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MOUNTAINS AND MOUNTAIN MEN
OF THE BIBLE

MOUNTAINS
and
MOUNTAIN MEN
of the Bible

By ✓
CLARENCE EDWARD MACARTNEY

**MINISTER, FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
PITTSBURGH, PENNSYLVANIA**



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MOUNTAINS AND MOUNTAIN MEN OF THE BIBLE

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FOREWORD

WHEN HENRY WADSWORTH LONGFELLOW FIRST VISITED Europe, in the year 1836, and went to Switzerland and saw the Alps, he wrote: "Mountains are great Apostles of Nature, whose sermons are avalanches, and whose voice is that of one crying in the wilderness."

Mountains dominate the history of the Bible and the divine revelation, as they do the land and the sea. Great events in the history of redemption, and in the lives of the great personalities of the Bible, are associated with the mountains of the Bible lands. On a mountain the ark rested after the Flood, when God showed mercy to mankind. On Mount Moriah, Abraham prepared to offer up Isaac. On Mount Sinai the Ten Commandments were given to Moses. On Mount Carmel the prophet Elijah overcame the prophets of Baal. On Mount Gilboa, Saul and Jonathan fell in battle. On Mount Gilead, Gideon mustered his immortal three hundred. On Mount Tabor, Barak and Deborah assembled their hosts. On Mount Calvary, Christ died for our sins, and on Mount Olivet he ascended up into heaven.

Thus it is that a series of sermons on the mountains of the Bible will deal with many of the great characters of the Scriptures, from Noah to Christ, and will set forth the cardinal doctrines of the Christian faith. The psalmist said, "I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help." As we lift up our eyes unto the mountains of the Bible, we shall look into the faces of the great

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men of the Bible and hear the majestic voice of the great doctrines of redemption.

Consumption of the body is stayed by breathing pure mountain air. After the same manner, a visit to the mountains of the Bible will prove a tonic to our souls. There we shall make the acquaintance of many of the greatest men of the Bible and witness some of the most stirring and inspiring scenes of the divine revelation. In my travels in the Near East I have stood on not a few of these mountains, and others I beheld afar off.

CLARENCE EDWARD MACARTNEY

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I

MOUNT ARARAT AND NOAH

“And the ark rested . . . upon the mountains of Ararat.”

GEN. 8:4

PICTURES TRACED UPON THE WALLS OF CHILDHOOD'S imagination do not fade with the years. In one of the old-time illustrated Bibles, or in some book of Bible pictures, I remember seeing Gustave Doré's great painting of "The Deluge." I can still see it now—the wild waste of rising waters, one large rock not yet submerged, and on it a few survivors, several naked children, a father sinking down into the waters with his wife clinging to him, while with his free hand he pushes his infant to the top of the rock. Both man and wild beast have taken refuge on the rock, for the doom which threatens both has broken down the barrier of their mutual enmity, and common fear of the flood has made them cease to fear one another. The most striking thing in this masterpiece by Doré is a tigress on the top of the rock, holding her cub in her mouth and lifting her head high in dismay and terror.

Tertullian said to the Roman persecutors of the Christians, warning them of judgment to come, "You delight in spectacles! Expect then to see the greatest of all spectacles—the Last Judgment." That indeed will be the greatest of all spectacles, when the quick and the dead, the small and the great, the ancient, medieval, and modern, stand before the judgment seat of God. But until then the flood will remain time's greatest spectacle.

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“The ark rested . . . upon the mountains of Ararat.” It is fitting that the first mountain mentioned in the Bible and in human history should have been the highest mountain of the Bible, Ararat, the noble mountain which lifts its snow-crowned head on the Armenian highlands between the Black Sea and the Caspian Sea, rising to a height of 16,873 feet, with its summit far above the line of perpetual snow. Ararat is more than 2,700 feet higher than Pike’s Peak, almost 1,100 feet higher than Mont Blanc, the highest mountain of Europe. It was there that the ark rested when God made a wind to pass over the earth and “the waters assuaged” and the “rain from heaven was restrained.” Forever this mountain will be associated with the name of Noah and with God’s great act of judgment in the flood which destroyed all the inhabitants of the earth except Noah and his family.

As Ararat rises above all the mountains of the Bible, so, standing upon its summit, we can survey, as it were, the whole panorama of the divine revelation which reached its climax in the coming of Christ and in that great act of God’s judgment and mercy when he died for sinners upon the cross. In considering Noah and this greatest of all disasters which have befallen the human race, we shall not forget that we have great forerunners and great examples: Isaiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, Peter, Paul, and, above all, the Lord Jesus Christ himself, who compared the judgment of the flood to the judgment which shall fall upon the earth at his second coming.

THE RIGHTEOUSNESS AND THE JUDGMENT OF GOD

From this peak of the divine revelation and man’s history the first timeless truth which we discern is that God

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is a God of righteousness and that judgment and punishment follow sin. "God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually." The Bible always goes at once to the heart of things. Instead of reciting a list of man's transgressions and crimes, it uncovers man's heart as the source of the evil which he did. "Every imagination of . . . his heart was only evil continually." That was Christ's way too, for he said: "That which cometh out of the man, that defileth the man. For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness: all these evil things come from within, and defile the man." I wonder if the human heart has changed since Jesus thus diagnosed its state. Evidently it was the same in the days of Noah, when God looked upon man and saw that "every imagination of . . . his heart was only evil continually."

It was this state of man which brought the flood upon the earth, a judgment which inflicted God's punishments but also, by purging away a corrupt generation, prepared the way for the coming of a better generation. In a certain sense God does this from age to age. He turns the earth upside down like a dish and empties it of its inhabitants. He sweeps the earth clear of each generation of men and starts with another and a new generation. Were that not done, were men who have become corrupt and have developed in iniquity permitted to live on from age to age without death's stop and interruption, life on this planet would be intolerable. In that respect we can thank God for the universal judgment of death.

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The law of judgment and punishment runs through the history of the nations. The time at length comes, the hour at length strikes, when God says, "Now will I rise . . . ; now will I be exalted; now will I lift up myself." These "risings" of the Almighty, when he doeth terrible things in righteousness, are a sublime page, not only in the book of divine revelation which we call the Bible, but also in the book of man's history; for even if men will not read the inspired Bible, God makes a Bible out of history.

Take the history of our own country. As nations go, our history is a very brief one, yet long enough to display the law of righteousness and the punishment of God upon sin. Three quarters of a century before the stroke of judgment fell, Thomas Jefferson, writing his *Notes on the State of Virginia* on the tilting rock at Harper's Ferry, which overlooks the junction of the Shenandoah and Potomac Rivers, commented on the institution of Negro slavery which had sprung up and flourished in America, saying, with a prophet's voice and vision, "I tremble for my country when I reflect that God is just." In 1859 at Charlestown, not far from Harper's Ferry, where Jefferson wrote those prophetic words, an old man was led down the steps of the jail to be hanged by the neck until dead. As he left the prison he handed to his guards this last message to his countrymen: "I, John Brown, am now quite certain that the crimes of this guilty land will never be purged away but with blood." Then came 1860, 1861, 1862, the seventeenth of September, the bloodiest day of the Civil War; and the rock where Jefferson wrote his *Notes* and the ground where the gallows stood on which John Brown was hanged shook and quaked with the concussion of the guns firing across the Potomac in the

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battle of Antietam. When the moon came up over the mountains that night, it looked down upon a strange scene. The rows of standing corn, swept by the sleet of lead, lay prostrate and trampled; the trim hedges and fences were broken and scattered; the orchards were mangled and splintered. In the great barns the surgeons with bare and bloody arms cut and sawed by the flickering light of the lantern, while the cattle looked on with dumb awe. And down by the river banks, and in the river, and under the bridges and along the roads and lanes, and in the trampled grain, and beneath the splintered trees, thousands of young men, most of them under twenty-one, lay still and rigid, their white faces pleading a mute protest to the autumnal moon. Had John Brown's prophecy about the atonement of blood come true? Abraham Lincoln must have realized that it had, for less than three years afterward, when he delivered his Second Inaugural Address, he spoke of the war then raging as the punishment that had come to both North and South because of the offense of slavery:

Fondly do we hope, fervently do we pray that this mighty scourge of war may speedily pass away. Yet, if God wills that it continue until all the wealth piled by the bondsman's two hundred and fifty years of unrequited toil shall be sunk, until every drop of blood drawn with the lash shall be paid by another drawn with the sword, as was said three thousand years ago, so still it must be said, "The judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether."

These facts of our past are of a nature to make us ask questions about the present and the future. Has the course of our national life in recent years, our falling away from righteousness and morality, our disregard and contempt for the Ten Commandments and the teachings of Christ,

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been such as to make it reasonable to expect that God will arise and bring a great judgment down upon the head of the recreant nation? If so, shall we therein discern "any departure from those divine attributes which believers in a living God always ascribe to him"?

THE MERCY OF GOD

The second truth which we discern from Ararat's lofty summit is the truth of God's goodness and mercy: "The Lord is good, his mercy is everlasting." The ark rested upon the mountains of Ararat. That meant that the deluge was over, that the waters which had prevailed upon the face of the earth for 150 days were abating. The same mighty Hand which had opened the windows of heaven and broken up the fountains of the great deep now closed them, and the rain from heaven was restrained.

When the ark rested on the mountain, Noah first sent forth the raven to spy out the state of the world. That unclean bird, able to subsist on carrion, the floating corpses of drowned creatures, returned not to the ark. Then as a second spy he sent forth the dove, which found no resting place for the sole of her foot and returned to the ark. After a few days he sent her forth again, and this time she returned at evening, "and, lo, in her mouth was an olive leaf, plucked off."

That olive leaf let Noah know that the floods were subsiding and that nature was again resuming her normal course. Ever since, that olive leaf in the dove's mouth has been the beautiful symbol of peace and good will. This sign of the olive branch was soon followed by another, and a more beautiful one—the rainbow. When Noah and his family had gone forth from the ark, and Noah had built an altar to the Lord, God made a cove-

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nant with him, with the promise that he would not again visit the earth with a flood, and that "while the earth remaineth, seedtime and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease." As a sign and token of that covenant God said he would set his bow in the cloud. Henceforth the rainbow, seen of all, the most beautiful thing in nature, casting its lovely iridescent bridge across the sky, will be God's reminder to men of the divine forgiveness, and of the tempering of all his judgments with his mercy.

The rainbow which appears here at the beginning of man's history appears again at the end of man's history and at the end of the Bible. In his vision on the "isle that is called Patmos" John saw the throne of God, out of which proceeded lightnings and thunderings and voices. "And there was a rainbow round about the throne, in sight like unto an emerald." That rainbow which encircled the throne of God's majesty and holiness and justice speaks to us of God's mercy and forgiveness. The cross on which Christ died was a throne of God's holiness and justice. It condemned sin in the flesh. It proclaimed the guilt of man as a sinner. It revealed the mind of God toward sin—what sin is, and what sin deserves. But it also proclaimed God's love, his great plan, and his great readiness to forgive us our sins. So God punishes sin, and yet forgives the sinner. So he remains just, and yet the justifier of them that believe in Jesus.

WHAT GOD CAN DO THROUGH ONE MAN

Standing on Mount Ararat and contemplating the great history associated with it, we see what God can do through one man. Some time ago a missionary driven out of China by the Communist invasion was expressing his deep con-

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cern to me about the state of the Church in America. "What," he asked, "do you think will bring about the change, the revival? Will it be a movement, or a man?" At first, when we consider the state of religion and the things which need to be changed, it would seem that this is beyond man's power, even to start. Yet we remember what God has done in times past through one man: what he did in the eighteenth century in England through John Wesley; what he did in the sixteenth century through Martin Luther and the Protestant Reformation; what he did to preserve the Church from error through Athanasius in the fourth century; what he did through one man, and that man once the bitter foe of Christ, when Paul established the Church and spread the gospel throughout the world; what he did through Daniel and Elijah to preserve the true religion; what he did through Joseph and through Moses to save Israel alive and to carry on his great redemptive purposes; what he did through Abraham to call out a chosen nation; and here, at the very beginning of man's history, what he did through Noah to judge the world and to save the human race from extinction. When we think of these men and what God did through them, we shall not be disposed to place a limit to what God, when it pleases him, can do for the world through one man. Perhaps in this dark hour for the Church and for the world God will send forth the man of his own choosing to speak to the souls of men and to call them back to God, to speak to the heart of the Church and to call it back to Christ. O Lord, send forth that man!

In Noah we behold the kind of man God can use for his great and wise purposes. When God declared to Ezekiel the doom which was to fall upon Jerusalem and the Holy Land, and how nothing now could avert that doom, he

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said, "Though these three men, Noah, Daniel, and Job, were in it, they should deliver but their own souls by their righteousness." Thus God assigned to Noah, Job, and Daniel a pre-eminence of personal and vicarious influence. If any three men could have saved Jerusalem from the impending judgment, these were the men.

What was there in the first of them, Noah, that won for him that highest praise? We are not left in doubt as to that. In the first place, Noah was a godly man. We associate the phrase with Enoch; but of Noah, too, it was recorded, "And Noah walked with God." He did that when other men no longer walked with God. Instead of doing evil, as the majority were doing, instead of being conformed unto the evil world, Noah walked with God. That is the mystery and beauty of God's purpose as we see it unfolding through the ages. Always there is a remnant left; always God has his witnesses among men. In the most corrupt generation the world has ever seen Noah walked with God. Paul sends the salutations of the saints "that are of Caesar's household," and that Caesar the monstrous Nero. In wicked and opulent Sardis, notorious for its licentiousness and idolatry, Christ discovered "a few names even in Sardis which have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with me in white; for they are worthy."

Not only was Noah a godly man himself, but he carried his family with him. When Lot warned his sons-in-law of the doom of Sodom and Gomorrah, he seemed to them as one that mocked. This may mean, not only that what Lot warned them against—the destruction of the cities of the plain—seemed incredible to them and impossible, but that Lot's life in Sodom had not been such as to qualify him as a preacher of righteousness. But with Noah

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it was altogether different. His three sons and his three daughters-in-law went with him into the ark. Had he not been able to persuade his sons and his daughters-in-law to go with him, the race would have perished, for Noah and his wife, as sole survivors of the flood, would have died without leaving a generation after them to people the earth. America's great need today is the godly Christian home, a home anointed with prayer, where the Word of God is read, and where Jesus Christ is the daily example. When God called a chosen race who should carry on his great redemptive purpose through the ages, he began with a godly man and his family, for he said of Abraham, "Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him. For I know him, and he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord, to do justice and judgment."

Again, Noah was distinguished by his courage. I have no doubt that when he was preparing that ark, his neighbors and friends gathered about the huge barge and laughed at him for a fool. Rain? Where were the signs of the coming of rain? Where could he see the slightest cloud, even one the size of a man's hand? Yet still the hammer of Noah rang out its music of warning and invitation. Noah had the courage which could endure being laughed at. Sometimes I think people can endure being persecuted for their faith more than they can endure being laughed at for it.

In his prompt obedience to the word of the Lord, Noah is one of the greatest examples of faith recorded in the Bible. When the inspired author of the Epistle to the Hebrews wrote the famous eleventh chapter, in which he calls the roll of the heroes of faith in past ages, Noah

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comes third in that immortal list, after Abel and Enoch. "By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house; by the which he condemned the world, and became heir of the righteousness which is by faith."

Such, then, was the man through whom God judged and saved the world. God's cause is the same from age to age, and still he works through godly, courageous, and believing men. That means he is willing to work through you and me, and that we too can serve our day and generation and the cause of righteousness if we will obey his voice and do his will.

It is in connection with the ark that we hear God's first invitation. It was when the ark was finished that we hear for the first time the voice of God speaking God's favorite word—that word with which redemption began, and with which the Bible ends; that word which is written in letters of gold over the gates of heaven, God's favorite and greatest word: "Come."

Come thou and all thy house into the ark.

Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.

Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters!

And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come: and whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely.

Again God speaks that word which he spake first of all to Noah, when he said to him, "Come thou and all thy house into the ark." Will you come? Will you come to Christ, who is your refuge and your hope?

II

MOUNT MORIAH AND ABRAHAM

“Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land of Moriah; and offer him there for a burnt offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of.”

GEN. 22:2

TWO OF THE MOST BEAUTIFUL BUILDINGS THE WORLD has ever seen were built on Mount Moriah. One of them was the glorious temple of Solomon; the other, still standing, the Mosque of Omar, with its incomparable dome. But Mount Moriah's highest claim to honor and memory is not the beautiful buildings which have adorned it, but Abraham's great act of self-renunciation and faith when he climbed the mountain to offer up Isaac, his only beloved son.

Mount Moriah is one of the mountains at Jerusalem and rises to a height of 2,400 feet above the level of the sea. The particular mountain in the land of Moriah which God said he would show to Abraham as the place for the sacrifice of Isaac is not named. But a very ancient tradition has always identified it with the hill upon which the temple was built at Jerusalem. This hill was already sacred and memorable before Solomon built the temple on it, for it was there on the threshing floor of Ornan that the plague which had come upon Israel for David's sin in numbering the people was stayed, and there David built an altar unto the Lord and called upon the name of

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the Lord. This hill therefore was an appropriate place as a location for the temple where the mercy of God to his people could be commemorated with burnt offerings, sacrifices, and holy songs.

In reading the biographies and autobiographies of great men we are struck with the fact that not infrequently these men in their lifetime had one great affection, one great sorrow, and one great trial of their character and their faith. It was so at least in the life of Abraham. His whole life was one of separation and renunciation, ever since God had called him out of Ur of Chaldees. But his great trial, and his final trial, was the solemn drama which was enacted upon Mount Moriah, when he laid his only begotten son upon the altar for a burnt offering.

One of the most profitable studies of the Bible is to see how God tested and tried the great men of the Bible. The supreme trial of Moses was when he was forbidden to enter the Land of Canaan, to the border of which he had brought the people of Israel after forty years of wandering. Joseph in Egypt was tried by a wicked woman's accusation and was cast into the prison. Ezekiel was tried by the death of his wife, of whom God spoke as "the desire of thine eyes." David was tried by the persecution of Saul; Elijah by the persecution of Jezebel; and Paul was tried by a thorn in the flesh and by other thorns in his spirit. The writer of the letter to the Hebrews, when he calls the roll of the heroes of faith, after mentioning an illustrious company from Abel down to Samuel, speaks of others whose names he says he does not have time to mention, who had "trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover of bonds and imprisonment: . . . of whom the world was not worthy." All these, he said, in their trial, and after their trial, "obtained a good report

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through faith." But none of them, either the named or the unnamed heroes of faith, ever obtained a better "report through faith" than did Abraham when he offered up Isaac.

What is the severest trial through which the human soul can pass? Many who have passed through it would answer that life's sorest trial is to lose an only and well-beloved son. Job passed through severe trials in quick succession. He lost his property, his family, and his health. But these things came upon Job from without. He had no choice in the matter. But Abraham was asked to be the architect of his sorrow and anguish. Perhaps your only son was smitten with a fatal disease which carried him off in the morning of his life. Perhaps your only son fell on one of the battlefields of the World War. That brought great sorrow and suffering to you. But you had no choice in the matter. You were indeed called upon to submit to the will of God, but you were not asked to play a part in your son's death. Abraham was. His son was not smitten by a disease, nor was he slain in a quarrel, nor did he die by accident, nor did he fall on the field of battle. Abraham was commanded to offer up Isaac as a sacrifice on Mount Moriah. It was therefore, in a sense, a voluntary trial through which he passed. He could have obeyed or disobeyed the command of God. Abraham obeyed, and it is that which makes him immortal.

A great promise had been given to Abraham: that from him and through him would come a great and mighty nation, and that all the nations of the earth should be blessed in him. This promise was to be fulfilled through the birth of Isaac and through those who should be the descendants of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob. When Abraham was an old man, Isaac was born unto him and

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Sarah. Isaac was therefore the incarnation of the great promise. Abraham's own life was nearing the sunset, but in his son Isaac he was confident that the great promise given him of God would be carried down to succeeding generations.

Never have I felt that I was brought so close to antiquity, and to the springs and sources of Bible history and divine revelation, as that day when I stood in the Moslem mosque at Hebron and, looking down through a grating in the floor of the mosque, saw a candle burning dimly in the Cave of Machpelah, the grave of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob. As I stood there, those familiar words of the Bible came back to me: "The God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob." And I thought of those other words of Christ, when, after repeating what God had said to Moses at the bush, "I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob," he said, "God is not the God of the dead, but of the living." That means that the souls of Abraham and Isaac still live, that God is still their God; and therefore I too can say, "The God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob! My God and my Lord!"

At the time of this great and final trial in his life Abraham's encampment was at the oaks of Mamre near Hebron. He thought he had been promised possession of all the land of Canaan; but the only bit of land that he could call his own, when he came to die, was the Cave of Machpelah, which he had purchased from the sons of Heth as a burial place for Sarah, his wife. As he sat in meditation beneath the oaks at Mamre that evening and saw the stars come out, Abraham must have been thinking about the great promise that God had given him; how God had asked him to look up toward the heavens

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and to see if he could number the stars which shone there, and told him that the nation which was to spring from his loins would be as numerous as the stars of heaven. There was peace and stillness that night, broken only by an occasional cry of a restless child in one of the tents or the tinkle of a bell on one of Abraham's flock. It was then that Abraham heard the Voice which commanded him to take Isaac and offer him up for a sacrifice on one of the mountains of Moriah. It must have seemed to Abraham as if the very stars themselves, those stars which were the symbols of the great promise which had been given him, were falling out of the heavens. Isaac! My well-beloved son! The child of the promise! Now he was asked to offer up that son upon whom all his hopes rested, for a burnt offering on a mountain in Moriah. That seemed to him, not the fulfillment of the promise, but its annihilation.

The shock to Abraham, however, was not a moral one. That is, the fact that he had been commanded to offer up Isaac did not, of itself, make Abraham question the righteousness of God or the right of God to demand such a sacrifice. We must not attribute to Abraham the moral sensibility of our day, which has come down to us through ages of Christian faith and teaching. Human sacrifice was common in that day; and, ages afterwards, Jephthah, in keeping the rash vow he had made, offered up his daughter, a willing sacrifice.

The shock to Abraham was, first of all, an emotional one. Isaac was the child of his old age and well beloved. To give up a child in death always brings sorrow to a father's heart. The sorrow that Abraham felt was the sorrow that Jacob felt when the wicked brothers of Joseph held up before him the torn and bloodstained coat

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of many colors, and Jacob refused to be comforted and said, "I will go down into the grave unto my son mourning." It was the sorrow that David felt when he learned that Absalom had fallen in the battle in the wood of Ephraim, and went up to the chamber over the gate exclaiming, "O my son Absalom! my son, my son Absalom! would God I had died for thee, O Absalom, my son, my son!" It was the sorrow that the Shunammite woman felt when she laid her dead child on the prophet's bed and sent for Elisha. It was the sorrow that the widow of Nain felt when Jesus met and stopped the funeral procession of her only son that day at the gates of the city. It was the sorrow which thousands of fathers and mothers are experiencing this very moment in those homes where an only son or an only daughter lies dead. An ancient, a familiar, and yet ever-new sorrow.

But still more, the shock to Abraham was not only emotional, not only a shock to his affections, but a shock to his hope; for Isaac was not only his dearly beloved and only son, but the son through whom the great promise of a nation and a people in whom the remotest ages would be blessed was to be fulfilled. But how could that promise be fulfilled if Isaac was offered up for a sacrifice?

We have no record of the struggle through which Abraham passed, the long night of wondering and doubting and questioning and praying. All we know is that when the morning came, Abraham had won the victory. He announced to Sarah that he was going to the land of Moriah to make a sacrifice and to make a burnt offering. There was nothing strange about that; for wherever he went, Abraham built an altar unto the Lord. We can follow his history by the altars which he built. He announced, too, that he was going to take Isaac with him. I can remember

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the stir of joy it brought to me, and to the brother just older than I, when father was going on some journey and told us we could go with him. Isaac felt that same joy on that memorable morning. You can picture the early morning meal, the two servants loading the ass with the things necessary for the journey, the impatient excitement of Isaac. And now they are off; and there is Sarah, standing at the door of her tent, waving them farewell. What must have been the emotions in the heart of Abraham when he said goodbye to Sarah! How, he wondered, could he face her when he returned without her son?

On the third day they saw rising in the distance Mount Moriah. The ass and the two servants were left at the foot of the mountain. The bundle of wood for the sacrifice was laid upon Isaac's willing shoulders. Abraham carried the flint for the fire and the knife and the cord for binding the victim to the altar. Thus they began the ascent of Moriah. Now and then Abraham stopped to rest and to breathe. On one of those pauses Isaac said to his father: "Behold the fire and the wood; but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?" All that troubled Abraham could answer was, "God will provide."

At length they reached the summit of the mountain. There Abraham and Isaac cleared a level space, brought together the stones, and built the altar, upon which the wood was laid. The wondering Isaac again asked, "Where is the lamb for the offering?" This time Abraham told him, "Isaac, thou art the lamb for the offering!" So saying, he laid hold on Isaac and bound him to the altar. But the bonds were not necessary, for Isaac was a willing sacrifice. There he lay, fair and beautiful in his young body, the son of Abraham's affections, the son through whom the promise was to be fulfilled. Now the knife,

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lifted on high by Abraham, flashed in the bright sunlight. But before it could inflict the fatal wound, Abraham heard a voice, "Abraham, Abraham, . . . lay not thine hand upon the lad, neither do thou any thing unto him: for now I know that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son from me." At the same moment Abraham saw a ram caught in the thicket by his horns. The bonds of Isaac were severed with the knife, and the father and son seized the ram, laid him on the altar, "and offered him up for a burnt offering in the stead of his son."

We may wish the inspired chronicler had told us something of Abraham's return journey to Hebron: the joyful descent of the mountain which a little before he had climbed with such a heavy heart, the three days' journey to Hebron, and the welcome home by Sarah. But all we know is that Abraham changed the name of that mountain. Instead of Moriah, he called it *Jehovah-jireh*, which means "The Lord will provide." That was what Abraham had answered when on the way up Isaac had asked him, "Where is the lamb for the burnt offering?"

Abraham and Paul are perhaps the two most influential men of history. It is not without significance that they were both men who gave up all for God. Paul counted all things to be loss for the sake of Christ. Abraham gave up his native land, renounced all worldly hope, and to all intents and purposes offered up his only son as a burnt offering to God. The one who gave up most for us all on the cross is the same who said, "Whosoever will save his life shall lose it; but whosoever shall lose his life for my sake and the gospel's, the same shall save it." It was after Abraham had met this supreme test, and God had learned how much Abraham feared him and loved him, that the

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great promise of the blessing that was to come through him and through Isaac was repeated. The Lord said to him, "Because thou hast done this thing, and hast not withheld thy son, thine only son, . . . in blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of the heaven, and as the sand which is upon the sea shore: . . . and in thy seed shall all nations of the earth be blessed: because thou hast obeyed my voice." It is true, then, that when we obey the voice of God and for the sake of God deny ourselves, not only do we bless our own lives, but we influence for good the lives of others.

Measure thy life by loss instead of gain ;
Not by the wine drunk, but by the wine poured forth ;
For love's strength standeth in love's sacrifice ;
And whoso suffers most hath most to give.¹

Abraham was tried for a purpose, and the purpose, God said, was to test him and try him and learn how much he feared God, and how worthy he was to be the channel through which a river of blessing should flow to all nations. "Now I know," said God, "that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son from me." There is an old Hebrew tradition that Satan appeared in heaven before God to accuse Abraham, and the accusation was just as in the case of Job, that Abraham did not fear God for nought. Now that he had come safely to the land of Canaan, Satan said, and now that his son Isaac was born, he no longer trusted in God. If Isaac were taken from him, he would no longer fear God. The legend embodies at least the truth that God in his

¹ From Harriet Eleanor King, *The Disciples*. Used by permission Charles Scribner's Sons, publishers.

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providence submitted Abraham to this trial and test in order that he might exhibit complete and absolute submission to the will of God.

God has a purpose in every trial through which you are called upon to pass. The particular purpose may not be clear to you now; but you can trust God in your trial, as Abraham did when he offered up Isaac. Sometimes the purpose of the trial will be to break the hold of some temptation or evil habit or sin in your life. Sometimes it will be to win your soul from some earthly affection. Sometimes it will be a long trial, like Paul's thorn in the flesh, and sometimes a short trial. But always, in every trial, God has some good purpose. When we remember that, it will help us to give a good account of ourself and of our faith in our trial.

Again, in every trial we must wait until the end. Abraham trusted God. It seemed to him a terrible thing, the severing of all his affections, the blighting of all his hopes, when he was called upon to offer up Isaac. But in the end everything was right, and everything was clear. Isaac was spared; the ram, and not the only son, was sacrificed upon the altar; and Abraham blessed the name of the Lord and changed the name of the mountain from Moriah to *Jehovah-jireh*, "The Lord will provide." It is a great thing for the soul if in the hour of your trial you can trust that God has some good purpose in it and wait patiently for the end to be made clear. The psalmist said, "I had fainted, unless I had believed to see the goodness of the Lord"—that is, unless he had held onto God and believed that in his trial there was some good and wise purpose, and that all would be made clear in the end. "Wait on the Lord; be of good courage, and he shall strengthen thine heart: wait, I say, on the Lord." Some

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years ago the nation was shocked by the story of the kidnaping and murder of the son of a Tacoma physician. At length the dead body of the child was discovered lying in the snow where the kidnaper and the murderer had left it. But the father and the mother were true Christians; and, instead of rebelling against the providence of God, they said they wanted all their friends to know that they believed that when God permitted such a thing to happen, it was for some wise and good purpose. So they "waited upon the Lord."

Abraham's conduct on Mount Moriah, his sublime submission to the will of God, was a triumph of faith. "By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac: and he that had received the promises offered up his only begotten son." Perhaps he trusted that even at the very last, even when he had lifted the knife on high, Isaac would be spared. We cannot be certain as to that. What we know is that he believed that even if Isaac were offered up, still the great promises would be fulfilled, and that "God was able to raise him up, even from the dead."

Moriah is a mountain that you cannot miss on the pilgrimage of life. One by one on life's journey all reach the foot of Moriah. When God points to Moriah and tells you to climb that mountain, will you be able to go? How much faith will he discover in your heart? Can you say as you go, "*Jehovah-jireh*"—"The Lord will provide"?

From Mount Moriah there is another mount that is clearly visible at Jerusalem. Its name is Mount Calvary. One day Jesus, bearing his cross, just as Isaac climbed Moriah with the wood for the burnt offering on his back, ascended Calvary to be crucified. But this time there was no substitute.

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There was no other good enough to pay the price of sin;
He only could unlock the gate of heaven and let us in.

Christ himself upon the cross is the sinner's substitute. When they mocked and taunted him when he was dying for us on the cross, they said, "He saved others; himself he cannot save." Forever that is true! Christ would not come down from the cross and save himself. He saves by remaining on the cross. One of the thieves said, "If thou be Christ, save thyself and us." But the only way Jesus could save them was by remaining on the cross. And one of those two thieves learned how true that was when, after he had repented, Jesus said to him, "To day shalt thou be with me in paradise!" Yes, there is only one way to paradise, only one gate to heaven, and that is by the way of the Cross, by faith in him who loved you and gave himself for you.

III

MOUNT SINAI AND MOSES

“And the Lord came down upon Mount Sinai.”

EXOD. 19:20

IF YOU PAUSE IN FRONT OF THE ALLEGHENY COUNTY courthouse in Pittsburgh, you will see inscribed on its grim smoke-begrimed walls the Ten Commandments. Thirty centuries after Moses was given the Ten Commandments on Sinai they are still regarded as the best guide for the citizens of a great city; and of all the words that have been spoken or written and preserved through the ages, the most fitting and appropriate to be inscribed upon a building dedicated to justice and righteousness among men.

Moses is the man of three mountains. The greatest moments of his history are associated with mountains. On Mount Sinai God spake to him the Ten Commandments; on Mount Nebo he viewed the Promised Land, which he was not permitted to enter. There he died and was buried. On the Mount of Transfiguration he appeared in glory with Elijah and spake with Jesus concerning his decease which he should accomplish at Jerusalem.

After the miraculous crossing of the Red Sea, Moses led the children of Israel far to the south until they reached the central portion of the peninsula which is formed by the Red Sea, the Gulf of Suez, and the Gulf of Arabia. There they encamped in the wilderness at the foot

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of Mount Sinai, known today by the Arab name, *Jebel Musa*. This rocky, barren, and forbidding mountain rises out of the sands of the desert to a height of 7,497 feet. Other great figures in biblical history appear in that same wilderness country which lies about Sinai. There at Horeb, the other name for Sinai, Elijah heard the "still small voice of God." Into that same wilderness Hagar fled when she was driven out of the camp of Abraham by the jealousy of Sarah. It was probably in that same region that John the Baptist was prepared for his great ministry. Paul also, after his conversion, was in Arabia for three years. Jesus was "led up by the Spirit" into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil, and perhaps this is the very wilderness where he said to Satan, "Get thee behind me."

Out of a thick cloud God spake to Moses and told him of his great purpose to call out Israel as a holy nation, and that if they kept his covenant and obeyed his voice they would be a peculiar treasure to him above all people. The people were ordered to prepare themselves for the revelation of God's law and will by three days of purification. Barriers were built around the base of Mount Sinai, so that none of the people should touch it, lest they die.

On the third day "there were thunders and lightnings, and a thick cloud upon the mount, and the voice of the trumpet exceedingly loud; so that all the people that was in the camp trembled." Moses then brought the people out of their tents and assembled them near the base of the mountain. Sinai was then "altogether on a smoke, . . . and the whole mount quaked greatly." Moses was called up now into the mountain, and there the Lord spake to him the Ten Commandments. Afterwards Moses with Joshua went again into the mount, where they remained forty days and received the instructions for the building

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of the tabernacle and the ark of the covenant. The Ten Commandments, known also as the Covenant, were graven on both sides of two tables of stone. But when Moses returned to the camp of Israel and found that they had set up a golden calf and were worshiping it, in his anger he threw down the tables of stone and broke them in pieces.

After this he was again called into the mount, where God showed him his glory, and the Ten Commandments were graven again on two new tables of stone. When the ark of the covenant was finished and placed in the holy of holies behind the sacred veil of the tabernacle, the two tables of stone with the Ten Commandments on them were deposited in it. It was into this holy of holies that the high priest entered once in the year to make an atonement for the people, when he sprinkled the blood on the mercy seat, the golden lid of the ark.

The ark of the covenant, so called because the Ten Commandments were in it, accompanied Israel through all the forty years' wandering in the desert. It was carried on the shoulders of the priests when the people crossed over the river Jordan, and around the walls of Jericho when that stronghold fell. It rested in the tabernacle at Shiloh. When the Philistines, at the time of Samuel's boyhood, defeated Israel in battle, they captured the ark and carried it down to Ashdod, where they set it up in the temple of their god, Dagon, only to find when they arose on the morrow that Dagon was fallen upon his face to the earth before the ark of the Lord. Anxious to be rid of this wonder-working chest, the Philistines returned it to Israel, where it reposed for a time in the house of Abinadab; then in the house of Obed Edom; then in the house of David; and at length when the glorious temple of Solomon was built

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it found a resting place in the holy of holies. When Nebuchadnezzar captured Jerusalem, the ark of the covenant disappeared. Probably it was taken down with other spoils from Jerusalem into Babylon. After that we know nothing of its history. It may be that the spade of some archaeologist will one day turn up those tables of stone. But whether still in existence today or destroyed, whether found or never found, the tables of stone have their successor in the history of the nations, and the Ten Commandments are graven on multitudes of believing hearts.

A DIVINE REVELATION OF GOD'S WILL

The two greatest events in the history of mankind were the death on the cross of our Saviour Jesus Christ and the giving of the Ten Commandments on Mount Sinai. The one great question of religion is this: Has God come out of the silence and the darkness on his side and spoken a word to man? And if so, have we a credible record of what was spoken? The answer of the Bible is that God has so spoken, and that in the Bible we have a trustworthy account of what was spoken. The only alternative for an infallible record of a divine revelation for our guidance and our salvation is human reason, which, as an eloquent American agnostic, Robert Ingersoll, declared, is "a flickering torch, borne on a starless night, and blown by the winds of prejudice and passion."

The whole Bible is, in a sense, a comment on the Ten Commandments, where we have the summary of man's whole duty to God and to his fellow man. The psalmist saw the glory of God in the heavens and said, "The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handywork. Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night sheweth knowledge." But he saw the glory of

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God also in the Ten Commandments, in the revealed law of God, for he said :

The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul: the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple. The statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart: the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes. The fear of the Lord is clean, enduring for ever: the judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether. More to be desired are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold: sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb. Moreover by them is thy servant warned: and in keeping of them there is great reward.

The law of the Lord is perfect. There is no conceivable duty or relationship of God to man, or of man to man, which is omitted from the Ten Commandments. The first three commandments, which are :

Thou shalt have no other gods before me ;
Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image ;
Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain ;

have to do with God and man's worship of God. Six of the commandments—the fifth, sixth, seventh, eighth, ninth, and tenth—which are :

Honour thy father and thy mother ;
Thou shalt not kill ;
Thou shalt not commit adultery ;
Thou shalt not steal ;
Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour ;
Thou shalt not covet ;

deal with man's relationship with his fellow man. The Fourth Commandment "Remember the sabbath day, to

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keep it holy," is related to both God and man. The Tenth Commandment, "Thou shalt not covet," enters into the realm of motive and desire, into the thoughts of the mind and the desires of the heart. It passes beyond deeds and actions and, in that respect, looks forward to Jesus and his spiritual interpretation of the Ten Commandments.

How perfect the law of God is will be seen if we try to imagine a state of society where these ten laws are faithfully observed. In such a society God would always come first; religion would have no idols and no superstitions; there would be a universal day for rest and worship; the home life would be pure, and marriage would be sacred; property would be safe, for there would be no stealing; there would be no slander or malicious gossip or lying; there would be no wars, or rumors of war, for there would be no coveting of another person's or another nation's possessions. It would be a society ruled by that great summary of the Ten Commandments as declared by our Saviour Jesus Christ, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God . . . , and thy neighbour as thyself."

Not only is the law of God, the Ten Commandments, a perfect code of life and duty, but that code has had a strange survival through the vicissitudes of the ages. The Ten Commandments have been the foundation of religion and civilization. Still we hear the echo of the thunders of Sinai. After every great world convulsion, when the deluge of evil and judgment has subsided and retreated, then again the sacred summit of Sinai has appeared above the waters, and men have bowed once more before that eternal law which God gave to Moses upon the mount. How can we account for this perfect law which has influenced mankind through the ages? Certainly not upon

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the ground of human origin and inspiration. The Bible gives us the only reasonable origin of the Ten Commandments when it says, "God spake all these words."

JESUS AND THE TEN COMMANDMENTS

The Ten Commandments were given to Moses on Mount Sinai. Thirty centuries afterward the new covenant, or the new law, which came with Christ, was found on Mount Sinai. By this I mean that the oldest manuscript of the Greek New Testament was discovered on Mount Sinai in 1859. How appropriate that where the Old Covenant was given to Moses, there, on that same barren mountain, was found the oldest and most precious manuscript of the New Testament, the new covenant!

In 1912, on a visit to what was then St. Petersburg, now Leningrad, I went to the Imperial Library to see this ancient manuscript. The librarian received us courteously and took us back to a glass case which he opened. He then drew out from it, wrapped in what looked like red cheesecloth, the most ancient and most valuable manuscript of the New Testament, and, so far as a record goes, as near as we can come to the original autographs.

In 1844 on a visit to the monastery of St. Catherine, at the base of Mount Sinai, the German scholar Konstantin von Tischendorf, in search of old manuscripts, saw a number of leaves of vellum in a basket to be used for lighting the convent lamps. He was permitted to take with him 43 of these 129 leaves, all of the Old Testament. But he had manifested such joy and enthusiasm over this find that the suspicious monks refused to give him anything else. He returned to the convent in 1853 and made another search but found nothing of value. On a third visit in 1859, as he was about to leave the monastery, the stew-

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ard told him that he had a manuscript of the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament. But when he opened the package, he found to his great joy that it contained also a manuscript of the Greek New Testament. This was the famous Codex Sinaiticus, dating from the middle of the fourth century A.D. and as near as we can come to the originals. The manuscript was presented by the Convent, for a consideration, to the Emperor of Russia. After the Russian Revolution in 1917 the precious manuscript was purchased by the British government and by public subscription for about \$500,000, and now reposes in the British Museum in London. Mount Sinai is therefore forever and sacredly associated, not only with the Old Testament and the old covenant, but with the New Testament.

What was the attitude of Jesus toward Moses and the Ten Commandments? He said that Moses wrote of him, and he declared and held the validity and sanctity of the Ten Commandments. When the rich young ruler came to him and asked, "Good Master, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?" Jesus took him back to the Ten Commandments and told him that by keeping the commandments he would enter into life.

Yet Jesus spiritualized the commandments and released them from the bondage of a mere external and formal interpretation. The Sixth Commandment with him forbade not only murder, but hatred and angry thoughts; adultery was not only the breaking of the Mosaic law, but sinful desires and lascivious looks. It is when we interpret the commandments as Jesus did that we see our need of a Redeemer, for no man perfectly is able to keep the law of God, but daily breaks it in word, thought, and deed.

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On one occasion a scribe came to Jesus and said to him, "Which is the first commandment of all?" To him Jesus gave his great answer, restating the summary of the Ten Commandments as found in the book of Deuteronomy. "The first of all the commandments is, . . . The Lord our God is one Lord: and thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: this is the first commandment. And the second is like, namely this, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. There is none other commandment greater than these." Thus Jesus made love the fulfillment of the law.

Samuel Rutherford, the great Covenanter minister, was minister of the church at Anwoth by the Solway. There he had his "praying stones," where he labored in prayer for the salvation of his people. He was wont to say that if a single soul from Anwoth should meet him at God's right hand, his heaven would be two heavens in Immanuel's land. One Saturday evening a stranger appeared at Anwoth and was entertained at the manse. After supper, according to his custom, Rutherford conducted family worship and then catechized the family, the servants, and the unknown guest who had come in to spend the night with them. When the stranger's turn came, Rutherford asked him, "How many commandments are there?"

The stranger promptly answered, "Eleven." Whereupon the children and the servants smiled. How, they thought, could anyone be so ignorant as not to know that there are just Ten Commandments!

The next morning Rutherford went to his appointed place in the woods for prayer, but found that the stranger was there before him. As he listened to his supplications,

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Rutherford realized that this was no ordinary guest. When the stranger had finished his devotions, he learned that his guest was none other than the renowned Archbishop Usher, whose name will always be associated with the chronology of the Bible. Rutherford graciously invited Usher to preach at the morning service. He announced for his text John 13:34, "A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another." Rutherford, sitting in the minister's pew in front of the pulpit, nudged his wife and whispered, "There is his eleventh commandment!"

There are only Ten Commandments. Christ did not rescind any of them, nor did he add to them, but he gave them the interpretation of love. And so Paul interpreted the Ten Commandments when he wrote that great chapter on Christian charity, "Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, . . . though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, . . . and though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing." In common with the greatest preachers Thomas Chalmers quoted hardly at all, but he concludes his *Institutes of Theology* with these beautiful lines by Gambold the Moravian :

I'm apt to think, the man
That could surround the sum of things, and spy
The heart of God and secrets of His empire,
Would speak but love. With him the bright result
Would change the hue of intermediate scenes,
And make one thing of all theology.

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When John in his great vision saw the vast multitude of the redeemed standing on the sea of glass mingled with fire, he heard them sing "the song of Moses the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying, Great and marvellous are thy works, Lord God Almighty; just and true are thy ways, thou King of saints." So the voice of Moses blends with the voice of Jesus, of whom Moses wrote, and together they sing the song of divine love and eternal redemption. Moses will no longer sing to us as only a stern, austere lawgiver; for when we meet him in heaven, we shall see how the rainbow of mercy and the love of Christ encircle the Ten Commandments as the rainbow in John's vision encircled the great White Throne.

THE TEN COMMANDMENTS AND MY SOUL

The Ten Commandments, it is important to note, although given to a nation, to a chosen people, are not addressed to a nation or a company or a race, but to the individual. They begin, not with "Ye," but with "Thou." "*Thou* shalt not." The individual is more important than the community, the nation, or the race. The way to read and to hear the Ten Commandments is to listen to that solemn "Thou." When we hear that "Thou," we are compelled to ask ourselves, "Have I kept the Ten Commandments as Christ interpreted them? Has God always been first in my life and deeds, or have I put other things, other desires before God? I have not worshiped graven images, but in the sense of giving my desire to them, and honoring them, have I worshiped money, fame, learning, or pleasure? Have I taken the name of God in vain? I may not have used profane oaths; but have I prayed to God without

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due reverence and earnestness, and thus taken his name lightly upon my lips? Have I spent the Sabbath in a way that honors Jesus Christ, who is the Lord of the Sabbath, or have I on that day gone my own ways, thought my own thoughts, and sought my own pleasures? Have I honored my father and my mother, and been ever mindful of the obligations of the family? I have not killed any man, but have I broken the Sixth Commandment as interpreted by Jesus, who said, 'Whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment'? And the Seventh Commandment: have I kept that commandment as Jesus interpreted it when he said, 'Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not commit adultery: but I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart'? Have I kept the Ninth Commandment? Have I never borne a false witness against my neighbor? Have I never repeated an evil report, the truth of which I could not have established? I have not coveted, not my neighbor's ox or ass, or wife, or automobile, but have I ever been jealous of another's popularity, or beauty, or success?"

These are searching questions for all of us. They are questions which make appropriate the response of the congregation in some of the churches when the commandments are read, "Lord, have mercy upon us."

"The law," Paul said, "was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ"; that is, it taught men the requirements of God, holiness, and therefore their own sinfulness. Thus it is that we all need, and through the mercy of God we can all have, the redeeming work of him who is the great and only law-keeper, who alone perfectly kept the command-

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ments, and who bore our condign punishment, the penalty of our breaking of the Ten Commandments, on the cross, where he was wounded for our transgressions and bruised for our iniquities, that he might present us faultless before the presence of God.

IV

MOUNT HOR AND AARON

“And Aaron died there in the top of mount.”

NUM. 20:28

MOUNT HOR, WHERE AARON DIED AND WAS BURIED, rises on the border of Edom to a height of 4,430 feet above the level of the sea. The mountain fronts westward, and at its base lies a wide plain upon which you can picture the encampment of Israel when Aaron ascended the mountain to die.

The stillness of the morning air was broken by the sound of a trumpet, loud, clear, commanding, and awaking its echoes among the barren mountains which surrounded the encampment of Israel. Forbidden to pass through the land of Edom, Moses had led the people southward by way of Mount Hor, at the foot of which the tents of Israel were now pitched. The tabernacle with the ark of the covenant was in the center; and in orderly array around it, with the standard of each tribe floating over it, the people were encamped.

As the echoes of the silver trumpet died away, the people came out of their tents and assembled near the tabernacle. Presently three men emerged from the sacred house—Moses; Aaron, his brother, the high priest; and Eleazar, the son of Aaron. The word of the Lord had come to Moses, saying, “Aaron shall be gathered unto his people: for he shall not enter into the land which I

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have given unto the children of Israel." The reason for this was that Aaron with Moses had displeased the Lord at the smiting of the rock at Kadesh, when Moses had brought water out of the rock for the people. Now God commanded Moses to take Aaron to the top of the mountain, where he would be stripped of his garments and die.

As he came out of the tabernacle with his son Eleazar and Moses, Aaron was resplendent in the robes of the high priest. These, as God said to Moses when they were first provided, were "for beauty and glory." And that certainly they were. On Aaron's shoulders was the ephod, wrought of gold, blue, purple, scarlet, and fine linen. On either shoulder of the ephod was an onyx stone, and on each stone the names of six of the tribes of Israel, signifying that when Aaron went into the holy of holies to offer sacrifice, he was bringing before God the sins of all his people, that atonement might be made for them. On Aaron's breast was the breastplate, a span long and wide. On the breastplate were four rows of precious stones, flashing now in the bright morning sunlight, and on each of the twelve stones was cut the name of one of the twelve tribes of Israel. On the breastplate, too, were the mysterious Urim and Thummim, perhaps two additional stones by which the priest inquired of the Lord. The priestly robe was all of blue, traced with pomegranates of blue, purple, and scarlet; and hung on the robes were small golden bells, which with their music heralded the entry of the high priest into the holy of holies. Surmounting all was the miter, which held across the forehead of Aaron the plate of pure gold on which were graven the words, "Holiness unto the Lord."

This was the last time Aaron was to wear these beautiful, symbolic, and sacred vestments. Slowly the three

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men, Moses, Aaron, and Eleazar, passed between the lines of the wondering people and began the ascent of Mount Hor. Higher and higher they climbed, until they were lost to the view of the people. When they reached the summit, Moses stripped Aaron of his mystic robes and put them upon Eleazar his son, signifying that Eleazar now succeeded to the priesthood. "And Aaron died there in the top of the mount."

Now Moses and Eleazar came down the mountain to the camp. And when the people saw only two returning, they knew that Aaron was no more, and they mourned for Aaron thirty days, "even all the house of Israel."

The passing of Aaron there on lonely Mount Hor is one of the commanding incidents of the ages. The eye of Moses, we are told, was not dim when he died at the great age of 120 years and was buried "By Nebo's lonely mountain." But his eye must have been dim that day when he disrobed Aaron, the brother who had been his spokesman and his companion in all the great events of the exodus out of Egypt.

One of the old Jewish legends has a touching account of the passing of Aaron. Moses was greatly distressed when the word of God came to him that on the morrow his brother Aaron must die. After a restless night he went at the dawning to the tent of Aaron, who, surprised at his coming so early, said to him, "Wherefore art thou come?"

Moses answered, "I have come to thee that I may relieve my mind, for certain things in the Law seem to me heavy and unendurable." Together they opened the Book of the Law, and when they came to the history of Adam and the Fall, Moses stayed from the reading and exclaimed

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bitterly, "O Adam! thou hast brought death into the world."

Aaron said to Moses, "Why art thou troubled, my brother? Is not death the way to Eden?"

"Yes," said Moses, "but it is very painful. How many years, thinkest thou, that we shall live?"

Aaron: "Perhaps twenty."

Moses: "Oh, no! not so many."

Aaron: "Then fifteen."

Moses: "No, my brother, not so many."

Aaron: "Then surely it must be five."

Moses: "Not so many."

Then Aaron, hesitating, said: "Is it then one?"

And Moses answered, "Not so much."

Full of anxiety and alarm, Aaron kept silent. Moses then said to him gently, "O my beloved! Would it not be good to say of thee as it was said of Abraham, that he was gathered to his fathers in peace?" Aaron was silent.

Then Moses said, "If God were to say that thou shouldst die in a hundred years, what wouldst thou say?"

Aaron said, "The Lord is righteous in all his ways and holy in all his works."

Moses: "And if God were to say to thee that thou shouldst die this year, what wouldst thou answer?"

Aaron: "The Lord is righteous in all his ways and holy in all his works."

Moses: "And if he were to call thee today, what wouldst thou say?"

Aaron: "The Lord is righteous in all his ways and holy in all his works."

"Then," said Moses, "arise and follow me."

The death of Aaron, and the bestowal of his office upon his son, shows how no man, even the greatest, is

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indispensable. Aaron dies, but the priesthood goes on. There is an uninterrupted tide and river of position and honor and office from age to age. At the end of every generation God empties all posts and offices, secular and sacred, of those who occupy them. He calls a new generation into being. No man is indispensable to God. No man is indispensable to the cause of truth. Yet each man in his day and generation can hear the voice of God and speak and act for God, and he can do this with the firm assurance that "Your labor is not in vain in the Lord."

Because it was on that mountain that he died, Mount Hor has ever been associated with the name and life of Aaron. As a personality Aaron is somewhat overshadowed by his greater brother. Yet not only in his dramatic death on Mount Hor but all through his life there is much in Aaron's history which is of absorbing interest.

AARON THE SPOKESMAN FOR MOSES

Aaron first makes his appearance as a spokesman for Moses, his brother, three years his junior. When God gave Moses his commission to go to the court of Egypt and command Pharaoh to let Israel go, Moses drew back from that difficult task, pleading that he was not an eloquent man, but slow of speech and of a slow tongue. For this the anger of the Lord was kindled against Moses, and he said, "Is not Aaron the Levite thy brother? I know that he can speak well. . . . And he shall be thy spokesman unto the people. . . . I have made thee a god to Pharaoh: and Aaron thy brother shall be thy prophet." Henceforth the messages and the commands which God gives to Moses were repeated by Moses to Aaron and by him spoken to the people of Israel and to the stubborn and unwilling Pharaoh. Not only was Aaron the spokes-

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man, but he was the worker of signs and miracles. It was through his rod, afterwards stored in the sacred chest, the ark of the covenant of the tabernacle, that the waters of Egypt were turned into blood and the other plagues brought down on the land of Egypt.

In his relationship to Moses, Aaron is a type of the true preacher. He was an eloquent man. God said that he knew him, that he could "speak well." But Aaron's "speaking well," his eloquence, and his ability to work wonders with the rod would have availed nothing if he had not been faithful to the word Moses had given him to speak, and which God had given to Moses. It was, no doubt, a temptation to the eloquent Aaron to speak for himself. Indeed we know that on one occasion, jealous of the power and influence of Moses, Aaron with his sister Miriam spoke against Moses, saying, "Hath the Lord indeed spoken only by Moses? hath he not spoken also by us?" But on the whole Aaron's life is a long record of faithful utterance of the word Moses had given him.

So is it with the preacher of the gospel. Save as man to man, he has no message of his own. His task is to proclaim the word of the Lord. So Paul said when he preached at Corinth:

And I, brethren, when I came to you, came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified. . . . And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power: that your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God.

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After Jonah had fled from the face of the Lord when sent to preach against Nineveh, and had been delivered out of his great peril on the sea, and had repented of his disobedience, God gave him a second chance. The word of the Lord came unto Jonah the second time saying, "Arise, go unto Nineveh, that great city, and preach unto it the preaching that I bid thee." "The preaching that I bid thee"! That is the preacher's duty, and that is his only message.

In that searching book *Deliverance of Mark Rutherford*, the author tells how his friend Mackay had an idea that he could regenerate the submerged masses by quick spiritual measures and wished that he had a pulpit of influence and power where he could proclaim his message. Rutherford asked him what he would say if he did get into a pulpit; and then told him how he himself, sitting one day in St. Paul's Cathedral, was stirred and excited at the thought of speaking from a pulpit to several thousand of his fellow men. But in another moment he discovered that his sermon would have to be something like this: "Dear friends, I know no more about it than you know. We had better go home." Without a "Thus saith the Lord," without the preaching which God in the Scriptures has bidden him, the preacher really has nothing to say; he knows no more about it than anyone else.

THE FALL OF AARON

The one sad and dark chapter in the history of Aaron was his part in the tragedy of the golden calf. That the man who was the spokesman of Moses, the man whose rod had worked such wonders, the man who wore on his forehead the golden plate with its inscription, "Holi-

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ness unto the Lord," and the man who was to enter into the holy of holies to offer sacrifice and make atonement for the sins of the people—that he should weakly have yielded to the idolatrous longings of the people and built for them a golden calf seems almost incredible. But, alas, it was so! That it was so goes to show how the man of even the highest gifts and most sacred office and consecration must be ever on his guard against the devices of the tempter of men's souls.

The gray-haired saint may fail at last,
The surest guide a wanderer prove;
Death only binds us fast,
To the bright shore of love.¹

"Out of sight, out of mind." Moses was out of sight on the mount, whither he had gone to receive the divine commandments. Out of sight, he was soon out of mind of the people. Moses present, they followed and trusted. But Moses absent, they doubted. At length the people became restless and impatient; and as day after day passed by, and Moses did not appear, their fickle hearts began to long for some visible token of guidance and leadership, and they bethought them of the gods of Egypt. So they went to Aaron, whom Moses had left in charge of the camp, and said to him, "Up, make us gods, which shall go before us; for as for this Moses, the man that brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we wot not what has become of him."

Instead of withstanding their folly and clamor, Aaron weakly yielded to the people. He gave them instructions to break off the earrings which their wives and their sons

¹ John Keble, *The Christian Year*.

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and daughters were wearing and to bring them unto him. When the glistening pile was complete, he cast them into a furnace; and when the metal was molten, he poured it into a mold which he had fashioned with his own hands, and there came out a golden calf. In front of the calf Aaron built an altar. The next day was proclaimed as a feast unto the Lord, and the people were invited to eat, drink, and be merry. The next day, eating and drinking and divesting themselves of their garments, they leaped and danced in sinful glee about the golden calf, shouting one to another, "These be thy gods, O Israel, which have brought thee up out of the land of Egypt!" And this was God's people! The people who had celebrated the Passover, the people who had passed through the Red Sea, the people who had been fed with manna out of heaven, and who had been led by the pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night! Alas, how quickly and how deeply a man and a nation can sink into apostasy and sin.

It was no wonder that Moses, coming down from the mount with Joshua, was shocked at what he heard and saw. When he had overturned the altar and stamped the golden calf into fragments, Moses demanded of Aaron an explanation. The answer of Aaron was in part evasive and in part false. He reminded Moses that he knew as well as he did that the people were set on mischief. They had come to him and had demanded an idol, and there was no resisting them. But as for the actual production of the golden calf, all that he had done was to collect the earrings and put them in the furnace, and out came the golden calf. The silence of the contempt of Moses at this answer is eloquent. Giving Aaron a withering look, he turned to inflict judgment upon the people. But after the judgment had been inflicted, and three thou-

sand of the people had been slain, with a tenderness in his character like that of the rainbow round about the throne, Moses lifted up his voice in intercession for the people and pleaded for their forgiveness. But if God would not forgive them, and destruction was to be their fate, then he asked to share that fate. "If not," he says, "blot me, I pray thee, out of thy book which thou hast written."

Aaron was a man of great gifts, and with Moses at his side he could go into the presence of the Egyptian despot and proclaim the message of God. With Moses by his side he could face the hostile and discontented people. But by himself, as an independent commander, Aaron was a different person. He could not stand up before the clamor and wrath of the people but weakly yielded to their demand for an idol.

How timeless and true to human nature are the excuses that Aaron made for himself in the matter of the golden calf. First of all, he blamed the people. "Thou knowest," he said to Moses, ". . . that they are set on mischief." That was the excuse Saul made when Samuel denounced him for violating the command of God in taking of the spoils of Amalek. He told Samuel that the people had done it. "Sin," as quaint Matthew Henry once put it, "is a brat no one will own." In this instance Aaron tried to shift the responsibility of the golden calf to the people who had demanded it. In other words, he said, as people say today, that he had done the thing against his will, that the particular situation which existed at the time made it necessary.

In the second place, Aaron blamed the furnace. His plea was that all he did was to put the gold earrings into the furnace, and after a time out came the golden calf; just as if he had not molded it himself. This excuse strikes

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us as childish and foolish. But is it more childish and foolish than the excuses men make to themselves and to others when they have done wrong? We all like to blame the furnaces or the fire; that is, we all like to blame human nature. I spoke angrily, or ungenerously, or profanely; but I was sorely provoked. I yielded to the appetite of the body; but it was God who implanted that appetite in my body. Therefore I am not responsible. All of which amounts to saying that God tempts men to sin. This excuse has received memorable recognition in Omar's great poem, where he says:

Oh thou, who didst with pitfall and with gin
Beset the Road I was to wander in,
Thou wilt not with Predestined Evil round
Enmesh, and then impute my Fall to Sin!

We cannot disclaim our responsibility by blaming human nature. In spite of our human nature, we are called upon to do the right and to obey the word of God. This is the glory of Christian character. Whoever heard of a soldier receiving the cross of valor or the congressional medal for distinguished bravery in the *absence* of the enemy? No, such medals are bestowed only for heroic conduct in the presence of the enemy. In order not to disgrace ourselves by making foolish and shameful excuses for our conduct, as Aaron did to Moses, we ought to endeavor so to live that it will not be necessary for us to excuse ourselves to ourselves. If we do not need to excuse ourselves to ourselves, we shall never need to do so unto others. There comes a time when we shall make no attempt to excuse our transgressions. That is what

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Jesus taught in his dramatic parable of the supper and the wedding garment. When all were seated, and the lord of the feast came in to speak to his guests and found one without the wedding garment, which had been freely supplied, he asked him, "Friend, how camest thou in hither, not having a wedding garment?" The answer of the man is one of the most dramatic, thrilling, and awe-producing things in the Bible—"And he was speechless."

AARON AS THE TYPE OF CHRIST

Aaron has both a personal and a representative character. In spite of his fall at the time of the golden calf, when he repented, Aaron was consecrated as the high priest of Israel. On the Day of Atonement, laying aside his gorgeous official robes and clad only in a white linen vestment, he entered into the holy of holies and sprinkled the blood on the mercy seat. In this act of atonement the New Testament tells us that Aaron was a type and forerunner of Christ. Once every year, and with the blood of offering, Aaron entered the holy of holies and made atonement for the sins of the people. At length the day came when Aaron had to die, and his priestly office descended to his son. But not so Jesus. He has never been divested of his priestly robes, and the atonement which he made was made only once, and once for all. As the high priest entered into the holy place, so Christ has entered, not into the holy place made with hands, but into heaven itself, where he ever liveth to make intercession for us. Christ is great and incomparable as a king, for all dominion has been given into his hands, and every knee shall bow, and every tongue confess that Christ is Lord. He is great and incomparable as a prophet, as

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one who speaks to us the words of God. But since we are all sinners, Christ's greatest office for us is his office as God's high priest, the high priest who is touched with a feeling for our infirmities, and who offered himself on the cross for our redemption.

V

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“And he brought him . . . to the top of Pisgah.”

NUM. 23:14

ONE OF THE UNFORGETTABLE CHARACTERS OF *Pilgrim's Progress* is Mr. Facing-Both-Ways. He was not a hypocrite. A hypocrite is a man who pretends to be facing in the right direction, but in his heart and life is going in the wrong direction. But Mr. Facing-Both-Ways was sincerely attracted in both directions, toward the City of Life and toward the City of Destruction. There were times when he really wanted to go heavenward, yet he had never really turned his back finally upon the City of Destruction. The chief historical representative of what Bunyan had in mind when he sketched for us that character is Balaam, the son of Beor, the eloquent seer of Mesopotamia. He desired God and a godly life, yet at the same time he loved and wanted this present world. Above all others in the Bible he illustrates the truth of our Saviour's saying, “Ye cannot serve God and mammon.” There is a possible Balaam in your heart and in mine.

Pisgah is one of the high mountains of Moab, not far from the Jordan River, on the eastern side. From Jerusalem one can see Pisgah rising in the distance beyond the Jordan. From the top of Pisgah one commands a view of the Jordan Valley, the Dead Sea, Jericho,

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and the mountains which are round about Jerusalem. Two famous men of the Bible, and both in a dramatic moment and scene in their lives, stood on Mount Pisgah. Yet how different they were in their life, in their death, and in their destiny! One was Moses, who was called to deliver Israel out of the land of Egypt and out of the house of bondage; Moses, who led them through the Red Sea, rebuked them for their sins, brought water for them out of the rock, exhorted them and interceded for them when they had sinned against God, even asking God to blot his own name out of the Book of Life if he did not spare them; Moses, who received the Ten Commandments and the oracles of God on Mount Sinai, who led the people for forty years through the wilderness to the borders of Canaan and then was called up to the top of Pisgah for a last interview with God and a longing, wistful look from the mountaintop to the Land of Promise, where ages after he was to appear with Elijah and to talk with Christ upon the Mount of Transfiguration; Moses, who was forbidden to enter Canaan, but who died there on Mount Pisgah and was grandly buried by God "in a valley in the land of Moab."

The other who stood on Mount Pisgah was Balaam. He was more eloquent than Moses. He was granted a grander vision of the future of God's people. He was entranced, caught up, and stirred with that vision and desired to share in it, for he prayed, "Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his!" Yet he longed for the gold of Balak, who had hired him to curse Israel. Forbidden by God to curse the people, he blessed them in words of magnificent eloquence; and yet at the end he suggested to Balak a wicked and diabolical plot to corrupt and defile the

children of Israel and, instead of dying the death of the righteous, fell in battle fighting with the Midianites against God's people. "Balaam also, the son of Beor, they slew with the sword." Standing at Jerusalem, or on the Mount of Olives, and looking eastward at Pisgah, one thinks of those two men, Moses and Balaam, and of their two destinies.

When the children of Israel reached the land of Moab, across the Jordan from Jericho, the king of Moab, Balak, having heard of their approach and what had happened to those who had opposed them—Og, the king of Bashan, and Sihon, the king of the Amorites—was filled with fear. Instead of sending his army against the Israelites, Balak dispatched messengers to Balaam, a seer in far-off Mesopotamia, who had the reputation of having the power either to bless or to curse, and asked him to come and to curse Israel for him. But when the messengers delivered their message to Balaam, he told them that he could not go back with them and curse Israel, for the Lord had said to him, "Thou shalt not curse the people: for they are blessed."

The king of Moab evidently held to the view that every man has his price. He therefore sent a second embassy to Balaam, inviting him again to come and to curse Israel, promising him great reward, and that if he did so, he would promote him unto very great honor. But Balaam answered. "If Balak would give me his house full of silver and gold, I cannot go beyond the word of the Lord my God, to do less or more." That had a very fine ring to it. But unfortunately Balaam followed this with a request that the messengers spend another night with him. Perhaps God would have something more to say on the matter. That night Balaam

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received, or thought he received, permission to go with the men; and early in the morning he saddled his ass and eagerly set out for Moab, his heart set on the gold of Balak. "And God's anger was kindled because he went." On the way he was stopped by an angel with a drawn sword. When he saw the angel, Balaam said, "I have sinned; . . . if it displease thee, I will get me back." But the angel told him to go on to Moab; but he was to speak only the words which God put in his mouth.

When he arrived at Moab, Balaam had the king of Moab build him seven altars, upon each of which Balaam offered a sacrifice. He was conducted by Balak to one of the high mountains, where he could see the whole encampment of Israel, the tribes in orderly array about the ark of the tabernacle, their standards floating over them. When he looked down upon the camp of Israel, this was the word that God put in Balaam's mouth: "How shall I curse, whom God hath not cursed? or how shall I defy, whom the Lord hath not defied? . . . Who can count the dust of Jacob, and the number of the fourth part of Israel? Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his!"

The king of Moab was much disappointed that Balaam had blessed and not cursed Israel. Thinking that if he took him to a mountaintop whence he could not see the whole camp of Israel, he might utter a different word, Balak conducted Balaam to the summit of Mount Pisgah. But as he stood on Pisgah, this was the word that the Lord put in his mouth: "God is not a man, that he should lie: neither the son of man, that he should repent. . . . Behold, I have received commandment to bless, . . . and I cannot reverse it. . . . According to this

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time it shall be said of Jacob and of Israel, What hath God wrought!"¹

Again Balak was disappointed and displeased. This time he took Balaam to the top of a third mountain, Peor, where seven altars were built and sacrifices offered. But again, caught up out of himself, Balaam blessed Israel: "How goodly are thy tents, O Jacob, and thy tabernacles, O Israel! . . . Blessed is he that blesseth thee, and cursed is he that curseth thee."

This time Balak was very angry; and, smiting his hands together, he told Balaam to get out and to go back to his own country. But before he departed, Balaam again blessed Israel and uttered one of the great and beautiful Old Testament predictions of the coming of Christ: "I shall see him, but not now; I shall behold him, but not nigh: there shall come a Star out of Jacob, and a Sceptre shall rise out of Israel."

When you see Balaam mount his ass and set out for his own country without the gold of Balak, you feel like saluting him for his obedience to the word of the Lord and his eloquent forecast of Israel's history. Would that that had been the end of Balaam's history! Then he would have been worthy of a niche in the temple of biblical fame. He would have been worthy of mention in the eleventh chapter of Hebrews, the roll call of the heroes of faith; worthy to stand by the side of Moses as one who, choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season . . . "endured, as seeing him who is invisible." But, alas, that was not the end of Balaam. According to

¹ "What hath God wrought?" was the first message that was flashed over the first telegraph line from Washington to Baltimore by Samuel Morse in 1844.

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Plutarch, when Cyrus conquered Sardis, and the king of Sardis, Croesus, according to the custom of that cruel age, was about to be put to death, Cyrus chanced to overhear him quoting to himself a saying of the Greek philosopher Solon, "Count no man happy until the end." Struck with that quotation, and being an admirer of Solon, Cyrus set Croesus free. "Count no man happy until the end." How true that was in the case of Balaam! We turn a few pages in the book of Numbers, and there, reading of a battle in which the army of Israel defeated the Midianites, we come upon this record: "Balaam also, the son of Beor, they slew with the sword." Balaam had never altogether lost sight of the gold that the king of Moab had offered him if he would curse Israel. Afraid and unwilling to curse the people with words, Balaam persuaded the king of Moab to tempt and corrupt the people of Israel by licentious conduct with the women of Midian and so to curse themselves. In the battle which was waged against Midian to avenge the Lord—and as a judgment—Balaam, fighting in the ranks of Israel's enemies, was slain. And there he lay, gashed and bloody, among the heaps of the dead. Those eyes of divination, which had seen the glory of the coming of the Lord, were now vacant and staring. Such was the end of the man who had prayed, "Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his!"

At first, in his speech and life, this Mesopotamian seer and prophet seems far remote from us and our generation and the interests of our life; but the more we study Balaam, the more modern he appears. His seven altars with their smoking victims, the three mountains upon which he stood, his garments streaming in the wind—all that disappears and fades, and, lo, Balaam walks our

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own streets, appears in our own homes, in our places of business, in our churches; and, lo, we find a man very like Balaam in our hearts. Balaam is a timeless man.

THE LACK OF A FINAL AND DECISIVE "NO" TO TEMPTATION

One of the prophets speaks of the "sounding again of the mountains," that is, the echo of the mountains. What are the echoes that come back to us from Mount Pisgah? The first is this: The lack of a final and decisive No to temptation. Balaam said No, but he did not utterly and finally mean it. That spelled his doom, as it has of many a man since. It was a critical day for Balaam when the messengers of the king of Moab arrived at his home on the Euphrates River and asked him to come and to curse Israel. Balaam had a conscience, and conscience warned him not to go with the men and not to curse Israel. He desired to speak only God's word and to do God's will, yet he wanted also those high rewards that the king of Moab had offered him.

When the messengers came back the second time, promising great reward if he would go and curse Israel, Balaam told them to tell their king that if he would give him his house full of silver and gold, he would not go beyond the word of the Lord. In that declaration there was an ominous boasting. "Let not him that girdeth on his harness boast himself as he that putteth it off." After this boast Balaam invited the ambassadors of the king of Moab to spend another night with him, and he would again consult the Lord. He already knew what the will of God was. Yet he hoped that God might change his mind. He was glad that night when he thought he received permission to go; and when on the way to

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Moab he was stopped by the angel of the Lord with a drawn sword in his hand, he said, "I have sinned; . . . now, therefore, if it displease thee, I will get me back again." There again you have his indecision. He still wanted to go. He was still a double-minded man, still facing both ways. And for that reason the angel of the Lord told him to go on to Moab. And there, even after God had put words in his mouth, and after he had prayed that he might die the death of the righteous, and that his last end might be like his, he could not finally decide for God. Still he wondered if there was not some way by which he could get the gold of Balak.

It is always dangerous to postpone a final decision against temptation. The way to deal with temptation is the way that Jesus dealt with it when he said to the tempter, "Get thee behind me, Satan." It is written, "Resist the devil, and he will flee from you." Balaam did not really resist the devil, did not altogether close the door against him, and therefore the devil did not flee from him.

When conscience flashes the light of its warning, then is the time to act. When you feel that you must consult others about the right or wrong of an action, when you are troubled about it and perhaps before doing a thing, or after doing it, must spend some sleepless nights until you are at ease again, you can be sure the thing is wrong. You are like Balaam when he asked the messengers to come to stay that second night and to see if God would not change his mind.

How great here is the contrast between Balaam and Paul. Paul, too, was on an evil course, a wrong course, although his motives were different from the avarice of Balaam. But when God spoke to him, Paul turned

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immediately from that wrong way. As he himself describes it, "I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision." Balaam, too, was granted a heavenly vision of surpassing splendor, but instead of obeying it he disobeyed it. He is an illustration of those words of Jesus about being false to the light of conscience. "If . . . thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light: but if thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness!" Balaam's eye was not single; that is, it was not sincere. He had his eye on the Kingdom of God, but also on the gold of Moab. The sacred light that was granted unto him became, as Christ said, darkness. And how great was that darkness! "Balaam also, the son of Beor, they slew with the sword."

RELIGIOUS DESIRES, EMOTIONS, AND LONGINGS NOT ENOUGH

The second echo that we hear from the top of Mount Pisgah and from Balaam is this: Religious desires, emotions, and longings are not enough. There must also be the effort, the struggle, the denial. None ever wished himself, or prayed himself, you might say, into the kingdom of heaven. He must also watch, as well as pray. He must also strive. "Sure I must fight, if I would win." None had a more correct or grand conception of the blessings of the godly life and the destiny of the godly man, and none gave more eloquent expression of that conception, than did Balaam. You could not improve upon his prayer, "Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his." Yet the gold of Moab "too close around his heart, its tangling veil had hung." How de-

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ceiving, how confusing, is the tangling veil of this present world!

There are few men, even the basest, who at some time do not have a loathing of sin and a desire for godliness and the reward of the godly man. Few deliberately purpose to die unreconciled to God. You have had moments in the church, joining in the public worship of God, when your soul was uplifted and your eyes were opened to the greatness of faith and the glory of a blessed immortality; or perhaps some providence of God let you see that you were on the wrong path, as the angel did for Balaam, and you desired the blessings of the righteous and felt disposed to turn from your sins and to change your life. But be not deceived! That was the way Balaam felt, and in words of great beauty and eloquence he gave expression to that feeling. But how did Balaam die? He died, not as he had wished to die, but as an enemy of God. Oh, remember it is possible to have noble ambitions and heavenly aspirations, to agree to sublime truths, to be a member of the church, and yet to live, and in the end to die, unreconciled to God. You wish to have the blessings of the righteous and the last end of the righteous, but are you unwilling to make the final and absolute decision, and do you still look over your shoulder in the direction of your desire or sin, still unwilling to pay the price of eternal life? Are you really seeking first the Kingdom of God? Remember what Jesus said, "No man, having put his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God." There he described Balaam in exact colors, and there he described many a man and many a heart today. Work out your salvation with fear and trembling—with trembling because of the record of so many

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men like Balaam who wanted to go to heaven but were not
willing to pay the price.

THE TRAGEDY OF A LOST VISION

The third echo which we hear coming back to us from Mount Pisgah is this: The tragedy of a lost vision, the tragedy of a noble purpose that was abandoned. This is a common tragedy in men's lives. When the king of Egypt stripped the palace of Rehoboam at Jerusalem, the House in the Wood, of its golden shields, Rehoboam, instead of blowing the trumpet and marching with his army to recover those shields of gold, hung up in their place shields of brass. How often that happens in life. Kierkegaard, the Danish philosopher, has a parable, a piercing parable, of a wild duck. In the springtime this wild duck with his companions was on flight from Mediterranean lands to their summer home in Norway. Flying low over Holland, this wild duck saw tame ducks in their barnyard. He came down among them and, pleased with their plentiful fare, stayed day after day. But one day when he heard his wild companions flying overhead, he tried to join them. But he had grown so heavy with his plentiful fare that he could get no farther than the eaves of the barn. So back again he went to live with the tame ducks in the barnyard. In the autumn when his wild companions were winging their way southward, and again in the springtime, when they were winging their way northward, he would hear their cry, and, looking up, see them in their flight. Then he would stretch out his wings for a little and try to lift himself from the ground so that he might join them. But this he was not able to do. At length the day came when he would hear the wild ducks flying over him, northward or southward, but pay no heed to them. That is a parable

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of what happens to the souls of men, and how their splendid vision fades. John Keble in his splendid poem on Balaam said this of that prophet:

But true Prophetic light
Flashed o'er him high and bright,
Flashed once, and died away,
And left his darkened thought.²

So on the souls of men rises the vision of that fair life they want to lead but never lead. Where are all those who once had a high desire to serve God and their day and generation? Where are all those who at a Communion table felt the outgoing of their hearts to God? Where are all those who once planned to give themselves to his service? Where now are all their dreams and hopes, and even their vows, of serving God and his Kingdom? Alas! They have been abandoned; they have been forsaken. The light flashed once and died away. That was the tragedy of Balaam. How many like him have stood by altars of inspiration and then gone down from the mountaintop to live a worldly life!

So Balaam takes his place with Judas, who once felt the thrill of Christ's teaching and presence and desired to be his disciple, but betrayed and sold him, and himself too, for thirty pieces of silver; and by the side of that rich young ruler who wanted to walk with Jesus on the way to eternal life, but who, when he learned the price, went away sorrowful; and by the side of Paul's young companion who was caught with Paul's magnificent spirit and for a time became his follower, but whose epitaph is this: "Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world."

² *The Christian Year.*

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A moment ago Keble's poem on Balaam was mentioned. This may be regarded as the greatest sermon ever preached on Balaam. In that poem Keble tells the secret of Balaam's failure and fall, and what he teaches you and me. The poem ends with these words :

Sceptre and Star divine,
Who in thine inmost shrine
Hast made us worshippers,
O claim thine own :
More than thy seers we know—
O teach our love to grow
Up to thy heavenly light,
And reap what thou hast sown.

“And reap what thou hast sown.” Often that phrase has come back to me when I have been preaching to others, and when I have thought of my own heart. “And reap what thou hast sown”! How many great things God has sown in your heart: godly ancestors, a godly home, the example of godly parents, early associations with the church, pure desires, sacred aspirations and ambitions, wise and tender providences, the prayers of those who love you, the tears of grief and sorrow, the plowing and harrowing of adversity and suffering and trial. Yes, God is not a sparing sower. Will you let him reap what he has sown? Will you give your whole desire and heart to that harvest? Will you turn your back on those temptations and desires which sow the tares in your heart where the Holy Spirit has sowed the good seed? Will you repeat in all earnestness and sincerity that prayer of John Keble?

O teach our love to grow
Up to thy heavenly light,
And reap what thou hast sown.

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VI

MOUNT NEBO AND MOSES

“And Moses went up from the plains of Moab unto the mountain of Nebo.”

DEUT. 34:1

NEBO IS THE MOUNTAIN OF VISION AND DISAPPOINTMENT. It is on Mount Nebo that we get our last view of Moses, of whom it was written, “And there arose not a prophet since in Israel like unto Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face.” And now, after all the centuries which have passed away since Moses died on Nebo’s lonely mountain, still it can be said that, in many respects, there hath not arisen a prophet or a man in all the world like unto Moses. It is on Mount Nebo, too, that we hear the last words of Moses, when he besought the Lord to let him pass over Jordan with the people of Israel into the land of Canaan.

We have seen Moses in dramatic, striking, and sometimes awful moments: when he stood courageously before Pharaoh and in the name of the Lord said, “Let my people go”; when he stretched out his rod over the Red Sea, and it drowned Pharaoh and his chariots and horses; when he received the Ten Commandments amidst the smoke and flame of Sinai; and when, coming down from the mount and seeing the people dancing and shouting about the golden calf, in his righteous indignation he smashed to fragments the two tables upon which the Commandments were engraved. But now we shall see him

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in one of those tender and moving experiences common to mankind, a moment of great personal disappointment.

The long expedition, the memorable journey and exodus which had commenced forty years before in Egypt, when he led the people out of Egypt, through the Red Sea, and through the wilderness, has at length come to an end. Now the people are encamped in Moab on the other side of Jordan, on the borders of the Promised Land. Moses remembers the word that was spoken to him by the Lord long before, when he rebuked him for his anger and impatience when he smote the rock three times to bring water out of it for the people. Provoked by the murmuring of the people, Moses cried out in his anger as he smote the rock three times, "Hear now, ye rebels; must we fetch you water out of this rock?" Because of this the Lord was displeased and told Moses that for this offense he would not be permitted to enter the Promised Land. Remembering that word of the Lord, Moses now beseeches God to forgive him and to permit him to cross over Jordan. This is the prayer he utters: "O Lord God, thou hast begun to show thy servant thy greatness and thy mighty hand: for what God is there in heaven or in earth that can do according to thy works and according to thy might? I pray thee, let me go over and see the good land that is beyond Jordan, that goodly mountain and Lebanon." But God says to him: "Let it suffice thee; speak no more unto me of this matter. Get thee up into the top of Pisgah, and lift up thine eyes westward, and northward, and southward, and eastward, and behold it with thine eyes: for thou shalt not go over this Jordan."

Pisgah and Nebo seem to have been peaks of the same mountain. From the top of Nebo one commands a view of

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the whole country, north, south, east, and west. At the command of God, Moses went up to Nebo, where the Lord said to him, "This is the land which I swear unto Abraham, unto Isaac, and unto Jacob, saying, I will give it unto thy seed: I have caused thee to see it with thine eyes; but thou shalt not go over thither."

Standing on Nebo, Moses could look down upon the encampment of Israel, where the tents of the tribes were pitched in orderly array about the ark of the covenant and the tabernacle, with their standards waving over them. Looking westward, he could see the Dead Sea, the River Jordan, Jericho, and the mountains which are round about Jerusalem. To the north he could see the Sea of Galilee and snow-crowned Hermon. There was the land which had been the goal of his dreams and aspirations. There was the land which had been promised to the people of Israel. The great panorama which was spread out before him he drank in like an inhalation. How his soul yearned to cross over into the land! "I pray thee, let me go over and see the good land that is beyond Jordan." But God said to him, "Behold it with thine eyes: for thou shalt not go over this Jordan." And there by that lonely mountain God buried Moses. "But no man knoweth of his sepulchre unto this day."

By Nebo's lonely mountain,
On this side Jordan's wave,
In a vale in the land of Moab,
There lies a lonely grave;
But no man built that sepulcher,
And no man saw it e'er;
For the angels of God upturned the sod
And laid the dead man there.¹

¹ Cecil Frances Alexander, "The Burial of Moses."

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LIFE'S DISAPPOINTMENTS

Nebo is the mountain of vision and also of disappointment. There can be no disappointment where there has been no vision, no aspiration, no desire, no dream. Nebo is a mountain all must climb. Life has its mountains of success and achievement, but also its mountain of disappointment and frustration. Here was the leader of a nation who died on the mountaintop in Moab just when his people were about to cross over Jordan into the Promised Land. In World War II the leader of this nation, President Roosevelt, was stricken in death just a few weeks before the bells and the cannon were sounding out the victory of V.E. Day, the great goal toward which he had led the people. Abraham Lincoln was shot just when Lee's army had laid down its arms, and the bloody four years' war was coming to an end. On June 9, 1864, Father Charles P. Chiniquy, of Illinois, paid his last visit to Lincoln. Lincoln took him with him to visit the sick in the hospitals and, after they returned to the White House, took up the Bible that always lay on his desk and, opening it at the third chapter of Deuteronomy, read the verses which tell of the disappointment and death of Moses on Mount Nebo. When he had finished, Lincoln said :

I have read these strange and beautiful words several times these last five or six weeks. The more I read them, the more it seems to me that God has written them for me as well as for Moses. . . . Now I see the end of this terrible conflict with the same joy of Moses, when at the end of his trying forty years in the wilderness; and I pray my God to grant me to see the days of peace and untold prosperity which will follow this cruel war, as Moses asked God to see the other side of Jordan and enter the Promised Land. But do

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you know that I hear in my soul, as the voice of God, giving me the rebuke which was given to Moses? There is a still, but solemn, voice which tells me that I will see those things only from a long distance, and that I will be among the dead, when the nation, which God granted me to lead through those awful trials, will cross the Jordan, and dwell in that Land of Promise. . . . It seems to me that the Lord wants, today, as He wanted in the days of Moses, another victim—a victim which He has himself chosen, anointed, and prepared for the sacrifice, by raising it above the rest of the people. I cannot conceal from you that my impression is that I am the victim. . . . But just as the Lord heard no murmur from the lips of Moses, when He told him that he had to die before crossing the Jordan for the sins of his people, so I hope and pray He will hear no murmur from me when I fall for my nation's sake.²

Like Moses, Lincoln had no word of complaint or murmuring against the expected decree of God's providence. Yet there was a sadness in his taking off, just when the war was coming to an end and the nation was ready to pass over into the Promised Land of reunion and peace.

How many different kinds of disappointments there are in life! Every heart has some buried hope hidden away within it. There are disappointments in plans and ambitions. The Patent Office of the government at Washington, with its thousands of registered patents which were never adopted or applied, is a monument to disappointment. Hundreds of books are published every month. But what of the rejected manuscripts over which authors spent their strength and time, and in which they invested all their hopes? A man from the mountains of Kentucky once wrote me asking my aid in getting a manu-

² Chiniquy, *Fifty Years in the Church of Rome*, pp. 706-10.

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script published, from the sale of which he hoped to make a little money, so as to give his children an education: "So that," he wrote, "my children may realize some of those dreams which I dreamed too late." The dreams he dreamed too late! How many such dreams there are in life! How many have awakened to a high desire for achievement in some line of work too late; when time and circumstance, and lack of education and training, were all against the carrying out of their plan and the fulfillment of their dreams!

There are many disappointments also in the more intimate relationships of life. How many disappointments there are in marriage: the marriage that, from the human viewpoint, was a mistake; the marriage that was as brief as it was happy; the marriage that might have been.

I mind me it was this very room . . .
I was making bread at the table there.
"It's a fine wife you'd make!" he said:
Then she came by, with her curly hair.

Queer how life goes! Why, I might have
A man, and a brood of boys and girls,
If she had only made the bread,
And I had had the yellow curls! ³

In the family life, too, there are many sore disappointments. No author ever wrote of the family joys and sorrows and affections in such a tender strain as did Charles Dickens. And yet his own married life was a disappointment to him. Speaking once in behalf of a children's home or hospital, Dickens appealed for gifts:

³ Virginia L. Tunstall, "Spinster Songs." Used by permission.

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"In behalf of the child you once were, the child you once had but lost, and the child you never had." The child you never had! Many a husband and wife have had to drink that cup of disappointment—the child they desired, but never had.

But a still more bitter disappointment is that of the father and mother whose child turns out an unworthy man or woman and, instead of adding to the righteousness of this world, adds to its sum of iniquity and misery. "A wise son maketh a glad father: but a foolish son is the heaviness of his mother. . . . A foolish son is a grief to his father, and bitterness to her that bare him." Samuel, one of the noblest men of the Bible, knew the sorrow and disappointment of unworthy sons. He put his two sons in the judgeship. "And his sons walked not in his ways, but turned aside after lucre, and took bribes, and perverted judgment." David, too, knew that disappointment, a disappointment which found supreme and pathetic expression in his lament over the death of well-beloved, but unworthy, Absalom in the battle in the wood of Ephraim, when David went to the chamber over the gate, and as he went, cried out: "O my son Absalom! my son, my son Absalom! would God I had died for thee, O Absalom, my son, my son!"

In my boyhood town there was a cobbler who once had been master of a German sailing vessel. Though he was well along in years, the love of the sea came back upon him, and a yearning to visit the fatherland. When he was not busy with awl and hammer on his cobbler's bench, we would see him at work in the yard back of his shop on a small schooner in which he planned to descend the Ohio and the Mississippi into the Gulf of Mexico, and then to sail across the ocean to Germany.

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At length the great day came when the schooner was completed and he was ready to start on the long voyage to Germany. He got his schooner into the Ohio and sailed it down to the Mississippi, where it upset and sank in a gale. Then the old shoemaker had to return to the town from which he had started and resume his seat on the cobbler's bench. Whenever I pass the place where his shop was, and think of him and that adventure, there comes back to my mind that story at the end of the second book of Chronicles, how Jehoshaphat, the king of Judah, and Ahaziah, the king of Israel, fitted out an expedition at a port on the Red Sea to sail for the gold of Ophir, "but they went not; for the ships were broken at Ezion-geber." The ships went not, for they were broken on the rocks! That is the epitaph on the grave of many a hope, many a dream, and many an ambition. The keels were laid; the ships were built; the voyage was charted; the anchors hoisted; the sails set. But the ships went not!

What, then, has Christian faith to say on this very practical subject, one that comes home to so many hearts and bosoms—life's broken hopes, frustrated desires, and disappointments?

SUBMISSION TO THE WILL OF GOD

First of all, our Christian faith teaches us to submit to these disappointments without murmuring and without bitterness of spirit. That was the way Moses took his great disappointment when he prayed so earnestly that he might be permitted to enter the Promised Land. There is no record of his repining or murmuring. That was the way David took his great disappointment when he was not permitted to build the temple. When he was well established on the throne, and the Lord gave him rest

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from all his enemies round about, David said to the prophet Nathan, "See now, I dwell in an house of cedar, but the ark of God dwelleth within curtains." He then went on to tell Nathan of his plan to build a house for the worship of God. Nathan encouraged him to do so. But that very night the word of the Lord came to Nathan to tell David that because there had been so much war and violence and bloodshed in his life, he would not be permitted to build the temple, but his son Solomon should build it. Instead of murmuring against the decree of God and this frustration of his ambition to build the temple for the worship of God, what did David say? This is what he said: "Thou art great, O Lord God; for there is none like thee. . . . And let thy name be magnified forever." That was David's way of saying, "Thy will be done." Instead, then, of murmuring or rebelling against God's decree, David set himself in the last years of his reign to gather material—gold and silver and precious stones—for the temple which Solomon built at Jerusalem after his father was dead. God said to David, "Whereas it was in thine heart to build an house unto my name, thou didst well that it was in thine heart." But David himself was not permitted to see the fulfillment of the fondest desire of his heart.

Sometimes you meet persons who have experienced heavy disappointments in their lives and have become soured and embittered because of them. Unsuccessful themselves in some field of endeavor and disappointed in their ambitions, they envy and disparage others who have won success. But Christian faith will trust that God has some good and wise purpose in the disappointments which he brings upon us.

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THE BLESSINGS OF DISAPPOINTMENT

Disappointments accepted in the right spirit have a purifying and disciplinary effect upon our souls. They are a part of the probation of life. They lift our thoughts and desires to higher things. They have often been the spur which has stirred men to high achievement. Jean François Millet, whose paintings depict the almost perfect story of French peasant life, as seen in "The Reapers," "The Angelus," and "The Man with the Hoe," won his first recognition in the world of art with his "Oedipus Unbound." Before that he had presented to the salon a painting of Jerome. When this picture was rejected, Millet was so poor that he could not afford to buy more canvas for another painting. He therefore painted out his Jerome and over it painted his first success, "Oedipus Unbound." Thus the disappointment and failure served only to spur him to greater efforts. Nathaniel Hawthorne was discharged from his post in the customhouse at Salem and returned home a crushed and discouraged man. But when he told his wife of his discharge, her only reply was to put pen and ink and paper before him on the desk and to say to him, "Now you can write." So these disappointed men "took captivity captive." When we get to heaven, we may be sure that we shall see how, in ways that now we cannot see, our disappointments were for our good.

Then, welcome each rebuff
That turns earth's smoothness rough,
Each sting that bids nor sit nor stand but go!
Be our joys three-parts pain!
Strive, and hold cheap the strain;

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Learn, nor account the pang; dare, never
grudge the throe! ⁴

DISAPPOINTMENT AND THE LIFE TO COME

In a certain sense the experience of Moses is common to all. Though it never deceives us, the ideal eludes us. Even those who, to our view, have done the most with their talents and have come nearer to the goal of their ambitions and their heart's desire must confess at the end to a certain disappointment. There was a something beyond, a "still-further" country, to which they never came. After all their efforts there was still a wide gap between their reach and their grasp. Andrea del Sarto was spoken of in Italy as the "faultless painter." Yet, like every great worker, he realized that he fell far short of his ideal. He took that falling short, however, that failure, as evidence of a higher state of life and higher achievements in the life to come:

Ah, but a man's reach should exceed his grasp,
Or what's a heaven for? ⁵

In the case of Moses and his experience on Mount Nebo, there is a New Testament reference to him which must not be forgotten. Moses, forbidden to enter the Promised Land, died and was buried near that lonely mountaintop. But now, after the ages have rolled away, Jesus takes Peter and James and John and ascends the Mount of Transfiguration; and there two men, Elijah and Moses, appear in glory and talk with Jesus concerning his decease, his death, which he should accomplish

⁴ Browning, "Rabbi ben Ezra."

⁵ Browning, "Andrea del Sarto."

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at Jerusalem. Was that not far better for Moses than to lead the people in the conquest of Canaan, a task for which Joshua was better fitted?

Disappointments, then, must be considered, not only in the light of the present, but in the light of the future. They certify the life to come, where alone life's highest hopes can be realized, and turn men's thoughts to that life to come. In the famous eleventh chapter of the Letter to the Hebrews, where the roll of the heroes of faith in past ages is called, it is written of Abraham and his descendants that they came out of Ur of Chaldees, seeking a new and permanent home in Canaan. But "these all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off." They could have returned to the country whence they came out. "But now they desire a better country, that is, an heavenly." Thus it was that their disappointment as to Canaan turned their thoughts to the "better country, that is, an heavenly."

May it ever be so with you and me in our disappointments. May they train and purify our souls and lift our thoughts to the life to come, that better and heavenly country, where never falls the least shadow of disappointments. May we have faith "that all things work together for good to them that love God."

O lonely tomb in Moab's land!
O dark Beth-peor's hill!
Speak to these curious hearts of ours,
And teach them to be still:
God hath His mysteries of grace,
Ways we cannot tell;
He hides them deep, like the secret sleep
Of him He loved so well.⁶

* Cecil Frances Alexander, "The Burial of Moses."

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VII

MOUNT EBAL AND MOUNT GERIZIM

“Thou shalt put the blessing upon
mount Gerizim, and the curse upon mount
Ebal.”

DEUT. 11:29

ON AN AUGUST DAY SOME YEARS AGO I LEFT TIBERIAS early in the morning after witnessing a magnificent sunrise on the Sea of Galilee. We drove along the western shore of that sacred sea to Capernaum, associated with many of the miracles of Jesus. Then, leaving the Sea of Galilee, we drove to Cana of Galilee, where Jesus turned water into wine. Our next stop was at Nazareth, which we had visited a few days before. Leaving Nazareth we crossed the fertile plain of Esdraelon and came to the ruins of Jezreel, where I thought of Ahab, Naboth and his vineyard, the ferocious Jezebel, and grand Elijah. Soon we were crossing the plain of Dothan, where the sons of Jacob were tending their flocks when they lifted up their eyes and saw in the distance Joseph the dreamer and his coat of many colors. Driving on in the direction of Jerusalem, we came to the town of Sebaste, which stands on the site of ancient Samaria, the capital of the kings of Israel. One thought of the scenes of terror, cruelty, shame, suffering, and judgment which were enacted there. There, too, one remembered the great prophet Elisha, Naaman the leper, the flight of the Syrian army, and how the four lepers found their camp deserted. Some

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distance from Samaria we came to Nablus, a fanatical Arab town, but pleasantly situated on the site of ancient Shechem. A little distance from Shechem is the well of Jacob, where one of the monks drew water out of the deep well for our refreshment.

Shechem lies between Mount Gerizim and Mount Ebal, the highest mountains of Samaria. These two mountains look down upon sacred and memorable scenes in the history of Israel. In the valley between them lay Shechem, in many respects the most sacred place in the Holy Land. There Abraham, coming from far-off Ur of Chaldees, first settled, and there he built his first altar unto the Lord. There the bones of Joseph, who, when dying, had charged his people, "Bury me not in Egypt," after they had been carried out of Egypt and had accompanied Israel in the long marches through the wilderness, were reverently buried when the land was conquered. To Shechem, Jacob came when he returned from Padan-aram; and there the Lord appeared unto him and told him to go to Bethel, where he had dreamed his dream of the ladder, the top of which reached unto heaven, and to fulfill the vow he had made there thirty years before. There Joshua at the very end of his life assembled the people and, having rehearsed God's dealing with the nation in the past, called upon them to decide immediately and once for all whether they would serve idols, to which already they were falling away, or the living God. "Choose you this day whom ye will serve; . . . but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord." There, too, centuries afterward, at the well of Jacob, Jesus offered the woman of Samaria the water of life.

Some years before the death of Joshua, Gerizim and Ebal looked down upon another solemn convocation.

MOUNT EBAL AND MOUNT GERIZIM

Before his death Moses had given instructions that when the people entered the land of Canaan, they were to be assembled in the valley between Ebal and Gerizim; and from the two mountains all the words of the law of God, its blessings, if they obeyed the commandments of God, its curses, if they disobeyed, were to be read to them. "These shall stand upon mount Gerizim to bless, . . . and these shall stand upon mount Ebal to curse."

In accordance with this command Joshua assembled the people in the narrow valley between the two mountains, together with their elders, officers, and judges, and the strangers also who had joined them. Six of the tribes stood at the foot of Mount Gerizim, and six at the foot of Mount Ebal. Then Joshua read to them the words of the Law, given to Moses on Mount Sinai. After each curse for disobedience was read, and after each blessing for obedience, the people shouted, "Amen!" and the echo of that Amen reverberated back and forth between the two mountains.

THE TWO WAYS OF LIFE

Today we hear the solemn echo of those two Amens, the Amen after the blessings and the Amen after the curses, as they were sounded forth there between Gerizim and Ebal by the people on that memorable occasion. All history, all human experience, echoes those Amens. Those two mountains, the mount of blessing and the mount of cursing, uprear themselves on every man's path and pilgrimage through life. They speak and declare the truth that life has its blessing, also its curse. There is a way of life which brings a blessing to man, and a way of life which brings misery and misfortune. "But the path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more

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and more unto the perfect day. The way of the wicked
is as darkness." These two ways open before every soul,
and every soul chooses and decides which way he will go.

To every man there openeth
A Way, and Ways, and a Way.
And the High Soul climbs the High way,
And the Low Soul gropes the Low,
And in between, on the misty flats,
The rest drift to and fro.
But to every man there openeth
A High Way, and a Low.
And every man decideth
The Way his soul shall go.¹

We choose which way we shall take; and "The choice goes by forever 'twixt that darkness and that light." That is the message which rings throughout the Bible, from its first page to its last page. As the years go by, more and more am I impressed with the deep, timeless, and tremendous meaning of those first pages of the Bible which tell of man's creation, his temptation, and his fall. It is a history which is repeated and re-enacted with every new generation. In the beginning the Lord God "planted a garden eastward in Eden." In that garden were two trees, the tree of life in the midst of the garden and the tree of knowledge of good and evil. The tree of life was the symbol of man's immortality and the blessings of obedience to God's command. The tree of knowledge of good and evil was the symbol of death and the misery which followed man's disobedience. "In

¹ John Oxenham, "The Ways." Used by permission the American Tract Society.

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the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die." The tempter persuaded the man and the woman that it would be good for them to eat of the tree of knowledge of good and evil.

Those two trees still grow in the garden of every man's soul; and the consequences of the right or the wrong course, obedience or disobedience, are still the same. Jesus brought the Sermon on the Mount, in which he pronounced blessings on those who take the right way through life, to a dramatic conclusion by describing two houses, one built on the rock, the other built on the sand; and when the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat upon those two houses, the one built on the rock fell not, whereas the one built on the sand fell, and "great was the fall of it." In his great judgment scene, too, Jesus divides men into two classes, those who have taken the right way, his way, and those who took the wrong way.

Even the heathen and the pagans had their conception of two kinds of life, two ways of going through life, and two destinies, for such a conviction is a part of natural religion, an instinct which has survived the fall of man. The Greeks had their famous myth about the choice of Hercules. In his young manhood Hercules was called upon to make the supreme choice. Before him stood two female figures. One was Pleasure, a young woman of beautiful appearance, and who spoke with a siren's voice. Pleasure asked Hercules to choose her for his friend and companion, promising that all his desires and appetites would be gratified without labor or toil on his part. The other figure was Virtue. With earnest mien and modestly attired, Virtue called upon Hercules to walk in the path of duty and usefulness. She did not conceal from him

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the difficulties of that path; but she assured him of exceeding great reward in the end if he chose her for his companion. Hercules chose Virtue, and for that reason became the hero of all Greek heroes.

In his *Marble Faun*, Nathaniel Hawthorne describes that beautiful statue which some of you may have admired in the Sculpture Gallery in the Museum on the Capitoline Hill at Rome. The statue symbolizes the soul of man and its choice between good and evil. What you see is a child clasping a dove to its breast and assailed by a serpent. This is a statue which fits the history of every soul—the serpent after the dove, the tempter seeking to ruin the soul.

WILL DETERMINES CHOICE

Destiny turns on the hinges of choice, and the determining factor in choice and in destiny is the power of will. In his "The Two Streams," Oliver Wendell Holmes tells the story of two rivers, flowing from the same mountaintop, but one flowing eastward, the Athabasca; the other flowing westward into the Pacific.

So from the heights of Will
Life's parting stream descends,
And, as a moment turns its slender rill,
Each widening torrent bends,—

From the same cradle's side,
From the same mother's knee,—
One to long darkness and the frozen tide,
One to the Peaceful Sea!

I can remember, when hearing read at family worship those chapters from the books of the kings of Israel which

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said at the beginning of the history of each king, "He did that which was right," or, "He did that which was evil," in the sight of the Lord, wondering just what it was that made one king do what was right in the sight of the Lord and another king do what was evil in the sight of the Lord. Today, after all the years, I am just as far away from an answer to that question as I was then as a child. All I know is that man has a choice, that he has a will, and that some men make the right choice, and some make the wrong choice.

At Noyon in France in the sixteenth century there were born two boys, brothers. Their last name was Calvin. The name of one was Charles. He lived a dissolute and immoral life, and added to the sum and total of evil and misery in the world. The name of the other was John. Standing once in front of the house where he lived and wrote and died at Geneva, I read the words, "Here John Calvin lived and died." As I did so, there came to my mind those words of the eulogy on Calvin in which George Bancroft summed up the meaning and the ministry of his life:

And so he continued, year after year, solitary and feeble, toiling for humanity, till after a life of glory, he bequeathed to his personal heirs a fortune in books and furniture, in stocks and bonds, not exceeding two hundred dollars, and to the world a purer reformation, a republican spirit in religion, and the kindred principles of republican liberty.

Two brothers, born in the same home, heirs to the same traditions. And yet how great the gulf between them! One chose the right way; the other chose the wrong way.

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THE TIME FOR DECISION IS NOW

Daily the choice between these two mountains, the mount of blessing and the mount of curse, confronts us. Every day we begin and finish a journey. When, a few years later, Joshua stood between Gerizim and Ebal and called upon the people to choose between their idols and the true and living God, he told them to choose that very day: "Choose you this day whom ye will serve."

How many there are who fail to make a firm, definite, and final decision for the right and for God; not that they willingly decide for evil, but that they postpone the right decision until indecision becomes a decision for the wrong. Augustine in his celebrated *Confessions* tells us of his struggles to get free of the sinful and licentious habit into which he had fallen. At first he prayed, "Lord, save me from my sins; but not quite yet." Later his prayer was, "Lord, save me from all my sins except one." But at length came the final prayer, "Lord, save me from all my sins, and save me *now!*" The victory was his when he made that final decision against the sin which was besetting him.

Are you beset by some temptation or caught in the toils of some evil habit? Then now, today, is the time to say to that temptation, "Get thee behind me, Satan!" Now is the time to turn from the evil habit and the evil way; to climb and choose the mount of blessing rather than the mount of cursing.

For Christ or against him! That is the greatest choice and the most solemn decision of life. Lying ill once in a New York hotel, I chanced to hear through the air those words of Moses, spoken by a Portuguese rabbi to his congregation: "Therefore choose life." Coming suddenly in

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upon me in the silence of the night, and out of invisible places, those words seemed unspeakably solemn and arresting, as if coming out of heaven itself. Life and death set before men! The voice of the prophet ages ago, and the voice of the preacher today, calling upon men to choose life rather than death! "I call heaven and earth to record this day against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing: therefore choose life."

VIII

MOUNT GILEAD AND GIDEON

“Whosoever is fearful and afraid, let him return and depart early from Mount Gilead.”

JUDG. 7:3

WHEN HE CALLED THE ROLL OF THE HEROES OF FAITH in past ages, and got as far as Rahab and the fall of Jericho, and realized that space and time would not permit him to recount the deeds of others, the author of the great eleventh chapter in the Letter to the Hebrews remembered Gideon and said, “Time would fail me to tell of Gideon.” But if time failed the inspired writer, his mere mention of Gideon among the immortals of the Old Testament has moved many another writer and speaker to “tell of Gideon.”

God's chosen men come upon the stage of history in different ways and in different places: Moses at the burning bush in the desert; Samuel as a little child in his bed in the holy house at Shiloh; David on a battlefield, when he slew the giant; Elijah in the court of Ahab, with the thunder of judgment on his lips; Isaiah confessing his sins in the temple; Peter in a fishing boat on the Sea of Galilee; Paul in a vision that blinded him at the Gate of Damascus. But Gideon comes on the stage of divine history with a question on his lips. The word that he spoke is the most mysterious word of human speech. It was the word on the lips of the psalmist when he thought that God

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had forgotten him; it was the word which pain-wracked souls have spoken in their agony; it was the word which is often on the lips of fathers and mothers who stand by the grave of a little child; it was the word which disappointed souls have uttered when they surveyed the wreck of their dreams and hopes; it was the word which men who believe in God and righteousness have uttered when truth went to the scaffold and wrong ascended to the throne; it was the word which was on the lips of Immanuel when, amid the darkness which prevailed over the earth, he died for our transgressions on the cross. That word is, Why?

Gideon's history begins with a Why. He was threshing out the grain on the mountainside at Ophrah. The Midianites had driven the Israelites out of the fertile valleys into the mountains, and for seven long years the land had groaned under the iron heel of the invader. To hide his store of grain from the enemy, Gideon was threshing out the wheat in this remote and secret threshing floor.

As Gideon was thus engaged, the angel of the Lord stood before him and said to him, "The Lord is with thee, thou mighty man of valor." But Gideon answered the angel with a question: "If the Lord be with us, why then is all this befallen us? and where be all his miracles which our fathers told us of, saying, Did not the Lord bring us up from Egypt? but now the Lord hath forsaken us, and delivered us into the hands of the Midianites."

The angel did not debate the matter or answer Gideon's question. Instead of that, he gave him a task to perform. He "looked upon him" and told him he was chosen of God to deliver Israel. The best answer, sometimes the only answer, God gives to our anxious Why? is to point us to the golden gate of duty. Whatever happens, duty

always remains, and in the path of duty there is relief for the soul. When John Bright was crushed by the death of his young wife, his friend Richard Cobden came to call on him. After the usual words of condolence, Cobden sat in silence with his friend for a few moments and then said, "There are thousands of houses in England at this moment where wives, mothers, and children are dying of hunger. Now, when the first paroxysm of your grief is past, I would advise you to come with me, and we will never rest till the Corn Law is repealed."

"I accepted his invitation," said Bright, "and since then, though there has been suffering, and much suffering, in many homes in England, yet no wife and no mother and no little child has been starved to death as the result of a famine made by law."

When you are troubled about the ways of God in your own life and in the lives of others, or in the history of the world, and spirits are low and depressed, the best cure is to act, to take the path of duty, and to go out and to encourage some other soul in trouble; and then see if it is true, what the prophet Isaiah said so long ago: "If thou draw out thy soul to the hungry, and satisfy the afflicted soul; then shall thy light rise in obscurity, and thy darkness be as the noonday."

Gideon was ready to march against the hated Midianites. But instead of that he was told to march first against the idols of his own people and his own father's house. He obeyed this command, and in the morning the trees in the grove of Baal were cut down, and the image of Baal himself was pulled off its pedestal and left lying on its face in prostrate ignominy and impotence. Judgment begins at the house of God. When we speak of a revival, we generally mean those efforts and those meetings when souls

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are converted and brought into the Kingdom of Christ. But in reality a revival has to do primarily with believers, with those already in the church. That is the great need. Revive thy work, O God! "Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live." Before Gideon marched against the foe, he was commanded to destroy the idols of his own people. The same thing is true in the life of the individual. Before you march against the foe or testify of Christ, be sure that you make earnest warfare upon evil and idolatry in your own heart. What of worldly habits that blight your influence? What of secret sins? What of those chambers in your own life from which God is excluded? John Henry Newman's searching lines apply to all who would serve the Lord, but especially to the ministers of Christ:

Tho' to wax fierce
In the cause of the Lord,
To threat and to pierce
With the heavenly sword,
Thou warnest and smitest;
Yet Christ must atone
For a soul which thou slightest—
Thine own.

When Gideon blew the trumpet, the trumpet which echoed from hill to hill and from tribe to tribe, 32,000 men-at-arms answered the summons and assembled on Mount Gilead, one of those mountains which look down on that battlefield of the ages, the Valley of Esdraelon. Compared with the grasshopper-like multitude of the army of the Midianites which covered the valley, that 32,000 seemed a small army indeed. You and I would say—and, no doubt, so Gideon thought—that what his

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army needed was reinforcement, not depletion. But God said to Gideon: "The people that are with thee are too many." Too many? Just 32,000 against Midian's vast host?

There was an ancient provision in the law of Israel that when the people went forth to war, the leaders were to say to the soldiers, "What man is there that is fearful and fainthearted? let him go and return unto his house, lest his brethren's heart faint as well as his heart." Gideon was directed to make such a proclamation to his army. How many of the 32,000, think you, availed themselves of this opportunity to return home, and thus publicly proclaimed themselves as cowards—100? 500? 1,000? 5,000? No, 22,000 left the army and started for home.

That left Gideon with just 10,000 men. But again God told him that his army was too large, and that he must cut it down. The first test by which the army had been reduced was the test of courage. Now came the second test, the test of earnestness, eagerness for the cause. Gideon was directed to march his army across a brook. By the time they reached the brook all the soldiers, under the hot sun and the dusty march, were athirst for water. Some of them, when they came to the ford, got down on their hands and knees and drank their fill. But others of them marched straight through the ford and, as they passed, dashed the water up to their mouths with their hands. God told Gideon to send home all those who got down on all fours to drink. You can see the reason for that. These soldiers showed carelessness in the proximity of the foe, who might have leaped upon them from some reedy ambush. They also showed indifference, lack of zeal, the lack of eagerness to get at the foe. But the others, those who dashed the water up to their mouths as they

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crossed the ford, showed alertness in the presence of the enemy and a commendable zeal for the cause in which they had enlisted.

How many of the 10,000, think you, got down on their hands and knees to drink and were sent home? Just 9,700! That left Gideon with an army of 300. We may wonder what he thought, and how he felt, when he stood there on Mount Gilead and saw the 9,700 streaming over the hills on their way homeward. But God said to him, "By the three hundred men that lapped will I . . . deliver the Midianites into thine hand." God likes to carry out his will through what he calls in his Word a "remnant," through a minority.

Minorities, since time began,
Have shown the better side of man;
And often in the lists of Time
One man has made a cause sublime! ¹

There remained 300 out of 32,000! Only one man out of every 1,006 fit for the battle! Yet with 300 such men the army was stronger than when it numbered 32,000. What if those two tests to which Gideon put his army on Mount Gilead were applied to the Church today? How much of a reduction in numbers would there be? If all who fear to lift up their voice and to witness; if all who fear that the powers of darkness are stronger than the powers of light; if all who cannot see what Elisha saw, and what his frightened servant saw when his eyes were opened that morning at Dothan, that the mountain about them was full of horses and chariots of fire; if all the halfhearted and

¹ By Paul Laurence Dunbar. Used by permission Dodd, Mead & Co., publisher.

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indifferent; if all who do not honor the Lord with their substance; if all who seldom pray or read the Bible; if all who worship only when it suits their fancy; if all who do not believe that the Bible is the Word of the Lord; if all who put their church in the last place instead of in the first—if all these were cut out of the ranks, how many would be left? Would the reduction be comparable to that in Gideon's army? Yet we take heart when we remember what God did through that little army, and when we hear him say to Gideon, "By the three hundred men that lapped will I . . . deliver the Midianites into thine hand."

As the sun was sinking toward Carmel and the sea, Gideon looked down from Mount Gilead upon the army of the Midianites and the Amalekites, which lay all along the valley, like grasshoppers for multitude. He could see the spirals of smoke going up from their campfires and the reflection of the sun on their shields and breastplates and on the dashboards of their chariots. When the wind shifted he could hear the hum of that great host: the far-off echo of a trumpet, the neighing of the war horses, and the call of the camels. Gideon did not ask for another sign. But we may be sure that as he stood there and surveyed the camp of the Midianites and wondered how he could attack and destroy that host with only 300 men, it must have been a great encouragement to him to hear the Lord say, "Get thee down unto the host; for I have delivered it into thine hand. . . . Thou shalt hear what they say; and afterward shall thine hands be strengthened."

That night, when darkness had come down, Gideon and his servant descended the mountain into the camp of the enemy. Now they were on the outskirts of the slumbering hosts. They could smell the reek of the camels and hear the barking of dogs. Very cautiously now, lest they dis-

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lodge a stone or stumble over a guy rope or fall across a sleeping camel, and down on their hands and knees, they went forward until they came up against one of the large black tents. There they lay, Gideon and his servant, not daring to whisper a word one to the other.

Within the tent a Midianite soldier stirred uneasily. Then, awakening his companion, he said to him, "I have just had a strange dream. A cake of barley bread came tumbling down the side of the mountain and struck our tent and overturned it. What do you make of such a dream?"

"What do I make of it?" said his tentmate. "I make this of it. This is nothing else save the sword of Gideon, for into his hands God hath delivered Midian and all the host."

Gideon had heard all he needed to hear. He touched his servant, and together, and as cautiously as they had come down, they made their way out of the camp, ascended the mountain, and rejoined the waiting 300. Soon 300 men, not armed with swords and spears, but carrying a trumpet in their right hand and a torch concealed in a pitcher in their left hand, made their way to the edge of the camp of Midian. At the zero hour there rang out over the startled foe the crash of 300 pitchers, the blast from 300 trumpets, and the shout of 300 voices, and in the darkness 300 torches danced and flashed. Seizing their weapons, the Midianites and the Amalekites in their dread and confusion fell upon one another. When morning dawned, the valleys and the hills, clear over to the fords of the Jordan, were strewn with spears and shields and with the bodies of the dead and wounded of the panic-stricken army. Gideon's 300 "turned to flight the armies of the aliens." Yet the 300 did not draw a bow or lift a sword or hurl a

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spear. All they did was to wave their torches, to break their pitchers, to blow their trumpets, and to shout, "The sword of the Lord, and of Gideon."

It was an army of only 300. But it was a shouting 300. We used to hear of "shouting" Methodists. Where are they now? What we need in the Church is the echo of the shout of triumph and victory, the glad confidence that no sword of this world can measure itself against the sword of the Lord. Recently one of the great London newspapers offered a prize for the best essay on the subject, "What is wrong with the Church?" The prize was won by a Welsh minister. And what do you think was his answer? Was it the lack of doctrine, of which indeed there is great lack? Was it the lack of education? Was it the lost touch with the masses? Was it coldness or exclusiveness? Was it poor preaching or poor music? No, it was none of these. His answer, his splendid answer, was this: "What is wrong with the Church is our failure to realize and wonder at the beauty, the mystery, the glory, the greatness of the Church." Yes, that is our weakness, for "great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory."

"Thou shalt hear what they say." Ah, yes! Gideon heard, and his 300 heard and lifted up the shout of victory, "Get thee down unto the host; . . . and . . . hear what they say." Get thee down and hear, not its noisy proclamation and hostility, but what in its heart of hearts the world has to say of strong, consistent, believing Christians; its secret verdict as to the ultimate victory of righteousness; its restless tossing under the sting of remorse for sin; its despair by a grave unlighted by Christian

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hope; its secret, wistful yearning after better things; its Balaam-like sigh, "Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his!" Ah, yes! Could we "hear what they say," we should gird up our loins anew, and go to our posts of duty and witness with new courage and with new hope.

The same holds true of your own personal battle with the Midianites of doubt, and fear, and temptation, and sin. "Greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world," says John. These enemies of your soul are not as strong as they seem. They fear your prayers; they fear your holy aspirations and resolves; they know that at your side there stands one whom they cannot overcome, that one who hath said to you, "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee." O Gideon's loaf of barley! Roll down the slopes of Mount Gilead again! Knock over the tents of the enemies of my soul, and let me "hear what they say"!

We wish we could leave Gideon there in the moment of his great victory over the Midianites. But we must leave him where the Bible, which is no respecter of persons, leaves him. When we read the last chapter of his life, we might wish also that Lot had died when he left the doomed cities of the plain, that Noah had died before he lay drunken and uncovered in the presence of his sons, that Balaam had died with that great prayer upon his lips when his eyes saw the coming of the glory of the Lord, that David had died when he was established on his throne and before the fatal evening came when he walked on the roof of his palace and saw Bathsheba bathing herself, that Solomon had died when the beautiful accents of his prayer at the dedication of the temple were yet upon his lips. But God knows best. The brightest day may end in dark and clouded and stormy skies.

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It was so with Gideon. Jubilant over the victory over Midian, the people wanted to crown Gideon as their king. But Gideon put aside the temptation and said to them, "I will not rule over you . . . : the Lord shall rule over you." Nor would he consent to enrich himself with the spoils taken from Midian. All that he asked was that the people bring to him the golden anklets, earrings, bracelets, and chains taken from the dead Midianites, that he might make an ephod out of them. The ephod was one of the six garments worn by the high priests when they ministered in the holy place. In making use of this richly wrought ephod Gideon arrogated to himself the sacred prerogatives of the priest. Thus the ephod became a snare unto Gideon, and unto Israel, for soon it was worshiped as an idol.

"Even in Ophrah," is the significant comment of the sacred chronicler. If Gideon was going to set up an idol, one would think he would have set it up anywhere but at Ophrah. Ophrah was where he was beating out the grain on the secret threshing floor when the angel called him to deliver Israel from Midian. Ophrah was where the signs of the divine presence and blessing were given him. Alas, how often this has happened! How many a man has sinned against his earlier dream; how many a man has betrayed the consecration of yesterday. What of your own Ophrah? Are you true to the sacred resolves and holy purposes of that place of early consecration, where, like Jacob at Bethel, you saw a ladder which reached to the top of heaven and the angels of God ascending and descending, and where you heard the voice of God? Alas for these forgotten, abandoned, betrayed, profaned, sinned-against Ophrahs of the soul! O God, forgive us for our forsaking them and profaning them. Bring back to our hearts the high hope, the glowing love, and the

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glad obedience to thy will that once we knew at Ophrah.

After a long and prosperous voyage ships have gone on the rocks at the very mouth of the harbor which was their goal. So Gideon was wrecked at the end of his great career of service to his nation and to God. "Time would fail . . . to tell of Gideon." But when we "tell of Gideon," we must tell not only of his courage and faith but of his temptation and fall. For this reason Gideon tells us to make our calling and election sure, to work out our salvation with fear and trembling. On his grave I read this epitaph: "Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall." God keep us safe unto the end!

IX

MOUNT GILBOA AND SAUL

“And it came to pass on the morrow, when the Philistines came to strip the slain, that they found Saul and his three sons fallen in mount Gilboa.”

I SAM. 31 :8

“HOW ARE THE MIGHTY FALLEN, AND THE WEAPONS OF war perished!” When the Philistines came to strip the slain in battle, they found Saul and his three sons fallen on Mount Gilboa. To David that seemed so terrible a thing: Saul and Jonathan slain in battle with the Philistines, their bodies gashed and mutilated, Saul’s body nailed to the wall of Beth-shan, his armor hung up in the house of Ashtaroth, and his head fastened in the temple of the Philistine god, Dagon, as a ghastly trophy of the victory over Israel and their great enemy—to David that seemed so terrible a thing that when in his magnificent ode and dirge he lamented the death of Saul and Jonathan, he called upon the very mountain upon which Saul fell to mourn over him: “Ye mountains of Gilboa, let there be no dew, neither let there be rain upon you, nor fields of offerings: for there the shield of the mighty is vilely cast away, the shield of Saul, as though he had not been anointed with oil.” Saul had fiercely and cruelly pursued and persecuted David, when his jealous rage was upon him, and more than once he had tried to kill David. But now that Saul was dead, magnanimous David, subscribing

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to the ancient doctrine *De mortuis nil nisi bonum* (Concerning the dead, speak nothing but good), remembers only the noble and splendid traits of his fallen adversary.

Some of the mountains of the Bible are associated with great events, such as the Flood, the giving of the Ten Commandments, the victory over the prophets of Baal, the Transfiguration, the Crucifixion, and the Ascension. Others are associated with the death and passing of great men, like Aaron and Moses; and others with great victories in battle, like that of Gideon; and others with grand predictions of the coming of the Kingdom of God, like Pisgah. But Gilboa forever will be associated with the tragedy of a soul, the shipwreck and doom of King Saul. Gilboa is a mountain on the southern side of the Valley of Esdraelon, a territory associated with great events in Israel's history. It is visible to one who stands on Mount Tabor, and rises 1,696 feet above the level of the sea. This is the mountain which David addressed in his beautiful apostrophe, commanding it to be free of dew and rain, as a memorial of the death of Saul and beloved Jonathan.

One of the saddest and most melancholy sights that I have ever seen was the great French liner Normandie, then the queen of the Seven Seas, lying on her side in the North River, a charred wreck and ruin, man's mightiest marine achievement reduced to a prostrate hulk. A wreck is always a sad sight. There the ship lies on the rocks or half sunk in the sand; masts gone, sails gone, boats gone, superstructure gone, seagulls flying above it, and the waves sounding a melancholy refrain as they break over it. But there are shipwrecks among men as well as among ships. The greatest wreck of all is the wreck of a human

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soul. At the end of the Sermon on the Mount, where Jesus described the fall of the house that was built on the sand—and he was speaking, of course, not of the fall of a house, but of the fall of a soul—he said, “And great was the fall of it.”

Ages after Saul fell on Mount Gilboa he still casts a spell over the minds of men. His life and death are a magnet which attracts our thought and attention. Although he was of supreme interest in himself, Saul has the added interest of having been associated with two of the Bible's greatest men—Samuel, the noblest character of the Bible, and David, its greatest sinner and greatest saint. We might add, too, a third—the greatest and most beautiful friend of the Old Testament, Saul's son, Jonathan. Saul cast a singular spell over men during his life and even after his death: over Samuel, who anointed him King and wept over his rejection; over Jonathan, who remained loyal to him even after Saul had sought to kill him in a jealous rage; over the women of Israel, whom he clothed in scarlet; over that company of godly men whose hearts God had touched and who clave to him; over David, who loved him in spite of his murderous jealousy; over the men of Jabesh-gilead, who took his mutilated body down from the walls of the Philistine stronghold and gave it decent sepulture among his own people. Saul is one of those timeless, universal characters. We lose all sight of the fact of time and race, whether it is B.C. or A.D., whether he is Jew or Gentile, Greek or barbarian; for when we study Saul, we study the soul; we study man; we study our own heart. Standing then on Mount Gilboa, let us hear, first, of the call of Saul; second, of the fall of Saul; and third, of the doom and end of Saul.

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THE CALL OF SAUL

The sacred chronicler tells us that when Samuel met Saul and anointed him king, he met him at "the spring of the day." That beautiful phrase fits the morning of Saul's life, and the life of all others, too, who are at life's morning. Every soul has its mystic and beautiful "spring of the day," when great things are possible for the soul, when the gates of a noble destiny can be glimpsed, and when decisions are made which shall influence the soul for good throughout the ages to come. Alas that so many fail to keep the innocence, enthusiasm, and hope of the "spring of the day"!

Saul was the first king of Israel. The people wanted a king, but it is important to remember that it was not the people who chose this king, and not Saul who aspired to the throne, but God who chose him. In the humble task of seeking the lost asses of his father, Saul came upon a throne. When Samuel informed him of his high calling, Saul expressed amazement and said: "Am not I a Benjamite, of the smallest of the tribes of Israel? and my family the least of all the families of the tribe of Benjamin? wherefore then speakest thou so to me?" But Samuel had said to him, "On whom is all the desire of Israel [for whom is all that is desirable in Israel]? Is it not on thee?" In a certain sense that is true of all in the morning of life. There is an invisible prophet standing before every young man and every young woman, and he says to you, "For whom is all that is desirable in the world? Is it not for thee?" God intends the best for you. He has called you, as Paul said, to "glory and honour and immortality." Will you also intend it for yourself? Will you choose that great destiny, as well as be called to

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it—and strive and suffer for it? As Jesus said, “Many are called but few are chosen.”

Saul had excellent traits, fitting him to be the first king of Israel. He had a splendid body, head and shoulders over all Israel. He was every inch a king. He had moral and spiritual qualities also. He was clothed with the favorite virtue of Jesus, humility; for when Samuel held the convocation at Mizpeh and announced to the people that Saul was to be their king, they found that he was hiding “among the stuff,” in the tents, and they had to draw him out to receive their acclamations as they shouted, “God save the king.”

As is so often the case with humble men, Saul was also a man of great courage. His humility covered his courage as the moss covers the granite rock. As soon as he became king, he received an appeal from the men of Jabesh-gilead, besieged by the Ammonites, who had offered them cruel terms of peace—that is, that they would spare the city on condition that their right eyes be thrust out. When Saul heard that, he slew a yoke of oxen and sent the pieces throughout the coast of Israel, with the word that whosoever failed to come out after Saul to battle would have his oxen hewn in pieces. In the battle which followed he won a great victory and delivered the men of Jabesh-gilead from a cruel fate. They never forgot that deliverance at the hands of Saul; and it was they who, after Saul had fallen on Mount Gilboa, and the Philistines had nailed his mutilated body to the wall at Beth-shan, went by night and at the risk of their own lives took down the body and gave it decent burial.

Saul was also a magnanimous man. When he was crowned king, there were “children of Belial,” who said, “Shall Saul reign over us?” And they despised him and

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brought him no presents. But Saul held his peace. Now when the great victory had been won, his soldiers came to him and said, "Who is he that said, Shall Saul reign over us? bring the men, that we may put them to death." But Saul refused to mar his great victory with an act of personal vengeance and retribution and said, "There shall not a man be put to death this day: for to day the Lord hath wrought salvation in Israel."

THE FALL OF SAUL

Bright and fair was the morning of Saul's life and the first year of his reign. But now the clouds began to gather, and soon the sky was overcast. The first transgression of Saul, the first sign that his heart was not wholly with the Lord, was at Gilgal, where his army was pitched over against the invading army of the Philistines. Samuel had told him to wait seven days before beginning the battle, and he would come and offer the sacrifices. As the seven days passed, and there was no sign of Samuel, Saul himself offered the sacrifices. This act showed not only a lack of reverence but reliance upon self rather than upon God. Samuel appeared on the scene while yet the smoke of the offering was going up to heaven. When he rebuked Saul for his arrogant impiety and disobedience, Saul said that he had offered the sacrifice because Samuel had not come at the appointed time, and his army was beginning to scatter. "I forced myself, therefore, and offered a burnt offering." How true to human nature that is! And how often when men have done evil, they have tried to excuse themselves as Saul did by saying that the circumstances demanded it. "It was against my will and against my conscience. Nevertheless, it had to be done. I forced myself."

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Because of this act of disobedience and impiety Samuel told Saul that he would lose his throne, and that God had sought as a successor "a man after his own heart." The fact that Saul was left for a number of years on his throne, and that David had not yet been anointed king, would perhaps intimate that this was only a conditional rejection on the part of God, and that even yet, if Saul had repented, his kingdom might have continued.

Saul's first transgression was soon followed by a more serious one. Instead of the utter destruction which God had commanded him to visit upon the Amalekites, Saul brought back with him some of the spoils and the Amalekite king, Agag, to grace his triumph. When Samuel heard of this new disobedience, the record is that he wept all night over Saul unto the Lord. The only charge made against this grand character of the Old Testament was his intemperate grief over Saul, for God said to him, "How long wilt thou mourn over Saul, seeing I have rejected him from reigning over Israel?" Yet to you and me there is a tenderness and pathos in those tears of Samuel over Saul. Happy is the man who has a friend like that, one who will pray for him and weep over him when he has turned from the right path.

As usual, Saul had a ready excuse. He blamed what he had done upon the people. It was the people, he said, and not he, who wanted and took the spoils of the battle. He blamed the people, just as Aaron blamed the people for making the golden calf, although he had told them how to make it. When he was rebuked by Samuel for his transgression and was told that his kingdom would be given to David, a man better than he, Saul said, "I have sinned." No person in the Bible ever said that as often as Saul did, and he said it sometimes with tears. But soon after he

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said it, he turned back to his old ways. He was convicted for the moment, but he did not repent. This was the last meeting between Samuel and Saul till they met on Mount Gilboa on the eve of Saul's death.

"And Samuel came no more to see Saul until the day of his death." There is one of the saddest sentences of the Bible. Samuel was God's representative with Saul, giving him the message of the Holy Spirit. But God has said, "My Spirit shall not always strive with man." The departure of Samuel from Saul meant the final rejection of Saul. Henceforth, all is darkness and confusion.

SAUL'S DOOM AND END

The departure of Samuel from Saul introduces us to the last chapter in Saul's life. We read that "the Spirit of the Lord departed from Saul, and an evil spirit from the Lord troubled him." The sacred writer explains, as far as can be explained, the ensuing tumult and darkness in Saul's life by saying that "an evil spirit . . . troubled him." One manifestation of that evil spirit is plain enough. It was the evil spirit of jealousy. From the very beginning of their relationship, when, after David's victory over Goliath, the women chanted, "Saul hath slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands," from that day forward, Saul "eyed David." Nor could he forget what Samuel had said, that his kingdom was going to be given to David, "a man better than thou." Saul loved David, and yet hated him. He wept over him, and yet tried to kill him. Nowhere else do we see so clearly the devastating corrosion of jealousy in the human heart. We wonder if when that great observer of the heart wrote in *Othello*,

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Jealousy ;
It is the green-eyed monster which doth mock
The meat it feeds on,

he had King Saul in mind, for never was there a life in which jealousy did so mock its victim as in the life of Saul.

Nathaniel Hawthorne was a man well qualified to treat of this strange character, King Saul. We regret that he never did so. But in his tale of *The Bosom Serpent* he illustrates the power of jealousy to destroy a soul. In his village this man, who had been separated from his wife because of jealous suspicions, would sometimes hold his hand to his bosom and exclaim, "It gnaws! It gnaws!" For this reason he was known to the people of the town as the man with the snake in his breast. Sometimes he would create consternation and alarm when he stopped other men in the street and asked them how their serpent was. At length, after all kinds of remedies had been tried, his wife appeared and pleaded with him to forget himself and to show his love for her. At that the man fell to the ground, and there was a sound like the passing of a serpent through the grass, and a tinkle was heard as if it had dropped into the fountain. Thus the man was cured of the bosom serpent of jealousy. What about the serpent in your breast? Beware of that bosom serpent of jealousy! It was a greater than Shakespeare who said, "Jealousy is cruel as the grave: the coals thereof are coals of fire, which hath a most vehement flame."

In the last chapter of his life Saul is like a man struggling in a vortex. In all human biography there is hardly anything like it. What a chaos! What a tragedy of doom and jealousy, suspicion, insane anger, cruelty, murder,

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sacrilege, awful solitude, melancholy, soul-shaking remorse! And yet, at the same time, he makes pathetic appeals to David to deliver him from the evil spirit in his heart, turning to weep over David after he has tried to kill him, consulting a witch, and yet through the witch asking for the presence and prayers of the godliest man of the Bible.

Grand and terrible is the last scene in Saul's life. Leaning on his spear on Mount Gilboa, Saul surveyed the great army of the Philistines spread out in battle before him. He heard the distant hum and murmur of the host and saw their helmets and breastplates and chariots flashing in the declining sun. Saul had a premonition that perhaps this was to be his last battle. Anxious about the coming struggle on the morrow, he inquired of the Lord. But the Lord answered him not, neither by prophet, nor by dream, nor by Urim and Thummim, the mystic stones which gleamed upon the breastplate of the high priest. God answered him not! To that lamentable state Saul had permitted himself to drift. The same God who had called him to be king over Israel, who had given him a new heart and had sent Samuel to instruct him and to warn him and to pray for him, now answered him not. He spoke to him the word which he speaks in the book of Proverbs: "Ye have set at nought all my counsel, and would none of my reproof. . . . Then shall they call upon me, but I will not answer; they shall seek me early, but they shall not find me." The same God who says, "Those that seek me early shall find me," says also to those who have scorned his love, "They shall seek me early, but they shall not find me."

In his distress Saul turned to the underworld, to the world of shades. He learned that hard by his headquarters

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there lived a woman who had a familiar spirit. Saul disguised himself and, taking two companions, went to the witch's cave by night and asked her to bring up whom he should name. The woman reminded him of how Saul had outlawed her practice, and that it would be at the risk of her life if she called up the spirit of one who was dead. But when Saul reassured her, she said, "Whom shall I bring up unto thee?" And whom did Saul name? For whom did he ask in this great crisis of his life? Did he ask for Abraham, the father of the faithful? Or Moses, to whom God spake face to face? Or Joshua, the famous captain of the host? Or Gideon, who in that same district of Esdraelon had put to flight the army of the aliens? No! It was for none of these that Saul asked. He said to the woman, "Bring me up Samuel!" Call up Samuel, who anointed me king and kissed me at the spring of the day, ere the dark clouds had gathered over my life; Samuel, who instructed me and encouraged me and warned me, and when I fell into transgression and sin and disobeyed the word of the Lord, prayed and wept unto the Lord all night for me. Call up Samuel! If any man can help me or deliver me now, or tell me what I ought to do, that man is Samuel. Call up Samuel! Sublime tribute, that on the part of God-rejected Saul to Samuel, now dead. That is the way to live, to pass through this world, so that when you have passed out of this world, someone in great trial will think of you and will wish to call you up. And, indeed, are there not those, the sainted dead, whom from time to time you do call up, not in the cave at Endor, but in thankful memory and recollection, and pray that their spirit, their endurance, and their faith shall be yours?

When the woman saw Samuel, she cried out with a loud voice and realized too that her midnight visitor was

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Saul himself. But Saul said to her, "Be not afraid: for what sawest thou?" And the woman said unto Saul, "I saw gods ascending out of the earth." And he said, "What form is he of?" The woman answered, "An old man cometh up; and he is covered with a mantle." Then Saul knew that it was Samuel, and he fell to the ground and bowed himself. This was the word he heard, "Why hast thou disquieted me, to bring me up?" And Saul told him why: because of the war with the Philistines, and because God had departed from him and answered him no more. Therefore he had called Samuel up that he might make known unto him "what I shall do." But Samuel said: "Wherefore then dost thou ask of me, seeing the Lord is departed from thee, and is become thine enemy? . . . The Lord will also deliver Israel with thee into the hand of the Philistines; and tomorrow shalt thou and thy sons be with me."

On the morrow's battle Saul, fighting with his old courage, was overcome by the Philistines, and, lest they should torture him and mutilate him, took a sword and fell on it. There is Saul's epitaph—"Saul took a sword, and fell upon it." He was the architect of his own misery, of his own rejection, of his own doom.

The mistake Saul made that night was to think that Samuel could help him when God had departed from him. But all that he could hear from the lips of Samuel was that word of doom, "Tomorrow shalt thou and thy sons be with me."

That brief sermon which Samuel preached that night to Saul in the cave at Endor is the only record of a sermon preached by the dead unto the living. And what does that sermon tell you and me? What but this—that the day of opportunity passes, that God's Holy Spirit will not always

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strive with our hearts, that the unpardonable sin is to reject the Holy Spirit. That is the only true sermon a preacher from the realms of the dead could preach, and the only true sermon that the living preacher can preach. That was the word so often upon the lips of the prophets, of the apostles, and of Christ himself, the sermon that time is always preaching: "Now is the accepted time; . . . now is the day of salvation." "Seek ye the Lord while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near."

X

MOUNT CARMEL AND ELIJAH

“And Elijah went up to the top of
Carmel.”

I KINGS 18:42

IF YOU LEAVE OUT MOUNT CALVARY AND THE CRUCIFIXION, the ten most dramatic scenes in the Bible are the following: the murder of Abel by Cain, and God's interview with Cain; Abraham's offering up Isaac on Mount Moriah; the passage of the Red Sea by the Israelites; the death of blind Samson in the temple of the Philistines; the appearance of Samuel to Saul in the witch of Endor's cave; the healing of the Gadarene demoniac by Jesus; Peter's denial of Jesus in the palace of Caiaphas; the kiss of Judas in the Garden of Gethsemane; and Elijah's contest with the prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel.

Because it is visible in all that part of the Holy Land, there is frequent mention of Carmel in the Bible. Jeremiah speaks of “Tabor . . . among the mountains, and . . . Carmel by the sea.” In the Song of Solomon the Shulamite damsel is likened by her lover to Mount Carmel, “Thine head upon thee is like Carmel.” In some respects more like a headland or a promontory than a mountain, Carmel rises out of the sea at the western end of the Valley of Esdraelon. Although it is not high as mountains go, the view from Carmel is extensive and beautiful. Looking eastward, one sees the Valley of Esdraelon, the river Kishon, Nazareth, and far in the distance Mount Tabor. At the foot of Carmel lies the chief port of Palestine, Haifa.

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From Haifa to Acre stretches the beautiful crescent of the Bay of Acre. I recall distinctly how, standing on the top of Carmel, I could see at the other end of the crescent of the bay the domes and minarets and walls of Acre, the ancient Ptolemaïs, where Paul stopped on his last voyage up to Jerusalem and saluted the brethren. Looking at Acre in the distance, I thought of the Moslem conqueror Saladin and Richard the Lion-Hearted, who fought round the walls of Acre in the battles of the Crusades in the thirteenth century. I thought also of Napoleon, whose dream of Asiatic conquest was shattered and dissipated when he made his futile assaults upon the Turks behind the walls of Acre. But on that August day when I went to the top of Carmel, all was quiet and peaceful. No armies—Moslem, Christian, or French—clashed about the walls of the ancient city or on the plain of Esdraelon, stretching far to the east. The azure sea, sweeping westward, lay quiet and lovely in the afternoon sun. A little Arab village nestled on the side of the mountain, and flowers were blooming, and scented bushes. On that day I heard no wild incantations of the prophets of Baal, nor the sublime intercession of the prophet Elijah. No fire flamed out of heaven to consume Elijah's offering and altar, nor was there the "sound of abundance of rain," when the heavens were black with clouds and wind, and there was a great rain. But all those memories came back to me as I stood there and thought of the dramatic incidents of that great day.

When he delivered his funeral oration over Julius Caesar, Mark Antony said:

The evil that men do lives after them;
The good is oft interred with their bones.

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This is only a half-truth, for the good men do lives after them, as well as the evil men do, and "the memory of the just is blessed." There is, however, no doubt about the way in which the evil that men do lives after them. With monotonous refrain we read in the first book of Kings, and elsewhere, how Jeroboam did that which was "evil in the sight of the Lord." When he set up his golden calves at Dan and Bethel, the two extremities of the kingdom of Israel, he gave the nation a push toward idolatry. The climax of this degradation and apostasy came in the reign of King Ahab. He had for his wife the ferocious Jezebel, the daughter of a heathen king. An altar for the worship of Baal, the bull god, was built at Samaria, the capital of the nation. The true prophets of Jehovah were hunted like wild animals over the hills of Israel, and in the whole nation there were only seven thousand left who had not bowed the knee to Baal.

But here again, as so often in the history of the world, it was darkest just before the dawn. Without any previous word concerning him, suddenly the prophet Elijah stands before the recreant king of Israel. He comes on the stage of Hebrew history like a crash of thunder. This is the word he speaks to Ahab, "As the Lord God of Israel liveth, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years, but according to my word." We often hear of people praying for rain, but here is a man who prayed that it might not rain. Elijah "was a man subject to like passions as we are, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain; and it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months." As Jesus said when he preached his first sermon that Sabbath in the synagogue at Nazareth, within sight of Carmel, "The heaven was

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shut up three years and six months, when great famine
was throughout all the land.”

The normal rainfall in Palestine today is little enough; and for the most part the land impresses one as treeless, grassless, and barren. We can therefore imagine what it must have been like when it rained not for the space of three years and six months. The vine and the fig tree withered and died; the hillsides and the fields lay yellow and parched from the scorching of the relentless sun; every stream and every brook dried up, even the brook Cherith, where Elijah lay hid from the wrath of Ahab. The sheep and cattle with distended eye and piteous moan wandered about in a vain quest for water. The famine was great in the land, for man lives by bread, and bread comes from wheat, and wheat comes from the harvest; but when there is no rain, there is no harvest, no wheat, and no bread. The suffering which the famine brought to the land has a pathetic illustration in the story of Elisha and the widow. When he asked her to bake him a little cake, she told him she had just a handful of meal in a barrel. And she said, “I am gathering two sticks, that I may go in and dress it for me and my son, that we may eat it, and die.”

But the end of the terrible drought was at hand. Elijah, for whom Ahab had been hunting all over the kingdom, at last appeared before the king and told him to assemble the people on the slopes of Mount Carmel. Ahab brought with him the 450 prophets of Baal. When all were assembled on the top of Carmel, Elijah made his memorable appeal to the people to choose between the worship of God and the worship of Baal: “How long halt ye between two opinions? If the Lord be God, follow him: but if Baal, then follow him.” The recreant and apostate people “an-

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swered him not a word." Their silence was in part the silence of shame and self-condemnation, and in part the silence of indecision.

Elijah then challenged the prophets of Baal to a trial by fire. Two altars were to be built and two offerings laid upon them. The prophets of Baal were to pray to Baal, and Elijah was to pray to the Lord. If the prayer of the 450 was answered by the coming down of fire to consume the offering and the altar, that would show that Baal was God. But if Elijah's prayer brought down fire, that would show that Jehovah was God.

The priests of Baal built their altar, slew their bullock, laid it upon the altar, and began their heathen cries and incantations. From morning till the sun began to sink into the Mediterranean they shouted, "O Baal, hear us!" Mount Carmel echoed with their cries. "But there was no voice, nor any that answered." In their fear and frenzy they leaped upon the altar, cutting and gashing their bodies with knives until the blood which flowed from their wounds drenched the altar. But still no fire; no answer came from Baal. When they were exhausted with their shouting, and there was a moment of quiet, Elijah, standing on the other side, mocked them. That mockery is the high-water mark of satire and irony in the Bible. "Cry aloud," Elijah exhorted them, "for he is a god: either he is talking, or he is pursuing an animal, or he is on a journey, or peradventure he sleepeth, and must be awaked." Elijah's mockery stirred the prophets of Baal to new efforts and new fervor, and once again Mount Carmel rang with their unavailing shouts. But at the time of the evening sacrifice, late in the afternoon, they gave up the effort and ceased from their futile supplications to Baal.

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Now came Elijah's turn. How great the contrast between Elijah and the prophets of Baał, between their wild cries and frenzied incantations and Elijah's brief, but sublime supplication! First of all, Elijah repaired a broken altar of the Lord, abandoned during the reign of Baal worship. Around the altar he had a deep trench dug. When the bullock had been slain and laid upon the altar with the wood for the offering, Elijah bade his attendants drench the altar three times with four barrels of water. When they had done so, the water ran down into the trench and filled it.

Elijah then took his stand by the altar. On the other side stood the sullen, discomfited priests of Baal, and Ahab and his officers. Back of Elijah stood the people of Israel. Amidst a great silence Elijah lifted up his voice in brief, but noble, supplication: "Lord God of Abraham, Isaac, and of Israel, let it be known this day that thou art God in Israel, and that I am thy servant, and that I have done all these things at thy word. Hear me, O Lord, hear me; that the people may know that thou art the Lord God, and that thou hast turned their heart back again."

The moment Elijah's prayer was finished, fire fell from heaven and consumed the sacrifice and the wood and licked up the water that was in the trenches. When the people saw this, they fell on their faces and cried, "The Lord, he is the God; The Lord, he is the God." So ended the contest with the priests of Baal, and so God answered Elijah by fire.

THE JUDGMENT AND DOOM UPON EVIL AND EVIL MEN

This public defeat and condemnation of the 450 prophets of Baal was swiftly followed by their punishment and death by the waters of the river Kishon, that same Kishon

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in which, several centuries before, the invading hosts of Sisera had been swallowed up—that great victory celebrated by Deborah in her inspired song when she said, “The river of Kishon swept them away, that ancient river, the river Kishon.” Now those same waters were dyed crimson with the blood of the slain priests of Baal. As enemies of God and corrupters of the people, their doom was one they well deserved. “The judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether.” The end of the prophets of Baal is a warning, and also a prediction of that fate that awaits all enemies of God, all false and anti-Christian systems which exalt themselves against God and against his Anointed.

How quickly God can turn the tide of events! In the morning of that day a whole people were apostate and astray, and a false and licentious worship, seemingly invincible, was established in the kingdom of Israel; but when the sun sank that day into the distant sea beyond Mount Carmel, the worship of the true God was re-established, and the 450 prophets of Baal were slain! When you are disturbed and perplexed at the sway of evil and evil systems and evil men in the world, do not forget that God is the supreme actor in human affairs, and that the last act is always his. Those splendid lines which Edward Rowland Sill wrote seventy years ago in “The Reformer” may well be spoken of Elijah in his contest with the priests of Baal.

Before the monstrous wrong he sets him down—
One man against a stone-walled city of sin.
For centuries those walls have been a-building;
Smooth porphyry, they slope and coldly glass
The flying storm and wheeling sun. No chink,

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No crevice lets the thinnest arrow in.
He fights alone, and from the cloudy ramparts
A thousand evil faces gibe and jeer him.
Let him lie down and die: what is the right,
And where is justice, in a world like this?
But by and by, earth shakes herself, impatient;
And down, in one great roar of ruin, crash
Watch-tower and citadel and battlements.
When the red dust has cleared, the lonely soldier
Stands with strange thoughts beneath the friendly stars.

TURNING POINTS IN THE HISTORY OF MEN AND NATIONS

This great scene on Mount Carmel reveals the power
of choice and decision in the history of men and nations.

Once to every man and nation comes the moment to decide,
.....
And the choice goes by forever 'twixt that darkness and that
light.

The people of Israel had not formally decided for Baal
and his worship, although practically many of them had.
Elijah summoned them to make a formal decision. "How
long halt ye between two opinions? If the Lord be God,
follow him; but if Baal, then follow him." The people
were silent. Why? Because no matter how entangled they
were in Baal worship, they were not ready to say that
Baal was God. For that matter, who is? Even the most
worldly and licentious man, even the most devoted fol-
lower of Baal, that great and false Baal, "this present
world," with all its abominations and seductions, knows
that Baal is not God, knows that the life and death of the
righteous are greatly to be preferred to the life and death

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of the wicked, even as Balaam did when he prayed that prayer which, alas, he did not live, "Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his." In any moment when the world presses its pleasures and its rewards upon us, or threatens the soul, or when the way of righteousness is hard and lonely, speak thou, Elijah, to our soul, as of old thou didst to Israel on Carmel's summit: "How long halt ye between two opinions? If the Lord be God, follow him; but if Baal, then follow him." Lord God of Elijah! We know in our inmost soul that Baal is not God; that thou alone art the living and true God. Give us, then, we pray thee, grace and courage to choose and follow thee!

ELIJAH'S PREVAILING PRAYER

We think of Elijah as a man who thunders with the judgments of the Lord God. And such, indeed he was—a man who troubled evildoers and pronounced upon them the righteous judgments of the Lord. But we must not forget that Elijah was also a man mighty in prayer. He prayed for the drought to come upon the apostate nation which had gone awhoring after Baal, and it rained not. But after the victory over the prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel he prayed again, and "there was the sound of abundance of rain." Writing long centuries afterward to encourage Christian disciples in prayer, James said: "[Elijah] was a man subject to like passions as we are, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain; and it rained not in the earth by the space of three years and six months. And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth brought forth her fruit."

What a picture that is—Elijah on his hands and knees praying, while his servant climbs to the topmost peak of

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Carmel to see if the rain is on its way. Elijah's servant, according to an old tradition, was that very youth, the son of the widow whom the prophet had restored to life during the great drought. "Go up now," Elijah said to him. "Look toward the sea." The young man climbed to the highest point of Carmel and looked off toward the west. But nowhere could he see what Elijah had sent him to see, the sign of the coming of rain. Below him, on either side of the mountain, lay the parched valleys burning in the pitiless sun; westward stretched the glassy sea, not a ripple on its surface, its unruffled waters flaming like an opal as the sun sank into its depths. Not a breath of air was stirring; not a cloud appeared in all the expanse of the heavens; not a single whitecap on the sea intimated the coming of the rain. He stretched out the palms of his hands but felt not a single drop of rain. Then he went down to where Elijah was on his knees and said to him: "There is nothing." And Elijah said to the youth, "Go again the second time."

Again the young man climbed to the lookout; and again he scanned the horizon, and still no sign of the coming of rain. Once more he returned to Elijah and said, "There is nothing." No doubt he said it with an accent which meant, "The prophet is mistaken. This time his prayer will not be answered." No doubt, too, the silent king and his courtiers, and some of the people also, were sure there would be no rain.

But still Elijah prayed, and once more he said to his servant, "Go again." If Elijah had prayed as you and I often pray, he would have given it up as hopeless. But what a lesson he gives us in earnest and continuing prayer—that, as Jesus said centuries later, we "ought always to pray, and not to faint."

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The third time the youth went to his lookout on the mountaintop, and the third time he returned with the same report. But Elijah sent him back the fourth time, and then the fifth, and then the sixth; and each time he brought back the same report, "There is nothing." But when he went up the seventh time and looked, lo, on the rim of the horizon was a cloud like a man's hand! When he brought back that report to his master, Elijah knew that the rain was coming, and told the king to get into his chariot and start for the capital, ere the roads were impassable from the floods. In a few moments the cloud like a man's hand had spread and expanded until it covered the heavens; the wind came sweeping in from the sea, and "there was a great rain."

"The sound of abundance of rain!" What sound in all nature is sweeter than that? I like to hear the gentle sigh of the wind in the tops of the trees on a summer evening. I like to hear the breaking of the waves of the sea against the shore—sometimes loud and roaring as they fling themselves with mighty reverberation against granite cliffs, and sometimes with musical refrain as they fall gently and softly on some sandy beach. I like to hear the musical murmur of a river or brook as it flows seaward over the rocks or winds its graceful way under the willows and through the meadow. I like to hear the deep, far-off cadence of a cascade as it falls down the side of a mountain. But best of all I like to hear the "sound of abundance of rain"; sometimes the heavy rushing downpour of the thunderstorm, like that storm on Mount Carmel's slopes; sometimes like the sound of the rain at night when it falls on a shingle roof, as I can remember hearing it in a Pennsylvania farmhouse we used to visit; and sometimes the sound of the quiet summer rain "on mown grass." But to

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whatever note it sings, sweet is the music of the rain, and sweetest of all after a drought, when for long weeks or months it has not rained on the earth. For that reason how grateful was the sound of the abundance of rain to Elijah, to the people of Israel, and even to wicked and idolatrous Ahab that day on Carmel after the heavens had been shut up for three years and six months. Blessed rain! Blessed rain, which is the symbol of God's mercy, for he maketh his sun to shine and his rains to fall upon the just and the unjust. Blessed rain, which is the symbol of God's forgiveness—of how he can cleanse the guilty soul as the rain that day washed away the stain of blood from Carmel's slopes. Blessed rain, which is the symbol of God's goodness to the soul, when his Holy Spirit "comes down like rain upon the mown grass."

As the rain came that day in answer to Elijah's seven-fold prayer and blessed the people in the land of Israel, so Elijah himself was a benediction to his nation and to his age. And still Elijah blesses mankind. He encourages you and me to stand for God and righteousness, though the multitudes forget him. He encourages you and me—for he was a man of like passions with us, a man of like nature, like deeds, like temptations—to pray and not to faint, to hold fast to God, who is our great possession.

Elijah's end was worthy of his life. Nothing in his life so became him as the leaving of it. When Elisha saw Elijah go up to heaven in a whirlwind, and with a chariot of horses and fire, he cried out, "My father, my father! the chariot of Israel, and the horsemen thereof!" Yes! Men like Elijah are the chariot and horsemen of the Church and of the nation, for in God and God-like men we build our trust. And they are the chariot and horsemen for your soul and for mine. They strengthen us in the

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midst of a hostile world. They encourage us to pray, to trust in God, to have faith; and when all the world says of our belief, "There is nothing," to see on the horizon a cloud like a man's hand, and to hear the "sound of abundance of rain."

"Where is the God of Elijah?" Elisha asked, as he smote the waters of Jordan with Elijah's mantle. The God of Elijah is here! He is the God, not of the dead, but of the living! If you will turn to him, pray to him, trust him, and obey him, you too will know that he is the living God.

XI

MOUNT TABOR AND THE TRANSFIGURATION

“And after six days Jesus taketh Peter,
James, and John his brother, and bringeth
them up into an high mountain apart.”

MATT. 17:1

THE MOUNTAIN WITH WHICH ABOVE ALL OTHERS JESUS was familiar, for it was the mountain he saw in the days of his youth at Nazareth, was Mount Tabor. Five miles east and south of Nazareth, Tabor rises abruptly like a Gibraltar out of the plain of Esdraelon. Standing on the summit, one can see to the north snow-crowned Hermon and the peaks of Lebanon, to the northeast the Sea of Galilee; and westward stretches the great plain of Esdraelon. That most fertile valley has been irrigated with the blood and fertilized with the bones of slain warriors more than any other portion of earth on this planet. From the earliest ages down to our own day hostile armies have fought over Esdraelon's fields. At Mount Tabor, Deborah and Barak assembled the thousands of Naphtali and descended to Esdraelon to the slaughter of Sisera and the army of the Canaanites on the banks of the river Kishon. There Sisera, the captain of the host, fleeing from the battlefield, was slain in his sleep by the hammer of Jael, the wife of Heber. There Gideon and his army of three hundred, with their lamps, their pitchers, their trumpets, and their shouts, put to flight the armies of the

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alien Midianites. There on the bordering hills of Gilboa, Saul and Jonathan fell in battle with the Philistines. There the good king of Judah, young Josiah, marching out to meet the army of Egypt under Pharaoh Necho, was slain in battle. There the armies of the Crusaders in the twelfth century clashed with the armies of the false prophet. There the army of Napoleon under Kleber vanquished the Turks. There in the First World War, General Allenby and the English army conquered the Turks. A mount rising near the western end of the valley, Megiddo, gave its name to the last great battle of the ages, the battle predicted in the book of Revelation, where it is said that the unclean spirits which came out of the dragon and out of the mouth of the beast and out of the mouth of the false prophet will gather together the kings of the earth and of the whole world into a place called Armageddon, the mouth of Megiddo, to the battle of that great day of God Almighty.

It was the morning of the April 16, 1799. "The winter is past, the rain is over and gone; the flowers appear on the earth; the time of the singing of birds is come." But when the sun went down that night, the birds had all fled; the rose of Sharon, the lily of the valley, and all the other flowers which at morning had carpeted the valley of Esdraelon with their coats of many colors lay trampled and torn and drenched with the blood of battle.

In March of that year General Bonaparte, not yet the Emperor Napoleon, having conquered Egypt, resolved to march on Syria and to seize Acre, the stronghold on the Bay of Acre, near the modern town of Haifa, and the key to Palestine. With Syria conquered, Napoleon dreamed of marching northward to take Constantinople or, even more ambitious, like another great conqueror,

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Alexander the Great, of marching through Persia and conquering India. But these dreams of an Oriental empire vanished forever before the walls of Acre.

Napoleon was carrying on his unsuccessful siege of that Oriental stronghold when he got word that the pasha of Damascus had crossed the river Jordan with an army of 25,000 and was marching to the relief of Acre. He at once sent Juneau to intercept this army. When he got as far as Nazareth, Juneau learned that the Turkish army was encamped on the slopes of Mount Tabor. Marching to destroy the Turkish force, Juneau was surprised and attacked by overwhelming numbers and would have been destroyed but for the timely arrival of another of Napoleon's famous generals, Kleber. As the Turks marched on westward to get between Nazareth and Acre, Kleber made a flank march by night to attack the rear of the Turkish army. Napoleon at Acre got word of Kleber's movement and, realizing the perilous nature of it, hurried to the scene of battle. When he arrived on the morning of the sixteenth of April, he found Kleber in the last extremity and retreating slowly up the slopes of Mount Tabor. Taking in the situation at a glance, Napoleon sent his cavalry under Murat to attack the Turkish flank, while he himself attacked in front with his infantry. Assailed now on its front, in its rear, and on its flank, the Turkish army was soon put to flight, and the gate to Damascus was open.

On the night of the eighteenth of April, the second day after the battle, Napoleon slept at the convent at Nazareth. We wonder what his thoughts were that night. Surely he must have thought of the Prince of peace, who was brought up there in the home of Mary and Joseph in the quiet street below the convent. What a contrast! Jesus

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and Napoleon! And yet they both slept at Nazareth. The brilliant, ambitious, able, but licentious, cruel, passionate, and unscrupulous victor of Lodi, Marengo, the Pyramids, and victor-to-be at Elayu, Austerlitz, Wagram, slept there at quiet Nazareth and dreamed of empire, where Jesus was brought up. Jesus bathed the summit of Mount Tabor with the glory of his transfiguration. Napoleon bathed its base with the blood of the slaughtered and strewed it with the bodies of those who had fallen in battle.

One day at Nazareth, Jesus, coming back from the wilderness where he had conquered Satan, went into the synagogue on the hill at Nazareth. The minister for that Sabbath day asked him to read the lesson. Jesus stood up and read these words from the book of Isaiah, prophetic of his future ministry and his influence upon future history: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the broken-hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind; to set at liberty them that are bruised, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord." And he closed the book and gave it again to the minister and sat down and the eyes of all them that were in the synagogue were fastened upon him. And ever since the eyes of mankind have been fastened upon Jesus, for there, in those words from the book of Isaiah, you have the beautiful summary of his ministry to mankind: the gospel preached to the poor; broken hearts healed; captives of Satan delivered; eyes blinded by sin opened; the bruised set at liberty. That was what Jesus said he would do when he stood up that day in the synagogue at Nazareth; and that is what he did and has been doing ever since. How different that

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of which Napoleon dreamed he would do when he slept that soft April night in the convent at Nazareth, and what he did do in the dreadful years to come, till God stopped him at Waterloo: hearts broken, eyes blinded, and bodies maimed in battle; fields wasted; cities desolate; a trail of blood and death from the Pyrennes to Moscow, and from Italy to the Pyramids. Yet Napoleon, too, slept at Nazareth!

At the end of his career of glory and blood and death and shame, standing on his lonely wave-washed rock in the South Atlantic, where the nations he sought to enslave had confined him, Napoleon paid this tribute to the other Conqueror who also slept at Nazareth: "I die before my time. My body will be given back to the earth to be done with as men please, and to become the food of worms. Such will be the fate of him who has been called the Great Napoleon. What an abyss between my deep misery and the eternal kingdom of Christ, which is proclaimed, loved, and adored, and is extending over the whole earth!"

It is of that conqueror, and not of Napoleon, that one thinks when one stands on the summit of Mount Tabor. The gospel records do not say that Mount Tabor was the mountain of the Transfiguration. But a very ancient tradition, going back clear to the time of Jerome, makes Mount Tabor the scene of that sublime event in the life of our Saviour. Certainly the noble mountain itself, rising out of the plain to a height of 1,929 feet, and the fact that this was the mountain with which Jesus must have been most familiar, and which he frequently saw when as a boy and young man he wandered over the hills about Nazareth, made it an altogether appropriate place for that great event when he was transfigured before three disciples and

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talked with Moses and Elijah concerning his death, which he should accomplish at Jerusalem.

The time of the Transfiguration was undoubtedly at night, for we read that it took place when Jesus was praying, and we know that night was his favorite time for prayer. It is said also that the three disciples fell asleep, which would indicate that it was night. Jesus took with him only three of the disciples, Peter, James, and John, the same three who were with him in the death chamber when he raised the daughter of Jairus, and whom he asked to watch with him in his agony in the Garden of Gethsemane.

You can see these four, Jesus, Peter, James, and John, as they went out from some little hamlet on the plain of Esdraelon and started the ascent of Tabor. Higher and higher they went, perhaps pausing now and then to rest and to look back and down upon the villages on the plain slowly sinking and disappearing in the evening gloom. When they reached the summit of the mountain, the three weary disciples at once lay down and fell asleep. But this time it was not the guilty slumber of Gethsemane.

While they slept, Jesus prayed; and "as he prayed, the fashion of his countenance was altered, and his raiment was white and glistening." "As he prayed!" It was the prayer of Jesus that opened that window into heaven, whence the heavenly light streamed upon him. Here you have the transforming power of prayer. Prayer reveals to the soul its beauty and destiny. Jesus said, "Watch, and pray, that ye enter not into temptation." Prayer unmasks the countenance of the tempter and delivers the soul from the distorting passions of impurity, anger, hatred, and doubt. Before the light of prayer these evil passions vanish into the darkness whence they came.

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As Jesus was praying, Moses and Elijah appeared in glory and spake with him concerning his coming death on the cross at Jerusalem. It was in the midst of this conversation that the three slumbering disciples awakened. Startled and thrilled by what they saw and heard, Peter cried out, "It is good for us to be here: . . . let us make here three tabernacles; one for thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elijah." To this request there was no answer on the part of Jesus. Then a cloud overshadowed them, and the disciples were afraid as they entered into the cloud. Then out of the cloud they heard a voice saying, "This is my beloved Son, . . . hear ye him." When the voice ceased to speak, and the cloud vanished, Jesus touched the three disciples and said, "Be not afraid." And when they lifted up their eyes, they saw no man, save Jesus only. The cloud was gone; the voice out of the cloud no longer spake; but Jesus was still there.

THE GLORY OF THE SON OF GOD

The Transfiguration declares, first of all, the glory of the Son of God. Partly for the encouragement of his disciples, amazed and saddened, no doubt, at his very recent prediction of the humiliation and suffering and death which awaited him, and partly for the encouragement of Jesus himself, the glory of his divine nature was here for a moment permitted to shine through his human nature. That it did encourage and inspire the apostles we know from the references they afterward made to it. John wrote: "We beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth." And Peter wrote: "[We] received from God the Father honor and glory, when there came such a voice to him from the excellent glory, This is my beloved Son, in

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whom I am well pleased. And this voice which came from heaven we heard, when we were with him in the holy mount."

Paul said, "There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body." We often wonder about that.

Deep within,
Some say, The Spirit has another frame,
Invisible, magnetic, beauteous, thin.¹

When we begin to talk about that other body, that other frame, we are beyond our depth. But here the spiritual and divine nature of Jesus shone forth before the disciples. They had followed the familiar form through the streets of Capernaum and along the shores of the Sea of Galilee, and they had often seen his face suffused with pity and compassion as he stopped on the highway to heal the sick, to take little children up in his arms, to open the eyes of the blind, and to raise the dead. But this was the first time they had seen his face radiant with the glory which he had with the Father before the foundation of the world. The Christ of the miracles and the parables, of the highways and the byways of Galilee, of the manger at Bethlehem, of the Cross and the Resurrection, survives in history and is the living Christ today, only because he is seen in the light of the glory of the Son of God. Sometimes you hear it said that it makes little difference what rank we ascribe to Jesus as long as we endeavor to follow his example and to do his will. But that is not the thought of God, and it is not the thought of Christ himself; for here we have both the proclamation

¹ J. C. Earle, "Light Leading unto Light."

MOUNTAINS AND MOUNTAIN MEN OF THE BIBLE and the shining forth of the glory of the divine sonship of Jesus.

THE GLORY OF THE ATONEMENT

Moses and Elijah appeared in glory and spake with Jesus concerning his decease; that is, his death on the cross. Why these two? Why not Abraham and Noah? Joshua and Joseph? Gideon and Samuel? David and Isaiah? Yet there was an appropriateness in those two, Moses and Elijah, as the witnesses of the Transfiguration. Both of them, beyond all others, had seen, as far as it is possible for mortals to see, the majesty and glory of God: Moses on Mount Sinai, and Elijah at Horeb, when he heard the still, small voice of God. Both of them, too, in their day and generation had endured as seeing him who is invisible, and had made a lonely and magnificent witness unto God. Both of them had experienced hours of doubt and depression, when it seemed to them that their labors had been in vain; and therefore both of them could testify to God's never-forsaking grace and could encourage Jesus as he looked forward to Gethsemane and Calvary.

The atonement was the great subject of their conversation there on the mount. That was the great act for which the ages had waited, conceived in infinite love, carried out by infinite power, approved by infinite justice and holiness, whereby on the Cross the sublime, stupendous, overwhelming, and awful price for man's redemption was paid.

The Cross is the test and touchstone of Christian faith. Do you delight to hear it spoken of? Can you join with Moses and Elijah as they speak with Jesus on that high theme? John the Baptist could have done so, for he said, "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of

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the world." Isaiah could have done so, for he said, "He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities." David could have done so, for he said, "Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered." John could have done so, for he said, "The blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin." Peter could have done so, for he said, "Ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, . . . but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot." And Paul, perhaps above all others, could have done so, for he said, "God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ." And the whole company of the redeemed in heaven, and all the holy angels, could have done so, for they said, and sang, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honor, and glory, and blessing."

THE GLORY OF THE FUTURE LIFE

At the Transfiguration, Moses and Elijah, one of them dead for fourteen hundred years and the other translated for nine hundred years, appeared in the full power of their personality and intelligence. They thus declare to us the reality and glory of the future life.

One of the pagan writers, Cicero, used to speak of the joy with which he looked forward to conversing in the next world with Homer and Hesiod and others of the renowned and mighty dead. But what will that be compared with the privilege of conversing with the prophets and the apostles, but most of all with Jesus himself? The Evangelist relates that after the cloud had lifted, and the voice no longer spake, and the great prophet and the great lawgiver had disappeared, they saw no man, "save Jesus

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only." Heaven will have its great personalities and its sweet reunions. But not Moses nor Elijah; nor David with his harp; nor seraphic Isaiah; nor world-conquering Paul; nor heavenly John; nor Peter, who, even after this sight of the glory of Christ, denied him and then was redeemed and brought back by a look; nor even those dear faces which we have loved long since and lost a while and then shall have found forever—none shall detain us in our eager and searching gaze as we look upon Jesus only, him whom, having not seen, we yet love. And in that glad and beautiful morning we shall say with ourselves, and with Peter and James and John, and Moses and Elijah, and all the prophets and apostles, and all the blood-washed company of the redeemed, "Lord, it is good for us to be here!"

Will you be there? Were you there when they crucified your Lord? Yes, we were all there when they crucified our Lord, for it was our sins which nailed him to the cross. Yes, we were all there. But will you be there when Moses and Elijah and David and Isaiah and Peter and James and John and Paul and all the redeemed gather about the throne of God and of the Lamb, and say one to another, and to him, "Lord, it is good for us to be here"?

XII

MOUNT CALVARY AND THE ETERNAL CROSS

“And when they were come to the place, which is called Calvary, there they crucified him.”

LUKE 23:33

CALVARY IS THE BEST-KNOWN MOUNTAIN OF THE BIBLE, the best-known mountain of all history. Mount Calvary churches, colleges, cemeteries, are to be found all over the world. Yet, strange to say, there is no Mount Calvary mentioned in the Bible. Calvary is there, and its Hebrew equivalent, Golgotha, “the place of a skull”; but there is no mountain called Calvary. All Jerusalem, of course, is a mountain—Mount Zion. But with the exception of the Mount of Olives there is nothing near that eminence upon which Jerusalem stands that looks like a mountain. Yet the name Mount Calvary persists through all the ages. Perhaps the reason is that Christian believers have felt that so grand and awful an event as the Crucifixion ought to have been carried out on a high mountain.

Calvary is a mountain that only a penitent sinner can climb. No angel can climb it. All that the angels can do is to wonder in amazement at it. As Peter said, “The angels desire to look into it.” Biblical archaeologists are unable to locate the site of Calvary. But there is no doubt as to the spiritual location of that mountain, no doubt as to its location in the eternal thought and plan of God, no doubt

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as to its location in the incomparable sufferings and the incomparable love of Jesus, and no doubt as to its location in the experience of repenting and redeemed sinners.

The ancients had a legend about a magnetic mountain of loadstone which had the power to draw to it ships afar off on the sea and men traveling by land. The magnetic mountain of the Christian faith is Mount Calvary. So Christ said, in a moment of great uplift and exultation, and just before the time of his crucifixion, "I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me." All who in the past ages have been drawn unto Christ, and all who in the ages to come shall be drawn unto him, are drawn by the magnetic power of his death on the cross.

A strange thing that, that a cross should have the power to draw men unto it. Nothing could be more terrible or repellent than a victim of crucifixion hanging on a blood-stained cross. Yet here is the paradox of Calvary. That terrible cross draws men to God. The thorn-crowned Jesus nailed to the cross, hanging on the cursed tree, becomes the magnetic Jesus; the dying Christ becomes the ever-living Christ; the conquered and crucified Christ becomes the Christ who takes captivity captive.

There is, of course, a widespread presentation of Christianity today which leaves out the bloodstained cross. It has, indeed, the cross in architecture and symbol and sentiment; but that is all. It is a Christianity without the cross—that is, the cross as it is presented to us in the Scriptures, the cross as Jesus explained it, the way by which our sins are forgiven when we are reconciled unto God.

Suppose, for a moment, that Christ's earthly life had come to a close in some other way than by his death on the cross. Suppose that at the end of his ministry, after his incarnation and baptism, and preaching and miracles,

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and calling of the twelve apostles, and predictions as to the future, suppose that Jesus in some upper chamber in Jerusalem, or by Galilee's quiet shore, or in the garden on the slopes of Olivet, had bidden his followers farewell and vanished out of their sight. Suppose that had been the history. What then would we have? We would have everything that the Gospels relate, from his incarnation to his last and beautiful farewell, and then his ascension into heaven. We would have everything that is related concerning Jesus, but this one thing—his cruel, bloody, vicarious, anguish-filled death upon the cross. If that had been the history, if Jesus had not been lifted up upon the cross, there would have been no Pentecost and no bestowal of the Holy Spirit. There would have been no Cornelius, the first fruits of the Gentile world; no Ethiopian eunuch reading Isaiah's prophetic description of what took place on Calvary; no Stephen calling upon God as they stoned him, and beholding Jesus standing at the right hand of God; no Paul preaching Christ to the nations and crying out, "God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ"; no Peter feeding the sheep of Christ, and at length stretching forth his hands on his own cross; no John on the Isle of Patmos for the Word of God and for the testimony of Jesus Christ.

All the great truths of our Christian faith are secured for us and handed down to us by the death of Jesus on the cross. That is why Jesus, speaking just before his death, could say, "I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me," and speaking historically, after he had been lifted up on the cross, could say to the two wondering disciples who walked with him on the way to Emmaus, "O fools and slow of heart, . . . ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into his glory?" There

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are depths of divine mercy and divine justice in the cross of Calvary which are far beyond our sounding and apprehension. "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out! for who hath known the mind of the Lord?"

In Milton's poems, between his poem "On the Morning of Christ's Nativity" and the sonnet "On Shakespeare," you will find his poem entitled "The Passion." Having written of the incarnation and the temptation, it was the purpose of Milton to write on the atonement, the great work of Christ on the cross. But the poem has just eight introductory stanzas, and at the end of the eighth stanza is this note: "This subject the author, finding it to be above the years when he wrote it, and nothing satisfied with what was begun, left it unfinished." If even so great a genius and intellect as Milton found that the cross was too great a theme for him, then what shall we say of the ordinary mind? The best that we can do is to touch the outermost hem of the crimson robe of the atonement. The cherubim cover the rest with their wings.

THE MOUNT OF CONDEMNATION

In the first place Mount Calvary is a mount of condemnation. Before we accept the deliverance of the cross, we must bow before its sentence and condemnation. If Christ died for all, then all must have been under the condemnation of death. On the cross Christ bore the penalty of sin. "The chastisement of our peace was upon him." The world thinks lightly of sin; but not so God. God has revealed his mind toward sin by the commandments and the penalties pronounced amid Sinai's smoke and flame, by the unspeakably solemn sacrifices in the tabernacle on

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the Day of the Atonement, by the judgments which have overwhelmed evildoers, by the recoil of the broken law, by minds that reel and bodies that crumble because of transgression. But the supreme demonstration of the mind of God toward sin, your sin and mine, was the death of Christ, the prince of glory and of life, upon the cursed tree.

When we stand before the cross, we behold, not only the goodness but the severity of God. We must take our place with John Newton, the converted slave dealer, who said:

I saw One hanging on a tree
In agonies and blood;
Who fixed His languid eyes on me,
As near His Cross I stood.

Sure, never till my latest breath,
Can I forget that look,
It seemed to charge me with His death,
Though not a word He spoke.

A man once dreamed that he saw Jesus chained to a whipping post, and a soldier standing by scourging him. Greatly distressed, the man rushed forward to stop the brutal punishment. But when the soldier turned around, the man recognized—himself. “Were you there when they crucified my Lord?” Yes, we were all there. We must all say what the penitent thief said when he hung on his own cross by the side of Jesus, “We receive the due reward of our deeds.”

THE MOUNT OF RECONCILIATION

In the second place the cross is a reconciliation. Here is the paradox of the cross. The same cross which condemns

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us as sinners is the cross which reconciles us and delivers us. The judge who sentences us is also the Saviour whose arms are stretched out to save us. The sentence of death is changed into the promise of eternal life. The worst that man has ever done, to nail the Son of God to a cross, has in the providence of God turned out to be the best that was ever done for man. If it is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptation that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners, it is also a faithful saying that he saves them by reconciling them to God on the cross. "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself."

The cross shows us God's method of dealing with sin. How ought God to have dealt with sin? He might have punished sin and destroyed the race of man. But God did not do that because God is pity and God is love, as well as justice. Again, suppose that God had ignored sin, overlooked it. But if that is blameworthy even in a parent, or in the administrators of justice in the society of the world, how much more so on the part of God, who is the fountain of righteousness! Again, suppose God had selected for salvation those whom the world rates as superior characters. On some of the Universalist churches you see the legend, "We believe in salvation by character." But if the law of God is perfection, then who could be saved by character? The only salvation by character is by the character and righteousness of Christ, imputed to man by faith alone.

Instead of dealing with sin in any of these ways, God dealt with it by the method of the cross. That was a way that the mind of man could not have conceived. "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him." This was spoken first by the prophet

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Isaiah, and then quoted ages afterward by Paul. What both Isaiah and Paul meant was not the wonders and powers of the future life, but the wonders of salvation in Christ. He hath "made peace through the blood of his cross." Ideals are good; but in the straits of the soul they are not sufficient. Then we need a great remedy and a great helper. Nothing that man can do can lift from his back the burden of sin. In the beautiful memorial window of the Abbey Church at Elstow, where Bunyan was born, and the bells of which he used to ring as a boy, you can see in the mystic colors of ecclesiastical glass the pilgrim kneeling at the foot of the cross, while his dark and heavy burden rolls from his shoulder. "So I saw in my dream, that just as Christian came up with the cross, his burden loosed from off his shoulders, and fell from off his back, and began to tumble, and so continued to do till it came to the mouth of the sepulchre, where it fell in, and I saw it no more."

THE MOUNT OF INTERPRETATION

In the third place the cross is a mount of interpretation. It is the solution of the mystery of existence. It is God's answer to the problem of sin and pain and sorrow. If the cross itself is a mystery, it is the mystery which solves all other mysteries. For a suffering world only a suffering God in Christ will suffice. Here "deep calleth unto deep." In Turgenev's powerful novel *Fathers and Sons*, filled with so much that is tragic and inexplicable in the tangled and stained web of human lives, Pavel Petrovich presents the princess who once loved him, but who has forsaken him, with a ring, on the stone of which was engraved the Sphinx. What he meant in this his hour of bitter grief or disappointment was that life is an enigma, as silent and

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unanswering to all cries and entreaties as the Sphinx itself. But after the princess died in Paris, Pavel received back the ring that he had given her. Over the Sphinx on the stone she had drawn the rude lines of the cross, meaning that the solution of life's mystery and enigma is the cross upon which the divine Love suffered and died. Only by the light of the cross can we hold onto God; and only by the light of the cross can we believe that "all things work together for good to them that love God."

THE MOUNT OF CELEBRATION

In the last place the cross is the mount of celebration. It is a celebration of victory. One of the chief splendors of the Roman world was the triumphal arch. These arches were erected to commemorate the victories of the empire. Some of them, such as the Arches of Constantine, Titus, and Severus, have long survived the empire itself. Bitten and defaced by the winds and rains of centuries, scarred and battered by catapult and cannon, they look grandly down upon a sea of ruins. Before the triumphal arch came the triumphal procession. Arrayed in silken garments and crowned with garlands, the conqueror rode in his car at the head of his victorious legions. At the wheels of his chariot walked the princes and potentates who had been taken captive. As the procession moved toward the walls of the city along the Appian Way, or the Via Sacra, successive pageants and pantomimes displayed the incidents of the victorious battles and campaigns, while clouds of incense went up to heaven from the altars which had been reared on the line of march. But the greatest triumphal arch that was ever erected is the blood-stained cross upon which Christ died. Because of sin the history of the world

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is a tragedy: but it is met and conquered by a greater tragedy, the tragedy of Calvary.

Sometimes men grow pessimistic about the conquest of evil. Mankind seems to be afflicted with an incurable disease and marked with an indelible taint. The beast in the book of Revelation and the enemy of God and man receives what looks like his "death stroke." But ere long he appears again with some new disguise upon his face and some new lie upon his lips, and goes forth to deceive and make war upon mankind. How long, O Lord, how long? The only hope of the ultimate conquest of evil is the cross of Christ. When Christ died upon the cross, it did not look like a triumph; it looked more like an overthrow, a disaster. But God knew, and the angels knew, and Christ knew when he cried out with a great voice, "It is finished!" that the cross was the greatest of all triumphs. That was what Paul meant in his magnificent utterances about the triumph of Christ; how when he ascended on high he "led captivity captive"; and again, how, having "nailed to his cross" our condemnation as sinners, and reconciled us unto God, and "having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a shew of them openly, triumphing over them in it."

When the Philistines brought blinded Samson out of the dungeon to make sport for them in their temple, so that they might mock him and blaspheme the God of Israel, Samson asked the lad who led him by the hand to let him feel the pillars upon which the temple rested. Then he put one arm around one pillar and the other arm around the other pillar, and, with the prayer on his lips, "O Lord God, remember me, I pray thee, and strengthen me, I pray thee, only this once," Samson bowed himself with all his

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might, and the temple and palace of the Philistines came down in ruins and in judgment upon the enemies of God.

So was it on Calvary. With eyes blinded with love for mankind, Christ put one arm around the dark and mighty pillar of death and the other around the dark and mighty pillar of sin and bowed himself with all his might, even unto death, and Satan's empire fell. When he died, Christ cried from the cross, "It is finished." John, who heard that cry and recorded it, heard the same cry in his vision on the isle called Patmos. John stands now at the end of the ages. The long conflict between good and evil has come to an end. Every engine of war and commotion has fallen. The beast, the false prophet, and the dragon, signifying all the enemies of God and of man, have been cast into the lake of fire. The discord of strife and sin has been succeeded by infinite and universal peace. The new heaven and the new earth have taken the place of the old heaven and the old earth, stained with blood and sin; and the New Jerusalem, the city of God, has come down out of heaven like a bride adorned for her husband. Then John heard him who sat upon the throne, Alpha and Omega, the same who had died upon the cross, cry out again, "It is done!" All that for which Christ died has been accomplished. The cry of Christ on Calvary, "It is finished," echoes in the cry of Christ on the throne of the universe, "The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ." It is finished!

This great work of redemption on the cross, the power of which affects the remotest ages and all things in the universe, whether, as the Apostle said, "they be things in earth, or things in heaven"—O mystery of mysteries, O divine condescension, O unfathomable love—was done for you and for me! It is your victory, too, which is

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celebrated on the cross. Does it seem to you now that you will never conquer? Then look at the triumph of Calvary. One day you shall put off the marks and scars of sin, and come to the stature of a perfect man in Christ. One day you shall gain the crown which belonged to you by creation in the divine image, but which was lost by sin. One day you shall be made fit to stand by the side of the angels. One day divine love shall reign and rule in your hearts. Listen! I hear them reading the names of the victors, the names of those who, like Paul, won a triumph in Christ, who came off conquerors and more than conquerors through him that loved them. Listen! I hear your name called. I see your name written there; I see your face in that triumphant throng; I hear your voice joining in the song of the blood-washed multitude: "Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, be unto him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever."

XIII

THE MOUNT OF OLIVES AND THE ASCENSION

“Received up into glory.”

I TIM. 3:16

THE STORY OF OUR LORD'S EARTHLY LIFE AND MINISTRY has much in it of sorrow and suffering and tragedy. But it has a happy and triumphant ending. “Received up into glory.” That was the happy ending of our Lord's earthly ministry.

Of all places in and about Jerusalem I like best the Mount of Olives. First of all, there is no doubt about its identity. You cannot be certain just where Jesus was crucified or where he rose from the dead. But there is no doubt about the Mount of Olives and the great events which are associated with it. I climbed one bright day to the top of the Moslem mosque which crowns the summit of the Mount of Olives, and standing there with a pleasant breeze blowing in from the Mediterranean, and listening to the muezzin as he called the people to prayer in the name of the false prophet, I had a wonderful view of Jerusalem and all the surrounding territory. To the right was the tomb of David, the American colony, and the road to Samaria, and the valley of Esdraelon. Over against me, on the left, was Bethany, where was the home of Martha and Mary. I could see the road leading from Bethany to Jerusalem, the road that was strewn with garments and palm branches when Jesus rode that day into the city of

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David, meek and lowly and sitting upon the foal of an ass. Far to the east lay Jericho and the Jordan River, the Dead Sea, and in the distance Mount Pisgah and the mountains of Moab. Far below me on the left was the dismal valley of Hinnom and the pillared tomb of Absalom. In the valley just in front of me flowed the brook Kidron. Beyond it was the road winding up the hillside into Jerusalem, the grim, massive walls of the city, the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, and the incomparable dome of the Mosque of Omar, the site of the Temple of Solomon; Mount Moriah, where Abraham offered up Isaac; and just a little below where I was standing, I could see the grove of ancient olive trees, the garden of Gethsemane, where Jesus entered into his agony.

Great events in the story of redemption are associated with the Mount of Olives. There Jesus was wont to retire for prayer and meditation with his disciples. It was there, toward the end of his ministry, that he sat one evening with the twelve disciples and lifted the curtain of the future and foretold the doom of Jerusalem, the terrible judgment which overtook it thirty years later when Titus besieged the city. And there also he lifted the curtain which veils the end of the age and spoke to them of his second coming and the judgments and the blessings of that day, when "shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven, with power and great glory." It was to the garden of Gethsemane and the Mount of Olives, too, that Jesus led his disciples on that night of nights when he entered into his agony. Wandering through that ancient olive grove, you wonder if it was by such a gnarled and twisted olive tree as this by which you are standing that Jesus knelt, "and his

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sweat was as it were great drops of blood," and prayed, "If it be possible, let this cup pass from me!" But the Mount of Olives has also happy and glorious memories, for it was there that Jesus, while he was blessing his disciples, was received up into heaven.

It will seem strange to us that, if we rule out the brief reference at the close of Mark's Gospel—for that section of the Gospel, although it reflects genuine Christian faith and belief, does not appear in the ancient manuscripts and was probably added to the original text of Mark's Gospel—if we rule out that reference, it will seem strange to us that only one of the Gospels, Luke's, speaks of the ascension of Christ, and that one Gospel not written by one of the apostles who witnessed the great events. Matthew and John were both there, and both shared in the great joy which the disciples experienced when they returned to the city after the ascension of their Lord. But neither Matthew nor John says anything of it. There are, indeed, in John's Gospel numerous predictions of the great event in the words of Jesus but no account of it. When we wonder about this omission on the part of the other three Gospels, it is well to remember that one or more of the great events in the life and ministry of Jesus is omitted in each of the Gospels. There is, as we have seen, no record of the ascension in the Gospels of Matthew and John. In the Gospels of Mark and John there is no record of the birth of Jesus, and in John's Gospel not only is the ascension omitted but there is no mention of the temptation, the transfiguration, and the institution of the Lord's Supper, although John tells us more than all the others about what Jesus did and said in the upper chamber on that last night.

The ascension of Christ was an event definitely predicted

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by Jesus. These predictions are found, for the most part, in the Gospel of John. There we hear Jesus say, "What and if ye shall see the Son of man ascend up where he was before?" And again, "I go unto my Father," and, "It is expedient for you that I go away." "I came forth from the Father: . . . again, I leave the world, and go to the Father." These are some of the numerous predictions which Jesus made concerning the end of his ministry on earth. You can see how appropriate—you might say inevitable—such an ending was when you try to think of some other conclusion to the earthly ministry. Suppose, for example, that immediately upon his resurrection Jesus had ascended into heaven without having appeared to his disciples. Then the great conviction that he had conquered death and risen from the grave would never have founded the Church. All that the disciples could have said, or thought, would have been what those two on the road to Emmaus said to Jesus when they walked with him by the way, "We trusted that it had been he which should have redeemed Israel." Or suppose that Jesus had remained with his disciples after the numerous appearances of the forty days, day after day, week after week, year after year, age after age. That too, a risen Christ living here upon earth from year to year and from age to age, is unthinkable. Instead of that, at the end of forty days, after having shown himself alive "by many infallible proofs, and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God," Jesus was received up into heaven.

The reason for that stay of forty days between the resurrection and the ascension was twofold. The first purpose was that of convincing the disciples that he was risen from the dead. Suppose he had appeared to just one of them on one day, or to just one of them on several days,

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or to a group of them on one day or on several days. But instead of that he confirmed the reality of his resurrection by appearing sometimes to one, as to Mary and Peter; sometimes to two, as on the road to Emmaus; to ten of the disciples when the doors were shut for fear of the Jews; to eleven of them a week later; to seven of them by the Sea of Galilee; to James by himself; and on one occasion to "above five hundred brethren." This is why the resurrection of Jesus is the best attested fact of history.

The other purpose of the forty days' stay was that of instruction. As Luke puts it, he "spake unto them of the kingdom of God." There were some things that Jesus could make plain to his disciples only after his resurrection and crucifixion. We have some hints as to what that instruction was, as when Jesus spoke with the two on the road to Emmaus, and "beginning at Moses, and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself." What would we not give for the record of that sermon! And how many things in the Old Testament, and in the New, too, it would make clear to us! We could wish that instead of telling us how many furlongs Emmaus was from Jerusalem, Luke had given us a summary of that sermon. We could wish, too, that he had told us more of what Jesus said to the ten disciples that night when he spoke of the things which were "written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms concerning me. Then opened he their understanding, that they might understand the scriptures." What we do know, however, is that the great theme of the instruction Jesus gave his disciples during the forty days was the meaning of his death and resurrection, and that repentance and

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remission of sins were to be preached in his name among all nations. When Peter preached the sermon to the Roman centurion Cornelius, he gave a summary of the gospel which he said Jesus commanded them to preach when he appeared unto them during the forty days. This summary includes the great facts of the person of Jesus, the power of the Holy Ghost that was upon him, the crucifixion, his appearance to chosen witnesses, and his resurrection; that he is to be the judge of the quick and the dead, and that to him and to these great facts all the prophets of the Old Testament bear witness.

When these two purposes, proof of his resurrection and instruction in the Gospel, had been fulfilled, there was no longer reason for Jesus to remain upon earth. He was "received up into glory." How simple, restrained, natural, and yet how beautiful, is the account of the ascension as it is related by Luke in the last chapter of his Gospel and in the first chapter of the Acts of the Apostles. There we learn that after having given the promise of the Holy Spirit and commanded the disciples to preach the gospel in Jerusalem, Samaria, and in the uttermost parts of the earth, Jesus led the disciples out as far as—or rather, over and against—Bethany, to the Mount of Olives. As he was lifting his hands upon them to bless them, a cloud received him out of their sight. After he was gone, and as they were looking steadfastly up into heaven, two men, angels, stood by them in white apparel and said, "Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven." John, and other disciples, if any, must have returned to the city after the crucifixion with great sorrow, for in spite of all that Jesus had taught them his

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death on the cross quenched all their hopes and expectations. How different it was after his ascension into heaven! Now there was no sorrow, no gloom, no disappointment, no perplexity. But they "returned to Jerusalem with great joy: and were continually in the temple, praising and blessing God."

THE REALITY OF HEAVEN AND THE SPIRITUAL WORLD

The first great truth which the ascension of Jesus declares is the reality of heaven and the spiritual world. In the apocryphal book of II Esdras it is written, "The Most High hath made not one world, but two." The ascension places the emphasis upon that second world. There is the world of phenomenon, of space and of time, with which we are all familiar, and which needs no proof or demonstration; but there is also the world which is invisible, spiritual, and eternal. These two worlds are not to be confused or identified, neither can either world be neglected. At the ascension Jesus passed into the eternal and heavenly world which was his true home from all eternity. He said that he had come down from heaven, and that he would return again unto heaven. As Paul puts it in his Epistle to the Ephesians, "Now that he ascended, what is it but that he also descended first into the lower parts of the earth? He that descended is the same also that ascended up far above all heavens, that he might fill all things."

It was necessary that there should be such a thing as a *visible* ascension in order that the disciples might be convinced that Jesus had gone into heaven, just as it was necessary that there should be a visible resurrection in order that the disciples might believe that Jesus was risen from the dead. In relating and explaining the ascension

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the New Testament writers of course had to use the terms, the language, of time and space. They say, "He went up; . . . he ascended." Does someone say that what is up to us is down to men who live in the Antipodes? Does someone say that we could believe in an ascension when men thought of the earth as flat and the heavens as a roof over us, but that such a belief is no longer possible after Copernicus has shown that the sun is the center of the universe and that the earth revolves around the sun, so that what tonight at 12 o'clock is above us, tomorrow at 12 o'clock will be underneath us? The answer to all this is that Jesus had to give his disciples a sign—that heaven is a place as well as a state, and that what we are particularly interested in is the spiritual, not the spatial, significance of the ascension.

Important though this visible world is in man's history and in the history of redemption, this present world is a temporary world. When it has fulfilled God's purposes, it will pass and disappear. It will "wax old as a garment;" "as a vesture shalt thou fold [it] up"; "it will melt with fervent heat . . . and be dissolved." But the heavenly and spiritual world is the eternal world.

Does heaven at times seem unreal, impossible, to you? Then behold Jesus as he passes from the visible into the invisible world. Luke says that after the ascension the disciples returned to Jerusalem with great joy. Jesus was no longer visible to their naked eye, nor could they hear his voice as they had been accustomed to hear it. But now they knew that he had gone into his Father's Kingdom, that he had gone, as he had said he would go, to prepare a place for them. Thus the ascension of Jesus is a chief proof of the existence of heaven and of the immortality of the soul; for it was in the body which he took at birth,

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that body which was smitten and spat upon and nailed to a cross and laid in the grave, and which rose again from the dead the third day—it was in that same body that Jesus passed from this earth into heaven.

THE SUPREME AUTHORITY AND POWER OF CHRIST

The ascension demonstrates and declares the supreme authority of Jesus and the final and glorious triumph of his Kingdom. From the beginning Jesus had that supreme power and authority. He referred to it as the glory which he had with the Father before the foundation of the world. He said that all power was given unto him in heaven and in earth. We have occasional gleams, even in his earthly ministry, of that power and authority, as when he showed his power over nature by walking on the sea and commanding the winds and the waves to be still, and his power over the world of evil by casting out evil spirits. We see flashes of that power and glory, too, when he was transfigured on the mount; and again in the garden of Gethsemane when the mob who had come to seize him fell prostrate on the ground when they heard him say, "I am he." But as a rule his authority was restrained and held in reserve. He permitted himself to be mocked and reviled and spat upon and bound and delivered to death on the cross. But when he ascended into heaven, he assumed all that power and authority which belonged to him from the beginning of Creation.

It is significant that almost every reference in the New Testament to the ascension of Jesus uses the same figure of speech; that is, the writers speak of Jesus as seated on the right hand of God. Peter says, "Who has gone into heaven, and is on the right hand of God." The author of the Epistle to the Hebrews says that when "he had

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by himself purged our sins, [he] sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high." Stephen, in his dying vision, saw Jesus "standing on the right hand of God"; and Paul in his Letter to the Ephesians says that when God raised Christ from the dead, he "set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places." To all of them, therefore, the ascension meant that all power and authority have been committed into the hands of Christ, and that he will overthrow all evil and establish his everlasting Kingdom. He "led captivity captive" when he ascended on high; he "spoiled principalities and powers." Although evil to us is omnipresent, and sometimes appears to be invincible and eternal, in the ascension of Jesus we have the assurance that its doom is certain. Satan's empire fell when Jesus ascended into heaven. When he was exalted in the ascension, it was certain that "every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; and . . . every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." This, we take it, does not mean that every created being shall gladly bow to Jesus in Christian faith and hail him as Lord, but that the deity and the authority of Christ shall have universal recognition—on the part of some, willingly and gladly; on the part of others, unwillingly and in the judgment which falls upon them. Since all authority is vested in Christ, we need not be too alarmed or too disturbed by movements and events in time and history which are dark and evil and beyond our power to guide or control, for the ascension of Jesus declares to us that the pierced hand holds the scepter of the universe, and that the chief and final actor on the stage of time and eternity is the Son of God, Alpha and Omega, exalted above all power and principalities.

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THE INTERCESSION OF CHRIST

Another great and precious truth declared by the ascension of Jesus is his present intercession on our behalf before the throne of God, "who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us." And again, "He ever liveth to make intercession for them"—that is, for those who come unto God by him, and whom he is able to save to the uttermost.

Sometimes we wonder about prayers for the dead. We like to follow our beloved with our thought and love into the unseen world. There is nothing in the Scriptures which would teach us that there is any availing power in the prayers of the living for the dead, for destiny is decided at death. "It is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment." But what of their prayers, the prayers of the sainted dead on our behalf? We like to think that their eye is still upon us, and that as they did in life, so in that other world they follow us with their love and their prayers. As to that the Scriptures are silent. But there is something far better, something of which we have full assurance, and that is the intercession and the prayers of Christ on our behalf. "He ever liveth to make intercession for them." Jesus assumed our human nature. In that human nature he was crucified and raised from the dead, and that same nature he carried with him in the ascension into the heavenly places. He is therefore qualified in his sympathy to understand our need, our peril, our weakness, and to intercede for us. He is not a great high priest who cannot be touched with a feeling of our infirmities, but one who was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. Therefore it is that, assured of his sympathy and of his interest and of his power and of his

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prayers on our behalf, we can come boldly unto the throne of grace and seek the divine help.

Though now ascended up on high,
He bends on earth a brother's eye;
Partaker of the human name,
He knows the frailty of our frame.

In every pang that rends the heart,
The Man of Sorrows had a part;
He sympathizes with our grief,
And to the sufferer sends relief.¹

We hear much of the prayers of Jesus when he was upon earth: how he went by himself into the solitary places, into the desert, or into the mountains to pray; how he prayed by the grave of Lazarus; how he was transfigured when he was praying on the mount; how on the last night he prayed for his disciples that they might be kept from the evil that is in the world, and that they might dwell in unity and in love; how in the shadows of Gethsemane he prayed, "If it be possible, let this cup pass from me;" and how on the cross he prayed for his enemies, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." But I often think that the most moving prayer Jesus uttered was that prayer which he made for Peter, when he warned him of his coming trial and denial, and said to him, "But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not." I think that prayer of Jesus comes closer to us than any other prayer he uttered. It is that prayer, too, that makes real to us the assurance of the New Testament that at the right hand of God, the ascended and glorified redeemer is our Representative and Advocate, who maketh

¹ Michael Bruce.

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intercession for us. He who upon earth shed his tears and his blood for our salvation now at the throne of God pours out his prayers on our behalf. How great is the comfort and the hope in this truth of the intercession of Christ. In every time of weakness and danger and temptation and failure and trial it is our privilege to look to Christ at the right hand of God and to behold him interceding on our behalf, as the first martyr, Stephen, when they were stoning him to death, looked up and "saw Jesus standing on the right hand of God." That is the meaning of that glorious passage in the Epistle to the Hebrews, where after he has called the roll of the heroes of faith, the inspired author—and I still like to believe he was Paul—says this for our comfort and for our hope, "Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who, for the joy that was set before him, endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God." So let us look ever unto the great Interceder.

When I have erred and gone astray,
Afar from Thine and wisdom's way,
And see no glimmering and guiding ray,
Still Saviour plead for me.

When Satan, by my sins made bold,
Strives from Thy Cross to loose my hold
Then with Thy pitying arms enfold,
And plead, O plead, for me.

XIV

ARMAGEDDON AND THE LAST BATTLE

“And he gathered them together into a place called in the Hebrew tongue Armageddon.”

REV. 16:16

DRAMATIC AND UNFORGETTABLE SCENES, SCENES OF glory, pathos, revelation, and judgment, transpired on the mountains of the Bible. But upon none of them, save the Mount of Transfiguration, Mount Calvary, and the Mount of Olives, did there take place anything comparable to that which shall be seen and done on the last mountain mentioned in the Bible, Armageddon. The meaning of Armageddon is the “Mount of Megiddo.” Megiddo was a town in the Western end of the Valley of Esdraelon, and near a mountain in that part of the land. The sanguinary battles which through the ages were fought near Megiddo suggested to John the name of the place where the last great battle is to be fought between the forces of good and evil, between Christ and Satan.

From the summit of Mount Tabor one commands a grand view of the Holy Land. To the north and east on a clear day the waters of Galilee can be seen; to the north-west the hills of Nazareth, where Jesus was brought up; to the west Carmel and the Mediterranean; to the south the mountains of Gilboa and the mountains of Samaria. Immediately at the foot of the mountain is the great plain of Esdraelon, which belts its way clear across the Holy

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Land. On the slopes of the mountains which mark the southern end of the plain one can make out the Endor, where Saul consulted the witch the night before he fell at Gilboa; Nain, where Christ stopped the funeral procession and raised the widow's son; and further to the west, in the direction of Carmel, the ruins of Jezreel and Megiddo.

BATTLES FOUGHT AT ARMAGEDDON

But it is more than a great stretch of the Holy Land that one surveys from the summit of Tabor. It is a cyclorama of the history of Israel. One is looking down on the battleground of the nations. From the dawn of history that plain of Esdraelon has resounded with the tread of marching hosts, and the banners of invading and clashing armies have been wet with the dews of Tabor and of Carmel.

Standing now on Tabor's summit, let us watch the spectral hosts of the past ages go by. Here, marching from the east, comes a vast host with banners and trumpets. The plain shakes and rumbles with the rolling wheels of nine hundred iron chariots of war. As they draw up in martial array in the valley at our feet, another host, but far less numerous, goes out from the shelter of Tabor to meet them. This host is led by a man and a woman. I interrogate the woman and say, "Who art thou?" The woman answers, "I am Deborah, the mother in Israel, and I march with Barak, the son of Abinoam, who leads the princes of Israel to battle against Sisera and the hosts of Canaan." I hear the clash and roar of the battle, the reverberation of the thunder, and the pouring of the rain which flooded the Kishon and swept away Sisera and his

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army, while the stars in their courses fought against Sisera by the waters of Megiddo.

I look once more; and, behold, the great plain swarms with an army which covers it like grasshoppers for multitude, and their camels are without number, as the sand by the seaside for multitude. Surely no kingdom and no army can withstand such a host as this. But while I look and wonder, behold, another army comes down from the mountain to meet the Midianites. But this army numbers only three hundred, and they seem to be armed with nothing but pitchers and trumpets. At their head marches a stalwart leader, to whom I say, "Who art thou? And dost thou think with this paltry handful to meet yonder host, like the sand by the seaside for multitude?" But the leader answers, "I am Gideon. Stand still and see the salvation of our God!" While I wait to watch this unequal combat, the blare of three hundred trumpets breaks the stillness of the night, and three hundred lamps flash and wave like rushing flames. The plain echoes with the cry, "The sword of the Lord, and of Gideon!" And now clear to the Jordan I can trace the rout of the hosts of Midian.

To the west I see another great army encamped in the plain, not far from Megiddo. I ask the leader of this host who he is and whence he comes. He answers, "I am Pharaoh-Necho, king of Egypt, and I go up to fight against Carchemish, by Euphrates." From the direction of Jerusalem another army comes marching to meet the Egyptians. I ask the king of this host as he passes in his chariot, "Who art thou?" His answer is, "I am the king of Judah, the good king Josiah. I go to meet this king of Egypt." Once again the plain shakes with the galloping horses and the trampling hosts. When the battle is over, the good king Josiah is carried mortally wounded in his

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chariot up to Jerusalem, and Pharaoh marches on toward Carchemish.

Once again the plain swarms with a mighty host, this time marching from the north. I ask their leader who he is and whence he comes. He answers, "I am Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon, and I go to tear down the walls of Jerusalem and carry her people into captivity." The host vanishes on the road toward Jerusalem, leaving behind it only a cloud of dust. After this host comes another, a mightier host, with thousands of cavalry and chariots of war. I ask the leader of this host, "What is thy name? And whence comest thou?" He answers, "I am Sennacherib, the king of Nineveh, and I go to shut up Hezekiah, the king of Judah, like a bird in its cage." This host marches on; and lo, the plain shakes with the tread of another host, marching in phalanxes, and their countenance is different from that of all the hosts which have passed. I salute their young leader as he rides past and say to him, "Who art thou? And whence comest thou?" He answers, "I am Alexander the Great. I come from Macedonia. I have conquered the Persians. I have made Tyre a place for fishermen to spread their nets. I am on my way to Jerusalem, to Egypt, to India."

The rumble of this host has scarcely faded away when lo, another host comes marching up the plain from the sea. These I recognize without asking who they are. They are the legions of Rome, and the soldier at their head is Titus, on his way to fulfill the prophecies of Christ concerning the destruction of Jerusalem.

And still another host comes marching from the sea, from the direction of the stronghold of Acre. On their white banners red crosses are emblazoned, and the great knights are covered with mail from head to foot, and their

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spears pointing toward Jerusalem are like the trees of a forest. At their head rides a handsome, laughing, jesting knight. I ask him who he is, and whence comes this host with the cross on their banners. He answers, "I am Richard the Lion-hearted. These are the Crusaders. We march to wrest the sepulchre of our Lord out of the hands of the infidel."

Again the scene shifts, and another host crosses the plain not far from the sea, marching in the direction of Acre. I ask their squat, sullen leader as he rides by on his white charger with his hand in the breast of his coat, "Who art thou? And whence comest thou?" He answers, "I am Napoleon. I come from Egypt and the battle of the Pyramids to conquer Syria and repeat the glories of the Caesars."

Once again the plain shakes beneath the tread of squadrons of cavalry, and Tabor and Carmel throw back at one another the loud echoes of the cannonade. This army fights at Megiddo, where Josiah fell. I say to them, "Who are ye? And whence come ye?" And they answer, "We are Englishmen, and we come to rid the Holy Land from the curse of the Turk."

THE LAST GREAT BATTLE

But now I look again, and this time not one army, or two armies, but host upon host, army upon army. All races, all nations, all ages, seem to be represented in this host which fills the vast plain from one end to another and overflows on the slopes of Tabor and Carmel. All the kings and princes of the earth are there. The host is led by three strange leaders, captains such as the history of war had never seen before; three unclean spirits, three frogs out of the mouth of the dragon, the beast, and the

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false prophet. I ask these foul spirits who march in the van who they are, and whence comes the innumerable host which follows them. They answer, "We are the dragon, the beast, and the prophet, and we gather the kings of the whole world to the battle of the great day of God Almighty, in a place called in the Hebrew tongue Armageddon." Army after army, host after host, they march by, their banners stamped with every evil device, and their loud trumpets filling the canyon between Tabor and Carmel with unending clamor. Surely no host can stand up before such an army as that, led by this infernal trinity, the consolidated powers of darkness, the dragon, the beast, and the false prophet.

But now, near Megiddo, from the direction of Jerusalem I hear the call of a loud trumpet, like the sound of many waters; and soon there appears another host, but such a host as never before has crossed this blood-soaked plain. They bear no weapons, and they are encased in no armor but are clothed in white. They are immortal and cannot be wounded. At their head rides their Captain on a white horse. His eyes are as a flame of fire, and on his head are many crowns. He is clothed with a vesture dipped in blood, and on his thigh and on his vesture is written, "King of kings, and Lord of lords." Close behind him, mounted upon their white horses and clothed in fine linen, march the weaponless host of the saints. I bow before this awful conqueror and say to him, "Who art thou? Who are these that follow thee, and whither goest thou?" He answers, "I am Faithful and True, Alpha and Omega, and in righteousness I do judge and make war. I come from Calvary and from Edom, traveling in the greatness of my strength, with dyed garments from Bozrah. I have trodden the winepress alone, and of the people there was

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none with me, for I will tread them in mine anger and trample them in my fury. I am he who died upon Calvary; and I come now to reap the fruits of my agony and death, to be admired of them that believe, and to overthrow the enemies of God."

Now you see why John in his great vision of the seven vials, when he wished to describe what he saw when the sixth vial was opened and the nations of the world, seduced by evil spirits, went forth to war against God, called the place where this battle was fought, Armageddon, for that plain, more than any place in the world, is associated with the clash of armies and the overthrow of the enemies of God.

It is inevitable that we should ask about the end of things. "Then cometh the end," is just as logical and just as necessary as "In the beginning." The Bible tells us the beginning of things; it also tells us of the end of things. It not only tells us what man ought to do, but it tells us what God will do. In the book of Revelation, more than any other place in the Bible, the curtain of history and of futurity is lifted, and we see the unfolding of the drama of time. There, more than anywhere else, we behold the deeps which are in Satan, the subtlety, the power, the cruel tyranny of the kingdom of darkness and its federated allies on the earth. But there, too, more than anywhere else, we behold the final victory of the Kingdom of God, and our souls are thrilled with the echoes of the music of that great day when the kingdoms of this world shall have become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ.

Is what John saw when the sixth vial was opened, the nations of the world meeting in the last battle of the great day of God Almighty, an actual battle, with flesh and blood.

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and real warriors and real horses? And is Armageddon, the mount of Megiddo in the midst of the blood-soaked plain of Esdraelon, to be the scene of the last great conflict? I know not. All I know is that here we have two great truths taught us: first, that the last chapter in the world's history will be a final conflict between good and evil, between the Kingdom of Christ and the kingdom of Satan; and second, that that conflict will result in a grand and overwhelming victory, when all the forces of evil shall be put down and God shall be all and in all.

The Scriptures predict slow growth and development. But side by side with these predictions are the predictions of catastrophes, violence, and cataclysmic overthrows. This is in keeping with the history of the past. Always we can discern slow growth and development, the secret germination of great principles, and then sudden outbreaks, volcanic eruptions of wrath and judgment, Armageddons of divine intervention and retribution. It is not strange, therefore, that the history of mankind should come to a conclusion, so far as this world is concerned, with a great conflict such as is described in the vision of John. Do we not hear about us all the time the shock of contending beliefs, principles, ideas of life and of duty? What reason is there to think that that conflict is to go on forever, and that it will not terminate in one great and final test of strength?

The nations and the peoples were brought to Armageddon by these three evil, lying spirits, like unto frogs, the infernal trinity of dragon, beast, and false prophet. There is no doubt that that infernal trinity is at work in the world, and that it is seducing peoples and nations. There is no doubt about the work of the dragon, or the devil. The spirit of unbelief, of atheism, is abroad, in

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the earth as perhaps never before. Nor is there any doubt that the beast exercises a great fascination over the mind of humanity. The signs of this are written in unmistakable terms and colors, in the wave of licentiousness, sexual immorality, and indecency which pours like a flood through the literature, the drama, and the life of our age. Nor is there any doubt about the influence of the false prophet, for within the church itself we see multitudes misguided, misled, led to the slaughter of their faith, by those who speak in the name of God. All that John saw in his overwhelming vision we can match when we lift the curtain on our world today.

Formidable as are the hosts of evil led by supernatural spirits of unbelief and of wickedness, when Armageddon is over it is the dragon, the beast, and the false prophet who are cast into the lake of fire, and the Son of God who comes off conqueror and more than conqueror. Every true believer, every faithful church member, every Sunday-school teacher, every soul who speaks a word or does a deed in the name of Christ, is invited to behold the end of that battle and take heart. "Occupy till I come!" is the grand message of Christ to his church. To doubt the victory would be disloyalty; to falter would be sin. With such armies marching to the conflict, what would be the judgment upon him who, while pretending to follow the White Horse and his rider, is in reality a follower of the infernal trinity, living for this world only, worshipping the creature rather than the Creator, violating the commandments, forsaking the church and the Word of God? But on the other side, every humble, faithful, and true Christian shall have his share in that great victory, which shall put a period to the history of this world and enthrone Christ as King of kings and Lord of lords.

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When the sixth vial had been opened, and the infernal trinity led their hosts to Armageddon, the voice of Christ was heard in tones of warning and supplication, just before the armies clashed and the battle was joined: "Behold, I come as a thief. Blessed is he that watcheth, and keepeth his garments, lest he walk naked, and they see his shame." Always Christ comes suddenly, unexpectedly, like a thief in the night. Sometimes he comes in sickness and languishing disease; sometimes in accident; and sometimes in sudden death; and finally, and gloriously, at the end of the world. But however and whenever he comes, blessed is he who shall be found watching. Blessed is he who has confessed his sins and repented of them and had them washed away in the blood of the Lamb. In that day he shall not be found naked, but clothed in white, following the Captain of his salvation.

MOUNT ZION AND THE LIFE TO COME

“Ye are come unto Mount Zion, and
unto the city of the living God.”

HEB. 12:22

ZION IS A NAME WHICH SETS MANY CHORDS TO VIBRATING. It was first of all the name given to one of the hills, a natural fortress, at Jerusalem. In time Mount Zion came to stand for Jerusalem itself. The captives in Babylon, when they hung their harps among the willows in the midst thereof and thought of Jerusalem, “remembered Zion.” “By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, yea, we wept, when we remembered Zion.” Zion was precious to God. “The Lord loveth the gates of Zion more than all the dwellings of Jacob.” Majestic, terrible, tragic, beautiful, and sublime has been the history of Mount Zion and the city and the nation which had its center there. The name Zion came to be applied, not only to the fortress and the city, but also to the Jewish Church; and after that it was used as the name of the Christian Church. Today all over the world there are churches which bear the name “Mount Zion.”

But there is still another meaning to Mount Zion. It is used as a name, not for the earthly Jerusalem, but for the New Jerusalem, the heavenly Jerusalem, the City of God. In a sublime passage the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews, contrasting the heavenly city and the bless-

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ings of the Christian Church and the heavenly Mount Zion with Mount Sinai, which burned with fire and was shrouded with darkness and tempest when the Ten Commandments were given, says, "But ye are come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels." It is in this last sense, Mount Zion as the city of the living God and the home of the redeemed, that we shall consider this mountain now.

In one of the greatest passages in English fiction Charles Dickens in *Dombey and Son* describes the passing of little Paul. In his fancy the dying child was always hearing the rushing of a river, rolling away to meet the sea. Locked in the arms of his sister, Paul tells her how fast the river runs between the green banks of the rushes. At length the boat glides out to sea, and now he is standing upon the farther shore. He tells his sister that he sees his mother, whom he remembers only by a photograph on the wall, and how the light about her head is shining on him. The golden ripple on the wall, telling that evening is at hand, appears once more; but nothing else now stirs in the sick room. "The old, old fashion! The fashion that came in with our first garments, and will last unchanged until our race has run its course, and the wide firmament is rolled up like a scroll. The old, old fashion—Death!"

In this life we are constantly confronted by that old fashion, death. Thank God that in the Bible and in our Christian faith we are permitted to behold that other and older fashion, the fashion of immortality.

In one of the great visions of the book of Revelation, in which he describes the triumph of Christ, the over-

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throw of the kingdom of darkness and the victory of the church, John says that he saw a Lamb standing on Mount Zion, and with him "an hundred forty and four thousand, having his Father's name written in their foreheads." As he gazed, he heard "the voice of harpers harping with their harps: and they sung as it were a new song before the throne." What will it be like when we stand yonder by the side of the Lamb upon Mount Zion, in the city of our God? What will it be like when we "come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, and to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant"?

It is one thing to talk about heaven in a purely intellectual way, or as a proposition of theology. It is quite another thing to think about heaven and speak about heaven as the home of those we have loved and lost awhile. When we think and speak of heaven, we think of different faces and forms: one of a godly father or mother, another of a wife or husband, another of a brother or a sister, and still another of a little child.

One of my early recollections is that of seeing my mother standing before the fireplace in our dining room and looking up at the portrait which hung above the mantelpiece. She would address herself to that little girl, her first-born child, who died when she was three years of age, and would ask her where she was, and what she was doing now. "Where art thou now, my little lamb?" Often that thought will come to those who "think of the friends over there."

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Ah, Christ, that it were possible
For one short hour to see
The souls we loved, that they might tell us
What and where they be!

But we call, and no answer comes back, save the echo of our call. Only one person went to heaven and came back to earth, and he was not permitted to tell what he had seen. Paul said that he was caught up into paradise and heard wonderful things, such as it is not lawful for man to utter. Whatever he saw and whatever he heard, it must have been glorious indeed; but it did not please God to let Paul tell it, and no doubt that was for the best.

“Wilt thou shew wonders to the dead?” The psalmist, at least in the particular mood in which he was writing, was not sure that God would show wonders to the dead. In his great sickness and trial, with lover and friend put far from him, and with his life drawing nigh unto the grave, he draws back from its darkness and silence. But we have more light than he had, for Christ “hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.” We are absolutely certain that God will show wonders to the dead, and it is good for our souls, and comfort to our hearts, to think from time to time about those wonders.

HEAVEN AS A PLACE

The wonders of heaven will be the wonders of a place. Jesus said, “I go to prepare a place for you.” This would fit in with what Paul tells us about a resurrection body, and also with what he tells us about having been transported into paradise. Perhaps we have an unwarranted prejudice against thinking of heaven as a place as well

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as a state. Jesus said to the thief on the cross, "To day shalt thou be with me in paradise." John tells us of the heavenly city with its river of water of life, and its walls and gates flashing with precious stones; a city twelve thousand furlongs in every direction. That would be a city which would reach from Philadelphia to Denver, and from Florida to Canada. This, I suppose, is a figure of speech; yet back of this figure of speech must lie the fact of the reality of a heavenly place where heavenly beings live, and where they are conscious of each other's existence, just as there is an earthly place where earthly beings live. God has plenty of room in his universe for heaven. The astronomers tell us that the universe is so vast that our sun to the rest of the universe would be like the millionth part of a speck of dust in a great city. As that speck of dust to the whole city, so our solar system is to the vastness of the universe. God has plenty of room for heaven. Ezekiel, John, and Stephen, each one in far distant places—Ezekiel in Babylon, John on Patmos, and Stephen in Jerusalem—saw into heaven. It may be that heaven as a spiritual place lies all about us.

HEAVEN AS A STATE

Whatever it says about heaven as a place, the Bible has much more to say about heaven as a state. In his book *Religio Medici* Thomas Browne says that when men in this world begin to talk about the life of heaven, it is like two unborn infants discussing in their mother's womb the nature of this life. I do not feel that this is a true analogy. We are not infants. We have had experience. We have rejoiced; we have loved; we have suffered; we have hoped; and we can well imagine what would please and delight our souls in the world to come. But

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one asks, "Why not be content with the assurances of the Scriptures and leave it there—I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with thy likeness"; 'Where I am, there ye may be also'; and Paul's great assurance, 'Ever with the Lord.'" But the soul likes to go further than that. Tertullian once said, "Tell me what thou art, and I shall tell thee what thou shalt be." In other words, the life of the soul here in this world is a great mystery. But that does not prevent us from thinking and speaking about our life here in this world. Neither should the mystery which veils the life to come keep us from speaking and thinking about it.

Why are we not told more about heaven? The answer to that is not given us in the Bible. It may be that we have been told all we can receive at the present time. Paul said that "it was not lawful," and not possible, for him to utter what he had seen in paradise. Again, the probability is that more knowledge than we now possess would not bring us greater comfort, and would not warn our souls from evil more than the knowledge which we now have. Christ said that was so, at least concerning the punishments of the life to come; for he told the rich man in hell who wanted to have Lazarus sent to preach to his five brothers, that such preaching would have no effect upon them. "If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead."

Much of what is told us about heaven is on the negative side. When you think of it, that is not strange. If you were going to describe to an untutored native of the Arctic regions some tropical country, you could hardly give him an idea of what it was like by telling him the things that *are* there. What would palm trees mean to a man who had

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never seen anything but snow and ice? What would the flash of brilliantly colored birds mean to one who had never seen anything but the gull and penguin? What would the elephant, the striped tiger, or the tawny lion mean to one who had never seen anything but the polar bear or the floundering seal? You would have to begin the other way. You would have to describe that tropical land, first of all, by telling him what was *not* there—no ice, no snow, no polar bear, no polar night. So the Bible begins by telling us about the life beyond the grave. It tells us, first of all, what is *not* there.

“There shall be no more curse.” That means there shall be no more sin, the shadow of which is as universal as human nature and as eternal as human history. “There shall be no more death.” Death and sin ride together in the world. What a reign death has had, since that day when Cain looked upon the dying Abel, whose blood the earth had swallowed up, down to him who at this very moment has paid the debt we owe to nature! But now the last enemy has been destroyed. Death has lost its sting, and the grave its victory. “Neither can they die any more.”

“There shall be no more sea.” The unrest of life will be quieted. There shall be no more pain. No groan of misery shall echo by day, and no cry of anguish shall break the silence of the night. There shall be no more sorrow or sighing. How great the capacity of the human heart for sorrow! How wonderful, then, is this promise, that “God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes!”

“There shall be no night there.” This, of course, is figurative language. What it tells us is that there shall be no more sin, which brings midnight on the soul, and no more sorrow, which brings darkness to the heart.

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But now let us look on the positive side. Even if we had only these negative utterances about heaven, they would be sufficient for our comfort and hope. But we have more than that. Perhaps the most suggestive thing on the positive side is that saying of Paul, "As we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly." Here we have the image of the earthy, a relationship of body and soul perfectly suited to our earthly existence. There we shall have the image of the heavenly. But what will that image be like?

How will the change strike me and you
In the house not made with hands?

Paul said that Christ in his resurrection was the "first-fruits of them that slept." That is, Christ in his resurrection body is the prophecy of our resurrection body, and the model and the example of it. This lets us know that one of the wonders which God will show to the dead is the wonder of the resurrection body. The Christian doctrine is not redemption *from* the body, but redemption *of* the body, the body reunited to a redeemed soul. The Christian creed is not, "I believe in the life everlasting," but, "I believe in the resurrection of the body, *and* the life everlasting." To leave out that first clause is to leave out what the Bible tells us about the sanctity of the body, which is made in the image of God.

This present weak body is to be changed and made like unto the glorious body of Christ. Here the body is subject to weakness and sickness, and is under the bondage of sin. And yet even here, in this life, under the shadow and limitations of sin, how wonderful the body is! How true and beautiful the expression the body can give

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to the most sacred and sublime thoughts and feelings. If that is so now, then what will it be like when we shall bear the image of the heavenly; when we can labor without fatigue, launch great enterprises that shall never fail, and when the wings of aspiration shall never be furled because of weakness and of sickness? The mystic cherubim, graven on the walls of tabernacle and temple, with the head of the ox, the lion, and the eagle, were perhaps a symbol of the powers of man's resurrection body—the strength of the ox, the daring of the lion, and the eagle's mastery of space; a composite of all the powers of creation.

Again, the image of the heavenly will be the image of holiness. That will be another wonder that God will show to the dead. Here the image of the earthly is tainted and scarred with sin. Hence, the civil war and discord in our own hearts and the deep woe and agony of mankind. But when all this is no more; when all the redeemed have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb; when our souls no longer cleave to the dust; when man naturally loves what God loves; when there shall no longer be warfare between what we would like to do, and ought to do, and what we do; when the whole legion of evil spirits has been cast out of man, and he sits clothed and in his right mind at the foot of the Creator—all that God had in mind when he said, "Let us make man in our image"—then what will it be like? If, as Jesus said, the holy angels rejoice and sing over one sinner that repenteth, let us remember that what they are rejoicing and singing over is not merely what man has been delivered from, but what he has been restored to—the glorious image of God.

The wonders of heaven will be the wonders of high

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achievement. To do good, to achieve something worth while, to create something beautiful, useful, and enduring—that is one of the highest joys of this life. I am sure it will be one of the highest joys of the life to come. In the parables of the pounds and the talents Jesus teaches, not merely that this life is a trial and probation for the next, but that the life to come will give new and unlimited opportunity. Instead of ruling over a few things, the soul shall rule over many things. Instead of ruling over one city, it shall rule over ten cities. In this life the greatest of human undertakings are related to the sorrows and sins and ignorance and sufferings of mankind. But when all that has passed away, what will the work of a redeemed soul be? All we can say is that there must be a higher ministry and service in store for us. What it will be, goes beyond our comprehension; but we can be sure that it will be worthy of the redeemed body and the redeemed soul. Tennyson was sure that for Wellington

There must be other nobler work to do
Than when he fought at Waterloo.

And Matthew Arnold was certain that his father, Thomas Arnold, the master of Rugby, was still doing the will of God in the unseen world:

Still thou performest the word
Of the Spirit in whom thou dost live.

What has Abraham been doing since they buried him in the cave of Machpelah? Over what kingdoms has Joseph been ruling as prime minister since they buried him “in a coffin in Egypt”? What lands has Joshua conquered since he won Canaan for God’s people? What

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kings has Samuel anointed since they buried him in Ramah? What has Jeremiah been doing since they carried him down into Egypt? What souls has Barnabas, the "son of consolation," been able to comfort since they stoned him in the market place at Salamis? To whom have Mary and Martha been able to minister since they entertained Jesus for the last time at Bethany? To whom has eloquent Stephen preached the gospel since that day they stoned him, "calling upon God, and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit"?

Finally, the wonders of heaven will be the wonders of joy and love. Man was created for joy. That is why the morning stars sang together and all the sons of God shouted for joy over the creation of man. Christ said he came that man's joy might be full. In the life to come we shall drink of the cup of divine joy. "At thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore."

One of the joys of heaven will certainly be the joy of reunion and recognition. Here friend after friend departs; but there, after the long and silent separation, will come the joy of reunion. Here for life's most tender relationship it is "until death do us part." When Thomas Jefferson was leaving forever his beautiful home at Monticello, he told his daughter Martha that he had left in a drawer something for her to read when he was gone. This is what he had written: "On that shore which crowns all my hopes, or which buries my care, I will find awaiting me two seraphs, long shrouded in death." The two to whom he referred were his wife and his daughter Maria. There it was not the political philosopher, statesman, or freethinker, who was speaking, but the universal heart of man.

Reunion and recognition in heaven are assumed in the

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Bible; but it is also, at least inferentially, taught. Paul looked forward to the day when he would meet those to whom he had preached the gospel at Thessalonica; and in the beautiful and oft-quoted passage in the First Epistle to the Thessalonians he tells those who are in sorrow for their beloved dead to "comfort one another" with the words which he had spoken to them about the resurrection of the dead at Christ's second coming. But there could be no comfort in those words unless they carried with them the assurance that those mourning Thessalonians would know in the resurrection those whom they had "loved and lost awhile." To the thief on the cross Jesus said, "To day shalt thou be with me in paradise." The immense significance of the repentance of that thief, and his salvation between the cross and the grave, marvelous though it was, must not be permitted to eclipse the teaching of Christ as to the future conscious existence of the soul and its bliss in paradise. Jesus said to his disciples, "I go to prepare a place for you, . . . that where I am, there ye may be also." That was to comfort them in view of his coming separation from them. But there would have been no comfort in it, if when reunited with Christ they did not know him.

The New Testament employs five beautiful metaphors when it comes to describe the change from the earthly life to the heavenly. One is that of moving out of a frail and perishable tent into a permanent house, the house not made with hands, God's building for our soul, eternal in the heavens. Paul says we have a building from God, a house not made with hands; and Peter speaks of "putting off" his tabernacle, or tent.

Another metaphor is that of the exodus. Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration spoke with Moses and Elijah

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about his "exodus" on the cross from this life. The children of Israel made an exodus out of the land of Egypt and out of the house of bondage to the land of Canaan. So at death the believer makes an exodus and passes from the bondage and limitations of this life into the heavenly Kingdom.

A third metaphor is that of sleep. Jesus said of the daughter of Jairus and of Lazarus that they were not dead, but sleeping. Luke said that Stephen, after he had been stoned by the mob, "fell asleep." And Paul said, "We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed." For the believer, death is like the slumber of the night, out of which we awaken to the life of a new and greater day.

A fourth metaphor is the "unmooring," or the sailing of the ship. That is the figure of speech Paul used when he was himself on the margin of the other world. In his last message he said to Timothy, "The time of my departure is at hand"—literally, the unloosing of the ship from its mooring. How beautiful that is! The time for my sailing has come. There in the harbor at Seleucia or Miletus, or Rhodes, lies the ship, lifting up and down with the sea, straining at the hawser, as the seamen lift the anchor and hoist the horizontal sails; and away into the golden sunlight the ship sails on its journey to its unseen port across the seas. So is it at death. The time has come to unmoor the ship and start on the last great voyage to the heavenly port:

Sunset and evening star,
And one clear call for me!
And may there be no moaning of the bar,
When I put out to sea.

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MOUNTAINS AND MOUNTAIN MEN OF THE BIBLE

The fifth metaphor, the one which comes nearest to our hearts, is that of "going home." That was the one used by Jesus himself when he was bidding farewell to his disciples: "In my Father's house [or home] are many mansions. . . . I go to prepare a place for you, . . . that where I am, there ye may be also." For the believer, death is the "going home." That is the way the devout used to speak of it. They never said that mother, or father, or brother, or son, or daughter, or husband, or wife, had died, but that they had "gone home."

We think at first that home is heaven;
We learn at last that Heaven is home.

At the family altar in our home, when he prayed with and for the family, my father was wont to say, "May we all get home at last." That is my prayer for you and for me: "May we all get home at last." May we all stand one day by the side of the Lamb on Mount Zion, and sing the new song of our love and praise unto him that "loved us and washed us from our sins in his own blood."

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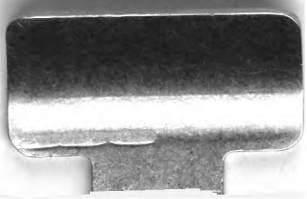
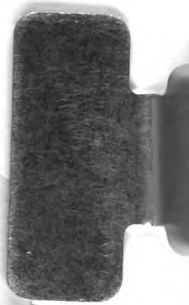
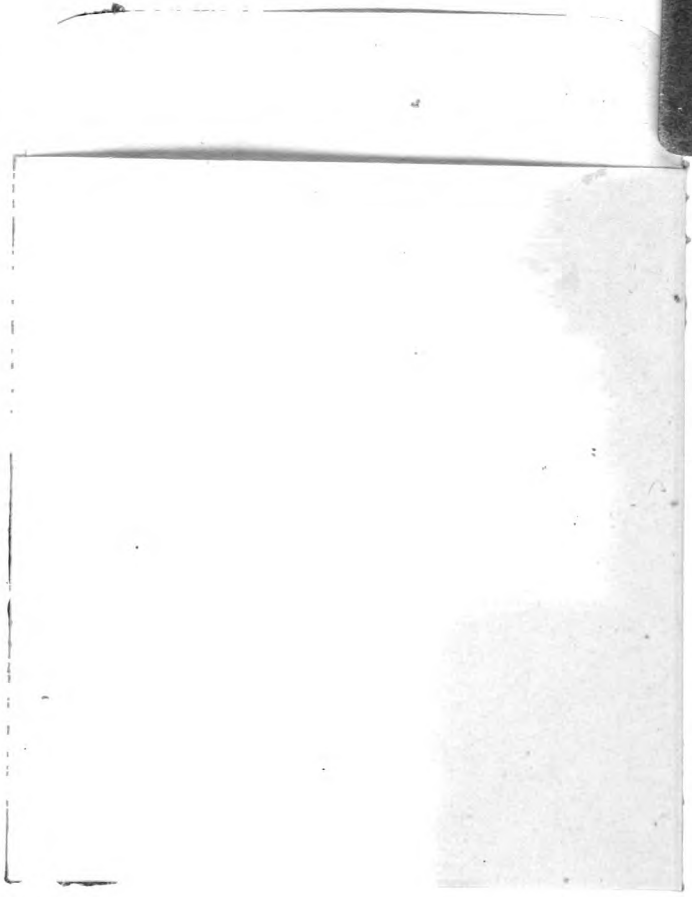


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