relation to God, and also of the relation to God of all with whom he meets. This consciousness is very imperfect, sometimes perhaps almost vanishes. Yet the man is aware that an immense truth is here close to him, and he has begun to be alive to it. This consciousness tends to give a new value to all the “moralities”: it awakens a new percipiency as to good and evil; in particular, the great duty of purity in relation to the man himself, and to others, acquires a new sacredness. The place and claims of self also begin to be judged by a quite new standard. In all directions possibilities of good and evil in human life are descried; and the obligation to refuse the evil and to choose the good presses with a new force. So far, the remark made a little ago is justified, that the Christian life of Paul was a life that had begun to point practically towards sinlessness, towards what we call an unfallen state; however far off it might be, as yet, from that attainment. But this would be a very limited account of the matter. The whole region of duty and privilege Godwards is lighted up now by the faith of redemption in Christ; that not only awakens gratitude, but inspires a new passion of desire and hope into all moral effort. And the man, being now aware of a kingdom of goodness set up by Christ, which is making its way to victory against all the power of evil, and being aware of the agencies by which it works, must give himself in his own place to the service of that kingdom, that he may not hurt, but help, the cause which it embodies. The new life is therefore to be an energetic life of the plainest goodness. Only faith places it in relation to the world of faith, and inspires it with the passion of love and gratitude, and amplifies it by the new horizons that fall back on all sides, and gives it a goal in the hope of life eternal.

Returning to the instance of the Apostle Paul, one observes from his account of it that the regard of the believer to Christ, such regard as may actually be attained and operative in this life, ought to fructify into desires and prayers that point beyond this life, and reach out to the resurrection of the dead. There is a contentedness with life here that is not Christian. It

would agree well with a thankful use of earthly comforts, and a cheerful serenity amid earth's changes, that we should feel our home and our treasure to be in another place, and the enjoyment of them to lie in a coming world. Not otherwise shall we know how to make a right Christian use and have a right Christian enjoyment of this life. We are not prepared to get the full good of this world until we are ready and willing to go out of it.

Let it be observed, also, how the Apostle strove to "attain" the resurrection of the dead. The great things of the Kingdom of God are exhibited in various connections, none of which is to be overlooked. One of these connections is here exhibited.

We know that in Scripture a distinction is made between the resurrection of the righteous and the resurrection of the wicked. A solemn obscurity rests on the manner and the principles of the latter, the resurrection to shame. But the resurrection of the just takes place in virtue of their union to Christ; it is after the example of His resurrection; it is to glory and honour. Now this resurrection, while it is most obviously a crowning blessing and benefaction coming from God, is represented also as having the character of an attainment made by us. The faith in which we turn to God is the beginning of a course leading to the "end of our faith, the salvation of our souls." This end coincides with the resurrection. Then the hour comes which completes, then the state arrives in which is completed, the redemption of the man. The resurrection rises before us, therefore, as something which, while on the one hand promised and given by God, is, on the other hand, "attained" by us. Our Lord (~~<D178>~~ Luke 20:35) speaks of those who shall be "counted worthy to attain that world, and the resurrection of the dead."

The resurrection is promised to believers. It is promised to arise to them in sequel to a certain course — a history of redemption, made good in their lives. How shall the disciple verify his expectation of this final benefit? Not surely without verifying the intermediate history. The way must point towards the end — *at least*, must point towards it. A resurrection state, if it be like Christ's, how much must it include! What purity, what high aptitudes, what delicate congenialities! The desires of the true Christian life, its aspirations and efforts, as well as the promises which animate and the influences which sustain it, all point in this direction. But how if in any case this prove unreal, deceptive; how if it be ostensible only? How if no real changes take place, or if they die out again? What if soul and body rise

unchanged, the soul polluted,. and so the very body bearing the stamp of old! sins? What if the murderous eye of hate, or the lurid eye of lust, shall look into the eyes of Him whose eyes are as a flame of fire? Accordingly this connection of things is impressed upon us by our Apostle (~~881~~Romans 8:11): “If the Spirit of Him that raised up Christ from the dead dwell in you, He that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal body by His Spirit which dwelleth in you.” While we live here, our body, however disciplined, must still be the body of our humiliation (ver. 21); and sin continues to beset even renewed souls. But if the Spirit of grace is even now bringing all into subjection to the obedience of Christ, enabling us to die to sin and to live to righteousness, that points forward to the completion of the work, in the resurrection to glory.

This, then, is one view in which the Apostle realises the solemnity and interest of Christian life. It is the way that leads up to such a resurrection. The resurrection rises before him as the consummate triumph of that life for which he came to Christ, the life which he longs perfectly to possess, perfectly to know. The success of his great venture is to meet Him in the rising from the dead; his course, meanwhile, is a striving onwards to it. How was it to be reached? In order to that, much must still be brought into experience of the resurrection power of Christ. Only in that strength did Paul look to be carried to the point at which, ending his course, he should lie down (if he died before Christ come) in the blessed hope of the rising from the dead. For this he looked to Christ to work mightily in him; “for this he owned himself bound, under the grace of Christ, to strive mightily, if “by any means” he might attain to it. So great is this consummation; so great are those things which fitly lead up to it. Is it not a great view of Christian religion that it sends men onward in a life in which they “attain” to the resurrection of the dead? Must not that be a great history of which this is the appropriate close?

Paul, then, was eager to go forward in a life intense and mighty, drawing on a great power to sustain it, and rising into splendid effects and results. But yet, in respect of some of its aspects, it rather seemed to the Apostle to be a certain deliberate and blessed dying. At least, the life must fulfil and realise itself along such a dying; and this also, this emphatically, he pressed on to know — “the fellowship of His sufferings, being made conformable to His death.”

Our Lord’s life on earth, strong and beautiful though it was, was really at the same time his procedure towards death. He lived as one laying down

His life, riot merely in one great sacrifice at the close, but from step to step along His whole earthly history. With no touch of the morbid or the fanatical, yet His course, in practice, had to be one of self-improvement, of loneliness, of acquaintance with energetic hostility of sin and sinners. It had to be so if it was to be faithful. He knew not where to lay His head; He endured the contradiction of sinners against Himself; He came unto His own, and His own received Him not. Even His friends, whom He so loved, and who loved Him in their imperfect way, did not love Him wisely or magnanimously, and constantly became occasions of temptation which had to be resisted. Pain and trial were the inevitable characters of the work given Him to do. It lay in His calling to put a strong and faithful negative on the natural desire for safety, for happiness, for congenial society and surroundings, for free and unembarrassed life. All this He had steadily to postpone to a period beyond the grave, and meanwhile make His way to the final crisis, at which, under a mysterious burden of extreme sorrow, accepted as the Saviour's proper portion, He died for our sins. By this sacrifice He did, no doubt, relieve His followers of a burden which they never could have borne. But yet in doing so He made it possible for them to enter, happily and hopefully, on a life so far like His own. Their life, too, comes to be governed by a decision, maintained and persisted in, for God's will, and against the impulse, in their ease the impure and treacherous impulse, of their own will. They also, in their turn, but under His influence and with His loving succour, have so to live as in that life to die. They learn to say "No" for their Master's sake to many objects which strongly appeal to them. They consent to postpone the period of perfectly harmonious life, free and unimpeded, to the time which lies beyond death. They must count their true life to be that which, perfectly conformed to and associated with their Master's life, they shall live in another scene of things. Meanwhile, as to the elements of this world, the life which stands in these must die, or they must die to it, growing into the mind of their Lord.

It is difficult to speak of this without, on the one hand, conveying a strained and unreal view of the Christian's attitude towards the present life, or, on the other hand, weakening too much the sense of "conformity to His death." In the first place the Christian's dying is mainly, and certainly it is first of all, a dying to sin, a mortifying the flesh with the affections and lusts. It is the practical renunciation of evil, along with the maintenance of the watchfulness and self-discipline needed in order to be ready to renounce evil when it comes. Evil has to be rejected, not merely by itself, but at the cost of those earthly interests which are involved in the surrender to it, however dear or constraining those interests may seem to be; so that

conformity to Christ's death, if it covered no more, would still cover a great deal of ground. But it seems to cover something more — namely, a general loosening of the grasp upon this life, or on the temporary and sensible elements of it, in view of the worth and certainty of the higher and the better life. This life, indeed, as long as we are in it, can never lose its claims upon us, as the sphere of our duty, and the scene of our training. Here we have our place to fill, our relations to sustain, our part to play, our ministries to perform. In all these ways of it we have some good to do, of lower or loftier kinds; in all, we have many lessons to learn, which crowd upon us to the last; through all we have to carry the faith of the unseen Kingdom and the unseen Lord; and in all these aspects of earthly life, if God gives us any cheering experience of earthly brightness, surely it is to be taken most thankfully. It is a poor way of construing the conformity to Christ's death, to renounce interest in the life of which we are a part, and the world which is the scene of it. But the interest should fasten more intently on the things which interest our Lord, and eagerness of spirit about earthly good for ourselves must give place and subside.

And yet, when one thinks of the beauty and sweetness of much that pertains to our earthly existence, and of the goodness of God in material or temporal gifts, and of the thankfulness with which Christian hearts are to take these when they are given, and are to walk with God in the use of them, one feels the risk of involving oneself here in extravagance or in contradiction. We are not going to maintain that the Apostle would shut himself out, or us, from interest or delight in the innocent beauty or gladness of the earth. But yet is it not true that we are all passing on to death, and in death are to be parted from all this? Is it not true that as Christians we consent to dying; we count it the good discipline of Christ's people that they should die, and pass so into the better life? Is it not true that our life as Christians should train us to maintain this mind deliberately and habitually, calmly and gladly? For indeed this life, at its purest and best, still offers to us a vision of good that is apt to steal our hearts away from the supreme good, the best and highest. Now that best and highest rises before us, as practically to be made ours, in the resurrection.

Meanwhile, it is well, no doubt, that we should cherish a frank and thankful gladness in all earthly good and earthly beauty that can be taken as from the Father's hand. Yet there should grow upon us an inward consent, strengthening as the days go by, that this shall not endure; that it shall not be our permanent possession; that it shall be loosely held, as erelong to be parted from. Such a mind should grow, not because our hearts are cold to

the present country of our being, but because they are warming towards a better country. These earthly things are good, but they are not ours; we have only a lease of them, terminable at any time. Who shall bring us to that which is, and shall eternally be, our very own?

So Christ our Master passed through life, with an open eye and heart for the fair and the lovable around Him, for flowers and little children, and for what was estimable or attractive in men, even in a natural way. Surely all was dear to Him on which he could see the trace of the Creator's holy hands. Yet He passed on and passed by, going forward to death and consenting to die, His face set steadfastly to a joy before Him which could not be realised by lingering here.

Now let this be especially observed, that while we may here recognise a practical lesson to be learned, the wisest of us may also recognise it as a lesson we could not undertake to teach to ourselves. To oppose sin, when conscience and God's word warn us of its presence, is at least something definite and plain. But how to take the right attitude and bear the right mind towards this various, manifold, engrossing, wonderful human life, as it unfolds for us here — how shall that be done? Some have tried to answer by amputating large sections of human experience. But that is not the way. For, indeed, it is in human life itself — in this present, and, for the present, the only form of our existence — that we must take the right view of human life, and form the right mind about it. Moreover, our conditions are varying continually, from the state of the little child, open to every influence that strikes the sense, to the state of the old man, whom age is shutting up in a crippled and stunted existence. The just equipoise of soul for one stage of life, could it be attained, would not be the just equipoise for the next.

The truth is, there is no ready-made theory here for any of us. All our attainments in it are tentative and provisional; which does not hinder, however, that they may be very real. When we believe in Christ we become aware that there is a lesson in this department to be learned, and we become willing, in a measure, to learn it. But we should learn little were it not for three great teachers that take us in hand.

The first is the inevitable conflict with sin and temptation. The Christian must, at all events, strive against known sin, and he must hold himself ready to resist the onset of temptation, watching and praying. In this discipline he soon learns how sin is entangled for him with much that in other respects seems desirable or good; he learns that in rejecting sin he

must forego some things which on other accounts he gladly would embrace. It is often a painful conflict through which he has to pass. Now in seeking help from his Lord, and entering into the fellowship of the mind of Christ, he is not only strengthened to repel the sin, but also learns to submit willingly to any impoverishment or abridgment of earthly life which the conflict entails. He is taught in practice, now in one form, now in another, to count all things but loss — to lower the overweening estimate of earthly treasure and let it go, dying to it with his dying Lord.

Then, besides, there is the discipline of suffering. Sorrow, indeed, is not peculiar to Christians. Of it, all are partakers. But Christian endurance is part of a fellowship with Christ, in which we learn of Him. In the warm air of prosperity a hot mist rises round the soul, that hides from view the great realities, and that deceives and misleads us with its vain mirage. But in suffering, taken in Christ's way and in fellowship with Him, in the pain of disappointment and of loss, and especially in the exercise of submission, we are taught feelingly where our true treasure is; and we are trained to consent to separations and privations, for the sake of Christ, and under the influence of the love of Christ.

And, lastly, the growth of Christian experience and Christian character deepens our impressions of the worth of Christ's salvation, and gives more body and more ardour to Christian hope. As that world with its perfect good draws the believer, as it becomes more visible to faith and more attractive, his grasp of this world becomes, perhaps, not less kindly, but it becomes less tenacious. Knowledge, such as the schools of earth afford, we still feel to be desirable and good. Love, under the conditions which earth supplies for its exercise, we still feel to be very dear. The activities which call out courage and resource, we still feel to be interesting and worthy. Yet knowledge proves to be but in part. And love, if it does not die, needs for its health and security a purer air. And in the problems of active life failure still mingles with success. But the love of God which is in Jesus Christ grows in worth and power; so that, in new applications of the principle, we learn afresh to "count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ."

In a word, then, that we may grow into the mind of Christ, sufferings and self-denials are appointed to come into experience. He sets them for us; we should not unwisely set them for ourselves. They come in the conflict with sin or in the ordinary discipline of life. Either way they become for believers the fellowship of Christ's sufferings; for they are taken in Christ's

way, under His eye, endured in the strength of His truth and grace and salvation. So believers become more conformable to His death. Hence this discipline of trial is indispensable to all disciples.

Some such view of the ends of Christ in regard to separation from sin and disengagement from the life which is doomed to die, we suppose to have been before Paul's mind. He had come to Christ for life, abundant and victorious, such as should be answerable to the power of Christ's resurrection. But he saw that such life must fulfil itself in a certain dying, made good in a fellowship of Christ's sufferings; and it must find its completeness and its peace beyond death, in the resurrection of the dead. Did he flinch or shrink from this? No: He longed to have it all perfectly accomplished. His knowledge of Christ was to be not only in the power of His resurrection, but in the fellowship of His sufferings, being made conformable to His death.

Whatever mistakes have been made by followers of the ascetic life, it is a mistake on the other side to neglect this element of Christianity. He who is not self-denied, and that cheerfully, to the danger and seduction of lawful things, is one who has not his loins girt nor his lamp burning.

It is worth our while to mark the thoroughgoing sincerity of the Apostle's Christianity. Not merely did he in general embrace Christ and salvation: but with the utmost cordiality he embraced the method of Christ; he strove after fellowship, with Christ's mind in living, and also in dying; he did so, though the fellowship included not only the power of His resurrection, but the fellowship of His sufferings. He longed to have it all fulfilled in his own case. So he strove toward the resurrection of the dead.

In parting from these great Christian thoughts we may note how fitly the power of Christ's resurrection takes precedence of the fellowship of His sufferings and the being made conformable to His death. Some have thought that, as death comes before resurrection, the order of the clauses might have been inverted. But it is only through the precedent virtue of Christ's resurrection that such a history is achieved, either in Paul or in any of us. We must be partakers of life in the power of Christ's resurrection, if we are to carry through the fellowship with the suffering and the death.

CHAPTER 14.

CHRISTIAN LIFE A RACE. — PHILIPPIANS 3:12-17 (R.V.).

VARIOUS passages in this Epistle suggest that the Apostle's Philippian friends or some of them were relaxing in diligence; they were failing perhaps to lay to heart the need of progress, less sensitive than they ought to be to the impulse of Christianity as a religion of effort and expectancy. Some of them, it might be, were inclined to think of themselves as now pretty well initiated into the new religion, and as pretty thorough adepts in its teaching and its practice; entitled therefore to sit down and look round with a certain satisfaction and complacency. If it were so, the tendency to division would be accounted for. Arrogance in Christians is a sure preliminary to heats and disputings. At all events, however it might be at Philippi, an insidious complacency in little improvements and small attainments is not unknown among Christians. It is, one may fear, a common impression among us that we are fair average Christians, — a feeling perhaps not so cherished as to make us boast, but yet so cherished as to make us feel content. And, alas! the very meaning of Christianity was to inspire us with a spirit that would refuse so to be contented.

Some feeling of this kind may have led the Apostle to lay stress on the onward energising character of Christianity as he knew it. This was the manner of his regard to his Lord. At the foundation of his religion there was, indeed, the faith of a wonderful gift of righteousness and life. That gift he welcomed and embraced. But it wrought in him eagerness of desire, and intentness of purpose, to secure and have all that this gift implied. It stirred him to activity and progress. His was not the Christianity of one who counts himself to have already obtained all into possession, nor of one who finds himself landed already in the state at which the Christian promises aim. Rather he is one set in full view of a great result: some experience of the benefits of it is already entering into his history; but it is yet to be brought to pass in its fulness; and that must be along a line of believing endeavour, Christ working and Paul working, Christ faithful with Paul faithful. "I follow after, if that I may lay hold and extend my grasp, seeing Christ has laid hold with His grasp on me." Christ had a purpose, and has mightily inaugurated a process through which this purpose may be achieved in the history of Paul. And as Christ lays His grasp on Paul, behold the purpose of Christ becomes also the purpose of Paul, and he

now throws himself into the process with all his force, to apprehend that for the sake of which Christ apprehended him.

Here Paul signalled one distinguishing attribute of genuine Christianity as he knew it. He did not yet count himself to have laid complete grasp on the whole of Christian good. In a very important practical sense salvation was still something ahead of him, as to the final, secure, complete possession; Christ Himself was an object still before him, as to the knowledge and the fellowship for which he longed. But one thing is vital and distinctive. "This Saviour with His salvation holds me so, that I count all but loss for Him. He holds me so, that forgetting all that lies behind, I bend myself to the race, stretching out towards the goal at which the prize of the high calling of God in Christ is won. That is my Christianity." He who had suffered loss of all for Christ, he who so burned with desire to know Him in His righteousness, in the power of His resurrection, in the fellowship of His sufferings, is far from thinking he has reached the goal. Because the knowledge of Christ is so great a thing in his eyes, therefore, on the one hand, all he has attained as yet seems partial and imperfect; but for the same reason, on the other hand, he feels the great attraction by which all his powers are drawn into the endeavour which so great a prize shall crown.

The question may here be put how the consistency of the gospel can be made out if we are called to rest and rejoice in Christ, and if, at the same time, we find ourselves committed to so absorbing a struggle for a prize. If God will have us, it may be said, to seek and strive that we may obtain, then we must do so because it is His will. But where is the connection of things that will avert inconsistency, and bring out a reasonable continuity of principles, between the call to rest on Christ for full salvation, and the call to run a race, and so run as to obtain? For answer it is to be remembered, in the first place, that (as commonly happens in matters where life and its activities are concerned) the difficulty concerns only the adjustment of our theory; it begins to vanish when we come to practice. When we are in vital contact with the spiritual realities themselves, we find both elements of the case to be true for us, and each indispensable to the truth of the other. The rest of faith and the fight of faith belong to each other. But not to dwell on so general a consideration, two lines of thought may be suggested to those who are conscious of embarrassment at this point.

First, let it be considered that the faith of a Christian embraces real relations with the living God, different from anything that is possible to

unbelief. Through Christ we believe in God. Those relations are conceived to be real and vital from the first, though the perfect experience of all that they imply belongs to the future. Faith means that from the outset of believing we are to be to God, and God is to be to us, something different from what the flesh perceives. Christ believed in is an assurance that so it is and shall be. But now, the state of men is such, as long as they have to carry on a life of faith in a world of sense and sin, that this faith of theirs presently meets with flat contradiction. The course of the world treats it all as null. Sin in their own hearts, and many experiences of life, seem to negative the pretensions and the claims of faith. And strong temptations whisper that this high fellowship with a living God not only does not exist, but that it is not desirable that it should. So that from the outset and all along, faith, if it is not content to be a mere dream, if it will count for a reality, must contend for its life. It must fight, "praying always with all prayer," to make good its ground, and to hold on to its Lord. It is indeed the nature of faith to rest, for it is a trust; not less certainly faith is under necessity to strive, for it is challenged and impeached.

It lies therefore in the very nature of the case that, if faith is in earnest in embracing real and progressive salvation, it must find itself drawn into conflict and effort to assert the reality and to experience the progress. The opposition it meets with ensures this.

On the other hand, it is the nature of the gospel to set men free for active service. It supplies motives, therefore, for enterprise, diligence, and fidelity; and it provides a goal towards which all shall tend. So men become fellow-labourers with their Lord. And if it is intelligible that the Lord should exert continual care for them, it ought to be intelligible also that they are to be exercised in a continual care for Him; care, that is, for the discharge of the trust which they hold from Him.

The Apostle dwells on all this, evidently because he felt it to be a point of so great importance in practical Christianity. In this world the right Christian is the man who knows well he has not attained, but who devotes his life to attaining. Paul brings this out by means of the image of a race for a prize, such as might be seen in the public games. This is a favourite illustration with him. His use of it illustrates the way in which things that are steeped in worldliness may aid us in apprehending the things of God's kingdom. They do so, because they involve elements or energies of man's nature that are good as far as they go. As the Apostle thought of the racers, prepared by unsparing discipline, which had been concentrated on

the one object; as he thought of the determination with which the eager runners started, and of the way in which every thought and every act was bent upon the one purpose of success, until the moment when the panting runner shot past the goal, it stirred him with the resolve to be not less eager in his race; and it made him long to see the children of light as practical and wise as, in their generation, the children of this world are.

As usual in the case of illustrations, this one will not hold in all points. For instance, in a race one only wins, and all the rest are defeated and disappointed. This is not so in the Christian race. The analogies lie elsewhere. In order to run well the runners submit to preparation in which everything is done to bring out their utmost energy for the race. When the race comes each competitor may possibly win: in order to win he must put forth his utmost powers; he must do so within a short period of time; and during that time nothing must distract him from the one aim of winning. He does this for a benefit embodied in, or symbolised by, the prize which rewards and commemorates his victory. These are the points in which the races of public games afford lessons for the Christian race. In the former the fact that the success of any one competitor deprives the others of the prize they seek, is the circumstance that puts intensity into the whole business, and makes a real race of it. So also in the spiritual antitype there are elements which make the race the most real, though they are elements of another kind.

The prize can be nothing else than the life eternal (~~50612~~ 1 Timothy 6:12) which comes, as we have seen, into full possession at the resurrection of the dead. He whose favour is life confers it. The bestowment of it is conceived as taking place with gladness and with honourable approbation: "Well done, good and faithful servant; enter thou into the joy of thy Lord." The prize stands in strict connection with the perfecting of the believer: the time of receiving the prize is also the time of being presented faultless. Neither prize nor perfectness is attained here; neither is attained unless sought here; and the blessedness bestowed is connected in fact and measure with the faith and diligence expended on the race. On all these accounts the prize is spoken of as a crown; a crown of glory, for it is very honourable; a crown of life, incorruptible, that fadeth not away, for it shall never wither on the brow, as the wreaths of those earthly champions did. Now to run his race was for Paul the one thing. He had not yet attained; he could not sit still as if he had: it was his living condition that he must run, as one not yet there, following on in earnest that he might actually have the prize.

Perhaps some one may regard it as objectionable to conceive practical Christianity as a race for a prize. This seems, it may be said, to subordinate the present to the future, this world to the other world, and, in particular, virtue to happiness; because in this way the efforts of goodness here are conceived only as a means to enjoyment or satisfaction there. We reply that the prize does indeed include joy, the joy of the Lord. But it includes, first of all, goodness, consummate in the type of it proper to the individual; and gladness is present no otherwise than as it is harmonised with goodness, being indeed her proper sister and companion. Besides, the elements of the gladness of that state come in as the expression of God's love — a love both holy and wise. Communion with that love is the true security for goodness. It is equally absurd to suppose, on the one hand, that when that love fills the heart with its unreserved communication there can fail to be gladness; and, on the other hand, to suppose that fellowship with it can be other than the proper and supreme object of a creature's aspiration.

There is no unworthiness in devoting life to win this prize; for it is a state of victorious well-being and well-doing. The highest goodness of all intervening stages is to aspire to that highest goodness of all. Whatever we may do or be, meanwhile, is best attained and done as it confesses its own shortcoming, and hopes and longs to be better and to do more.

It is true that a complete gift of eternal life is held out to us in Christ, and it is faith's part to accept that gift and to rest in it. But yet part of that gift itself is an emancipation of the soul; in virtue of this the man becomes actively responsive to the high calling, reiterates his fundamental decision all along the detail of mortal life, affirms his agreement with the mind and life of his Lord, approves himself faithful and devoted, and runs so as to obtain. All this is in the idea of the gift bestowed, and is unfolded in the experience of the gift received. So the prize is to arise to us as the close of a course of progressive effort tending that way: the reality of the prize corresponds to the reality of the progress; the degree of it, in some way, to the rate of that progress. The progress itself is made good, as we have said, by perpetually re-affirming the initial choice; doing so in new circumstances, under new lights, with a new sense of its meaning, against the difficulties implied in new temptations; yet so as ever, in the main, to abide by the beginning of our confidence. With all this let it be remembered that the time is short; and it will be understood that the Christian life, so viewed, assumes the character, and may well exhibit the intensity and pressure, of a race.

How far short men fall of the great idea of such a life — how they flinch from the perfectness of this Christian imperfection — need not be enlarged upon. But if any life is wholly untrue to this ideal, the Apostle seemingly could not count it Christian. This one thing he did, he bent himself to the race. For if the ultimate attainment has become very attractive, if the sense of present disproportion to it is great, and if, in Christ, both the obligation and the hopefulness of reaching the perfect good have become imperatively plain, what can a man do but run?

Verses 15 and 16 state the use which the Apostle desires his disciples to make of this account of his own views and feelings, his attitude and his effort, — “As many of us as are perfect.”

Since the Apostle has disclaimed (ver. 12) being already perfected, it may seem strange that he should now say, “As many of us as are perfect.” His use of language in other places, however, warrants the position that he is not speaking of absolute perfection, as if the complete result of the Christian calling had been attained. Rather he is thinking of ripe practical insight into the real spirit of the Christian life — that is to say, advanced acquaintance, by experience, with the real nature of the Christian life. He uses this word “perfect” in contrast to “babes” or “children” in Christ. These last are persons who have been truly brought to Christ; but their conceptions and their attainments are rudimentary. They have not attained to large insight into the means and ends of the Christian life, nor to any ripe acquaintance with the position of a Christian man, and the relation he holds to things around him. They are therefore unready to face the responsibilities and perform the duties of Christian manhood. Hence the translators of the Authorised Version, in some passages, render the same word so as to bring out this sense of it. So ^{<614>}1 Corinthians 14:20, “Be not children in understanding: howbeit in malice be ye children, but in understanding be men” (τέλειοι), and ^{<8014>}Hebrews 5:14, “Strong meat belongs to those that are of full age” (τελείων).

It cannot be doubted, however, that the word is used here with a certain emphatic significance in reference to the previous disclaimer, “I am not yet perfected.” In the Philippians, or in some of them, Paul apprehended the existence of a self-satisfied mood of mind, such as might perhaps be warrantable if they were now perfect, if Christianity had brought forth all its results for them, but on no other terms. In contrast to this he had set before them the intense avidity with which he himself stretched out towards attainment and completeness which he had not reached. And now

he teaches them that to be thus well aware how far we are from the true completeness, to be thus reaching out to it, is the true perfection of our present state: he only is the perfect Christian who is “thus minded”; who knows and feels how much remains to be attained, and gives himself up to the effort and the race under that inspiration. It is as if he said: Would you approve yourselves to be believers, advanced and established; would you show that you have come to a larger measure of just views and just feelings about the new world into which faith has brought you; would you have the character of men well-acquainted with your Lord’s mind about you, with your own position in relation to Him; in short, would you be perfect, fully under the influence of the Christianity you profess: — then let you and me be “thus minded”; let us evince the lowly sense of our distance from the goal, along with a living sense of the magnificence and urgency of the motives which constrain us to press on to it.

For is there such a thing attainable here as a Christian perfectness, a ripe fulness of the Christian life, which exhibits that working of it, in its various forces, which was designed for this stage of our history? If so, what must it be? That man surely is the perfect man who fully apprehends the position in which the gospel places him here, and the ends it sets before him, and who most fully admits into his life the views and considerations which, in this state of things, the gospel proposes. Then, he must be a man penetrated with a sense of the disproportion between his attainment and Christ’s ideal, and at the same time set on fire with the desire and hope of overcoming it. Has a man experienced many gracious dealings at his Lord’s hands, has he made attainments by grace, has he come to a Christian standing that may be called full age, would he be what all this would seem to imply, — then let him take heed to be “thus minded.” Otherwise he is already beginning to lose what he seemed to have attained.

It is not so surprising, and it is not so severely to be reprehended, if those fail in this point who are but children in Christ. When the glorious things of the new world are freshly bursting into view, when the affections of the child of God are in their early exercise, when sin for the present seems stricken down, it is not so wonderful if men suppose danger and difficulty to be over. Like the Corinthians, “now they are full, now they are rich, now they have reigned as kings.” It has often been so; and at that stage it may be more easily pardoned. One may say of it, “They will learn their lesson by-and-by; they will soon find out that in the life of a Christian all is not triumph and exultation.” But it concerns those who have got further on, and it is expected of them, that they should be “thus minded” as the

Apostle Paul was. It is a more serious business for them to be of another mind on this point, than for those who are only children in Christ. It tends to great loss. Are we, says the Apostle, come to a point at which we may be thought to be — may hope we are — experienced believers, well acquainted now with the salvation and the service, men in Christ? Then as we would ever act in a manner answerable, at this stage, to the gospel and to our position under the gospel, let us be thus minded; forgetting that which is behind, reaching forth to that which is before, let us press toward the mark. For at each stage of progress much depends on the way in which we deal with the position now attained, with the views which have opened to us, and with the experiences that have been acquired. This may decide whether the stage reached shall be but a step towards something better and more blessed, or whether a sad blight and declension shall set in. There are Christian lives to-day sadly marred, entangled and bewildered so that one knows not what to make of them, and all by reason of failure to be “thus minded.”

A man is awakened to the supreme importance of Divine things. At the outset of his course, for years, perhaps, he is a vigorous and growing Christian. So he comes to a large measure of establishment: he grows into knowledge of truth and duty. But after a time the feeling creeps into his mind that matters are now less urgent. He acts rather as a man disposed to keep his ground, than as one that would advance. Now he seems to himself to lose ground somewhat, now to awaken a little and recover it, and on those terms he is fairly well contented. All this while it would be unjust to say that he does not love and serve Christ. But time passes on; life draws nearer to its close. The period at which God’s afflictions usually multiply has arrived. And he awakens at last to see how much of his life has been lost; how extensively, though secretly, decay has marred his attainments and his service; and how little, in the result, of that honourable success has crowned his life which once seemed fair before him.

“Let us be thus minded.” Let Christians be admonished who have for some time been Christians, and especially those who are passing through middle life, or from middle life into older years. There is enchanted ground here, in passing over which too many of Christ’s servants go to sleep. Leave that which is behind.

“Let us be thus minded:” but this proves hard. One may see it in a general way to be most reasonable, but to come up to it in particulars is hard. In all particular cases we are tempted to be otherwise minded. And in many

particulars we find it very difficult to judge the manner of spirit that we are of. Were all right in us, absolutely right, rectitude of disposition and of moral action would be in a manner instinctive. But now it is not so. With reference to many aspects of our life, it is very difficult to bring out distinctly to our own minds how the attitude that becomes us is to be attained and maintained. The difficulty is real; and therefore a promise is annexed. "If in anything ye be otherwise minded." That may realise, itself in two ways. You may be distinctly conscious that your way of dealing with some interests which enter into your lives is unsatisfactory, is below your calling and privilege as a Christian; and yet you may find it hard to see how you are to rise into the worthier life. It is like a problem which you cannot solve. Or, again, you may fear that it is so; you may fear that if things were seen in the true light it would turn out so. But you cannot see clearly; you cannot identify the faulty element, far less amend it. Here the promise meets you. "If in anything ye be otherwise minded, God shall reveal even this unto you." Keep your face in the right direction. Be honestly set on the attainment, and the way will open up to you as you go. You will see the path opening from the point where you stand, into life that throughout is akin to the aspiration and the achievement of the life of Paul.

Paul here has regard to a distinction which theorists are apt to overlook. We have a sufficient objective rule in the word and example of Christ. This may be summarised in forms easily repeated, and a man may, in that respect, know all that need be said as to what he is to do and to be. But in morals and in spiritual life this is only the beginning of another process — namely, the subjective individual entrance into the meaning of it all and the practical appropriation of it. I know the whole of duty on the human side: I am to love my neighbour as myself. It is most essential to know it, and a grand thing to have consented to make a rule of it. But, says one, there remains the difficulty of doing it? Is that all? I reply. There is another previous difficulty. I can preach a sermon on loving my neighbour as myself. But what does that mean, for me, not for any one else, but for myself, on a given day in November, at half-past one in the afternoon, when I am face to face with my neighbour, who has his merits, and also his defects, being, perhaps, provoking and encroaching, with whom I have some business to arrange? What does it mean then and there and for me? Here there opens the whole question of the subjective insight into the scope and genius of the rule; in which problem heart and mind must work together; and commonly there have to be training, experience, growth, in order to the expert and just discernment. Short of that there may be honest

effort, blundering most likely, but honest, and lovingly accepted through Christ. But there ought to be growth on this subjective side.

Moreover, when progress has been made here it imposes responsibility. Have you been carried forward to such and such degrees of this subjective insight? Then this ought to be for you a fruitful attainment. Do not neglect its suggestions, do not prove careless and untrue to insight attained. Whereto we have attained, “by the same rule let us walk,” — or, as we may render it, “go on in the same line.” So new insight and new achievement shall wait upon our steps.

Generally, if their Lord had carried the Philippians forward to genuine attainments of Christian living, then that history of theirs was a track which reached further on. It was not a blind alley, stopping at the point now reached. It had had a meaning; there was some rationale of it; it proceeded on principles which could be understood, for they had been put in practice; and it demanded to be further pursued. There is a continuity in the work of grace. There is a rational development of spiritual progress in the case of each child of God. What God means, what the direction is in which His finger beckons, what the dispositions are under the influence of which His call is complied with and obeyed,—these are things which have been so far learned in that course of lessons and conflicts, of defeats and backslidings, restorations and victories; which has brought you so far. Let this be carried out; keep on in the same road. Whereto you have attained, go on with the same.

But such an admonition at once raises a question; the question, namely, whether we are at any stage in the pathway of Christian attainment, whether there is for us as yet any history of a Divine life. Among those who claim part in Christ’s benefits are some whom the grace of God has never taught to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to live soberly, righteously, and godly; for they have been persistently deaf to the lesson. There are some who do not know how Christ turns men from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God. To them the line of admonition now in hand does not apply: to exhort them to “walk on in the same” would be to perpetuate for them a sad mistake. Their course has been dark and downward. Therefore to the admonition already given, the Apostle adds another. “Brethren, be followers together of me, and mark (keep sight of) them who walk so as ye have us for an example.” Do not mistake the whole nature of Christianity; do not altogether miss the path in’ which God’s children go. It is one spirit that dwells in the Church; let

not your walk forsake the fellowship of that spirit. Christians are not bound to any human authority: Christ is their Master. They must sometimes assert their independence, even with respect to the maxims and manners of good people. Yet there is one spirit in God's true Church, and there is in the main one course of life which it inspires. God's children have not been mistaken in the main things. In these, to forsake the spirit and the way of Christ's flock is to forsake Christ.

CHAPTER 15.

ENEMIES OF THE CROSS. — PHILIPPIANS 3:18-19 (R.V.).

THE New Testament writers, and not least the Apostle Paul, are wont to bring out their conception of the true Christian life by setting it vividly in contrast with the life of the unspiritual man. They seem to say: "If you really mean to say No to the one, and Yes to the other, be sincere and thorough: compromises are not possible here." So ^{<5460>}1 Timothy 6:10: "The love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows. But thou, O man of God," etc. Or ^{<6018>}Jude 1:18: "mockers, walking after their own ungodly lusts. These are they who separate themselves, sensual, having not the Spirit. But ye, beloved," etc. Here in like manner the course of worldliness and self-pleasing life is sketched in concrete instances, that its sin and shame may be felt, and that by contrast the true calling of a Christian may be discerned and may be impressed on the disciples.

It may be taken as certain that the Apostle is not speaking of mere Jews or mere heathen. He is speaking of professing Christians, whose practical life belied their profession. In general they are enemies of the cross of Christ; that is the first thing he thinks fit to say of them. And here it may be asked whether the Apostle has in view, if not Jews, yet the Judaising faction about which he had already said strong things in the beginning of this chapter. Some have thought so; and it must be owned that antagonism to the cross, ignorance of its virtue, and antipathy to its lessons, are exactly what the Apostle was wont to impute to those Judaisers; as may be seen in the Epistle to the Galatians, and in other Pauline writings. But it is preferable, as has been already indicated, to take it that the Apostle has turned from the particular issue with those Judaisers; and having been led to declare emphatically what the life of Christianity was in his own experience and practice, he now sets this

life in Christ not merely against the religion of the Judaisers, but in general against all religion which, assuming the name of Christ, denied the power of godliness; which meddled with that worthy name, but only brought reproach upon it. It is quite possible indeed that here he might have in view some of the Judaisers also; for there was a sensual side of popular Judaism

which might be represented also among the Judaizing Christians. But it is more likely that the Apostle's eye is turning mainly to another class of persons. It seems that in the early Churches, especially perhaps at the time when the later Epistles were written, a recognisable tendency to a loose and lawless Christianity was finding representatives. Warning against these was needed; and they embodied a form of evil which might serve to show the Philippians, as in a mirror, the disaster in which an idle, self-satisfied, vainglorious Christianity was like to land its votaries.

What first strikes the Apostle about them is that they are enemies of the cross of Christ. One asks, Does he mean enemies of the doctrine of the cross, or of its practical influence and efficiency? The two are naturally connected. But here perhaps the latter is principally intended. The context, especially what follows in the Apostle's description, seems to point that way.

When Christ's cross is rightly apprehended, and when the place it claims in the mind has been cordially yielded, it becomes, as we see in the case of Paul himself, a renovating principle, the fountain of a new view and a new course. That immense sacrifice for our redemption from sin decides that we are no more to live the rest of our time in the flesh to the lusts of men (<000>1 Peter 4:1). And that patience of Christ in His lowly love to God and man under all trials, sheds its conclusive light upon the true use and end of life, the true rule, the true inspiration, and the true goal. So regarded, Christ's cross teaches us the slender worth, or the mere worthlessness, of much that we otherwise should idolise; on the other hand it assures us of redemption into His likeness, as a prospect to be realised in the renunciation of the "old man"; and it embodies an incomparable wealth of motive to persuade us to comply, for we find ourselves in fellowship with Love unspeakable.

Under this influence we take up our cross; which is substantially the same as renouncing or denying ourselves (<000>Matthew 16:24) carried practically out. It is self-denial for Christ's sake and after Christ's example, accepted as a principle, and carried out in the forms in which God calls us to it. This, as we have seen, takes place chiefly in our consenting to bear the pain involved in separation from sin and from the life of worldliness, and in carrying on the war against sin and against the world. It includes rejection of known sin; it includes watchfulness and discipline of life with a view to life's supreme end; and so it includes prudential self-denial, in avoiding undue excitement and over-absorbing pleasure, because experience and

God's word tell us it is not safe for our hearts to be so "overcharged" (~~2134~~ Luke 21:34). This cross in many of its applications is hard. Yet in all its genuine applications it is most desirable; for in frankly embracing it we shall find our interest in salvation, and in the love which provides it, brought home with comfort to our hearts (~~1044~~ 1 Peter 4:14).

It seems, then, that there are professing Christians who are enemies of the cross of Christ. Not that it is always an open and proclaimed hostility; though, indeed, in the case of those whom Paul is thinking of, it would appear to have revealed itself pretty frankly. But at all events it is a real aversion; they would have nothing to do with the cross, or as little as they may. And this proves that the very meaning of salvation, the very end of Christ as a Saviour, is the object of their dislike. But in Christianity the place of the cross is central. It will make itself felt somehow. Hence those who decline or evade it find it difficult to do so quietly and with complacency. Eventually their dislike is apt to be forced into bitter manifestation. They begin, perhaps, with quiet and skilful avoidance; but eventually they become, recognisably, enemies of the cross, and their religious career acquires a darker and more ominous character.

It is, however, an interesting question, What draws to Christianity those who prove to be the enemies of the cross? Nowadays we may explain the adhesion of many such persons to Christian profession by referring to family and social influences. But we can hardly set much down to that score when we are thinking of the days of Paul. It cannot be doubted that some persons were then strongly drawn by Christianity who did not prove amenable to its most vital influence. And that may persuade us that the same phenomenon recurs in all ages and in all Churches. For different minds there are different influences which may operate in this way. Intellectual interest may be stirred by the Christian teachings; the sense of truth and reality may be appealed to by much in the Christian view of men and things; there may be a genuine satisfaction in having life and feelings touched and tinged with the devout emotions which breathe in Christian worship; there may be a veneration, real as far as it goes, for some features of Christian character, as set forth in Scripture and embodied in individual Christians; and, not to dwell on mere particulars, the very goodness of Christian truth and life, which a man will not pay the cost of appropriating to himself, may exert a strong attraction, and draw a man to live upon the borders of it. Nay, such men may go a good long way in willingness to do and bear for the cause they have espoused. Men have run the risk of loss of life and goods for Christianity, who have yet been shipwrecked on some

base lust which they could not bring themselves to resign. And who has not known kindly, serviceable men, hanging about the Churches with a real predilection for the suburban life of Zion, — men regarding whom it made the heart sore to form any adverse judgment, and yet men whose life seemed just to omit the cross of Christ?

In the case of those whom Paul thinks of there was no room for doubt as to the real nature of the case; and therefore the Apostle cannot too emphatically bring it out. He puts first the most startling view of it. Their end is destruction. Not salvation, but destruction is before them, although they name the name of Christ. Destruction is the port they are sailing for: that is the tendency of their whole career. Their place must be at last with those on whom the day of the Lord brings sudden destruction, so that they shall not escape. Alas for the Christians whose end is destruction!

“Their God is their belly.” Their life was sensual. Most likely, judging from the tone of expression, they were men of coarse and unblushing indulgence. If so, they were only the more outstanding representatives of the sensual life. The things which delight the senses were for them the main things, and ruled them. They might have intellectual and aesthetic interests, they might own family and social connections, they certainly did attach importance to some religious views and some religious ties; but the main object of their life was to seek rest and content for those desires which may have rest apart from any higher exercise or any higher portion. Their life was ruled and guided by its lower and sensual side. So their belly was their god. Yet they claimed a place in the Christian fellowship, in which Christ has revealed God, and has opened the way to God, and brings us to God. But their thoughts ran, and their plans tended, and their life found its explanation, belly-wards. This was their god. Their trust and their desire were placed in the things which the flesh appreciates. These they served, and of these they took on the likeness. They served not the Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly. One cannot think of it without grave questions as to the direction in which life preponderates. That would seem to indicate, our god. One does not severely judge “good living.” And yet what may “good living” denote in the case of many a professing Christian? In what direction do we find the tides of secret and unrestrained thought setting?

And they glory in their shame. In this Epistle and elsewhere, one sees the importance attached by the Apostle to that which a man glories in, as marking his character. For himself, Paul gloried in the cross of Christ: he

counted all things but loss for the knowledge of Christ. And these men also were, or claimed to be, in Christ's Church, in which we are taught to rate things at their true value and to measure them by the authentic standard. But they gloried in their shame. What they valued themselves upon; what they inwardly, at least, rejoiced in, and applauded themselves for; what they would, perhaps, have most cheerfully dwelt upon in congenial company, were things of which they had every reason to be ashamed — no doubt, the resources they had gathered for the worship of this god of theirs, and the success they had had in it. For example, such men would inwardly congratulate themselves on the measure in which they were able to attain the kind of satisfaction at which they aimed. They gloried in the degree in which they succeeded in bringing about a perfect accommodation between themselves and the objects which sense alone appreciates, and in producing a harmonious and balanced life set on that key. Really it should have been to them a cause of grief and shame to find themselves succeeding here, and failing in attaining a right relation to Christ and to the things of God's kingdom, to righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness. So they gloried in their shame. This was seen in their lives. Alas, is there no reason to fear that when the thoughts of all hearts are revealed, too many whose lives are subject to no obvious reproach shall be found to have lived an inward life of evil thought, of base desire, of coarse and low imagination, that can only rank in the same class with these — men whose whole inward life gravitates, and gravitates unchecked, towards vanity and lust?

In a word, their character is summed up in this, that they mind earthly things. That is the region in which their minds are conversant and to which they have regard. The higher world of truths and forces and objects which Christ reveals is for them inoperative. It does not appeal to them, it does not awe them, it does not govern them. Their minds can turn in this direction on particular occasions, or with a view to particular discussions; but their bent lies another way. The home of their hearts, the treasure which they seek, the congenial subjects and interests, are earthly.

Since this whole description is meant to carry its lesson by suggestion of contrast, the clause last referred to brings powerfully before us the place to be given to the spiritual mind in our conception of a true Christian life. In the eighth chapter of the Epistle to the Romans we are told that to be carnally minded — or the minding of the flesh — is death, but the minding of the spirit is life and peace. Care, therefore, is to be taken of our thoughts and of our practical judgments, so that they may be according to the spirit.

Effort in this direction is hopeful effort, because we believe that Christ grants His Spirit to hallow those regions of the inward man by His illuminating and purifying presence. It cannot be doubted that many lives that were capable of yielding much good fruit, have been frittered away and wasted through indulged vanity of thought. Others, that are methodical and energetic enough, are made sterile for Christian ends by the too common absence or the too feeble presence of the spiritual mind. It is not altogether direct meditation on spiritual objects that is here to be enforced. That has its important place; yet certainly, frank converse with the whole range of human interests is legitimately open to the Christian mind. What seems to be essential is that, through all, the regard to the supreme interests shall continue; and that the manner of thinking and of judging, the modes of feeling and impression, shall keep true to faith and love and Christ. The subject recurs in another form at the eighth verse of the following chapter.

Probably, as was said, the Apostle is speaking of a class of men whose faults were gross, so that at least an Apostolic eye could not hesitate to read the verdict that must be passed upon them. But then we must consider that his object in doing this was to address a warning to men to whom he imputed no such gross failings; concerning whom, indeed, he was persuaded far other things, even things that accompany salvation; but whom he knew to be exposed to influences tending in the same direction, and whom he expected to see preserved only in the way of vigilance and diligence. Outstanding failures in Christian profession may startle us by their conspicuous deformity; but they fail to yield us their full lesson unless they suggest the far finer and more subtle forms in which the same evils may enter in, to mar or to annul what seemed to be Christian characters.

The protest against the cross is still maintained even in the company of Christ's professed disciples. But this takes place most commonly, and certainly most persuasively, without advancing any plea for conduct grossly offensive, or directly inconsistent with Christian morals. The "enemies of the cross" retreat into a safer region, where they take up positions more capable of defence. "Why have a cross?" they say. "God has not made us spiritual beings only: men ought not to attempt to live as if they were pure intelligences or immaterial spirits. Also, God has made men with a design that they should be happy; they are to embrace and use the elements of enjoyment with which He has so richly surrounded them. He does not mean us to be clouded in perpetual gloom, or to be on our guard against the bright and cheering influences of the earth. He has made all

things beautiful in their time; and He has given to us the capacity to recognise this that we may rejoice in it. Instead of scowling on the beauty of God's works, and the resources for enjoyment they supply, it is more our part to drink in by every sense, from nature and from art, the brightness, and gladness, and music, and grace. Let us seek, as much as may be in this rough world, to have our souls attuned to all things sweet and fair."

There is real truth here; for, no doubt, it lies in the destiny of man to bring the world into experience according to God's order: if this is not to be done in ways of sin and transgression, it is yet to be done in right ways; and in doing it, man is designed to be gladdened by the beauty of God's handiwork and by the wealth of His beneficence. And yet such statements can be used to shelter a life of enmity to the cross, and they are often employed to conceal the more momentous half of the truth. As long as the things of earth can become materials by means of which we may be tempted to fall away from the Holy One, and as long as we, being fallen, are corruptly disposed to make idols of them, we cannot escape the obligation to keep our hearts with diligence. So long, also, as we live in a world in which men, with a prevailing consent, work up its resources into a system which shuts God and Christ out; so long as men set in motion, by means of those resources, a stream of worldliness by which we are at all times apt to be whirled away, — so long every man whose ear and heart have become open to Christ will find that as to the things of earth there is a cross to bear. For he must decide whether his practical life is to continue to accept the Christian inspiration. He must make his choice between two things, whether he will principally love and seek a right adjustment with things above, with the objects and influences of the Kingdom of God, or whether he will principally love and seek a right, or at least a comfortable adjustment with things below. He must make this choice not once only, but he must hold himself at all times ready to make it over again, or to maintain it in reiterated applications of it. The grace of Christ who died and rose again is his resource to enable him.

Every legitimate element of human experience, of human culture and attainment, is, doubtless open to the Christian man. Only, in making his personal selection among them, the Christian will keep sight of the goal of his high calling, and will weigh the conditions under which he himself must aim at it. Still every such element is open; and all legitimate satisfaction accruing to men from such sources is to be received with thankfulness. Let all this be recognised. But Christianity, by its very nature, requires us to

recognise also, and in a due proportion, something else. It requires us to recognise the evil of sin, the incomparable worth of Christ's salvation. Along with these things, duly regarded, let all innocent earthly interests take their place. But if we are conscious that as yet we have very incompletely established the right proportionate regard, is it any wonder if we are obliged to keep watch, lest the treacherous idolatry of things seen and temporal should carry us away, obliged to accept the cross? We are obliged; but in the school of our Master we should learn to do this thing most gladly, not by constraint, but of a ready mind.

The ideal life on earth no doubt would be a life in which all was perfectly harmonised. The antagonism of the interests would have passed away. Loyalty and love to God's kingdom and to His Son would embody themselves in all human exercise and attainment as in their proper vesture, each promoting each, working together as body and soul. There are Christians who have gone far towards this attainment. They have been so mastered by the mind of Christ that while, on the one hand, they habitually seek the things above, on the other hand there is little trace of bondage or of timorousness in their attitude towards the bright aspects of earthly experience. Some of them were happily carried in early days into so clear a decision for the better part; some emerged later, after conflict, into so bright a land of Beulah that they find it easy, with little conflict and little fear, to make frank use of forms of earthly good which other Christians must treat with more reserve.

This is one of the reasons why we must not judge one another about these things; why we must not lay down absolute rules about them; why even our recommendations must be provisional and prudential only. It is at the same time a reason for the more fidelity in each of us towards himself, to see that we do not trifle with the great trust of regulating our own life. It is possible to give to God and to Christ a recognition which is not consciously dishonest, and yet to fail in admitting any deep and dominant impression of the significance of Christ's redemption for human life. So the heart is yielded, the time is surrendered, the strength is given to attractive objects, which are not indeed essentially immoral, but which are suffered to usurp the heart, and to estrange the man from Christ. Such persons prove enemies of the cross of Christ: they mind earthly things.

Since the earthly side of human life, with its sorrow and joy, its work and its leisure, is legitimate and inevitable, questions arise about adjusting details. And in particular those who retain a relation to Christianity while

they cherish a worldly spirit, take a delight in raising questions as to the forms of life which are, or are not, in harmony with Christianity, and as to whether various practices and indulgences are to be vindicated or condemned. It is a satisfaction to persons of this sort to have a set of fixed points laid down, with respect to which, if they conform, they may take the credit of doing so, and if they rebel, they may have the comfort of feeling that the case is arguable: as indeed these are often matters upon which one may argue for ever. Now what is clearly prohibited or clearly warranted in Scripture, as permanent instruction for the Church, must be maintained. But beyond that point it is often wisest to refuse to give any specific answer to the questions so raised. The true answer is, Are you a follower of Christ? Then it is laid on your own conscience, at your own responsibility, to answer such questions for yourself. No one can come in your place. You must decide, and you have a right to decide for yourself, what course is, for you, consistent with loyalty to Christ and His cross. Only it may be added that the very spirit in which one puts the question may be significant. One whose mind's earthly questions will put the question in one way; one whose citizenship is in heaven, in another. And the answer which you attain will be according to the question you have put.

CHAPTER 16.

OUR CITY AND OUR COMING KING. — PHILIPPIANS 3:20, 21 (R.V.).

To live amid the things, of earth, and in constant converse with them, a life in the power of Christ's resurrection, and in the fellowship of His sufferings, was the Apostle's chosen course; in which he would have the Philippians to follow him. For a moment he had diverged to sketch, for warning, the way of the transgressors, who spend their lives intent on the things that pass away. Now he brings the argument to a close, by once more proclaiming the glory of the high calling in Christ. As the Christian faith looks backward to the triumph of Christ's resurrection, and to the meekness of His suffering, and receives its inspiration from them, so also it looks upward, and it looks forward. It is even now in habitual communion with the world on high; and it reaches on towards the hope of the Lord's return.

“Our citizenship is in heaven.” The word here used (~~30127~~Philippians 1:27) means the constitution or manner of life of a state or city. All men draw much from the spirit and laws of the commonwealth to which they belong; and in antiquity this influence was even stronger than we commonly find it to be in our day. The individual was conscious of himself as a member of his own city or state. Its life enfolded his. Its institutions set for him the conditions under which life was accepted and was carried on. Its laws determined for him his duties and his rights. The ancient and customary methods of the society developed a common spirit, under the influence of which each citizen unfolded his own personal peculiarities. When he went forth elsewhere he felt himself, and was felt to be, a stranger. Now in the heavenly kingdom, which had claimed them and had opened to them through Christ, the believers had found their own city; and finding it, had become, comparatively, strangers in every other.

A way of thinking and acting prevails throughout the world, as if earth and its interests were the whole sphere of man; and being pervaded by this spirit, the whole world may be said to be a commonwealth with a spirit and with maxims of its own. We, who live in it, feel it natural to comply with the drift of things in this respect, and difficult to stand against it; so that separation and singularity seem unreasonable and hard. We claim for our

lives the support of a common understanding; we yearn for the comfort of a system of things existing round us, in which we may find countenance. It was urged against the Christians of the early ages that their religion was unsocial — it broke the ties by which men held together; and doubtless many a Christian, in hours of trial and depression, felt with pain that much in Christian life offered a foundation for the reproach. On the other hand, those who, like the enemies of the cross, refer their lives to the world's standard, rather than to Christ's, have at least this comfort, that, they have a tangible city. The world is their city: therefore also the prince of it is their king. But the Apostle, for himself and his fellows, sets against this the true city or state — with its more original and ancient sanctions; with its more authoritative laws; with its far more pervading and mighty spirit, for the Spirit of God Himself is the life which binds its all together; with its glorious and gracious King. This commonwealth has its seat in heaven; for there it reveals its nature, and thence its power descends. We recognise this whenever we pray, "Thy will be done in earth as it is in heaven." This, says the Apostle, is our citizenship. The archaism of the Authorised Version, "Our conversation" (that is, our habitual way of living) "is in heaven," expresses much of the meaning; only the "conversation" is referred, by the phrase employed in the text, to the sanctions under which it proceeds, the august fellowship by which it is sustained, the source of influence by which it is continually vitalised. Our state, and the life which as members of that state we claim and use, is celestial. Its life and strength, its glory and victory, are in heaven. But it is ours, though we are here on earth.

Therefore, according to the Apostle, the standard of our living, and its sanctions, and its way of thinking and proceeding, and, in a word, our city, with its interests and its objects, being in heaven, the earnest business of our life is there. We have to do with earth constantly and in ways most various; but, as Christians, our way of having to do with the earth itself is heavenly, and is to be conversant with heaven. What we mainly love and seek is in heaven; what we listen most to hear is the voice that comes from heaven; what we most earnestly speak is the voice we send to heaven; what lies next our heart is the treasure and the hope which are secure in heaven; we are most intent upon is what we lay up in heaven, and how we are getting ready for heaven; there is One in heaven whom we love above all others; we are children of the kingdom of heaven; it is our country and our home; and something in us refuses to settle on those things here that reject the stamp of heaven.

Does this go too high? Does some one say, “Something in this direction attracts me and I reach out to it, but ah! how feebly”? — then how strongly does the principle of the Apostle’s admonition apply. If we own that this city rightfully claims us, if we are deeply conscious of shortcoming in our response to that claim, then how much does it concern us to allow no earthly thing that by its own nature drags us down from our citizenship in heaven.

It is in heaven. Many ways it might be shown to be so; but it is enough to sum up all in this, that One has His presence there, who is the Life and the Lord of this city of ours, caring for us, calling us to the present fellowship with Him that is attainable in a life of faith, but especially (for this includes all the rest) whom we look for, to come forth from heaven for us. He has done wonders already to set up for us the grace of the kingdom of heaven, and He has brought us in to it; He is doing much for us daily in grace and in providence, upholding His Church on earth from age to age; but this “working” is proceeding to a final victory. He is “able to subject all things to Himself.” And the emphatic proof of it which awaits all believers, is that the body itself, reconstituted in the likeness of Christ’s own, shall at last be in full harmony with a destiny of immortal purity and glory. So shall the manifestation of His power and grace at last sweep through our whole being, within and without. That is the final triumph of salvation, with which the long history finds all its results attained. For this we await the coming of the Saviour from heaven. Well therefore may we say that the state to which we pertain, and the life which we hold as members of that state, is in heaven.

The expectation of the coming of Christ out of the world of supreme truth and purity, where God is known and served aright, to fulfil all His promises, — this is the Church’s and the believer’s great hope. It is set before us in the New Testament as a motive to every duty, as giving weight to every warning, as determining the attitude and character of all Christian life. In particular, we cannot deal aright with any of the earthly things committed to us, unless we deal with them in the light of Christ’s expected coming. This expectation is to enter into the heart of every believer, and no one is warranted to overlook or make light of it. His coming, His appearing, the revelation of Him, the revelation of His glory, the coming of His day, and so forth, are pressed on us continually. In a true waiting for the day of Christ is gathered up the right regard to what He did and bore when He came first, and also a right regard to Him as He is now the pledge

and the sustainer of our soul's life: the one and the other are to pass onward to the hope of His appearing.

Some harm has been done, perhaps, by the degree in which attention has been concentrated on debatable points about the time of the Lord's coming, or the order of events in relation to it; but more by the measure in which Christians have allowed the world's unbelieving temper to affect on this point the habit of their own minds. It must be most seriously said that our Lord Himself expected no man to succeed in escaping the corruption of the world and enduring to the end, otherwise than in the way of watching for his Lord (see ^{<41235>}Luke 12:35-40 — but the passages are too numerous to be quoted).

And the Apostle lays an emphasis on the character in which we expect Him. The word "Saviour" is emphatic. We look for a Saviour; not merely One who saved us once, but One who brings salvation with Him when He comes. It is the great good, in its completeness, that the Church sees coming to her with her Lord. Now she has the faith of it, — and with the faith an earnest and foretaste, — but then salvation comes. Therefore the coming is spoken of as redemption drawing nigh, as the time of the redemption of the purchased possession. So also in the Epistle to the Galatians the end of Christ's sacrifice is said to be to "deliver us from this present evil world."

Doubtless it is unwise to lay down extreme positions as to the spirit in which we are to deal with temporal things, and especially with their winning and attractive aspects. Christian men, at peace with God, should not only feel spiritual joy, but may well make a cheerful use of passing mercies. Yet certainly the Christian's hope is to be saved out of this world, and out of life as he knows it here, into one far better — saved out of the best and brightest state to which this present state of things can bring him. The Christian spirit is giving way in that man who, in whatever posture of his worldly affairs, does not feel that the present is a state entangled with evil, including much darkness and much estrangement from the soul's true rest. He ought to be minded so as to own the hope of being saved out of it, looking and hasting to the coming of the Lord.

If we lived out this conviction with some consistency, we should not go far wrong in our dealings with this present world. But probably there is no feature in which the average Christianity of to-day varies more from that of the early Christians, than in the faint impressions, and the faint influence,

experienced by most modern Christians in connection with the expectation of the Lord's return.

As far as individual life goes, the position of men in both periods is much the same; it is so, in spite of all the changes that have taken place. Then, as now, the mirage of life tempted men to dream of felicities here, which hindered them from lifting up their heads to a prospect of redemption. But now, as then, counter-influences work; the short and precarious term of human life, its disappointments, its cares and sorrows, its conflicts and falls, conspire to teach even the most reluctant Christian that the final and satisfying rest is not to be found here. So that the difference seems to arise mainly from a secret failure of faith on this point, due to the impression made by long ages in which Christ has not come. "Where is the promise of His coming? All things continue as they were."

This may suggest, however, that influences are recognisable, tending to form, in modern Christians, a habit of thought and feeling less favourable to vivid expectation of Christ's coming. It does not arise so much in connection with individual experience, but is rather an impression drawn from history and from the common life of men. In the days of Paul, general history was simply discouraging to spiritual minds. It led men to think of all creation groaning together. Civilisation certainly had made advances; civil government had conferred some of its benefits on men; and lately, the strong hand of Rome, however heavily it might press, had averted or abridged some of the evils that afflicted nations. Still, on the whole, darkness, corruption, and social wrong continued to mark the scene, and there was little to suggest that prolonged effort might gradually work improvement. Rather it seemed that a rapid dispensation of grace, winning its way by supernatural energy, might well lead on to the winding up of the whole scene; sweeping all away before the advent of new heavens and a new earth. But, for us, nineteen hundred years have well-nigh passed. The Christian Church has been confronted all that time with her great task; and however imperfect her light and her methods have often been, she has set processes a-going, and pressed on in lines of action, in which she has not been without her reward. Also the public action of at least the European races, stimulated and guided by Christianity, has been inspired by faith in progress and in a reign of justice, and has applied itself to improve the conditions of men. How much of sin and pain still afflicts the world is too sadly evident. But the memory of the successive lives of saints, thinkers, men of public spirit and devoted public action, is strong in Christian minds to-day — it is a long, animating history. And never more than at the

present time did the world press itself on the Christian mind as the sphere for effort, for helpful and hopeful achievement. All this tends to fix the eye on what may happen before Christ comes; for one asks room and time to fight the battle out, to see the long co-operant processes converge upon their goal. The conflict is thought of as one to be bequeathed, like freedom's battle, from sire to son, through indefinite periods beyond which men do not very often look. And, indeed, the amelioration of the world and remedy of its ills by works of faith and love are Christlike work. The world cannot want it; the fruit of it will not be withheld; and the hopeful ardour with which it is pursued is Christ's gift to His people. For Christ Himself healed and fed the multitudes. Yet all this shall not replace the coming of Christ, and the redemption that draws nigh with Him, The longing eyes that gaze into the prospects of public-spirited beneficence and Christian philanthropy, do well; but they must also look higher up and further on.

One thing must be said. It is vain for us to suppose we can adjust beforehand, to our own satisfaction, the elements which enter into the future, so as to make a well-fitted scheme of it. That was not designed. And in this case two ways of looking at the future are apt to strive together. The man who is occupied with processes that, as he conceives, might eventuate in a reign of goodness reached by gradual amelioration, by successive victories of the better cause, may look askance on the promise of Christ's coming, because he dislikes catastrophe and cataclysm. First the blade, then the ear, then the full corn in the ear, is his motto. And the man who is full of the thought of the Lord's return, and deeply persuaded that nothing less will eradicate the world's disease, may look with impatience on measures that seem to aim at slow and far results. But neither the one mode of view nor the other is to be sacrificed. Work is to be done in the world on the lines that promise best to bless the world. Yet also this faith must never be let down — the Lord is coming; the Lord shall come.

How decisive the change is which Christ completes at His coming — how distinctive, therefore, and unworldly, that citizenship which takes its type from heaven where He is, and from the hope of His appearing — is last of all set forth. Paul might have dwelt on many great blessings the full meaning of which will be unfolded when Christ comes; for He is to conform all things to Himself. But Paul prefers to signalise what shall befall our bodies; for that makes us feel that not one element in our state shall fail to be subjected to the victorious energy of Christ. Our bodies are, in our present state, conspicuously refractory to the influences of the higher kingdom. Regeneration makes no improvement on them. In our body we

carry about with us what seems to mock the idea of an ethereal and ideal life. And when we die, the corruption of the grave speaks of anything but hope. Here, then, in this very point the salvation of Christ shall complete its triumph, saving us all over and all through. He “shall fashion anew the body of our humiliation, that it may be conformed to the body of His glory.”

For the Apostle Paul the question how the body is to be reckoned with in any lofty view of human life had a peculiar interest. One sees how his mind dwelt upon it. He does not indeed impute to the body any original or essential antagonism to the soul's better life. But it shares in the debasement and disorganisation implied in sin; it has become the ready avenue for many temptations. Through it the man has become participant of a vivid and unintermittent earthliness, contrasting all too sadly with the feebleness of spiritual impressions and affections, so that the balance of our being is deranged. Nor does grace directly affect men's bodily conditions. Here, then, is an element in a renewed life that has a peculiar refractoriness and irresponsiveness. So much is this so that sin in our complex nature easily turns this way, easily finds resources in this quarter. Hence sin in us often takes its denomination from this side of things. It is the flesh, and the minding of the flesh, that is to be crucified. On the Other hand, just because life for us is life in the body, therefore the body with its members must be brought into the service of Christ, and must fulfil the will of God. “Yield your bodies a living sacrifice.” “Your bodies are temples of the Holy Ghost.” A disembodied Christianity is to the Apostle no Christianity. There may be difficulties, indeed, in carrying this consecration through, elements of resistance and insubordination to be overcome. If so, they must be fought down. “I keep under my body and bring it into subjection, lest I prove a castaway.” To be thorough in this proved hard even for Paul. “Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?” — a text in which one sees how the “body” offered itself as the ready symbol of the whole inward burden and difficulty. So the body is dead because of sin: dying, fit to die, appointed to die, and not now renewed to life. “But if the Spirit of Him that raised up Christ from the dead dwell in you, He that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by His Spirit that dwelleth in you.” Then, limits now imposed on right thinking, right feeling, right acting, shall be found to have passed away. Till then we groan, waiting for the adoption, the redemption of the body; but then shall be the manifestation of the sons of God. To Paul this came home as one of the most definite, practical, and decisive forms in which the triumph of Christ's salvation should be declared.

The body, then, by which we hold converse with the world, and by which we give expression to our mental life, has shared in the evil that comes by sin. We find it to be the body of our humiliation. It is not only liable to pain, decay, and death, not only subject to much that is humbling and distressing, but it has become an ill-adapted organ for an aspiring soul. The bodily state weighs down the soul, when its aspirations after good have been rekindled. It is not wholly unconnected with our physical state that it is so hard to carry the recognition of God and the life of faith into the comings and goings of the outward life; so hard to wed the persuasions of our faith to the impressions of our sense. But we look forward to our Lord's coming with the expectation that the body of our humiliation shall be transfigured into the likeness of the body of His glory. In this we discern with what a pervading energy He is to subdue all things to Himself. Love in righteousness is to triumph through all spheres.

We have more than once acknowledged how natural it is to dream of constructing a Christian life on earth with all its elements, natural and spiritual, perfectly harmonised, each having its place in relation to each so as to make the music of a perfect whole. And in the strength of such a dream, some look down on all Christian practice as blind and narrow, which seems to them to mar life by setting one element of it against another. It must be owned that narrow types of Christianity have often needlessly offended so. Nevertheless we have here a new proof that the dream of those who would achieve a perfect harmony, in the present state and under present conditions, is vain. A perfect Christian harmony of life cannot be restored in the body of our humiliation. The nobler part is to own this, and to confess that amid many undeserved good gifts, yet, in relation to the great hope set before us, we groan, waiting for the redemption; when Christ who now fits us to run the race and bear the cross, shall come and save us out of all this, changing the body of our humiliation into the likeness of the body of His glory.

Against the ways of Jewish self-righteousness, and against the impulses of fleshly minds, the Apostle had set the true Christianity — the methods in which it grows, the influences on which it relies, the truths and hopes by which it is mainly sustained, the high citizenship which it claims and to the type of which it resolutely conforms. All this was possible in Christ, all this was actual in Christ, all this was theirs in Christ. Yet this is what is brought into debate, by unbelief and sin; this against unbelief and sin has to be maintained. Some influences come to shake us as to the truth of it — “It is not so real after all.” Some influences come to shake us as to the good of it

— “It is not after all so very, so supremely, so satisfyingly good.” Some influences come to shake us as to our own part in it — “It can hardly control and sustain my life, for after all, perhaps — alas, most likely — it is not for me, it cannot be for me.” Against all this we are to make our stand, in and with our Lord and Master. He is our confidence and our strength. How the Apostle longed to see this victory achieved in the case of all these Philippians, who were the treasure and the fruit of his life and labour! Be decided about all this, be clear about it, east every other way of it from you. “Therefore, my dearly beloved brethren, my joy and crown, so stand fast in the Lord, my dearly beloved.”

CHAPTER 17.

PEACE AND JOY. — PHILIPPIANS 2-7 (R.V.).

DR. LIGHTFOOT has observed that the passages in the Acts of the Apostles which record the Macedonian experiences of Paul have a good deal to say about women (Acts 16., 17.). They convey the impression that in Macedonia women had a position and exercised an influence, at least in religious matters, that was not usual in the Greek world. And he has appealed to the remains of ancient Macedonian inscriptions to support the general idea that exceptional respect was accorded to women in that country. Here, at any rate, we have two women of note in the Church at Philippi. They might, very likely, possess social standing and influence. They had been qualified to render, and in point of fact did render, important help in setting forward the cause of Christ in that city. We cannot doubt therefore that they were warm-hearted Christian women, who had deeply felt the power of the gospel, so that, like many of their sisters in later days, they gladly embarked in the service of it. In those days such service on the part of women implied no small effort of faith; and doubtless it had cost them something in the way of cross-bearing. But now, disagreements and estrangement had fallen out between them. Most likely the keen practical energies, which made them serviceable Christians, had brought about collision on some points in which their views differed. And then they had not managed the difference well. Self came in, and coloured and deepened it. Now, one may think, they were in danger of being always ready to differ, and to differ with mutual distrust and dislike.

People cannot always think alike, not even Christians who share the same service. But there is a Christian way of behaving about these inevitable divergences. And, in particular, in such cases we might be expected to show a superiority, in Christ our Lord, to minor differences, not allowing them to trouble the great agreement and the dear affection in which Christ has bound us. Whatever is to be said about a difference, as to its merits, the main thing that has to be said about it often is, "You should not have let it come between you. You should both of you have been big enough and strong enough in Christ, to know how to drop it and forget it. In making so much of it, in allowing it to make so much of itself, you have been children, and naughty children."

What this difference was we do not know; and it is of no consequence. Paul does not address himself to it. He holds both parties to be in the wrong now, and, for his purpose, equally in the wrong; and he addresses entreaty to both, in exactly the same terms, to agree in Christ and be done with it: no longer to allow this thing to mar their own edification and hinder the cause of Christ. Yet, while he is sure that this is the right way, he does not conceal from himself how difficult human nature finds it to come happily out of such a complication. So he appeals to some old comrade at Philippi, whom he calls his “genuine yokefellow,” to lend a hand. A Christian bystander, a friend of both parties, might help them out of the difficulty. In this connection the apostle’s mind goes back to happy days of cordial effort at Philippi, in which these women, and the “yokefellow,” and Clement, and others had all been at work, shoulder to shoulder, all rejoicing in the common salvation and the joint service.

In difficulties between Christians, as between other people, wise and loving friendship may perform the most important services. Selfishness shrinks from rendering these; and on the other hand, meddlesomeness, which is a form of egotism combined with coarseness, rushes in only to do harm. Wisdom is needed, mainly the wisdom which consists in loving thoughtfulness. The love which seeketh not her own, and is not easily provoked, is much called for in this ministry of reconciliation.

These good women had little idea, probably, that their names should come down the ages in connection with this disagreement of theirs; and they might have deprecated it if they had thought of it. But let them be remembered with all honour — two saints of God, who loved and laboured for Christ, who bore the cross, and each of whom was so important to the Church, that it was a matter of public interest to have this difficulty removed out of the way of both. As to it, we of later times have not succeeded in keeping Christian activity so free of personal misunderstandings as to be entitled on this account to assume any attitude of superiority. Let us think only with tenderness and affection of those venerable and beloved, those long-remembered mothers in Christ, Euodia and Syntyche.

The commentators have tried to divine something further about this “true yokefellow”; but with no success. As to Clement, some have been willing to identify him with the Clement known to have laboured in the first age at Rome, and who is reported to have been the writer of a well-known Epistle from the Church at Rome to that at Corinth. He, again, has been by

some identified with another Clement, also a Roman, a near relation of the Emperor Domitian, whom we have reason to believe to have been a Christian. Both identifications are probably mistaken; and the Clement now before us was no doubt resident at Philippi, and belonged to a somewhat earlier generation than his Roman namesake. The Roman world was full of Clements, and there is nothing surprising in meeting several Christians who bore the name.

With the “yokefellow” and with Clement, the Apostle recalls other “labourers” who belonged to the fellowship of those gospel days at Philippi. We are not to think that they were all gifted as teachers or preachers; but they were zealous Christians who helped as they could to gather and to confirm the Church. Paul will not give their names; but it must not be thought that the names have ceased to be dear and honourable to him. “They shall not be in my letter,” he says, “but they are written in even a better place, in the book of life. They are precious, not to me only, but to my Master.” Here, again, if any one had asked Paul how he ventured to speak with so much assurance of the condition of persons whose course was not yet ended, he would no doubt have replied, as in chap. 1:7: “It is meet for me to think thus of them, because I have them in my heart: because both in my bonds, and in the defence and confirmation of the gospel, they all are partakers with me of grace.”

These personal references indicate that the main burden of the Apostle’s thought in the Epistle has been disposed of, and that it is drawing to a close. Yet he finds it natural to add some closing admonitions. They are brief and pithy; they do not seem to labour with the weight of thought and feeling which pours through the preceding chapter. Yet they are not quite fragmentary. A definite conception of the case to be provided for underlies them, and also a definite conception of the way in which its necessities are to be met.

He had been pouring out his soul on the subject of the true Christian life — the deep sources from which it springs, the great channels in which it runs, the magnificent conditions of Christ’s kingdom under which it becomes possible and is accomplished. But yet, another order of things crosses all this. It is the incessant detail of human life on earth, with its pettiness and superficiality, and yet with its inevitable hold upon us all. How much we are at the mercy of it! How hard to keep quite true to the grand music of the gospel we believe, amid the multifarious patter of the incidents of life, playing on the surface only, but on the sensitive surface of our being. The

case of Euodia and Syntyche was but itself an illustration of the commonest kind, of the liability of believing lives to be swayed and marred in this way. For all these little things claim attention; they assume a magnitude that does not belong to them, and they take a place to which they have no right. Can anything be said to help us to some prevailing mood, in which we shall be likely to take the right attitude toward these elements of life, and, at the same time, to keep due touch with the springs of our spiritual welfare?

The Apostle reverts to the significant “goodbye” which was heard at the beginning of the third chapter. “Rejoice,” “Be of good cheer,” was the usual farewell salute. He had begun to use it in the third chapter, with an emphasis on the native signification of the word. Now he resumes it more emphatically still, for here he finds the keynote which he wants: “Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say it, Rejoice.”

If joy be possible, it would seem to need no great persuasion to induce men to embrace it. But, as a matter of fact, Christians fail greatly here. In the Old Testament there are abundant exhortations to Israel to rejoice in the Lord: the Lord being Jehovah, without further distinction or limitation; and the ground of rejoicing being His revealed character, especially His mercy and His truth, and the fact that He is Israel’s God. Here the Lord is our Lord Jesus, in whom the Father is both known and found. Now, to rejoice in Him is, and should be recognised as being, for believers, the most direct inference from their faith. For if this Lord be what the believer holds Him to be, then there is more in Christ to make him glad, than there can be in anything whatever to make him sorry. This applies even to remembered sin; for where sin abounded, grace doth much more abound. If indeed the joy be really in the Lord, it will be found to agree well with humility and penitence, as well as with diligence and patience; for all these things, and whatever should accompany them, come naturally from faith in Christ. But not the less, joy should have its place and its exercise.

If one will think of it, it will be plain that rejoicing in the Lord just denotes this, viz., that the influence of the objects of faith has free play through the soul. It is well that faith should bring our intellectual powers under its influence — that we should be brought to a vivid sense of the reality of Christ, and that our minds should work in reference to Him as they do in reference to things which are felt to be real, and which claim to be understood. That is well, even if, as yet, some malign force seems to impede cordial appreciation and personal fellowship. It is well, again, if

Christ is felt drawing out personal trust, and with that, genuine affection, so that the heart beats with desire and admiration, even though for the present that can only be under the burden of a perplexed and sorrowful mind. But when the conviction makes way through all the soul, first that Christ is most real, and second that Christ is most good and desirable, and thirdly that Christ is for me, and when the soul surrenders thoroughly to it all, then gladness is the token that faith is playing through the human soul, throughout all its provinces. It is the flag hoisted to signify that Christ is believed and loved indeed. On the other hand, wrong is done to the Lord, and an evil report is brought up upon Him, when those who profess to believe in Him fail to rejoice in Him.

You well may rejoice in the Lord; you ought surely to do it. You ought to give yourselves time to think and feel so as to rejoice; you should be ashamed to fail to rejoice. You do not apprehend aright your position as a believer, you do not take the attitude that befits you, if the Lord believed in, though perhaps He makes you diligent, and patient, and penitent, and thankful, does not also make you heartily glad. Let the elements of this gladness come warm home to your heart and do their work. Then you will realise as, short of this, you never can, how the believer rises above the things that threaten to entangle him, and can do all things through Christ that strengtheneth him.

And, in particular, how influential this is to preserve men from being unduly moved and swayed by the passing things of time! These sway us by joy and grief, by hope and fear; and what an inordinate measure of those affections they do beget in us! but let the great joy of the Lord have its place, and then those lesser claimants will have to content themselves with smaller room. A great grief shuts out lesser griefs. When a woman has lost her son, will she grieve greatly for the loss of her purse? So a great joy keeps down the excess of lesser joys. A man that has just won the heart and hand of the woman he loves will not be greatly concerned about winning or losing at some game. He will be about equally glad either way. So he whose heart thrills with the joy of Christ will feel the pleasure and pain of earthly things; but they will not master him, nor run away with him.

According to the Apostle, a believer in the way of his duty, if he cherishes this joy, may ordinarily have a great deal of it. And, as it were, he urges us: "Now do not be moved away from it. Do not be so foolish. Various things will come, all sorts of things, claiming to preoccupy your mind, so that for the present this joy shall fall into the background. They claim it — and far

too often they are allowed to succeed. Do not let them. ‘Rejoice in the Lord alway; again I will say, Rejoice.’“

Always: for many believers rejoice in the Lord sometimes; for example, in hours of undisturbed meditation. But when they go out into the stir of life, to meet experiences which neither greatly gratify nor greatly grieve them, then it seems fit that the new passion should have its turn, and the heart insists on this indulgence. So also when some great hope absorbs the mind, or some great anxiety weighs upon it, the soul seems fascinated with the coming good or ill, and hangs upon the prospect as if nothing else for the present could be minded. Now the Apostle does not say that insensibility is the duty of Christians in these circumstances. Indeed it is because these experiences do interest and impress, that they become an effective instrument of Divine training. But Christ is fit to be rejoiced in, right through all vicissitudes; and common experiences, duly dealt with, ought to throw into relief the reasons why He must still be cause of gladness, whatever may be felt about other things. This maintained joy of the Lord — a rejoicing faith, a rejoicing love, a rejoicing obedience — this is the temper in virtue of which all else of life will fall into its due place, and will assume its just proportion. ““Though the fig tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls: yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation” (<SIB7>Habakkuk 3:17, 18).

So then, “Let your moderation (or forbearance) be known to all men.” The word here used expresses a state of mind opposed to the eagerness that overrates the worth of our personal objects, and to the arrogance that insists on our own will about them. Some would render it “considerateness.” It is a temper which dictates a gentle and forbearing way of dealing with men. This is the appropriate evidence that the impetuosity of the heart about earthly things has been assuaged by the unseen presence and the influence of Christ. Christ seen, felt, and rejoiced in, is the secret of this moderation. A great vision of faith, and that not a vision which is dreaded, but a vision which is loved, brings the movement of the soul into a happy order. Now, not only so: not only does the love of Christ, unseen and absent, work in this way; but Christ is coming and is near. The hopes connected with Him are soon to be realised, the gladness of fellowship with Him is soon to be complete. The Lord is at hand. “Be patient therefore, brethren, unto the coming of the Lord. Stablish your hearts. The coming of the Lord draweth nigh” (<SIB7>James 5:7).

For believers, as we have already seen, the coming of the Lord is, according to the New Testament, the great hope. Then the joy in the Lord is to be complete and crowned. Those who apprehend that glad day as near are not supposed to be capable of yielding up their hearts to the uncontrolled sway of mere earthly interests.

Here, however, a question arises. Paul speaks of the day as near, and calls on his disciples to live under the influence of that belief. He does not merely say that it may be near, but that it is. Yet we now know that the day was then more than eighteen hundred years away. In the light of this fact one asks what we are to make of the statement before us, and what we are to make of the view of Christian life which the statement implies.

Our Lord expressly withheld from His disciples all definite statement of times and seasons in this connection. Yet the Early Church with one consent expected the Lord to come within comparatively few years (what are commonly called few), and language shaped itself in accordance with that impression. We have here, however, more than a mere mode of phrasing. The nearness of Christ is emphasised as the ground on which Christian experience ought to build. Was not this a mistake?

But one may ask in reply, Was it after all untrue that Christ's coming was near then, or that it is near now? Even if anticipations in our own day which bring it within a generation are to fail again, as they have always done before, shall we think that the Lord is not near?

There is a nearness which pertains to all future events which are at once very great and important, and also are absolutely certain. Being so great, involving interests so great, and being contemplated in their inevitable certainty, such events can loom large upon the eye, and they can make their influence felt in the present, whatever tale of days may interpose before they actually arrive. If, for instance, one were told of a friend, whom he supposed he might meet at any time, "You shall certainly see him six months hence," the reply might be, "Six months! That is a long time to wait." But if he were told with infallible authority, "Six months hence you shall die," would he then say, "It is a long time"? Would he not feel that it was near? Would not an event so momentous as death, so inclusive of all interests and all issues, prove able to stretch, as it were, across six months, and to come into each day, as part of that day's concern? So of the coming of Christ. It is the great event for the individual, the Church, the world. All issues run up to it; all developments are broken off by it; all earthly histories await its decision. To it all earthly movement tends; from it all that

lies beyond is dated. It is the great gate of the world to come. Let us think what it means: and suppose that we could be assured that it is still ten thousand years away, shall we say, “How far off it is”? Not if we believe in its certainty, and realise what it means. If we do so our hearts will stir and thrill as we hearken how the surges of the eternal world are beating on the thin barrier of ten thousand years. Come when it may, it comes hasting to us, pressing before it all that lies between, big with the decisions and the fulfilments of Eternity. If we truly believe and rightly estimate it, we shall feel that it is near — even at the door. We shall be aware whenever we look forward that beyond all possible events of earthly history it rises high, catching and holding our gaze, and hurrying toward our individual selves not one whit the less because it aims at others too.

We are apt to ask why the words of warning and encouragement in reference to the future are not connected with the prospect of death, rather than with that of the Lord’s return; for death certainly is the topic generally selected for such purposes by moralists and preachers of more recent days. The answer may partly be, that the possibility and likelihood of the Lord’s return, even in the lifetime of themselves and their contemporaries, might render it more natural for the Apostles to fix all but exclusively on that. Yet this will not suffice. For nobody could overlook the fact that some believers were dying, and that death before the Lord’s return might well be the portion of more. Besides, in particular circumstances, death does come into view in a perfectly easy and natural way, as at ^{<30123>}Philippians 1:23; and the bearing of it on what lies nearer is considered. The true answer is that death is not the great expectation of the believer — not death, but victory over death, consummated and conclusively manifested when the Lord comes. This expectation is certainly associated with the solemn prospect of judgment; but not so as to quench the gladness of the hope for those who love the Lord and have trusted in Him. This is our expectation — “the Lord Jesus Christ, who is our hope” (^{<50101>}1 Timothy 1:1). Death is a great event; but it is negative, privative, and, after all, provisional. True, it seals us up for the coming of the Lord, and so, in many respects, it may be, for many purposes, practically identified with that coming. The sermons which are preached upon it, commonly from Old Testament texts, are, no doubt, well grounded and edifying. But the New Testament, speaking to believers, all but constantly passes on to the day of the Lord as the true focus of the future; and it will be well for us to conform our thinking and our feeling to this model. No one can estimate, who has not made it matter of personal study, how large and how influential a place this topic takes in New Testament teaching.

Meanwhile, no doubt, the vicissitudes and the possibilities of earthly life press upon us. Now the Apostle provides a special additional relief for that. We are not merely prepossessed with a joy that should fortify us against undue disturbance from this source, but we have access in all things to the mind and heart of our Father. We can bring our thoughts and wishes about them all into contact with the deep, true thoughts and with the fatherly love of God. The incidents and the possibilities of life exercise us: they tend to become anxieties, keen and wearing; and anxieties are the materials of disturbance and temptation. "Be anxious about nothing; but in all things by prayer and supplication, with thankfulness, let your requests be made known unto God."

This is the practical way of getting continually to those springs of joy which comfort and establish the heart. The way to be anxious about nothing is to be prayerful about everything.

It is promised that when we pray in faith God hears us, and that he that asketh receiveth. However, this does not mean that whatever appears to us desirable shall certainly be brought to pass in answer to prayer. That would be to sacrifice our own welfare, and also the order of God's world, to our shortsightedness and vanity. There is great reason to believe indeed that those who live by prayer find many a desire granted, and many a burden lifted, in token of God's loving interest in them, and the heed He gives to their prayers. But we are not to start from a general principle that we are to get all our own way by praying. Two things we may fix upon: First, the absolute promises of the gospel, the blessings which pertain to eternal life, are given to us through prayer. "This poor man cried, and the Lord heard him." Secondly, concerning all other things we have access to God in prayer, as to One who grudges us no good thing; we are to express our anxieties and our desires, and to receive the assurance that they are lovingly considered by One who knows our frame and understands our troubles. Often the answer comes, even in small things. But, generally, we may in this point have an absolute assurance that we shall either have what we ask, or else something which God sees to be better for us than that.

It is this second article of the doctrine of prayer that is chiefly in view here. The prayer of faith must be a prayer of thanksgiving, because faith knows how much it owes to God. "Thou hast not dealt with us after our sins." At the same time it has supplications and requests, over and above the great petition for life eternal.

For our daily human experience is God's providence to us. It exercises our thoughts and feelings, and sets a-going contemplations and desires, which may be short-sighted and erring, but, so far, they are the best that we can make of it; or, if not the best, they have the more need to be corrected. Here, then, we are encouraged to pour out our hearts to God. We are to do it with submission: that is one of the best parts of the privilege, for our Father knows best. At the same time, we are to do it with supplication; we not only may, but we should. Our desires should all be made known in this quarter; nowhere will they have a kindlier hearing. So, last of all, we come, not only touching eternal life, but touching each day's concerns, into a blessed agreement with God our Father through Christ. It is agreed that He takes loving charge of our anxieties and desires, as One who would withhold no good from us; and it is agreed that we put unreserved confidence in Him, — in which confidence we say, "Abba, Father; not our will, but Thine be done."

The confidence we have that all this is most real and solid, and not merely a deceptive piece of religious acting, comes to us in the channel of the faith and experience which have been fulfilled in God's children from the first; but it is most emphatically confirmed and made sure to us by Christ. He has taught us to pray. His is the religion in which men pray. Under His influence we come away from ceremonial utterances, and also from the despairing experiments of supplication with which, in other religions, men assail the heavens; and hand in hand with that loving Mediator, we pray. Prayer, when it is real, when it is "in the Holy Spirit," is a wonderfully simple and a wonderfully great thing.

So it comes to pass that the peace of God which passeth all understanding is found. For this great and deep agreement with God in Christ, about all things great and small, is the very entrance into the peace of God Himself, and is the participation of it. In this, as in other aspects, things are daily realised in the history of believers, that pass all understanding, because God in Christ is in the matter. The infinite and eternal life is wedding itself to us and our affairs. It may be understood, finally, that this peace, arising to Christians at the throne of grace, guards their minds and hearts. It guards them against being overcharged, outworn, surprised; it guards them against being carried captive by earthly care. Yet this peace does not disable them for earthly business. Rather, because their main interests are so secure, it gives them calmness and clearness; it supplies them a moral vantage ground from which to dispose of all earthly affairs.

CHAPTER 18.

THE THINGS TO FIX UPON. — PHILIPPIANS 4:8, 9 (R.V.).

THE topics last considered bring us naturally to the remarkable exhortation of vv. 8 and 9. This proceeds on the same view of the moral and spiritual situation, and completes what the Apostle has to say in reference to it.

If men are to live as citizens of a heavenly commonwealth, on great principles and to great ends, it is, as we have seen, a very practical question, What to do about the inevitable play and onset of this changing earthly life, which assails us with motives, and detains us upon interests, and inspires us with influences, of its own. These cannot be abjured: they are not easy to harmonise with the indications of that loftier and purer world; they are prone to usurp the whole heart, or at least a very undue share of it. This is the practical problem of every honest Christian. In reference to the solving of it the Apostle had suggested the place given to Christian joy; he had suggested also the place and power of prayer. These were indications as to the spirit and the method in which a believer might bring into play the resources of the Kingdom of Christ to control and subjugate those insubordinate forces. But might not all this seem to be too negative? Does it not speak too much of holding off and holding in? After all, do not all human experiences constitute the scene in which we are both formed and tried? What can we make of life unless we are interested in it? How otherwise can we even be religious in it? What is life if it is not a scene of inquiry and of search set in motion by the objects around us, a scene in which we like and dislike, hope and fear, desire and think? The answer is, Yes, we are to be keenly interested in the experiences of life, and in the possibilities it opens. Life is our way of existing; let existence be animated and intense. But while the aspects of it that are merely transient are to have their place, and may attract a lively interest, there are other aspects, other interests, other possibilities. All the transient interests have an outgate towards such as are eternal. Life is the experience of beings that have high capacities, and can rise to noble destinies. It is the experience of societies of such beings, who mould one another, exchanging influences continually. The changing experience of human life, when seen in the true light, is found to add to all its lower interests a play of interests that are more interesting as well as more worthy. It is iridescent with lights which it catches from the infinite and the eternal. Every step of it, every turn of it,

asks questions, offers opportunities, calls for decisions, holds out treasures, which it is the business of a lifetime to recognise and to secure. It has gains, it has victories, it has accomplishments, it has glories, which need not lead us to deny its lower interests, but which we may reasonably feel to be far the higher. Endless shades, and forms. and types of goodness, of being good, getting good, doing good, gleam reflected to us from the changing experience. Goodness is not one monotonous category embodied in some solemn phrase, and exhausted when that is learned. There is no end to the rich variety in which it is offered, and in which it is to be caught, understood, appropriated. And life, through all the manifoldness of its legitimate interests, and its illegitimate possibilities, is the scene in which all this passes before us, and asks to be made ours. The Apostle says to us, Think on these things. Take account, that is, of what they are, and what their worth is. Lay forth on these the care and pains which spent themselves before on mere pain and pleasure, loss and gain. Reckon what these are, search out their nature, prove their capabilities, appropriate and enjoy them. Think on these things. So earthly life, through all its busy processes, shall acquire a nobler interest; and it shall begin, at the same time, to minister with unexpected readiness to your true welfare. Enter then, or press on, in this wide field. Be this your passion and pursuit; that which unifies your life, and draws all its resources towards one result.

We may be helped to fix more firmly the point of view from which this striking catalogue of good things is drawn up, if we observe that the Apostle collects all these excellences under the notion of “a virtue and a praise.” Let us consider how men are trained to progressive conceptions of virtue and praise. For virtue and praise, both name and notion, have had a large place in men’s minds and a great influence on their actions. How has this influence been sustained and made to grow?

Men are conscious of obligations; and they are aware, more dimly or more clearly, that the standard of those obligations must exist somehow above themselves. It is a standard not of their own creation, but such as claims them by an antecedent right. Yet if each individual could hold himself apart, forming his own conceptions of fit and right for himself without regard to others, the standard would tend downwards rapidly, because moral judgment would be warped by each man’s selfishness and passion, excusing evil in his own case and putting it for good. Even as it is, this has taken place only too widely. But yet the tendency is powerfully counteracted by the fact that men do not exist, nor form their notions, in that separate way. A principle within them prompts them to seek one

another's approbation, and to value one another's good opinion. Indeed the consciousness that what is law for me is law for others, and that they are judging as well as I, is one of the forms in which we realise that duty descends upon us all, from some august and holy source.

This principle of regarding the judgment and seeking the approbation of others, has had an enormous effect on men and on society. For though men are skilful enough, in their own case, in averting or silencing the admonition of the monitor within, they have little reluctance to make full use of their sense of right in scrutinising one another. They judge, in their thoughts about each other, with far more clearness, shrewdness, and certainty than they do about themselves. Men do in this way make requirements of one another, which each of them might be slow to make from himself. This is a great operative force in all cases; and in those cases in which, in any society, vivid convictions about truth and duty have taken possession of some minds, the principle we are speaking of propagates an influence through the whole mass, with effects that are very striking.

This mutual criticism of men "accusing or else excusing one another," has had a great effect in sustaining what we call common morals. But especially let it be observed that this criticism, and the consciousness of it, stimulating the higher class of minds, sustain and develop the finer perceptions of morality. There are minds that eminently strive for distinction in things that are counted for a virtue and a praise. And through them is developed in the general mind the approving perception of more delicate shades of worthy conduct, which in a coarser age were unperceived or unheeded. These come up in men's mutual judgments; they are scrutinised; they interest the mind and take hold of it. So, whether in the case of those who begin to pay respect to such forms of good because they perceive that others approve of them, or in the case of those who, when those forms of good are thus presented, perceive a worth in them and take a pride in living up to them for their own sake, — in both cases, the creating and sustaining of the higher standard depends on the principle we have now before us.

Thus there arises, for example, the code of honour, the fine perception of what is socially right, becoming, and graceful. Men, no doubt, are always to be found who cultivate the nicest sense of this, not from a mere desire that others should know it, but because they see it to be desirable in itself, and because they shun the sense of inward disgrace that follows when they fall below their own standard. Yet it is the process of mutual criticism

which develops the consciousness, and it is this which, on the whole, sustains it.

Thus we find in the world not merely a sense of duty, but something that has spurred men on to things counted for a virtue and a praise. Outside of all Christian influences, wonderful examples are found of self-sacrificing devotion to the noble and the true. Men have eagerly pursued the nicest discriminations of duty and honour, that they might be, and might show themselves to be, accomplished, finished, not merely in some things, but in whatever things were counted to be the proper tokens of a noble mind.

Well now, the Apostle is not shutting out from his plan of mental life the attainments made in this way in the true or the good, even apart from Christian teaching. Far less is he excluding the human social method, in which mind whets mind, and one stirs another to discern and appropriate what is for a virtue and for a praise. He supposes this mode of influence to go on in Christianity more successfully than ever. And he is not at all excluding the natural life of men; for that is the scene, and that yields the materials, for the whole process. But he does suppose that now all old attainment shall be set in a new light, and acquire a new life and grace, and that new attainment shall come wonderfully into view by reason of the new element which for us has entered into the situation. And what is this element? Is it that we recognise around us a society of Christians with whom we share a higher standard, and with whom we can give and take the contagion of a nobler conception of life? Yes, no doubt; but far before that, the great new element in the situation is the Lord — in whom we trust and rejoice.

It is always human duty to have regard to the will of God, however it may reach us. But when you are called to know the Lord and to rejoice in Him, when He vouchsafes Himself to be yours, when you begin to enjoy His peace, and to walk with Him in love, and to have it for your hope to be with Him for ever, then you are placed in a new relation to Him. And it is such a near and dear relation on both sides that much may be expected from you in it. If this be so, you are now dealing with Him always; not merely in direct acts of worship, but in your thoughts, your feelings, your words, your business, your common intercourse with men, and all your daily life, you walk with Him. You cannot repudiate having so much to do with Him, unless you will repudiate your Christianity.

Then, if so, something new is expected. A new test of the becoming, of that which is for a virtue and for a praise, has come into operation, and has

become intelligible to you; and it is a test of new delicacy and new force. It is expected we should recognise it. Not now the mutual judgments merely of erring men, but His mind and His will, what He delights in and approves, — this begins to solicit us and press upon us, for we walk with Christ. That this “walk” of ours may escape being mean, coarse, offensive, we have great lessons to learn. We have to learn what, in His judgment, as seen by His eye, as tried by the sensibilities of His heart, are the things that are true and venerable and just, what with Him counts for a virtue and a praise.

And here, indeed, is our crown. The crown of honour which man cast away when sin gained him, was the approbation of the Lord. But now we are set on afresh to seek it, testing our ways by the perception of that which He approves; or, on the other hand, what He counts to be mean and degrading, fit to be recoiled from and rejected. It is our calling (whatever our attainment may be) to be more sensitive to the nicest touches of truth and honour towards our Lord than ever we were towards men. And this does not apply only to some narrow field of life. It goes through all relations, up to God and Christ, and out through all duties and ties. The great calling reaches wide and far; it is very high and noble: we cannot pretend to disclaim it, unless we disclaim the Lord. This way lies God’s crown. Win it; wear it; let no man take thy crown.

When our Lord’s mind and heart are said to be the test, this does not exclude our profiting by our fellows, accepting the admonition contained in human judgments, and especially in those of Christian people. Great good comes to us in such channels. Only now the judgment of our fellows is to refer itself always to a further standard; and a new Presence brings new tenderness and grace, new depth and significance, to every suggestion of right feeling and worthy life. This is the light and this the influence under which we are to learn what shall be counted for a virtue and for a praise. And we must bend our mind to think upon it, if we are to learn our lesson.

We must think upon it. For, on the one hand, it is not “some things,” but “whatsoever things.” What should we say of a man who proposed in his dealings with others to do “some things” that are honourable, but not all things, not “whatsoever things”? And, on the other hand, we may be further off from even a small measure of attainment in this field than we are disposed to think. Christians who, as to all social excellence, as that is commonly understood between man and man, are unexceptionable, may be sadly blind to the requirements of an honourable walk with God; may be sadly wanting even in the conception of what is due in all love and honour

to Christ, and to men for His sake. Men may be the soul of honour and delicacy in their ways, judged from the world's point of view; yet not far from a savage coarseness in the manner of their life, judged by Christ's standard. We would not needlessly wound another's feelings; but with what indifference have we "grieved the Spirit." We would shrink from saying anything to our fellows that is deceitful and hypocritical: can we say as much for our prayers? In our common life we maintain truth in the ordinary sense between men; but do we loyally express and act out the truth by which God's children live in our speech and action among men? Is there that fine congruity of our bearing to the truth we live by, which becomes a child of God?

We are greatly hindered here by the assumption we make, that when we have mastered the form of knowledge concerning the will of God, we then know all about our calling. It is a great delusion. We must not only sit down at the feet of Christ to learn from Him; but also, with a watchful eye on the phases of life, catching the lessons which things and men afford, we must be trained to know and sharpened to loving discernment as to our Master's mind, and so, as to what is honourable and right-minded, refined and noble, in a walk with God. We do not easily emerge from the meanness of our spirits; we do not easily shake off that insensibility to what is spiritually fair and fit, on which the angels look down with pity and wonder.

Therefore, says the Apostle, think on these things, the things, which in the Lord's kingdom and under the Lord's eye are well-pleasing, and count for a virtue and a praise; think on those things which are related to His esteem, and to the esteem of persons who learn of Him, as various excellences are to the common judgment of the world. Do so, for here you are close to the genuinely and supremely true and good; and this, as was said before, is your crown.

The Apostle is thinking of a perception of duty and privilege attained not merely by studying a catalogue of virtues, but by a far finer and more living process — by life that is instinct with observant watchfulness, that is frank in self-criticism, that is recipient of the light flashing from the experience and the censure of others: all this under constant regard to the Lord, and leading us into fuller sympathy with Him.

That this is so appears from the Apostle's way of arranging the particulars of his exhortation. He does not merely desire his disciples to discern what is right in general: but he would have them grow into a vital knowledge, so

as to feel the right in those matters where the shading becomes delicate; where it may be difficult to distinguish argumentatively an absolute right and wrong, but where a mind purged and trained in the Master's school can well discern a difference. "Whatsoever things are true" — which includes not only veracity and fidelity, but also whatever in conduct and temper God's truth requires as agreeable to itself; and then "Whatsoever things are venerable" — the character that emerges when all that is congruous to truth, in its finest filaments and ramifications, has been developed, and has assumed its own place. "Whatsoever things are just" — rightfully due on all hands to God and to man; and then "Whatsoever things are pure" — the character that recoils from all that sullies, from the smallest shade or infection of iniquity. "Whatsoever things are lovely" — the dear or amiable, whatever draws out love, cherishes it, befits it; and then "Whatsoever things are of good report" — actions that can hardly be more discriminatingly classified than by saying that the heart is pleased to hear of them; it confesses that they are of a good name, of a welcome sound; they are like some delicate sound or odour on which you dwell with delight, but cannot definitely describe it. In a word, "If there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things." Study them, look out for them, learn to recognise them, to know their worth, to pursue them lovingly through all their manifestations.

Thus, let it be said once more, the Apostle is not open to the objection that he calls us to a mere retreat from energetic life. To such a call men have always replied that they find in themselves capacities wonderfully adapted to grapple with life, and to do so with interest and with energy. Virtually the Apostle says, Yes, true; and life has aspects to interest the mind, and results to engage the will, which are its noble and its imperative possibilities: for the followers of Christ these become dominant; they afford noble scope for all human faculty; and all forms of life are dignified as they become subservient to these supreme interests and aims. Now, lay forth the care and pains that fastened before on mere joy and sorrow, hope and fear, on a certain thinking and making account of the true, the venerable, the just, the pure, the lovely, that which is of good report. Reckon what they are; search out their nature; make them your serious object. "O man of God, flee those things; but follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness."

But progress is not to be made in this line by mere subtle refining and contemplation. If there was any danger that the Apostle's call to "think" might be interpreted that way, presently it is corrected. The thinking is to

be practical thinking, bending itself to action. “What things ye .have received and learned” — those practical points in which the Apostle always taught his Gentile converts to put to proof the grace of Christ; and “What ye have heard and seen in me” — in a man poor, tried, persecuted, a man whose life was rough and real, who knew weakness and sorrow, who bore heavy burdens, that were not proudly paraded, but which brought him lowly and weary to Christ’s feet, — these things do. That is the road to the attainments on which I bid you think.

“And the God of peace shall be with you.” In those ways (for they are His own ways) God walks with men; and peace with God, spreading out into peace with men, becomes the atmosphere in which such wayfarers move.

CHAPTER 19.

GIFTS AND SACRIFICES. — PHILIPPIANS 4:10-23 (R.V.).

THE Apostle had urged joy. in the Lord, and a moderation visible to all men. If any one supposes that in doing so he recommended a stoical temper, insensible to the impressions of passing things, the passage which now comes before us will correct that error. It shows us how the Apostle could “rejoice in the Lord,” and yet reap great satisfaction from providential incidents. “I rejoiced in the Lord greatly, that now at last you have revived your thought for me,” or, as In the older version, “that your care for me has flourished again.”

Worldly eagerness, and worldly care and anxiety about persons and things, are rebuked by the spirit of rejoicing in the Lord. But the persons and the things about us all have a connection with the Lord, if we have eyes to see it, and hearts to mark it; and that is the chief thing about them. They are in the Lord’s world, the Lord calls us to have to do with them: as for the persons, they are, some of them, the Lord’s servants, and all of them the Lord calls us to love and to benefit; as for the things, the Lord appoints our lot among them, and they are full of a meaning which He puts into them. So regard to the Lord and a spirit of rejoicing in Him may pervade our earthly life. The worldly eagerness and worldly care must be controlled. There is no avoiding that conflict. But now — shall we in faith give ourselves to learn the true rejoicing in the Lord? If not, our Christianity must be at best low and comfortless. But if we do, we shall be rewarded by a growing liberty. The more that joy possesses us, the more will it give occasion to the finest and freest play of feeling in reference to passing things; and some of these which, on other accounts, might seem insignificant, will begin to yield us an abounding consolation.

These Philippians, who had given early proof of attachment to the gospel, had lately, for some reason or other, been unable, “lacked opportunity,” to minister to the wants of Paul. Now the winter, whatever it was, that hindered the expression of their good will was gone, and their care of Paul flourished again. Did the Apostle think it needful to freeze up. the feelings of satisfaction which this incident awakened? No: but in his case those feelings, having spiritual elevation, became so much the more deep and glad. He rejoiced greatly in this; and still, he was rejoicing in the Lord. Let

us mark how this comes out both when we consider what was not the spring of his gladness, and what it was.

“Not that I speak in respect of want.” It was not the change from want to comparative plenty that explained the nature of his feelings. Yet he evidently implies that he had been in want, strange as that may seem in a city where there was a Christian congregation. But though the removal of that pressure would no doubt be thankfully taken, yet for a man whose gladness was in the Lord no mere change of that kind would lead to “rejoicing greatly.” “I speak not in respect of want: I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content. I know how to be abased, and I know also how to abound: in everything and in all things have I learned the secret (have been initiated) both to be filled and to be hungry, both to abound and to be in want. I can do all things through Him that strengtheneth me.”

“Therewith to be content.” Paul had learned to be so minded that, in trying circumstances, he did not anxiously cast about for help, but was sufficed: his desires were brought down to the facts of his condition. In that state he counted himself to have enough. He knew how to suit himself to abasement, that common experience of the indigent and friendless and he knew how to suit himself to abundance, when that was sent: each as a familiar state in which he made himself at home — not overgrieved or overjoyed, not greatly elevated or greatly depressed. “I have been instructed,” or initiated (the word used by the heathen of introduction to the mysteries), “not only into the experience of those conditions, but into the way of taking kindly with them both.” Mark how his words follow one another: “I have learned” — been put through a course of teaching and have had a teacher; “I know” — it has become familiar to me, I understand it; “I am initiated” — if there is a secret in it, something hidden from the natural man, I have been led into that, out and in, through and through.

If we would know by what discipline the Lord trained Paul to this mind, we may listen to what Paul himself says of it (☞1 Corinthians 4:9-13): “I think God hath set forth us the apostles last of all, as men doomed to death: for we are made a spectacle unto the world.... Even unto this present hour we both hunger, and thirst, and are naked, and are buffeted, and have no certain dwelling place; and we toil, working with our own hands: being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we endure; being defamed, we entreat: we are made as the filth of the world, the offscouring of all things, unto this day” (see also ☞2 Corinthians 6:4, 11:23). If,

again, we would know the manner of his training in such experiences, take ^{<472B>}2 Corinthians 12:8, 9: “Concerning this thing I besought thrice that it might depart from me. 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.” Also how his faith wrought and gathered strength in all these, we may see from ^{<473B>}Romans 8:24-28: “We are saved by hope. If we hope for that which we see not, “then do we with patience wait for it. Also the Spirit helpeth our infirmity: for we know not how to pray as we ought; but the Spirit Himself maketh intercession for us ... And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God.” So “being strengthened with all might, according to His glorious power, to all patience and long suffering with joyfulness “(^{<5101B>}Colossians 1:11), he was able to say, I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me.” This was the course, and this the fruit, of Paul’s biography. But each Christian has his own life, the tenor and the upshot of which should not be wholly estranged from Paul’s. Now what it was that did move him so to rejoice is explained when he speaks of the Philippians “holding fellowship, with his affliction”; and, again, when he says, I desire fruit that may abound to your account.” He saw in their succour the blessed unity of Christ’s living Church, the members having mutual interest, so that if one suffers all suffer, The Philippians claimed a right to take part as fellow-members in the Apostle’s state and wants, and to communicate with his affliction. And this was only a continuation of their former practice in the beginning of the gospel. This, as a fruit of Christ’s work and of the presence of His Spirit, refreshed the Apostle. It was a manifestation in the sphere of temporal things of the working of a high principle, communion with the common Lord. And it betokened the progress of the work of grace, in that the Philippians were not weary in well-doing. So it was fruit that abounded to their account. It may be noticed that the directness and frankness of the Apostle’s speech to the Philippians on these matters convey a testimony to the generous Christian feeling which prevailed among them. He speaks as one who feared no misconstruction. He does not fear that they will either mistake his meaning or do wrong to his motives; as he, on the other side, puts no other than a loving construction upon their action. He could not so trust all the Churches. In some there was so little of large Christian sympathy that a complaining tone in such matters was forced on him. But in the case of the Philippians he has no difficulty in interpreting their gift simply as embodying their earnest claim to be counted “partakers of the benefit,” and therefore entitled to bear the burdens and alleviate the sufferings of Paul.

Gladly he admits and welcomes this claim. It is worth observing that the way of giving vent to Christian feeling here exemplified was apparent at Philippi from the very first. Not only did it appear when Paul departed from Macedonia (ver. 15); but, before that, the earliest convert, Lydia, struck the keynote, — “If ye judge me faithful in the Lord, come into my house” (~~4165~~ Acts 16:15). Both in individuals and in Churches, the style of feeling and action embraced at the outset of Christianity, under the first impressions, often continues to prevail long after.

Now, in virtue of this liberality, Paul had all and abounded. He had desired to see the old spirit flourish again, and he had his wish. “I have all: I feel greatly enriched since I received the things sent by Epaphroditus.” What gladdened him was not the outward comfort which these gifts supplied, but much more, the spiritual meaning they carried in their bosom. Let us see how he reads that meaning.

This gift comes to him. As it comes, what is it? From its destination and its motives it takes on a blessed character. It is “an odour of a sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable, well-pleasing unto God.” This was what came to the Apostle: something that was in a peculiar manner God’s own, something which He regarded, set value on, and counted precious. Further, it turned out to be something in connection with which the assurance ought to go forth, “My God shall fulfil every need of yours.” They had ministered to Paul’s need, in faith, love, thankfulness, and loyal care of Christ’s servant. Christ counted it done to Him: as such He would surely repay it, supplying their need with that considerate liberality which it becomes Him to exhibit. Observe, then, the position in which the Apostle finds himself. He is himself the object of Christian kindness; affections wrought in the Philippians by the Holy Ghost are clinging to him and caring for him. He is also one so linked with God’s great cause that offerings sent to him, in the spirit described, become an “odour of a sweet smell, an acceptable sacrifice to the Lord.” Also this supply of his need is so directly a service done to Christ, that when it is done, God, as it were, stands forth directly on His servant’s behalf: He will repay it, supplying the need of those who supplied’ His servant. Poor though Paul may be, and sometimes sad, yet see how the resources of God must be pledged to requite the kindness done to him. All this made him very glad. His heart warmed under it. What a blessed, happy, secure, and, looking forward, what a hopeful state was his! This came home to him all at once with the Philippians’ gift. No wonder that he says, “I have all and abound.”

If any one chooses to say that all this was true about the Apostle, and he might have known it, apart from the gift, and even if it had never come, that may be a kind of truth, but it signifies exactly nothing to the purpose. It is one thing to have a doctrine which one knows: it is another thing to have the Holy Spirit setting it home with a warmth and glory that fills the man with joy. The spirit of God may do this without means, but often He uses means, and, indeed, what we esteem little means; by little things carrying home great impressions, as out of the mouths of babes and sucklings He perfects praise. When a child of God is cast down, no one can tell out of how small a thing the Spirit of God may cause to arise a peace that passeth all understanding.

Christianity confers great weight and dignity on little things. This gift, not in itself very great, passing between Christians at Philippi and an Apostle imprisoned at Rome, belongs after all to an unearthly sphere. Paul sees its connection with all spiritual things, and with the heavenly places where Christ is. And it comes to him carrying a rich meaning, preaching .everlasting consolation and good hope through grace.

Mark, again, the illustration of the truth that the members have need of one another, and are compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part. The strong may benefit by the weak, as well as the weak by the strong. This Apostle, who could do all things through Christ who strengthens him, might be very far more advanced as a Christian than any one in Philippi. Possibly there was nothing any of them could say, no advice they could tender to him in words, that would have been of material benefit to the Apostle. But that which, following the impulse of their faith and love, they did, was of material benefit. It filled his heart with a joyful sense of the relation in which he stood to them, to Christ, to God. It welled up for him like a water-spring in a dry land. No one can tell how it may have conduced to enable him to go forward with more liberty and power, testifying in Rome the gospel of God.

Nor must we omit the comfort to all who serve God in their generation arising from the view which the Apostle is here led to take. There may be trials from without and trials from within. Still God careth for His servant. God will provide for him out of that which is peculiarly His own. God so identifies him with Himself, that He must needs requite all who befriend him out of His own riches in glory.

So far for the bearing of the case on Paul. We have still to look a little into the view given of this Philippian gift on its own account. It is emphatically called a sweet savour, an offering acceptable and well-pleasing to God. We have seen already (^{<3817>}Philippians 2:17) that believers are called upon to offer themselves as a sacrifice; and now we see also that their obedience, or that which they do for Christ's sake, is reckoned as an offering to God. So it is said (^{<3816>}Hebrews 13:16) "to do good and to communicate forget not, for with such sacrifices God is well pleased." It need hardly be said they are not sacrifices to atone for sin. But they are offerings accepted by God, at His altar, from His children's hands. They suitably express both the gratitude of believers to God, and the sincerity of their Christianity in general. God grants us this way of expressing the earnestness of our regard to Him: and He expects that we shall gladly avail ourselves of it; our obedience is to assume the character of a glad and willing offering. The expressions used by the Apostle here assure us that there is a Divine complacency in the manifestation of this spirit on the part of God's children. The heart of Him who has revealed Himself in Christ, of Him who rested and was refreshed on the seventh day over His good and fair works, counts for a sweet savour, acceptable and well-pleasing, the works of faith and love willingly done for His name's sake.

In this connection it is fit we should remember that the view we take of money, and the use we make of it, are referred to with extraordinary frequency in the New Testament, as a decisive test of Christian sincerity. This feature of Bible teaching is very faintly realised by many.

The other point noteworthy in relation to this Philippian gift is the assurance that it shall be recompensed. God will not be unfaithful to reward their work and labour of love, in that they have ministered to His servant.

We are not to shrink from the doctrine of reward because it has been perverted. It is true the good works of a Christian cannot be the foundation of his title to life eternal. They proceed from the grace of God; they are imperfect and mixed at their best. Yet they are precious fruits of Christ's death, and of God's grace, arising through the faith and love of souls renewed and liberated. When a penitent and believing man is found devoting to God what he is and has, doing so freely and lovingly, that is a blessed thing. God sets value on it. It is accepted as fruit which the man brings, as the offering which he yields. The heart of Christ rejoices over it. Now it is fit that the value set on this fruit should be shown, and the way

God takes to show it is to reward the service. Such a man “shall in no wise lose his reward.” God orders the administration of His mercy so that it really comes in a way of recompense for works Of faith and labours of love.

This may well convince us that the kindness of our Father is measureless. He omits nothing that can win His children’s love, and bind them to Himself. Might not those servants who have gone furthest and done most, feel it almost a bitter thing to hear reward spoken of? For if their service could be far more worthy, it could not amount to an adequate expression of gratitude for all their Father has done for them. Yet He will certainly reward. Cups of cold water given to disciples shall have remembrance made of them, by Him who reckons all those gifts to be bestowed upon Himself. Every way God overwhelms His children with His goodness. There is no dealing with this God, otherwise than by confessing that every way we are debtors. It is vain to think of paying the debt, or relieving oneself of any of the weight of obligation. Only we may with all our hearts give glory to Him to whom we owe all.

Accordingly the Apostle closes in a doxology: “Now unto our God and Father be glory for ever.”

Among the salutations with which the Epistle winds up, every one must be struck with that which goes in the name of “those of Caesar’s household.” Bishop Lightfoot has annexed to his Commentary an essay on this topic, which collects, with his usual skill, the available information. It was remarked in connection with ^{<30112>}Philippians 1:12, that Caesar’s household was an immense establishment, comprehending thousands of persons, employed in all sorts of functions, and composed chiefly, either of slaves, or of those who had emerged from slavery into the condition of freedmen. Indications have been gathered from ancient mortuary inscriptions tending to show that a notable proportion of Christians, whose names are preserved in this way, had probably been connected with the household. At the end of the first century, a whole branch of the Flavian imperial family became Christian; and it is possible, as indicated in an earlier page, that they may have done so under the influence of Christian servants. This, however, fell later. The Apostle wrote in Nero’s days. It is certain that at this time singularly profligate persons exercised great sway in the household. It is also certain that powerful Jewish influences had got a footing; and these would in all likelihood act against the gospel. Yet there were also Christian brethren. We may believe that Paul’s own work had

operated notably to produce this result (⁵⁰¹¹²Philippians 1:12). At all events, there they were. Amid all that was vile and unscrupulous, the word of God had its course; men were converted and were sanctified by the washing of water by the word. Then, as now, the Lord gathered His elect from unlikely quarters: how secure soever the strong man's goods seemed to be, his defences went down before the might of a stronger than he. Probably the Christians in the household belonged chiefly or exclusively to the lower grades of the service, and might be partly protected by their obscurity. Yet surely entanglements and perplexities, fears and sorrows, must often have been the portion of the saints of Nero's household. Out of all these the Lord delivered them. This glimpse lets us see the process going on which by-and-by made so strange a revolution in the heathen world. It reminds us also for what peculiarities of trial God's grace has been found sufficient.

“The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.” This is the parting benediction; certainly an appropriate one, for the whole Epistle breathes the same atmosphere. The Epistle would not fail of its effect, if their spirit retained the consciousness of the grace of Christ; if throughout their life they owned its sway, and felt its attraction, its charm, its power to elevate and purify and comfort.

In following the course of thought and feeling which this letter embodies, we have seen the Apostle touch various topics. They rise into view as pastoral care, or friendly feeling, as outward circumstances suggest them. The demands of Christian friendship, the responsibilities of the Christian ministry, the trials of Christian endurance; what is due from an apostle, or from a Church member; how life and death are to be confronted; what is to be done about dangers and faults; how pride and self-will are to be judged and remedied; how the narrow heart is to be rebuked and enlarged; how the life of a disciple is to become luminous and edifying, — in reference to all, and all alike, he speaks from the same central position, and with the same fulness of resource. In Christ revealed, in Christ received and known, he finds the light and the strength and the salve which every case requires. Each new demand unlocks new resources, new conceptions of goodness and of victory.

So, in one great passage, in the third chapter, catching fire, as it were, from the scorn with which a religion of externals fills him, he breaks forth into a magnificent proclamation of the true Christianity. He celebrates its reality and intensity as life in Christ — Christ known, found, gained — Christ in the righteousness of faith and in the power of resurrection. He depicts

vividly the aspiration and endeavour of that life as it continually presses onward from faith to experience and achievement, as it verifies relations to a world unseen, and looks and hastes towards a world to come. Then the wave of thought and feeling subsides; but its force is felt in the last wavelets of loving counsel that ripple to the shore.

One feels that for Paul, who was rich in doctrine, doctrine is after all but the measure of mighty forces which are alive in his own experience. No doctrine, not one, is for the intellect alone: all go out into heart and conscience and life. More than this: he lets us see that, for Christians, Christ Himself is the great abiding means of grace. He is not only the pledge and guarantee that holiness shall be reached: He is Himself our way of reaching it. He is so for the Christian societies, as well as for the individual Christian soul.

One cannot but wonder sometimes in reading Paul's Epistles what manner of congregations they were to whom such remarkable letters were sent. Did they understand the deeper and loftier passages? Were Paul and they on common ground? But the answer may be, that whatever they failed to attain, they at least apprehended a new world created for them by the interposition of Christ — new horizons, new possibilities, new hopes and fears, new motives, new consolations, new friendships, and a new destiny. The grace of Christ has made all new — in which process they themselves were new. The "spirit" had become like a lyre new-strung to render new harmonies. And the great thoughts of the Apostle, if not always grasped or followed, yet made every string vibrate — so much on his part and so much on theirs being sensitive to the grace of our Lord Jesus.

Ere long they all passed away: Paul beheaded at Rome, as the story goes; the Philippian converts dying out; and the world changing in manners, thought, and speech, in all directions. But the message entrusted to Paul lives still, and awakens the same response in the hearts of Christians to-day as it did among the Philippians when first read among them. It still assures us that the highest thing in life has been found, — that it meets us in Him who came among us meek, and having salvation.

FOOTNOTES

^{ft1} This, however, is omitted in critical editions.

^{ft2} Various shades of meaning have been proposed. Meyer, whose opinion has weight, virtually interprets in this way: He did not reckon equality with God (which was His) to imply or to be fitly exercised in acquisition, or in accumulation of benefit to Himself: and Hofmann, after supporting another view, appears (in his “Hist. Schrift N.T.”) to agree with this. To be equal to God, and to put forth power for His own enrichment, were for the Son very different things. The one He possessed: the other He renounced.

^{ft3} In the text Ewald’s suggestion is followed, in the form given to it by Lightfoot. Meyer’s view, however, may seem simpler to some readers. He thinks that “the same things” of ~~<310B>~~Philippians 3:1 are the warnings against-Judaising which actually follow in ver. 2. According to Meyer, the Apostle had already, in a previous Epistle, warned the Philippians against the Judaisers, and he considers it “safer” for them and “not irksome” to himself to repeat the admonition. In this view the connection between vv. 1 and 2 may be stated in this way: “Rejoice in the Lord and, need I repeat it? — yes, it is better that I should repeat it, — rejoicing in the Lord is wholly contrary to that boasting in the flesh which characterises some great religious pretenders well known to you and me. Beware of them!” The energetic scorn of the phrasing is explained by supposing that the circumstances and the argument of the former Epistle had led to this animated denunciation, so that the Apostle recapitulates phrases that were well remembered in the Philippian congregation.

^{ft4} “Remains,” 4. p. 156.

^{ft5} The statement which follows in the next six paragraphs is partly based on Pfeleiderer, “Paulinismus” p. 172 fol. He will perhaps be regarded as a tolerably impartial reporter on this point.