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THE SHORT COURSE SERIES

THE SEVENFOLD *I AM*

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General Preface

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CHARLES SCRIBNER'S SONS

The Short Course Series

EDITED BY

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THE SEVENFOLD I AM

BY THE

REV. THOMAS MARJORIBANKS, B.D.
" COLINTON



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TO
MY PARISHIONERS
PAST AND PRESENT

TO THE
MEMBERS OF THE
PARISH OF ST. MARY'S
CATHOLIC CHURCH
OF BOSTON

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“NOT as one blind and deaf to our beseeching,
Neither forgetful that we are but dust,
Not as from heavens too high for our up-reaching,
Coldly sublime, intolerably just :

“Nay, but Thou knewest us, Lord Christ, Thou
knowest,
Well Thou rememberest our feeble frame ;
Thou canst conceive our highest and our lowest,
Pulses of nobleness and aches of shame . . .

“Yea, thro’ life, death, thro’ sorrow and thro’ sinning,
He shall suffice me, for He hath sufficed :
Christ is the end, for Christ was the beginning,
Christ the beginning, for the end is Christ.”

F. W. H. MYERS, *Saint Paul.*

I

CHRIST AND OUR DARKNESS

I

CHRIST AND OUR DARKNESS

“I AM the Light of the world : he that followeth Me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the Light of life.”
—St. JOHN viii. 12.

PROBABLY nothing in all nature has been more constantly used to express spiritual ideas than light. This is perhaps owing to the fact that light, besides being a great blessing in itself, is the indispensable preliminary to a great many others. “Let there be light” is the first word spoken on the day of Creation ; not till that has been achieved can anything else take shape or form. Light is so indispensable to our work, so closely associated with our knowledge, so necessary to our happiness, that even when we use the word figuratively we forget that it is a figure. Darkness becomes inevitably associated with

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ignorance, sorrow, sin ; light with knowledge, truth, happiness. All great religions, notably that of ancient Persia, have symbolised the conflict of good and evil as a strife between the powers of light and those of darkness. In the Bible, from Genesis to Revelation, we find light employed to signify the highest of blessings not only in the natural but in the spiritual world. On its very last page is the promise "There shall be no night there."

It is interesting to trace what Scripture says of light in relation to God Himself. At first it might seem that there is little light about Him ; He dwells in the thick darkness and makes the clouds His chariot. Gradually, however, we are made to see that the darkness is not in Himself, but in men's conceptions of Him. More and more of His nature is unfolded, more and more of His light revealed. Till at last we reach the emphatic testimony of St. John—"God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all."

The coming of the Messiah was more than once referred to as a light to illumine the

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world's darkness. Isaiah had said, "The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light; they that dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them hath the light shined." Zacharias, in the *Benedictus*, speaks of Him as "the Dayspring from on high," sent "to give light to them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace." St. John says, "In Him was life; and the life was the light of men. And the light shineth in darkness, and the darkness comprehended it not. . . . That was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world." These and other sayings prepare us for the gracious yet lofty claim which our Lord Himself makes here—"I am the Light of the world: he that followeth Me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the Light of life."

THE OCCASION.

The circumstances under which the words were spoken are worthy of special notice. Scholars are fairly well agreed that the pas-

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sage, St. John vii. 53–viii. 11, immediately preceding this verse, and containing the account of the woman taken in adultery, is an interpolation, and ought not to stand where it does. This makes our text immediately follow what is said in the previous chapter as to the events which happened at the Feast of Tabernacles. This feast was a sort of national harvest-home, in which the people dwelt in booths to remind them of those their fathers had dwelt in when they first came out of Egypt. Two customs, observed at this festival, merit our attention in view of our Lord's words. In one of them the element used was water. The people went each morning, after sacrifice, to the fountain of Siloam. The priest filled a golden pitcher from the fountain, and brought it back amid general manifestations of rejoicing, after which it was poured out beside the altar of burnt offering. In the other ceremony the symbol was fire, or light. On the evenings of the festival the temple-courts were illuminated by four great candelabra erected in the court of the women. There a sort of

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sacred dance was held, to the accompaniment of singing and playing on instruments. Both of these strange ceremonies were full of significance, as reminding the people of events which had occurred in the wilderness. The two chief terrors of the desert are its waterlessness and its pathlessness. God had supplied both of these wants. He had given His people water from the smitten rock, and He had given them a pillar of fire to guide them on their way. The water from the rock, then, was commemorated at the Feast of Tabernacles by the pouring out of water from the golden pitcher, while the pillar of fire was recalled by the lighting of the great lamps. In speaking of Himself and His influence, our Lord makes use of both symbols. Referring to the water, He says, "If any man thirst, let him come unto Me and drink," and adds, "He that believeth on Me, as the Scripture hath said, out of his bosom shall flow rivers of living water." That is, If you come to Me, not only will your own spiritual thirst be quenched, but you will be the means, through Me, of satis-

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fyng the spiritual thirst of other men. Then, referring to the light, He says, "I am the Light of the world," and adds, "He that followeth Me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the Light of life." That is, If you come to Me, not only will your own spiritual darkness be enlightened, but you will have within yourself, through Me, that which will make you in turn a light to yourself and others. From the simple elements of water and light, and from the associations which these called up in the hearts of the people, our Lord thus draws two lessons about His own work for and through men. He gives life to the thirsty and light to the darkened.

The figures are both suggestive, and the difference between them is no less striking than their resemblance. Water and light satisfy two great human needs, but they satisfy them in different ways. Water cannot affect a man's thirst till he comes and drinks it. Light, on the contrary, may flash on a multitude all at once, and with no conscious effort on their part. The figure of

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drinking the living water, then, is expressive of a man's relation to Christ at a more advanced stage. But the shining of the light is better adapted to illustrate the first contact of Christ with men—a contact universal and involuntary on their part. No doubt the second part of the sentence is in the singular—"he that followeth Me." But the first part is of universal application. It is not, I am the Light of this man, or of that man, but "I am the Light of the world."

CHRIST THE LIGHT.

In this saying our Lord makes two separate statements. He is at once the Light of the world and the Light of life. First, He is the Light for all—good and bad, friends and enemies, followers and non-followers. Secondly, and in a fuller though narrower sense, He is the Light for a certain number—those who follow Him, believe in Him, possess Him. To these He is the Light of life—a light shining within them as a source of vitality and spiritual influence.

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I. THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD.

The character of Christ's influence—light.—

Just because Jesus is to become so much more to men than this, He must begin by being this and no more. Light, as we saw at the outset, is the indispensable preliminary to everything else. Its function is not so much to make things different, as to show them in a new and true aspect. We must beware of unduly elaborating the metaphor of light, or of reading into it meanings other than our Lord intended. There was no thought in His mind, for example, of the healing and cleansing properties which light is now known to possess. He used the word in the simple sense of revelation and illumination. "Whatsoever doth make manifest," says St. Paul, "is light." It is in this sense that we apply the word to Christ. Compare the Old Testament with the New, and you find the Old like a dark room irradiated from time to time with intermittent flashes, the New like a room full of light, with only here and there a dark corner. The difference lies in the

Christ and Our Darkness

fact that the New, unlike the Old, is written in the full light of Christ. He sheds new light on everything. He reveals God, showing us His truth, wisdom, and power, and especially His fatherly and forgiving love. He reveals Himself, showing us in word and deed the nature and purpose of His mission to the world. He reveals sin, and its hues blacken as they are brought into the radiance of His light. He reveals the world, and tells us of the enemies we must meet and conquer, and of our brothers and our duties toward them. On all subjects of the deepest human interest—on the kingdom of God, on man's character and chief end, on service and sacrifice—He informs and enlightens us. When He speaks on these things He gets to the heart of them. He brushes aside the non-essential and irrelevant, and takes us to the root of the matter. Whatever He touches He illumines. Nor can we confine the name "light" to His teaching alone. Even His significant words here were shortly followed by as significant an act—the restoration of sight to the blind. In His whole

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personality, especially as interpreted in His great sacrifice for man, there shines forth a Light greater than any mere words can express—a Light that may be rejected but cannot be ignored.

From the power of light to reveal comes its power to search, to test, to judge. It throws good and evil into strong contrast. Even if Christ did nothing else, we should value Him for the searchlight He throws upon the world. Men must become better or worse after having known Christ. "His appearing separates the lovers of the day from the lovers of the night, mingled till then in the mass of mankind." He Himself spoke of the light as a judge between good and evil. "Light," He said, "is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved. But he that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God." We see examples of this in the

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effect which Christ produced on different people. The Pharisee and hypocrite were repelled by Him because He reproved their deeds and showed them in their true colours. On the other hand, those who "did the truth," with whatever of imperfection and frailty, came to the light. If Christ is the great Unifier, He is first the great Separator. With His revelation of the beauty of holiness comes His revelation of the ugliness of evil.

The scope of Christ's influence—the world.
—His appeal is world-wide; He makes no distinctions; He offers Himself to all. His gospel is, "God so loved *the world* that He gave His only-begotten Son." His claim is, "I am the Light of *the world*." His commission is, "Go ye into all *the world*, and preach the gospel to every creature." Christianity, from its very nature, cannot take its place as a local or partial religion. It rests on the universal forgiving love of God as shown forth in Jesus Christ, and accordingly makes its appeal to the world. There is that in Christianity which can appeal to the educated and to the ignorant, to the

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great and to the humble, to the mind of the East and the mind of the West. Christ speaks to men as men, caring little for what they have, much for what they are. Look at the history of Christianity, and you find it a faith that has been responded to by the genius of peoples so widely different as the Jew, the Greek, the Roman, the Teuton, the Celt. History is the basis of prophecy, and prophecy is already being fulfilled. We are seeing to-day how the Light of the world can shine over the far Eastern lands—how He has a message for India and Africa, for China and Japan. We are giving these nations many things. We are giving them the fruits of our inventive genius; we are giving them much that has enriched Western life and added to our material well-being. We are also giving them, it is to be feared, things that will profit them less. It has been said by competent observers that “when an Eastern and a Western nation infringe upon each other, the contact in some mysterious way tends to bring out the worst there is in each.” Surely, then, it is of all the greater

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importance that we should not fail to give them, with whatever else, that which is the best of all—the Light of the world. We must be witnesses of Him “unto the uttermost parts of the earth.”

2. THE LIGHT OF LIFE.

A guiding Light.—So far we have considered our Lord as the Light of all who see Him—good and bad, saints and sinners. But His work does not end there. To some He is the Light in a fuller sense. “He that followeth Me shall not walk in darkness.” Light can guide as well as reveal. Tennyson has told us, in “Merlin and the Gleam,” of the spirit of poetry which showed him his power, and bade him follow a pure and high ideal, in dark as in bright hours.

The light retreated,
The landskip darken'd,
The melody deaden'd,
The Master whisper'd,
Follow the gleam.

“Follow the gleam” is the message of Christ also. We have seen how He had in

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His mind the guiding pillar in the wilderness—a light amid surrounding darkness. This same guiding office of light is recognised by the Psalmist—"Thy Word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path." After the same manner, too, the Wise Men were led on their way to Bethlehem by the Star. In the *Pilgrim's Progress* Evangelist asks Christian if he can see the wicket gate, and he answers, "No." He then asks, "Do you see yonder shining light?" and on receiving the answer, "I think I do," adds, "Keep that light in your eye, and go up directly thereto, so shalt thou see the gate." So, too, it was with Newman when he sang—

Lead, kindly Light, amid th' encircling gloom,
Lead Thou me on!

To those that follow Him, Christ is a guiding Light. He leads us on from less to more; He warns us of hidden dangers; He sheds radiance on our path. "He that followeth Me shall not walk in darkness."

An indwelling Light.—The final words,

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“shall have the Light of life,” transcend even the figure of a guiding Light. Indeed, we need not unduly press the idea of *following*; elsewhere He speaks of coming to the light, believing in the light, abiding in the light. And here He seems to suggest that His followers will have an experience transcending that of the people of Israel. *They* had but an external means of knowing which way they were to go. His disciples, on the other hand, are to have a light within them, enabling them to choose what is right, and to walk as children of light. To *have* the Light of life implies that it is not merely in front but within. As Milton puts the thought—

He that has light within his own clear breast
May sit i' the centre, and enjoy bright day;
But he that hides a dark soul and foul thoughts
Benighted walks under the mid-day sun;
Himself is his own dungeon.

George Fox and the early Quakers insisted strongly on this doctrine of the “inner light.” They believed that that same light which revealed and made manifest would, if yielded to, lead out of sin to life. The doctrine is

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profoundly true. As St. John beautifully shows in his first Epistle, walking in the light and abiding in the light are connected at once with fellowship with God and love of our fellow-men. The man who obeys the light becomes himself luminous. The same Jesus who said, "I am the Light of the world," said also, "Ye are the light of the world"—a light which in its turn is meant to reveal and to guide and to inspire.

Heaven doth with us as we with torches do;
Not light them for themselves; for if our virtues
Did not go forth of us, 'twere all alike
As if we had them not.

And so the process goes on, each lighted torch lighting another in turn. In all ages and in all nations some men have been lights in the world. They have shone before men, and given light to them, passing on the radiance received from Him whose life is the Light of men. Every Christian can shine. The influence of even the humblest life may be incalculable.

How far that little candle throws his beams!
So shines a good deed in a naughty world.

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Thus, though the image of light seem at first to suggest a very elementary relation between Christ and ourselves, it may carry us farther than we think. Let us not be satisfied with yielding homage to Him as the Light of the world. Let each of us make Him the Light for his or her individual soul. To such He will become not merely a light above, like the sun in the heavens; nor even a light in front, like a guiding lamp on a winter's night; but a light within. "The spirit of man is the candle of the Lord."

II

CHRIST AND OUR HOMELESSNESS

II

CHRIST AND OUR HOMELESSNESS

“I AM the Door : by Me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture.”

—ST. JOHN X. 9.

A DOOR forms an extremely significant symbol. It may be open, or it may be shut ; and, if it be shut, there is all the difference in the world between being on one side of it or on the other. The opening and shutting of certain doors, such as those of the Temple of Janus in Rome, have been attended with great solemnity. Artists have lavished their highest skill on doors, and significant legends have been engraved over them. The door is the crucial point ; pass the door and you are all right ; be turned back at the door and you are all wrong. On the duty of keeping some doors open that

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are too often shut, and also on the duty of keeping some doors shut that are too often open, much might be written. The subject is a wide and a fascinating one. The idea evidently appealed specially to the mind of our Lord, for He makes no less than three different uses of the symbol to express the relation between Himself and His people.

1 Sometimes He is inside the door, as where He says, "To him that knocketh it shall be opened," or in the parable of the Virgins, where "the door was shut." Sometimes He

2 is outside the door. "Behold, I stand at the door, and knock; if any man will hear My voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with Me." But sometimes, as here, He is Him-

3 self the Door, and this is His most significant use of the figure. "I am the Door: by Me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture."

THE OCCASION.

As usual, the circumstances under which the words were spoken shed considerable

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light on their meaning. In the previous chapter we read of a work of healing performed by our Lord—the restoration of sight to a blind man. The gratitude which this man showed towards his Healer brought him into conflict with the authorities of the synagogue, with the result that they “cast him out”—shut their doors upon him. On his meeting Jesus shortly afterwards, our Lord asked him, “Dost thou believe on the Son of God?” It needs but a few words to show him that Jesus is indeed that Son of God; he says, “Lord, I believe,” and worships Him. The words about the sheepfold come almost immediately afterwards, and probably refer in the first instance to the case of this man. From the religious point of view he is homeless, outcast, excommunicate. What Jesus offers him, accordingly, is a new and better home. He invites this man who has been “turned out of doors” to enter the Door of the kingdom—to accept Himself.

Many have been comforted by the assurance that Christ's door is open to them

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though other doors be shut. At the degradation of Savonarola prior to his execution, the Bishop of Vasona said, "I separate thee from the Church militant and triumphant." "From the Church militant," corrected Savonarola, "not from the Church triumphant. The latter is not in thy hands." At the deposition of John Macleod Campbell by the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, the young man's father said, "I am not afraid for my son. Though his brethren cast him out, the Master whom he serves will not forsake him."

CHRIST THE DOOR.

This figure of Christ the Door is apt to be obscured by the still greater figure of Christ the Good Shepherd. From His picture of the sheepfold He selects these two images, and applies them successively to Himself. The relation of the two to each other may indeed be closer than we are apt to think. "Door" and "Shepherd" are not such mutually exclusive words as they appear to us. A well-known traveller in

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Palestine has told how he once entered into conversation with a shepherd at work near a sheepfold. Many things he learned from him, but the best of all came unexpectedly. Every feature the traveller expected to see was there, excepting one. "Here," he said, "is the fold ; there are the sheep ; this is the doorway ; but where is the door ?" "Door ?" asked the shepherd. "*I am the door !* I lie across the entrance at night. No sheep can pass out, no wolf come in, except over my body." It is better for our present purpose, however, to take the two figures apart than to press them as the component parts of a single parable. We do not, it is true, find it easy to discover to which figure some of the verses apply. None of the attempts to divide the allegory sharply into two have been quite successful, or need be repeated here. It seems enough to observe that Jesus saw the suggestiveness of both the figures *Door* and *Shepherd*, *Door* being the more obvious and general figure, *Shepherd* lending itself to greater elaboration. It is therefore the Shepherd-figure rather than

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the Door-figure that He treats in detail. With regard to the Door He does not say much, yet He says enough. The essence of what He says is contained in this one verse.

Its central lesson is that Christ is the one Door, the one entrance into the kingdom of heaven ; that it is by Him and by Him alone that men can enter their Father's home. There is no room for the thief and robber, the formalist or hypocrite, who climb over the wall instead of entering by the gate. If the one Door be open, it matters little what others remain shut ; but, conversely, if that Door be shut, it matters little what others are open. Christianity must start from Christ. It is impossible to teach it apart from Him. Not without significance was the temple-veil rent at His death, opening forever a door into the Holiest of all. The very panels of a common door are often arranged so as to produce the figure of a Cross. It is said that this originated with a guild of Carpenters, who took as their emblem the Cross on the Door, with

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the words of our text as motto. The symbolism, at all events, is a true one. Christ and His Cross are inseparable. Whoso enters by the Door must take up the Cross. Dr. Elder Cumming's poem expresses the same idea—

Hast thou ne'er seen the Cross upon the Door?
Yes! it is on thine own!
Look, even now, across th' accustomed floor,
Thou deemest so well known!

You have not noticed it? The Cross unseen,
Though on the Door it stands?
Large, clear, in full relief, as it had been
Carved there by reverent hands?

.
O Man! could'st thou have thought it possible
That this thing could have been?
The Cross so large, so plain, so close to thee,
And yet so long unseen?

Yes—the Door that we enter must be the Door with the Cross upon it. We may find it a strait gate; we may have to leave much behind as we go in. But it is the one Door into the home of our Father. And the Door is Christ Himself.

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We have called this theme "Christ and our homelessness" because what He offers us here is neither more nor less than a Home. The crossing of the threshold is an entrance into life—life on a higher plane—life hid with Christ in God.

The chief benefits of such a life, as described here, we may define as Refuge, Freedom, and Nurture.

I. A HOME OF REFUGE.

"By Me if any man enter in, he shall be saved." That is the first and most obvious blessing. It is to a friendly door that we look for refuge in a storm. Readers of *The Pirate* will remember the anger of the hospitable Shetlanders at the bare idea of keeping a door bolted against a stranger who sought its protection from the tempest. The idea of refuge or sanctuary is one of those most deeply rooted in the feelings of mankind. We find the rudiments of it even in savage peoples, such as the natives of Central Australia and the North American Indians. Among more advanced nations certain places,

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such as the tombs of kings, were regarded as asylums where a fugitive might find safety. We find the erection of Cities of Refuge commanded in the Mosaic law, and we find something resembling them in both Greece and Rome. But especially in the Church of Christ has the idea of refuge or sanctuary found favour. Churches were long regarded as places where the offender was safe, at least till his case could be fairly tried. His capture or molestation within the sacred walls was deemed an act of impiety. No doubt the practice was often abused. Criminals of the worst description were sometimes harboured, who could pursue their evil courses undeterred by the fear of consequences. Yet, as Dean Milman well remarks, "there is something sublime in the first notion of asylum." We cannot wonder at the association of refuge with God Himself, as One who is at once strong, just, and loving. "God is our refuge and strength," says the 46th Psalm, "a very present help in trouble." And when our Saviour calls Himself the Door, He gives

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refuge as one of the first benefits enjoyed by those who enter. "By Me if any man enter in, he shall be saved." Saved from what will most harm him ; saved from the dangers outside ; saved from evil men and evil spirits ; saved from himself and from his sins. Such hymns as Charles Wesley's "Jesus, Lover of my soul," and Toplady's "Rock of ages, cleft for me," breathe the instinctive cry for refuge and safety, for deliverance from peril, for salvation from sin. This is what Jesus offers. Whatever else He is, He is the Saviour—the One who seeks and saves and rescues. The primary idea of a home is that of a roof to shelter us, a protection from danger. These things we have in Christ.

O call Thy wanderer home ;
To that dear home, safe in Thy wounded side,
Where only broken hearts their sin and shame may hide.

2. A HOME OF FREEDOM.

"By Me if any man enter in, he shall . . . go in and out." The allusion is in the first place to the door of the sheepfold. But the words may be used with a wider reference,

Christ and Our Homelessness

and may remind us of the liberty wherewith Christ makes us free. At first sight the idea of "going in and out" may seem inconsistent with what was said before. We must be either inside or outside the gate of mercy. But the inconsistency is only apparent. When the door has once been opened to the homeless, he is free to go out as well as to come in. He does not need to knock a second time ; he is made free of the house and can enter it when he chooses ; even when out he is no longer homeless. The door is not shut to him on the inside, any more than on the outside ; the home is no prison. It is not to the cloister-life that Christ calls His people. His service is perfect freedom. "Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty." Jesus found bondage and slavery everywhere. Not merely was the country of His birth in subjection to a foreign yoke ; but its citizens were enslaved in bonds that they had forged for themselves. No one was free. One class was governed by its traditions and prejudices ; another had intolerable burdens

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laid on it by priestcraft; another was in a worse bondage through being cast off by the rest of society: all were in that deeper slavery that sin itself must cause, when no way of escape from it is seen. From all this Christ came to make men free. Not by force, not by political agitation, not even by schemes of social reform, but by His Spirit working from within, He led men into the free, fresh atmosphere of God's own truth. This sense of freedom we find in all the writers of the New Testament; freedom from the curse of the law; freedom from the burden of their sins; freedom given them by Christ. Ability to "go in and out," then, is one of the chief privileges of the Christian life. It is not inconsistent with this to say that it may make that life harder to live. To have our conversation on earth, yet in heaven; our affection set on things around, yet on things above; our life open with men in the world, yet hid with Christ in God; the task is no easy one. Yet the true Christian is the man who can go in and out. He is the same man in his religion as in his

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business. He can come out from the inner sanctuary of his life, fortified by all he has learned there, and he can re-enter it with all the experience he has gained in the world of affairs. He obeys and is judged by a law, but it is the "law of liberty."

3. A HOME OF NURTURE.

"By Me if any man enter in, he shall . . . find pasture." He shall find pasture without as well as within ; perhaps more without than within. But his power to find it and to feed on it will depend on what he has gained within the Door. What Christ offers us, as we have seen already, is, briefly, a home ; and a home gives nurture as well as protection. In the home we not only live ; we grow. And while that on which we feed may come from many sources, the home is the centre of all. We get ideas from this source and from that ; but our impressions are steadied, focused given their due perspective and proportion, under the roof which shelters us. Of course this is not always so ; there is bad home influence as well as good.

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But we are speaking of the ideal ; and the home Christ offers is such. We may feel that the figure of the Door has retreated, so to speak, into the background. But this is only because it has opened the way to so much more. Implicitly it contains a great deal beyond itself. Admit a man within your door, and you have gone far towards admitting him to your fireside and your table. The beginning and the fruition of membership in Christ are symbolically represented in some churches by the font at the western entrance and the Holy Table at the eastern end. But both are under the same roof, and represent only different stages in the Christian life. Admission within the door leads on to nurture and fellowship. The life in Christ is a life rich in spiritual blessing and progress. We come to find riches in it of which we never dreamed when we first embraced it. It is a growth, whose end is potentially contained in its beginning, as the flower and fruit are in the seed. "You may say," writes Marcus Dods, "you are saved when you fairly put yourself into

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Christ's hand, but you must also remember that then your salvation is only beginning, and that you cannot, in the fullest sense, say you are saved until Christ has wrought in you a perfect conformity to Himself." Christ does not develop here the idea of nurture. It is given fuller expression under the figure of the Bread of Life. Here it is only mentioned and no more. We get, as it were, only a glimpse through the Door into the life within, with all its privileges and benefits. But the glimpse should be enough to inspire us with confidence, and to encourage us to enter if we have not done so before.

Christ the Door, then, is Christ as the entrance to the Christian life. He is the Alpha as He is the Omega ; He meets us at the very beginning. What He offers us is a home : a centre from which to live, a standpoint from which to view everything else. His only condition is that we do enter the Door ; that we take our stand inside and not outside. For if we do, though we may go in and out, and find pasture without as

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well as within, we are saved, and shall be saved from the evil both in ourselves and in the world.

Let us not be afraid to make a beginning. True, the beginning is not all ; many have begun to build and have not been able to finish. The worst enemies of Christianity have been those who first espoused and then deserted its cause ; Judas, who betrayed his Lord ; Demas, who loved this present world. We are warned not to begin without counting the cost. But with many of us the danger rather lies in the direction of never beginning at all ; and while the man who begins may not finish, the man who never begins cannot. If the road to hell be paved with good intentions, the road to heaven is paved with them too. There is truth in the proverb, "Well begun, half done." Enter, then, by the Door. Enter, and you will never regret the step you took. Enter, and you will be led on from grace to grace and from strength to strength. There is no good to be got from hesitating on the threshold ; you must be on one side or other. Choose you this

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day whom you will serve. Now is the accepted time. The Door that stands open to-day may, for one or other of many causes which we cannot foresee, be shut to us to-morrow.

“Would a man 'scape the rod?”

(Rabbi ben Karshook saith)

“See that he turn to God

The day before his death.”

“Ay, could a man enquire

When it shall come!” I say.

(The Rabbi's eye shoots fire)

“Then let him turn to-day!”

III

CHRIST AND OUR WAYWARDNESS

III

CHRIST AND OUR WAYWARDNESS

“I AM the Way, the Truth, and the Life ; no man cometh unto the Father, but by Me.”—ST. JOHN xiv. 6.

WE must beware, of course, of spoiling our Lord's metaphors about Himself by trying to make them parts of one consistent figure. They were spoken at different times, as circumstances suggested ; they were not, for the most part, used with any distinct reference to one another. When our Lord called Himself the Door, for example, He was not thinking of a door opening on to a way, but in to an enclosure ; and when He called Himself the Way, the image of the Door was not before His mind. Yet it is no idle fancy to associate the two images with one another. Our Lord Himself did so when He said, “Wide is the

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gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction." . . . "Strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life." The association of the two has been further familiarised to us in the *Pilgrim's Progress*, where no sooner has the traveller entered the Gate than he is pointed to the one and only Way. There is no "way" before coming to the gate; he may come to it by any route; as a matter of fact he chooses a very roundabout one. But once he is there, the way is clear and definite. Many persons and things may lead us to Christ, but only Christ can lead us, in a full sense, to God. Thus the Door and the Way may be regarded as complementary figures, each having its part in any right conception of what Christ does for us. Entering by a Door is a single decisive act; traversing a Way is a long continuous process. In religion, as in everything, it is important that there should be a fixed and definite starting-point; a basis from which to work. But it cannot be too often insisted upon that this is only the beginning. He that putteth

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on his harness must not boast as he that taketh it off. There must be continual progress in the Christian life. And in view of this two-fold need—a definite start and a regular march—it is surely not without significance that He who said, “I am the Door,” said also, “I am the Way”; that He Who said, “By Me if any man enter in, he shall be saved,” said also, “No man cometh unto the Father, but by Me.” By the one Door we enter; by the one Way we travel. In the one case Christ offers Himself to us in our homelessness—offers us a Door, a home, with its refuge, its freedom, its nurture. In the other He corrects our waywardness, offers us a Way of truth and a Way of life, to keep us alike from error and from sin, and to lead us to the Father Who is the source of all truth and life.

The three words here applied by our Saviour to Himself—Way, Truth, and Life—have always been felt to possess a special attractiveness—an attractiveness perhaps all the greater because the relation of the three ideas to one another is not immediately

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apparent. Even the coincidence that in Latin, the language of medieval theology, they form an alliteration—*Via, Veritas, Vita*—has proved attractive, and has led to such elaborations as Augustine's *Vera via vitæ*, and Bernard's *Via in exemplo, veritas in promisso, vita in præmio*. As an example of the way in which men loved to enlarge on this theme, we may take the following from Thomas à Kempis :—

“Follow Me ; I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life.

“Without the Way, there is no going ; without the Truth, there is no knowing ; without the Life, there is no living.

“I am the Way which thou must follow, the Truth which thou must believe, the Life which thou must hope for.

“I am the Way inviolable, the Truth infallible, and the Life interminable.

“I am the Way most straight, the Truth most high, the true Life, the blessed Life, the uncreated Life.

“If thou abide in My Way, thou shalt know the Truth, and the Truth shall make

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thee free, and thou shalt lay hold on eternal Life.

“If thou wilt enter into Life, keep the commandments. If thou wilt know the Truth, believe Me.”

Luther and Calvin regard Way, Truth, and Life as the beginning, middle, and end of the Christian course. Attempts have also been made to apply the words to the three offices of Christ—Priest (Way), Prophet (Truth), and King (Life); or to suggest that they represent the three elements of His work for us—His sacrifice being the Way, His teaching, the Truth, His example, the Life. Many hymns, too, have been founded on the words.

Thou art the Way, the Truth, the Life;
Grant us that Way to know,
That Truth to keep, that Life to win,
Whose joys eternal flow.

THE OCCASION.

The words were first spoken on the night on which our Lord was betrayed. The apostles, gathered round the first Communion

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Table, had come to realise that their Master was about to leave them. "Whither I go," He said, "ye cannot come." St. Peter breaks in with questions such as those which any child would ask at such an announcement. "Lord, whither goest Thou?" "Why cannot I follow Thee now?" Jesus speaks words of comfort, and bids them trust His Father and Himself. He tells them of the heavenly mansions, of His going to prepare them a place, of His coming again to receive them unto Himself. Then He adds, "Whither I go ye know, and the way ye know," or perhaps more tersely, "Whither I go, ye know the way." St. Thomas, always the rationalist of the band, breaks in with: "Lord, we know not whither Thou goest; and how can we know the way?" Jesus, in His reply, does not so much answer the particular question, as raise the whole matter from the particular to the universal. "I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life; no man cometh unto the Father, but by Me." He goes on to show how the knowing of Him implies the knowing

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of His Father ; and in reply to St. Philip's demand, "Show us the Father," re-affirms the same truth in different language. "He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father."

From this it would seem that *Way*, *Truth*, and *Life* are not correlative terms, each corresponding to some one phase of our Lord's life and work. Rather is the first term inclusive of the others, and illustrated by them. *Way* constitutes the parable, *Truth* and *Life* the interpretation. Jesus had already spoken of the way, and St. Thomas had also referred to the way. This word Jesus accordingly takes up and uses in a figurative sense. A way may be at once a way of truth and a way of life. *Way*, as applied to spiritual things, is a figure of speech, while *Truth* and *Life* are not. The idea would have been a complete one, though of course less full and explicit, had our Lord left out *Truth* and *Life* altogether, and simply said, "I am the Way ; no man cometh unto the Father, but by Me."

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CHRIST THE WAY.

It is as the Way, then—the Way to the Father—that Jesus here offers Himself to His people. And this surely meets a human need. There could be no more pathetic study than that of the many strange ways in which men have sought to reach God. Man-kind apart from Christ are troubled by two difficulties. One is that they do not know the way to God; the other is that God's own ways are past finding out. Could they but understand these two things — God's way with man, man's way to God—a great part of life's problem would be solved. To Israel, the conception of a way was a familiar one. True, they might say of God, "Thy way is in the sea, and Thy path in the great waters, and Thy footsteps are not known." Yet man had not been left entirely ignorant even of God's ways. "All the paths of the Lord are mercy and truth unto such as keep His covenant and His testimonies." And with regard to the way in which man ought to walk, the

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revelation was clearer still. The wanderings between Egypt and Canaan were symbolic of the truth that God was always leading His people, though often by a way that they knew not. But here our Lord once and for all answers both the questions we have indicated. He is God's Way to man, and because of that, He is man's Way to God. On Him, as on the ladder between earth and heaven, angels of God are seen both ascending and descending. In Him God seeks and finds us ; in Him, too, we seek and find God. The latter truth rests upon the former. The true way to God could only be shown by One Who Himself came from God. This is implicit in His substitution of "cometh" for St. Thomas's "goest." He speaks not as one who starts from earth, but as One Whose home is in heaven. Yet His reference here is mainly to His work of bringing men to God. He answers the human craving for guidance and direction. When He calls Himself the Way to the Father, He utters a very rich and a very comprehensive truth.

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He does not refer exclusively to His teaching, or His example, or His sacrifice ; He means all these and more ; He means Himself. He means us to accept Him in all His fulness if we would reach God. His teaching warns us against evil and points us to good ; His example presents us with the highest and holiest life ever lived ; His sacrifice consecrates for us a new and living way into the Holiest of all. But over and above any of these is the great fact that our way to God must lie through Christ. Eliminate Him for a moment, even in thought, and the whole idea of approach to God breaks down. Try to leave out of account all that Christ has been and done, and taught and suffered, and you will find, like Dante in his dark wood, that the right way is lost, and that you are exposed to the powers of evil. We need not wonder, then, that the following of Christ, as we see from the Book of Acts, was soon known as "the Way," or that one of the earliest Christian writings after the New Testament was called the *Dua Via*, as showing the way of life

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and the way of death. No doubt many noble souls of heathendom have sought and felt after God, and have been not far from His kingdom. But are we not justified in saying that where they did come near Him they were following, albeit unconsciously, the way of Christ—that He was in some sort shaping and directing their way? Can we except even their experience from the exclusive claim He makes here—“No man cometh unto the Father, but by Me”?

Our Lord explains and amplifies this expression, “I am the Way,” by stating the two chief forms in which it is manifested, “I am the Truth,” and “I am the Life.” These two are correlative to one another, and are each related to “I am the Way.” To keep on the right way is to do two things; to observe correctness of judgment and rectitude of conduct. To depart from the right way is to commit intellectual error, or moral failure, or both. Thus the Way represents both Truth and Life; on our attitude towards it depend alike our creed and our conduct, our belief and our practice,

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our faith and our works. This becomes clearer when we remember that the Way is a Way by which we "come to the Father." For God is at once absolute Truth and absolute Life; and we are only fully His when freed from both error and sin. In a sense, no doubt, we are freed from both when we enter the Door. We then experience for the first time the love that reveals and redeems. Yet we became progressively freed from both as we follow the Way which is at once Truth and Life.

I. A WAY OF TRUTH.

To Pilate He said, "To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth. Every one that is of the truth heareth My voice." But to His disciples He could say more: not "I bear witness to the truth," or "I teach you the truth," but "I am the Truth." And while the word has a universal bearing, He means especially the truth about God, and about man in his

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relation to God. The words are governed by the final clause, "No man cometh unto the Father, but by Me." No man can know God in any full and intimate sense except through Christ. He is the Word of God—the articulate expression of the Godhead. He is, as He has already told us, the Light of the world, dispelling the darkness and making all things clear. No doubt many precious truths with regard to God had been revealed before Christ appeared. To these He did full justice; He came not to destroy but to fulfil. Yet the truth, before His day, had been fragmentary, heterogeneous, obscure. It was "line upon line, precept upon precept, here a little and there a little." It resembled extracts from a great author, set in a child's lesson-book, for the benefit of those unfit to read his works in their entirety. It was like the separate stones of a building, not yet fitly framed together. It was like the broken lights of the solar spectrum as shown through a prism, not yet fused into one clear radiance. It was diverse in its methods, in its agents of communication, in the principles

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which it imparted. But at last God spoke to man not "in sundry portions and in divers manners through the prophets," but "by His Son, the brightness of His glory and the express Image of His Person." Christ speaks directly from God. His words ring true. He is sure of Himself. What He says has authority. "He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father." "All things that I have heard of My Father I have made known unto you." His Gospel is a manifestation of God's nature. His parables are revelations of God's truth. His mighty works, in one of their aspects, are "signs" or illustrations of truth. Even His great sacrifice, while it is much more, is the profoundest explanation of God ever given, the evidence of God's love for the world. The Spirit He promises to His disciples is a Spirit of truth, a Spirit Who shall teach, and testify, and bring to remembrance, and guide them into all truth. Nor has the Church ever wholly lost sight of the fact that the communication of truth is one of the great tasks with which she is entrusted. When

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St. Paul said at Athens, "Him Whom ye ignorantly worship declare I unto you," he was following out the words of Christ, "I am the Truth." The ordinance of preaching, the formation of the creeds, the whole fabric of Christian theology, is but the development of the same idea. No doubt there is a great deal of truth which Christ does not directly touch. The Church has often erred in ignoring such truth, and her too one-sided and partial view of what truth means has had its reaction in the equally one-sided tendency to regard the truth of nature as the only truth attainable. A narrow orthodoxy in religion has been answered by as narrow an orthodoxy of science. But while we thankfully accept all that science tells us as to many of God's wondrous ways, it is not by its means that we can ever see Himself. It is in Christ that God stands revealed. "No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, He hath declared Him."

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2. A WAY OF LIFE.

If Christ is the Way because He is the Truth, He is the Way for a yet more significant reason—because He is the Life. A way is a safeguard not only against intellectual, but against moral failure; and the search after righteousness is an even more important thing than the search after wisdom. Our main business here is not to know, but to live; and truth is valueless until translated into action. St. Peter, as long as he remained on the housetop, could only “doubt in himself what this vision which he had seen should mean.” He found the answer to his doubts when he accompanied the men who were sent for him, and gave Cornelius the blessing he sought. St. Paul’s first cry after his conversion, “Who art Thou, Lord?” is quickly followed by a second, “What wilt Thou have me to do?” Truth and life have a mutual influence; if truth can inspire, action can illuminate. And thus, to come back to the words of our Saviour, it is clear that to

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“come to the Father” must imply more than the mere knowledge of God. Many of the Church’s greatest mistakes, much of her intolerance and persecution, have come from a one-sided conception of religion as truth to the neglect of life. Our Lord never regarded mere education as a panacea for all ills. He never said, like Socrates, that knowledge was virtue. Men, to Him, were not only blind, but sick; not only in error, but in sin; and He must, therefore, give them health as well as light, life as well as truth. Hence, to know Christ as the Truth is not enough; we must find Him as the Life. The Way is a way to *life* in God. “I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly.” All the work of Christ was directed to this end. His teaching had invariably a practical object. His miracles, if they were “signs,” were yet more emphatically “works” directed towards the helping and serving of men. His command, as he instituted the Holy Supper, was not “Look,” but “Eat”; the act was

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to signify assimilation of life as well as apprehension of truth. His great sacrifice, while it contained the sublimest revelation of God's nature ever made to man, had life, not truth, as its ultimate end; its aim was not so much to show God to man, as to give God to man, and to bring man to God. And while, as we have seen, He promised the Holy Spirit as a Spirit of truth, that Spirit is even more strikingly displayed as a Spirit of life and power. The Pentecostal grace consisted not only of illumination, but of inspiration; its emblems were the wind and the fire. And it is thus that the work of the Spirit is still manifest. As the *Shorter Catechism* well puts it, He operates not only by "enlightening our minds in the knowledge of Christ," but by "renewing our wills." According as we keep near to Christ we enter into larger and fuller life. As He alone can lead us to the full knowledge of God—to "know as we are known" of Him—so He will also lead us to perfect fellowship with God—to the fulness of what he calls "eternal life."

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In these two respects—as the Truth and the Life—is Christ, for us, the Way to God—the One without Whom “no man cometh unto the Father.” As Godet tersely puts it, “The truth is God *revealed* in His essential nature—that is to say, in His holiness and in His love; the life is God *communicated* to the soul, and imparting to it holy strength and perfect blessedness.”

If the lesson of our last study, then, was “Enter by the one Door,” our lesson from this one is “Journey by the one Way.” Let your religion be a progress forward, onward, upward; an increase in knowledge, a growth in grace; a constant advance in truth and life. Perhaps nothing is so wanting in the average Christian life of to-day as the signs of progress and growth. Remember that while life is a journey it is not meant to be a haphazard wandering. It has Christ as its Way, God as its goal. It leads through the world, but in Christ we can learn to use even the world as a means of

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approach to God. We forget what is behind, and reach forth to what is before. Every trial, every conquest, every failure even, becomes a step on the way of truth and life. We "press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus."

IV

CHRIST AND OUR HELPLESSNESS

IV

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“I AM the Good Shepherd; the Good Shepherd giveth His life for the sheep. . . . I AM the Good Shepherd, and know My sheep, and am known of Mine.”—ST. JOHN X. 11, 14.

THE pastoral life—the relation of shepherd and flock—has always had about it a peculiar charm. It has touched the imagination, and been made the frequent subject both of pictorial and of poetic art. The classic poets, the early English writers, and even the homelier bards of Scotland, have given the shepherd a place of honour. In his calling there would seem to lie that sympathy with Nature which comes of living in green pastures and far from the busy haunts of men. His task, though an engrossing, is not an enslaving one. It is one of responsibility rather than of drudgery ;

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one where the eye can look far ahead and far afield. It is a work that has often afforded opportunity for meditation and reflection, whether under the starry heavens by night, or amid the ever-changing scenery of mountain and glen by day. Hence men have always felt that there is something ideal in the life of the shepherd; something typical of life at its highest.

In Eastern lands the shepherd's work is invested with yet greater honour and significance by reason of the danger, the anxiety, the self-sacrifice, which it entails. There is a certain sacredness in having the care of a living creature; and in the case of the Eastern shepherd everything tended to increase that sacredness. He knew his sheep by name, and they knew him. He did not drive them from behind, but led them from before. For them he had to encounter many perils, and might even have to give his life.

THE SHEPHERD IN SCRIPTURE.

As we read the Old Testament we cannot

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but be struck by the number of shepherds we meet in its pages. The righteous Abel was a keeper of sheep. The faithful Abraham was very rich in cattle, and flocks, and herds. The patient Jacob kept the flock of his kinsman Laban, and met at the well's mouth the shepherdess for whom he was to wait twice seven long years. Moses was leading sheep through the desert when the word of God bade him conduct a mightier flock through a vaster wilderness. Amos, the stern preacher of righteousness, was a herdman of Tekoah. At the head of the whole band stands the great shepherd-king David. Long ere he fought human enemies he had slain the lion and bear that threatened the life of his sheep. While he yet lived among the flocks he had come to know that the Lord was his Shepherd, leading him beside the still waters, showing him the straight paths, comforting him with rod and staff even in the valley of the shadow. They were shepherds, too, who watched their flocks on that night when the glory of the Lord shone round about

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them, and the herald-angel delivered his message—"Unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord."

The relation of shepherd and sheep—strength and tenderness on the one hand, weakness and trust on the other—inevitably suggested that of God and His people. "Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel," writes one psalmist, "Thou that leadest Joseph like a flock." "We," writes another, "are the people of His pasture, and the sheep of His hand." And in the anticipations formed of the Messiah, it was not seldom as the Shepherd that He was depicted. "I will set up one Shepherd over them," writes Ezekiel, "and He shall feed them, even My servant David; He shall feed them, and He shall be their Shepherd." "He shall feed His flock," writes the second Isaiah, "like a shepherd; He shall gather the lambs with His arm, and carry them in His bosom, and shall gently lead those that are with young." Our Lord, when He came, not only accepted the same

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office, but passed it on to the apostles and ministers of His appointing. To St. Peter He says, "Feed My lambs," "Tend My sheep"; and that apostle in turn says to his own disciples, "Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof; . . . and when the Chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away." The tradition has been handed on; even the bishop's staff was fashioned after the likeness of a shepherd's crook; and in many countries the minister of Christ is still called the pastor or shepherd, bound to render an account to his Master of the souls placed in his charge.

CHRIST THE SHEPHERD.

It is thus in the midst of a goodly array that our Lord here stands as the Good Shepherd, fulfilling the old, instituting the new.

Before proceeding to the details of the picture given here, we learn something from a comparison of the two figures, "I

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am the Door," and "I am the Good Shepherd." At first we are half tempted to wish that our Lord had kept to one or other figure, in order to make the picture a clear and complete one. But we gain something from the very fact that He did not. We might almost say that in the parable the two conceptions of Christ as the Door and as the Shepherd struggle for the mastery, and that the latter prevails in the end. When Jesus speaks of a door, He is thinking of the door of a fold; but when He speaks of a shepherd, He is thinking of the shepherd of a flock. The idea of the fold has retired into the background; for the words at the end of verse 16 should be, not "one fold, one shepherd," but "one flock, one shepherd." Moreover, when He speaks of Himself as the Door, He speaks of our entering *in*; but when He speaks of Himself as the Shepherd, He says, "He leadeth them *out*." On the one side, then, we have *Door, fold, in*; on the other side, *Shepherd, flock, out*. And the second conception is an advance upon the

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first, both with reference to Christ and to His Church. In the first, all is stationary, fenced round, isolated; in the second, all is moving, free, progressive. According to the first idea the Church is a fold, of which Christ is the Door, and into which the flocks must be gathered in. But according to the second, the Church is a flock, of which Christ is the Shepherd, leading out His flock, some from one fold and some from another. And it is doing no injustice to the first figure to say that the second goes farther and deeper. One is reminded of the different ways in which two great English poets have spoken of death. Spenser uses the more obvious figure, that of *entering* a harbour.

Sleep after toil, port after stormy seas,
Ease after war, death after life, does greatly please.

But Tennyson has the courage to invert the figure, and to speak of death as of *leaving* a harbour.

May there be no moaning of the bar
When I put out to sea.

And there is a similar distinction here.

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There is comfort, no doubt, in the thought that Christ means for us entrance into a fold where we shall be safe from peril. But there is more that appeals to our chivalry in the thought that Christ is leading us out, and that we must follow Him. Our attachment is not to a place but to a Person. Better that we should be members of a flock than dwellers in a fold. We may say of metaphors what William Robertson of Irvine truly said of the arts—that while some, like architecture, painting, sculpture, tend to localise religion, there are others, like poetry and music, on whose wheels the chariot of the everlasting Gospel has gone abroad. It is grander to think of Christ's people as following Him out of many folds than as enclosed by Him within one. "Ubi Christus, ibi ecclesia." We can say, as Ittai the Gittite said to King David, "Surely in what place my lord the king shall be, whether in death or life, even there also will thy servant be." And it widens our whole conception of the Church of Christ, and shows us how different it may be from all our preconceived ideas, to

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read His words in this sense, and hear Him say, "Other sheep I have, which are not of this fold ; them also I must bring, and they shall hear My voice ; and they shall become one flock, one Shepherd."

Turning to the details of our Lord's picture, we find it to be one of sharp contrasts. Over against the picture of the Good (*i.e.* the true, the real) Shepherd, He places two types of false shepherds. It will make for clearness if we examine these first.

I. THE FALSE SHEPHERDS.

We may omit the "stranger" of verse 5, who may either be a person of no account, or may represent either of the two following classes ; and pass at once to—

The thief.—It must be noted that into one fold might be gathered the sheep of different flocks by night, guarded by a watchman or porter. To this fold came the various shepherds in the morning, to lead their several flocks out to pasture. Each has a recognised signal or knock, which when the porter hears he opens the door. Any one

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who is not a true shepherd need not attempt to gain entrance in this legitimate way. The porter will not admit him, nor will the sheep follow him, not knowing his voice. To enter at all, he must enter "not by the door," but "climb up some other way," and carry off the sheep by force or by stealth. Milton's elaboration of the parable was probably justified by the conduct of many so-called shepherds of his day—men who

Creep and intrude, and climb into the fold ;
Of other care they little reckoning make
Than how to scramble at the shearers' feast,
And shove away the worthy bidden guest.
Blind mouths ! that scarce themselves know how to hold
A sheep-hook, or have learned aught else the least
That to the faithful herdsman's art belongs !
What recks it them ? what need they ? they are sped ;
And when they list, their lean and flashy songs
Grate on their scrannel pipes of wretched straw ;
The hungry sheep look up and are not fed,
But swol'n with wind, and the rank mist they draw,
Rot inwardly, and foul contagion spread ;
Besides what the grim wolf with privy paw
Daily devours apace, and nothing said.

The thief's purpose is as evil as his method of entrance is unlawful. While the true

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Shepherd comes for a beneficent purpose, the object of the thief is "to steal, and to kill, and to destroy."

The hireling.—There is another type of so-called shepherd from which the true shepherd must be carefully distinguished. This is the hireling, "whose own the sheep are not." No doubt a man may be a hireling, in the sense of a man who works for hire, and yet have as strong a sense of responsibility as the actual owner. Most shepherds, indeed, are hirelings in this sense. But the hireling referred to here is a hireling and no more. He thinks not of the charge, but only of the reward. His aim is not the welfare of the flock, but his own enrichment. This is an old temptation to shepherds of souls. "Woe be," says Ezekiel, "to the shepherds of Israel that do feed themselves! should not the shepherds feed the flocks? Ye eat the fat, and ye clothe you with the wool, ye kill them that are fed; but ye feed not the flock." "Their own shepherds," says Zechariah, "pity them not." And St. Peter warns his successors in the pastoral

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office to "feed the flock of God . . . not by constraint, but willingly ; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind." Much, too, in Milton's description given above applies rather to the hireling than to the thief. Trouble or danger at once reveals the hireling in his true colours. The man who "careth not for the sheep," who puts himself and not his charge first, naturally seeks his own safety when evil days come. While he perhaps would not willingly harm the flock, he does not feel bound to endanger his life in keeping others from doing harm. Many of us who would not do a fellow-man a positive injury will not lift a finger to protect him from the injuries inflicted by others. Here, as in the parable of the Good Samaritan and elsewhere, our Lord reminds us that sins of omission may be as dangerous as those of commission. In any position of trust it is not enough to avoid being a thief. We must also abhor the spirit of the hireling, and regard the safety of those under our charge as of greater consequence than our own.

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2. THE GOOD SHEPHERD.

As already stated, this means the real, the true Shepherd, as against the false. The proofs of His reality are two in number. One is, "I am the Good Shepherd; the Good Shepherd giveth His life for the sheep." The other is, "I am the Good Shepherd, and know My sheep, and am known of Mine." We may call these proofs, respectively, self-sacrifice and mutual confidence.

Self-sacrifice.—"I lay down My life for the sheep." This brings us straight to the heart of all Christ's work for man. Unlike the thief, whose object was the sheep's destruction and his own enrichment; unlike the hireling, who cared nothing for the sheep, but everything for the safety of his own skin: the Good Shepherd lays down His life that the sheep may win theirs, that they may be delivered from danger and may enter into more abundant life. "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all." To help His

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lost sheep, the Good Shepherd suffered death, and that willingly.

“Lord, whence are those blood-drops all the way,
That mark out the mountain’s track?”

“They were shed for one who had gone astray,
Ere the Shepherd could bring him back.”

“Lord, whence are Thy hands so rent and torn?”
“They are pierced to-night by many a thorn.”

“No man taketh it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again.” The “laying down” and “taking again” of His life were both for our sakes; that He might work both for us and in us; that He might die for us and live for us. Here is the central mystery and glory of our faith—the sacrifice of very God for man.

Mutual confidence.—“I know My sheep, and am known of Mine.” Not only does He know His own sheep from those which are not, but knows them individually; knows them by name. Nor is the relation complete until they too know Him. The knowledge spoken of is by voice rather than by appearance. It is told that a Scottish traveller in Palestine, wishing to test the

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accuracy of these words, changed garments with a shepherd whom he met under the walls of Samaria. Thus disguised, he attempted to call the sheep. But they would not move. The true shepherd then raised his voice, and, in spite of his unaccustomed dress, they rallied to him at once. We are apt sometimes to belittle the intelligence of sheep. But we might well take a lesson from them in this respect. Let us learn to know the voice of Christ; to distinguish His call from the beguiling voices of those who wish our hurt; to recognise Him even when we meet Him in unexpected places and in strange guise—hungry, sick, in prison. Then will His words be literally as well as ideally true, “I know Mine own, and Mine own know Me, even as the Father knoweth Me, and I know the Father.”

If men were asked which of all our Lord's *I am's* appealed most to the heart, there are few who would not give the favourite place to “I am the Good Shepherd.” We may follow a Light, we may enter a Door, we

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may traverse a Way. But these symbols are all inanimate things. They cannot, owing to their inherent limitations, express with any fulness what Christ is to us. When we think of the infinite Love of Him Who gave His life that we might live, and of the infinite Wisdom of Him Who knows us and bids us know Him, it is as the Good Shepherd that He appeals to us. For among the many other specially attractive features of the symbolism of shepherd and flock, not the least striking is this—that it brings so clearly into view both our individual and our social relations with Him. We cannot read the allegory without seeing in it the personal contact of every follower of Christ with his Master. Sheep are prone to follow each other; but here they are represented each as separately hearing the voice of the shepherd, and each as the separate object of the shepherd's care. But while this is so, the unifying, consolidating influence of the Shepherd is no less clearly marked. His ideal is "one flock, one Shepherd"; and it is according as we own and follow the one

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Shepherd that we can ever become one flock. "Sheep having no shepherd" are scattered abroad; the shepherd's presence and care are necessary to the very existence of a flock as such. "We being many are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another."

V

CHRIST AND OUR FAINTNESS

V

CHRIST AND OUR FAINTNESS

“I AM the Bread of Life ; he that cometh to Me shall never hunger, and he that believeth on Me shall never thirst.”—ST. JOHN vi. 35.

ON all the emblems under which our Lord describes Himself as responding to human need, none is more realistic than this one of Bread. Bread is the general word we use when we mean food. We call bread the staff of life ; we speak of man's working for his bread ; we pray, “Give us this day our daily bread.” And food represents man's primary need as an animal being. Other things he may make shift to do without ; food he must have, or he dies. When Christ, therefore, calls Himself our Bread, He uses the strongest figure at His command. He means that He is what we want—nay, what we must have—if we would live. He is as truly and essentially the proper food for the

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human soul as the fruits of the earth are for the human body. Upon our acceptance or rejection of Him will depend our spiritual life or death.

THE OCCASION.

Bread was much in the minds of those who listened to our Lord as He said these words. A great multitude had followed Him, having seen the miracles which He did. He had asked St. Philip, "Whence shall we buy bread, that these may eat?" With the five barley loaves and the two small fishes He had wondrously fed the multitude, and His disciples had filled twelve baskets with the fragments that were left. It was on the following day, after the night on which Jesus had come to the relief of His distressed disciples on the lake, that the people, finding Him, to their surprise, on the other side, ask Him anxiously, "When camest Thou hither?" In reply He taxes them with a motive in seeking Him, which some of them at least must have felt that they deserved. "Verily, verily, I say unto you,

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ye seek Me, not because ye saw the signs, but because ye did eat of the loaves, and were filled." He adds the warning, "Labour not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth to everlasting life."

These words constitute an introduction to what follows, and furnish a very searching preliminary test. Before going on to inquire as to how Christ is the Bread of Life there is the prior question for each of us—"Do I really want Bread of Life, or are my aims exclusively material? Even in my desire to be connected with Christ and His Church, am I thinking mainly of temporal advantage—of what He can give me in the way of position, or repute, or comfort in this life?" Missionaries tell us of the extreme difficulty of knowing the real motives of their would-be converts, and of the numbers who expect something in return for their Christian profession, such as land, or influence, or the redress of their wrongs. We all need to put it very clearly before us that we are to seek *first, i.e.* chiefly, the kingdom of God and His righteousness.

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All good gifts, it is true, come from above. Our Saviour did not ignore the body ; He came eating and drinking ; He provided men with food and drink. But He makes it clear that these are not His distinctive and essential gifts. They are not what He came to offer, nor what we must seek Him for. The hunger and thirst He comes to satisfy are those of the human spirit, and the first necessity is that we really have that hunger and thirst.

CHRIST THE BREAD.

What is this heavenly food, then, that Christ bids us seek ? It is Himself. "I am the Bread of Life ; He that cometh to Me shall never hunger, and he that believeth on Me shall never thirst." By adding the word "thirst" He makes the figure a more perfect one, embracing the two great necessities of food and drink. If our Lord never actually says in so many words, "I am the Water of Life," He says practically the same to the woman of Samaria at the well, and also to the people at the Feast of Tabernacles. The parallel between food and drink is kept

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up throughout His teaching. As He speaks of living Bread, so He speaks of living Water. His words here, "If any man eat of this Bread, he shall live for ever," correspond to His words elsewhere, "The water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life." We must take the word "Bread" in the widest sense, indicating that He satisfies the wants of the soul as completely as food and drink satisfy those of the body.

In saying "I am the Bread of Life," our Lord refers in the first place to His source and being: where He comes from; what He is. In the second place, He refers to His purpose and work: what He achieves; what He bestows. The Bread of Life means the Bread which contains life in itself, and which is therefore able to give life unto the world. On the one hand, Christ comes to us living, and from the source of life. "I am the living Bread which came down from heaven." On the other hand, He comes to us that we may live, and that our life may be eternal. "If any man eat of

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this Bread, he shall live for ever." The two ideas are intimately connected; life begets life. "The Bread of God is He which (*a*) cometh down from heaven, and (*b*) giveth life unto the world." "As (*a*) the living Father hath sent Me, and I live by the Father; so (*b*) he that eateth Me, even he shall live by Me." In a word, the Bread of Life is both living and life-giving.

I. LIVING BREAD.

The Bread of Life means, first, the Bread that comes to us living, and forms the source of life. "I am the living Bread which came down from heaven." He claims a heavenly origin, a Divine ancestry. He compares and contrasts Himself not only with the bread with which He has just fed the multitude, but with the manna by which God had sustained His people in the wilderness. Some of His hearers have referred to this manna, quoting the words, "He gave them bread from heaven to eat." Our Lord replies that He is the true Bread from heaven, as superior to the manna of the wilderness as to the

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loaves of His own giving. The Jews murmur at this, and ask how He can thus speak of coming down from heaven. He is only "Jesus the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know. How is it, then, that He saith, 'I came down from heaven'?" In reply, our Lord is extremely explicit as to His heavenly origin. Six or seven times throughout this discourse does He speak of Himself as having "come down from heaven." They had fallen into the common error of thinking that what they knew of His origin explained everything about Him. Familiarity, as it often does, had bred contempt. The prophet had no honour in his own country. Nor are they the last who have argued that because Jesus is human He cannot be Divine. But men will argue in this way about anything. They will say that because man's body may have been evolved from lower forms of life, his soul can have no real existence. Or they will argue that because a man has sprung from the people, he cannot have refined feelings or noble instincts. But God's ways of working are

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not limited by any such rules. He can make man in His own image, and so distinguish him from all the lower creation. He can put the fire of genius in the humblest peasant's soul. He can incarnate Himself in all His fulness in one frail human form. In Jesus Christ we find not only the Bread, but the living, the heavenly Bread. The best gift is that which contains in it most of the giver ; and so God's best gift to man is not a book or a rule, but a Life. What God gives us in Christ is His own Life, and that is why Christ can speak of Himself as living and heavenly Bread. "In Him we have God, and in Him we touch the actual source of all life. In Him we have the one thing within our reach which is not earth-grown, the one uncorrupted source of life to which we can turn from the inadequacy, impurity, and emptiness of a sin-sick world."

2. LIFE-GIVING BREAD.

The words "Bread of Life," however, mean more than this. They mean not only that Christ has eternal life in Himself, but

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that He is the source of eternal life in others. "He that cometh to Me shall never hunger, and he that believeth on Me shall never thirst." "If any man eat of this Bread, he shall live for ever."

Observe the condition attached to the promise. It is described both metaphorically and literally; metaphorically by the word "eateth," literally by "cometh" and "believeth." The one use of bread is to be eaten, and the one way of benefiting by it is to eat it. With food on the one side and a hungry man on the other, eating is the natural and necessary consequence. You get no good by seeing or smelling or touching bread; you can only benefit by eating it, living on it, making it part of yourself. This, as applied to our bodily life, seems almost childishly simple. But it is what many men completely fail to realise in the spiritual life. Once be sure that Christ is the Bread of Life—the true, the living, the heavenly Bread—and then, surely, the only safe and sane course is to feed upon Him, to take His nature into yours, to fill yourself

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with His fulness, to assimilate Him and be partakers of Him. Yet that is where so many of us fail. We look, we hear, we touch, but we will not eat and live. We talk about Christ, read about Him, sing to Him, call ourselves by His name, associate ourselves with His Church; but we will not come to Him that we may have life; we will not let Him dwell in us, occupy us, transfigure us. What a power would Christians exercise in the world did their lives express the spirit of St. Patrick's hymn—

Christ be with me, Christ within me,
Christ behind me, Christ before me,
Christ beside me, Christ to win me,
Christ to comfort and restore me,
Christ beneath me, Christ above me,
Christ in quiet, Christ in danger,
Christ in hearts of all who love me,
Christ in mouth of friend and stranger.

Acceptance is the condition; life is the and. The living Bread, from a living God, makes living men. "As the living Father hath sent Me, and I live by the Father; so he that eateth Me, even he shall live by Me." The bond is a living one throughout. Christ's own meat and drink were to do the

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will of Him that sent Him, and ours must be to do the will of Him that has sent us. The result will be—life ; the only life worth living.

The life, too, will be an eternal one ; for this is a point on which our Lord insists with the most marked emphasis. If there is anything more emphatic than His reiteration of the phrase “I came down from heaven,” it is His assurance of immortality contained in such words as “He shall live for ever,” “He shall never die,” “I will raise him up at the last day.” The bread with which He had fed the multitude, wondrous though it might be, was only “meat which perisheth” ; the other was “meat which endureth.” Nay, the very manna given in the wilderness—bread from heaven though it was—was bread of which their fathers had eaten and were dead ; whereas “he that eateth of this Bread shall live for ever.” It must always be so. Live on what is temporary, evanescent, fleeting, and you yourself will become a mere creature of a day, possessing nothing that can endure to the end, no fruit that can remain.

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Live on what is permanent, eternal, immortal, and you yourself will have a place among the immortals ; you will have that within you which cannot die. "The world passeth away, and the lust thereof ; but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever." Poets and alchemists have dreamed of an elixir of life, by drinking which a man could secure perpetual life and youth. But Christ affords the only elixir that will not disappoint or embitter us. "If any man eat of this Bread, he shall live for ever." Apart from Him there is no immortality. Take His life into yours and you cannot die. You are one with God, because you live on Him Who lives on God.

LIFE THROUGH DEATH.

It is significant that in the latter part of His discourse our Lord finds even the word "Bread" insufficient to express His meaning, and changes it to a stronger and more specific term—"flesh." "The bread which I will give is My flesh, which I will give for the life of the world." This expression seemed

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to those who heard it even more harsh and strange than the former. They had "murmured at Him" when He called Himself the Bread from heaven. They now "strove among themselves, saying, How can this man give us his flesh to eat?" Yet there was a reason for the transition from the one term to the other. While bread and flesh both mean food, there is this difference between them, that flesh can become our food only through death. What is death to the one being is life to the other. We have already seen how the Bread of Life is both living and life-giving; life-giving because living. But it is only now that we are given the real connection between the two. It is by giving up His life that Christ gives life to others. Jesus had already contrasted Himself with the bread He had given to the hungry people, and with the manna rained from heaven in the wilderness. Here, however, He compares Himself to another and still more sacred food. This was the lamb of the paschal service, whose flesh was eaten by the people, and whose blood was sprinkled

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on their houses, in memory of God's deliverance. When He says, "The bread that I will give is My flesh, which I will give for the life of the world," He is expressing the same truth emphasised in His later words, "This is My Body, which is broken for you. . . . This is My Blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins." The law of death-in-life finds its full expression in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. He became poor that we might be rich ; He suffered that we might reign ; He died that we might live.

Thine the sharp thorns, and mine the golden crown :
Mine the life won, and Thine the life laid down.

Had Jesus merely spoken of our eating the Bread, we might have imagined that He was but referring to our copying the example of His earthly life. But when He speaks of our eating His flesh and drinking His blood, He touches a principle deeper and more vital. We are to believe on Him as the One Who died for us and lives again. We are to appropriate His sacrifice and make it

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our own. We are to act out in practice the beautifully suggestive words of St. Paul: "Always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body."

Christ the Bread of Life, then, means to us the indwelling Christ—the Christ in man. What is it that gives the Sacrament of the Holy Communion its eternal vitality? What makes it, under all forms and in spite of all controversies, *the* service of the Church? Largely, no doubt, our Saviour's command, "This do in remembrance of Me." But this only takes us a step farther back. Why was the command given? we ask with all reverence. Why was this act, of all others, perpetuated? Surely because it responds to an essential want in man's nature—that he must eat in order to live. Man's principal need is not a strength without but a strength within; not a strength on which he must lean, but a strength by which he can stand. We are not merely to admire and follow Christ, but to possess Him re-incarnate

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within our own being. In Christ the Good Shepherd we have a Guide, a Friend. We know His voice, we feel His hand, we lean on His bosom. But in Christ the Bread of Life we can have Him within ourselves. His voice rings out in ours; His mark is on our forehead, His grace in our countenance, His strength in our arm. "Should any one," said the great German reformer, "knock at my breast and say, 'Who lives here?' I should reply, 'Not Martin Luther, but the Lord Jesus.'" Let us cling fast, then, to the truth expressed in the words, "I am the Bread of Life." Let us find in Christ the satisfaction, the nourishment, the strength of the soul. Let us see in Him the true, the living, the heavenly, the enduring Bread. Let us realise what He gives us, and how He lays down His life that it may be the source of new life in us. As He gives, let us receive. Making Him our very own, feeding on Him, strengthened by Him, we shall receive out of His fulness the gift of everlasting Life.

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VI

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“I AM the Vine, ye are the branches : he that abideth in Me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit ; for without Me ye can do nothing.”—ST. JOHN XV. 5.

THE allegory of the True Vine is, in a sense, complementary to that of the Bread of Life, and expresses a different side of the same truth. Both of them are designed to show that intimate union of Christ with His people of which the Sacrament is the sign and seal : the truth that they dwell in Him and He in them. But while the figure of Bread is best adapted for showing the one side of this relationship, the figure of the Vine best shows the other. The message of the Bread of Life is “Christ in us” ; the message of the True Vine is “we in Christ.” As partakers of the Bread, we take Christ into ourselves, and have Him

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dwelling within us. As branches of the Vine we are grafted into Him, merge our lives in His, and participate in His Divine life.

This distinction carries us farther than we are apt to think. For it is here that we realise for the first time how our relation to Christ takes us beyond the mere satisfying of our own wants. Hitherto it has been because we could *get* so little good elsewhere that we came to Christ. Here, on the contrary, it is because we can *do* so little good otherwise that we come to Christ. Hitherto, while no doubt the good of others has been implied, the satisfying of our own wants has been the chief end and aim. Christ has offered Himself as a Light to our darkness, a Door which we may enter, a Way by which to travel, a Shepherd whom we may know and follow. And in the great allegory of the Bread of Life He has said, "He that cometh to Me shall never hunger, and he that believeth in Me shall never thirst." But our present allegory is quite different. It is not "He that abideth

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in Me, the same shall *eat* much fruit," but "he that abideth in Me and I in him, the same *bringeth forth* much fruit." We are not to be consumers, but producers. We are to measure life "not by the wine drunk, but the wine poured forth." Not our faintness, but our barrenness, is the chief trouble here. "Eat fruit and live" expresses a great truth; but "Bear fruit and live" expresses a greater. Our coming to Christ is to lead us far beyond ourselves. We are not only to be disciples; we are to be apostles. Faith without works is dead. Privilege cannot be divorced from responsibility. Freely we have received; let us freely give. Gladly would we learn; let us gladly teach.

The lesson, no doubt, is not entirely new. We have had glimpses of it in what was said of the Light and the Shepherd. But here for the first time is fruit-bearing put in the foreground. We need not therefore be surprised that this *I am* was spoken later than the others, or that it was one of those spoken to the inner circle,

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not to the multitude. Its appeal is to those who have advanced some little way in the Christian life ; to those who, having been helped, are prepared to become helpers in turn.

THE OCCASION.

It is perhaps just for this reason that our Lord here makes use of the figure of the Vine, though other causes may have contributed to bring it to His mind. He had alluded to the Vine in instituting the Holy Supper, saying that He would drink no more of its fruit until He drank it new with His disciples in His Father's Kingdom. In the valley of the Kedron, where He walked with them shortly afterwards, there were vines with spreading branches ; and over the gateway of the Temple there was a wreath of golden vines with large clusters of grapes. Often had Israel been compared by the prophets to a vine or a vineyard. And one reason for this lay in the fact that the vine, more than any other tree, has the production of fruit as its one end and aim. Eliminate the fruit, and its usefulness is at an end.

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Ezekiel gives a striking parable of a vine—a fruitless vine. “Shall wood,” he says, “be taken thereof to do any work? or will man take a pin of it to hang any vessel thereon? Is it meet for any work?” The sole end of the vine is the producing of fruit; and for this it is cut and pruned and held back in every other way. Nothing could better suggest the sacrifice, the devotion, the consecration of a true Christian life. And therefore Christ

did not choose the summer corn,
That shoots up straight and free in one quick growth,
And has its day, and is done, and springs no more;
Nor yet the olive, all whose boughs are spread
In the soft air, and never lose a leaf,
Flowering and fruitful in perpetual peace;
But only this for Him and His in one,
The everlasting, ever-quickening Vine,
That gives the heat and passion of the world,
Through its own life-blood, still renewed and shed.

CHRIST THE VINE : WE THE BRANCHES.

In what our Lord says of the Vine and the branches, He dwells less upon Himself than in any of the other figures we have

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studied. While He says, "I am the True Vine, and My Father is the Husbandman," the main interest of the picture is made to centre in the branches. The message He gives is a bracing rather than a soothing one. It is an invitation to work, not to rest. On the branches is thrown the responsibility not only for their own usefulness, but for the credit of the Vine and the Husbandman. It is through the branches alone that the Vine can work, and on them that its success must largely depend. In the branches' fulfilment of their task lies the ethical import of the parable.

The functions of a branch, as here set forth, are two in number, and they are very closely and intimately connected. One is, to bring forth fruit; the other is, to abide in the Vine. Every branch, to fulfil its proper end, must do both. The branch stands midway between stem and fruit, deriving life from the one, and communicating it to the other. Its business is at once to get and to give; to derive sap from the true source, and to impart this in some

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form to the fruit. So must it be with all Christian profession and service. In it all there must be a getting and a giving. We cannot communicate to others what we have not ourselves received. Nothing can flow out where nothing has flowed in. "As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the Vine ; no more can ye, except ye abide in Me." Yet we cannot properly receive without being ready to give. "He that abideth in Me and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit."

I. BRING FORTH FRUIT.

No more important lesson could have been put before the apostles at that hour. The personal ministry of Jesus on earth was about to close, and theirs was about to begin. There was an immense work ahead of them, of which as yet only the firstfruits had been gathered. Fruit, then, was the end at which they must aim. And what holds good of them holds good of us. "By their fruits ye shall know them," our Lord had said ; and by fruits men, like trees, are

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known still. The world is becoming less and less satisfied with anything short of fruits. High-sounding titles with no reality behind them; offices of profit with no corresponding duty—the days of such things are numbered. And the demand for fruits is surely a reasonable one. Carlyle's "What hast thou done, and how? Out with it—let us see thy work!" is a test which no one, least of all the follower of Christ, has any right to resent. For it is not only the world that asks for fruits. God asks for fruits, and He is a far better judge than the world as to whether fruits are of the right kind. Our Lord accordingly draws a sharp distinction between the branches which bear fruit and those which do not. Fruitfulness is to be the all-important test; and on the presence or absence of it our fate is to depend.

Barren branches.—"Every branch in Me that beareth not fruit He taketh away." No branch of a fruit-tree has the right to be merely ornamental. No follower of Christ is allowed to be inactive. If we are not

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helping His work, we are hindering it. We are not only doing no good ; we are doing positive harm. We are taking up the place that might be occupied by others who would do better work than we, and the sooner we are taken away the better for that work. "To go through life," says Froude, "and plead at the end of it that we have not broken any of the commandments, is but what the unprofitable servant did who kept his talent carefully unspent, and yet was sent to outer darkness for his uselessness." It is true that God has infinite patience. But there comes a limit to the opportunities a man ought to have. The fig-tree that bears nothing but leaves is doomed. The candlestick that carries no light is removed out of its place. So must the barren branch be removed. The tree is not dependent on the life of any one branch.

God doth not need

Either man's work or His own gifts

He can accomplish His purposes quite well without us ; we are not indispensable. If we fail to produce fruit, ours will be the

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penalty ; we shall simply be taken away, passed over, done without. The vine will flourish, but we shall have no part in its flourishing. Those who live for self, and not for others and for Christ, are not wanted ; they are of no use in the kingdom of God.

Fruitful branches.—“Every branch that beareth fruit, He purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit.” We must not complain if we are not rewarded at once when we do well. Part of the branch may have to be removed that the rest may do better work ; trials often only begin when we determine to do right. But just as fire tries the gold, and turns iron into the finer steel, and as pruning helps the fruit, so has many a man been helped by the trouble God has sent him. Pascal turned his ill-health into a means of spiritual perfection. Wesley accepted the wreck of his domestic happiness as another call to his public work. John Henry Shorthouse regarded the painful stammer from which he suffered as a means of concentrating his energies on literature. If our end and aim be fruit-bearing, we

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must be prepared to put happiness or unhappiness on one side as of comparatively little account. "I never allow myself," said Gladstone, "in regard to my public life, to dwell upon the fact that a thing is *painful*. Indeed, life has no time for such broodings." After all, we are not here for pleasure but for work ; and much that is pleasant, and even beautiful of its kind, may have to be given up that the one end may be served. The choice is here put plainly before us. We must be thrown aside as useless, or else tried in order to greater efficiency in the Master's service. Let us choose the higher and harder path.

Fruit-bearing, however, is dependent on a prior condition.

2. ABIDE IN THE VINE.

This watchword was no less necessary for the apostles than the other. There was to be no loosening of the tie that bound them to their Lord. Bewildered as they were by the tidings that He was soon to leave them, the bond between Him and them must be

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strengthened, not, relaxed. They must realise that His bodily absence really involved a spiritual presence. Henceforth He was to be nearer them than when on earth. His Holy Spirit, the Comforter, was to dwell with them and enter into them. But there must be two sides to every spiritual relationship. The prayer, "Abide with us," cannot be answered unless the command, "Abide in Me," is obeyed. The unity between Christ and His people must be a real one—a unity of spirit and life. A branch plucked from the tree may, like flowers gathered for a nosegay, look well for a time, but its real life is gone.

"The branch cannot bear fruit of itself."

To realise this is a crying necessity in our busy age. The life of any earnest man becomes so full of outward activities that it is quite possible for the servant of Christ to become so concerned over so-called fruit-bearing as to lose sight of Christ's other command, "Abide in Me." Even William Wilberforce's celebrated retort to the lady who asked him, in the midst of his self-denying work, whether he ever took thought

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for his soul—"Madam, I had forgotten I had one"—is not altogether to be commended. If fruit is to be real, the branch must abide in the Vine. The life for Christ can only be blessed if it is also a life in Christ.

These words of our Lord, "Abide in Me," bring into view a deeper distinction between branches than even that afforded by the presence or absence of fruit. If the barren be opposed to the fruitful branch, still more sharply opposed to one another are the dead branches and the living.

Dead branches.—"If a man abide not in Me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned." A branch that was merely barren might be spared for a time; but a dead one never. "Without Me ye can do nothing." A Christian without Christ is like a severed limb or a broken twig—good for nothing, and possessing no life. Yet individuals and even Churches may be found in this condition. "Thou hast a name that thou livest," says the

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Lord's messenger to the Church in Sardis, "and art dead." It was a Church "on paper"; it had lost all reality, because it had lost touch with Christ. It was like a dead branch, differing from it only in this, that it was not beyond the power of Christ's reviving hand. It is sad to think that there have been branches of the Vine not only barren, but dead. Only by abiding in Him can we maintain our spiritual life. Apart from Him we not only fail in our influence over others; we are devoid of life in ourselves. We are like salt that has lost its savour; like branches that have lost their sap. To be cast forth, gathered, burned—not even as fuel, but as a waste-heap—is all that such branches are good for.

Living branches.—"If ye abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you." The idea involved here is greater than can well be confined within the fetters of an allegory—even such an allegory as that of the True Vine. The framework is discarded when it has served its purpose. Christ speaks here

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of living members rather than of living branches. It is when there is unity of life between Christ and His people—when He is in them and they are in Him—that they get from Him the strength they need. As a living branch can draw from the Vine sufficient strength for its needs, so there are no limits to the strength which the man who “abides in Christ” can draw from Him. We have but to “ask what we will.” And the best thing of all we can ask is a fuller measure of that self-sacrificing love which is in Himself, that we may bring forth the Vine’s own fruit. Each one of us has it in his power to become, in the words of Whitfield about Isaac Watts, “a bit of Christ.” The worth of our influence on others will be measured by the extent of Christ’s influence on us. As we realise our own helplessness and barrenness, we shall rely more and more upon the fountain of strength within. To Christ’s words, “Without Me ye can do nothing,” we shall add these of St. Paul, “I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me.”

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“I am the Vine” is perhaps the most closely-reasoned and suggestive of all the allegories of our Lord about Himself. A recapitulation of its main features may be helpful. Christ is the Vine, His Father the Husbandman, His people the branches. These branches must (1) *bring forth fruit*: they must not be (a) *barren*—else they may be “taken away”—but (b) *fruitful*—even though they may have to be purged to ensure greater fruitfulness. To accomplish this, they must (2) *abide in the Vine*: they must not be (a) *dead*—else they will be cast out and burned—but (b) *living*—that they may receive from the Vine the strength they need.

The picture is a vivid one, and whether we have rightly interpreted all its details or not, it brings into prominence the two essentials of the Christian life—union with Christ and service for man. These it focuses in the two commands, “Abide in Me,” and “Bring forth fruit.” There we have life in Christ and life for Christ; the one enabling us to say “Whose I am,” the

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other "Whom I serve." As the life of the Vine abides in the branches and the branches in the Vine, so must Christians dwell in Christ and Christ in them. And as the branches are the only means whereby the Vine can produce its fruit, so are Christians the means whereby the life and power of Christ are to be communicated to the world. While the Christian life is hid with Christ in God, its fruits are known and tasted of men.

VII

CHRIST AND OUR DEADNESS

VII

CHRIST AND OUR DEADNESS

“I AM the Resurrection, and the Life: he that believeth in Me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: and whosoever liveth, and believeth in Me, shall never die.”—ST. JOHN xi. 25.

“I AM the Resurrection and the Life.” Such are the solemn triumphant words which we have heard read at many a burial service, converting what would otherwise be a ceremony of utter darkness and gloom into an observance of sober joy and hope. Spoken in the presence of death and the grave, they serve to remind us of Him who has robbed the one of its sting and the other of its victory. They take us back to the hour when they were first uttered—the hour when the Lord of Life showed a sorrowing woman His power over death. They bid us think, too, of that hour when other sorrowing women, standing by another tomb, heard

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the words, "I know that ye seek Jesus, which was crucified. He is not here, for He is risen, as He said."

We must have already been struck by the fact that the various gifts offered by our Lord for the satisfaction of our human needs all consist of *life* in some one or other of its forms. Does He call Himself the Light? "He shall have the Light of Life." Or the Way? "I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life." Or the Shepherd? "I am come that they might have Life." Or the Bread? "I am the Bread of Life." Even where not expressed, the idea is implied. It is Life to which the Door gives entrance; Life that unites Vine and branches. And now the Life which has triumphed over hunger, thirst, darkness, barrenness, triumphs over its great enemy, death. In the presence of the dreadest fact of all, Christ makes His highest claim, calls on faith to make its final venture, bids His people trust Him to the uttermost. He who is the Light of life, the Way of life, the Shepherd of life, the Bread of life, is now "The Resurrection and the Life."

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CHRIST THE RESURRECTION AND THE LIFE.

It is important to observe, by way of analysis, that the verse in which our Lord makes this claim has two clauses, and that each of them is in its turn divided, the division in the second clause corresponding to the division in the first. The first clause is about Christ Himself; the second is about His people. The first begins with "I am"; the second with "He that believeth in Me." The first gives us two names for Christ; the second gives us two facts about His people which correspond to these names. The two names are *Resurrection* and *Life*. To the first name, "I am the Resurrection," correspond the words, "He that believeth in Me, though he were dead; yet shall he live." To the second name, "I am the Life," correspond the words, "Whosoever liveth, and believeth in Me, shall never die."

Before studying the two names separately, it is worth while to notice the words "I am," which cover both the names in the first clause, and the words "he that believeth in

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Me," which cover both the facts in the second. His claim is not primarily, "I give you," but "I am." He gives of Himself. As a sovereign confers a title in virtue of being the fountain of honour, so Christ confers life as being Himself the Fountain of life. In this interview Martha has spoken to Him of a resurrection at the last day ; but He would lead her from trust in a future event to trust in a living Person. Victory over death is His personal work. Our hopes of immortality are centred in Christ. Our trust in Him carries us beyond trust in His promises. Faith does not mean our belief that He will do this or that for us, but our belief in Himself. We believe that a promise will be kept because we believe in the one who makes the promise. So with Christ it is *I am*, not I give. "He that believeth *in Me*," not in My gifts. Faith in the Person is what involves faith in the promises. The best illustration of this is given in the words that follow. He asks, "Believest thou this?" Martha's answer practically amounts to saying, "I do more

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than believe *this*—I believe *Thee*.” “Yea, Lord,” she says, “I believe that Thou art the Christ, the Son of God, which should come into the world.” Christ is the Fountain of immortality, and he that is united to Christ is partaker of His immortality. The gift held out in “I am ” is accepted by “whosoever believeth in Me.”

The two names which our Lord here gives Himself indicate respectively two sides of His work : His power of raising the dead to life, and His power of preserving the living from death. “I am the Resurrection . . . he that believeth in Me, though he were dead, yet shall he live.” “I am the Life . . . whosoever liveth, and believeth in Me, shall never die.”

I. THE RESURRECTION.

This name implies and takes into account the great fact of death—a fact never to be lightly passed over. If some of the heathen moralists were wont to bestow too much thought on death, that was better far than belittling or ignoring it. It is told of the

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Sultan Saladin that when he sat in state, surrounded by banners and trophies, there was hung above them all the banner of Death, with the words, "Saladin, king of kings—Saladin, victor of victors—Saladin must die."

While it is morbid to be always dwelling on death, it is good for us at times, as Samuel Rutherford put it, to "forefancy our death-bed." And our Lord's words were not spoken with any indifference as to death. He who spoke them wept, groaned, was troubled, ere He could perform His work of mercy and power. Even in the moment of lightening the world's sorrow He felt deeply what that sorrow was. "It is not with a heart of stone that the dead are raised." That very fact gives additional significance to His words. Death is mighty, but Christ is mightier. We can realise the mingled fear and joy of those who first heard that He could not be holden of death—that He was the living, the risen Lord. For it is on His own Resurrection that the very existence of His Church depends. "If Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your

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faith is also vain." His work did not end with the Cross. He was no mere martyr suffering at the hands of wicked men. There was a Divine purpose in His sacrifice, and that sacrifice was not complete until His victory over sin and death had been accomplished.

As Christ is "The Resurrection" in virtue of having personally overcome death, He is also "The Resurrection" as the pledge of immortality in His followers. "He that believeth in Me, though he were dead, yet shall he live." "If we believe," writes St. Paul, "that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with Him." There have, it is true, been hopes of immortality apart from Christ. Men have felt that the powers God has given them are too good to be allowed to perish as if they had never been; that the love which cements the hearts of husband and wife, brother and sister, parent and child, will not be left without its final satisfaction. But not until Christ had overcome death was the foundation laid of that firm trust which can look calmly and confidently through the

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gate of death to the undiscovered country beyond. A firm belief in God and a firm hope of immortality go hand in hand ; and the same Lord who revealed the face of God as it had never been revealed before, showed man also his own true dignity as born to hold eternal fellowship with God. Hence the appropriate symbols on a Christian tomb are not the urn, the death's head, or the broken column, signifying nothing but corruption and decay, but rather the shield of faith, the anchor of hope, the cross of redemption ; and their most becoming inscriptions are not those which extol the virtues of the departed, but those which speak of belief in a world to come. The Christian hope centres in the Person of Christ. He proclaims Himself here as the embodiment of that hope, and by His own Resurrection the promise was sealed. We date our assurance of immortality from the hour

When from the grave He sprang at dawn of morn,
And led through boundless air thy conquering road,
Leaving a glorious track, where saints, new-born,
Might fearless follow to their blest abode.

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But the name "Resurrection," as applied to Christ, covers more than His victory over physical death, either for Himself or for His followers. In His teaching, especially as interpreted by St. John, death is scarcely ever thought of in a purely physical sense. He sometimes even discouraged the use of the word to signify the dissolution of the body, preferring to employ the term "sleep." It is not, then, merely from death of this sort that Christ delivers His people. He has come to raise men from the spiritual death in which they are involved, and to make them partakers of the divine life of fellowship with God. Those who hear Him and believe in God are described as having "passed from death unto life"; and St. John uses the same expression in his first Epistle to indicate those who, by their love to the brethren, show that they have undergone the same change. All His saving of the lost—all His response to our needs and sicknesses—all His work as the Way, the Bread, the Door, the Light, the Shepherd—may be regarded as part of the Resurrection-

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work of Christ. In all that we do to raise men from a life of sin to a life of righteousness—from trust in themselves to union with Christ—we are aiding Him in the same work. “He that believeth in Me, though he were dead, yet shall he live.”

2. THE LIFE.

Resurrection is an act ; Life a condition. Resurrection points back to a previous state of life ; it is life re-assumed after temporary withdrawal. Christ is the Restorer of life because He is the Giver of life ; and He is the Giver of life because He has life in Himself. “In Him was life ; and the life was the light of men.” His Resurrection was but His re-assumption of what was His from the beginning. Wondrous fact though it was, it was not the greatest and most cardinal fact. Greater still is His possession from eternity of the Divine life. Life is the most difficult of all things to define, and many have been man’s attempts to explain its meaning and origin. The Christian view places the source of all life in God. “The

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system," writes Professor Flint, "of which the first word is, In the beginning there was nothing except space and atoms, has for its last word, Eternal Death ; as the system of which the first word is, In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth, has for its last word, Eternal Life." God is the source of all personality and life, and all the fulness of God's life is present in Christ.

"I am the Life . . . whosoever liveth and believeth in Me, shall never die." As Christ can restore the dead to life, so He can preserve the living from death. As salt has at once a quickening and a preserving power—a power to maintain as well as a power to bestow—so Christ, the Life, can make us partakers of His life, and preserve us from death. The life of the believer in Christ is ever striking its roots deeper and deeper, ever getting nearer and nearer to the source of life. Jesus can truly say, therefore, that such a man shall never die ; for while his life on earth must end, the higher life by which he is united to Christ is immortal. When we fully realise what life in Christ

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may mean, it will seem almost absurd to think that the close of earthly existence can terminate it.

From this it is obvious that Life, like Resurrection, cannot possibly be used here in any merely physical sense. It must transcend any such idea as the mere prolongation of existence. While the promise of Christ doubtless includes immortality, it includes far more. It means life on a higher plane, life hid with Christ in God. It means fellowship with God, and participation in His nature. It unfolds the idea dimly present to the mind of Abigail when she said to David, "The soul of my lord shall be bound in the bundle of life with the Lord thy God." Christ draws a line, not so much between present and future, as between higher and lower. The gulf between this world and the next is less wide than that which here and now separates life with God from life without God. "He that hath the Son hath Life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not Life."

Thus, if the act of turning to Christ is

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necessary for our restoration to life, the condition of abiding in Him is equally necessary for the preserving of our life. As the Way is to the Door, so is Life to Resurrection. If many of us feel the need of being raised up by Christ from our state of spiritual deadness, there are others who feel their chief need to be that of preserving the life that they have, lest they lose it or fall from it. For such it is good to remember that Christ is not only the Resurrection, but the Life ; that Resurrection, indeed, is only the entrance into Life ; that He who said "Come unto Me," said also "Abide in Me."

What our Lord promises us here, then, is Life under two aspects—its renewal and its continuance. He is the Resurrection ; therefore the dead who believe shall live. He is the Life ; therefore the living who believe shall not die. The two Sacraments of the Church afford illustrations of the same two-fold truth. Baptism, the first sacrament, speaks to us of renewal, of the new birth, of our burial with Christ, and our rising with

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Him to newness of life. "God," says St. Peter, "hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the Resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead." And again, "The like figure whereunto Baptism doth also now save us . . . by the Resurrection of Jesus Christ." It accordingly takes place but once ; it is a single act ; it symbolises the conferring of the new life. But if Baptism answers to the one claim, "I am the Resurrection," the Lord's Supper answers to the other and fuller claim, "I am the Life." It represents to us a perpetual communion with the living Christ ; the possession of Him within us as the source and means of life. "He that eateth of this Bread shall live for ever." It is no single act, performed only once on each individual, as Baptism is ; it represents a continuous process, like the assimilation of food ; an abiding and progressive life. The one is the lighting of the flame, the other its tending and feeding. The one is the birth, the other the growth. The one speaks of regeneration, the other of sanctification. In His sacraments, then, as in His

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words, we have pledges of the Eternal Life which Christ imparts. They are signs and seals attesting the twin truths that Christ is always able to revive us if we are dead, and to sustain us if we are alive. And it is this quickening and sustaining power that we all want. Deadness is our chief curse, life our most pressing need. Amid all the deadness of our spiritual state, there is hope for us if only we lay hold on Christ. "In Him, he who is dead is sure of life, and he who lives is sure never to die."

"I am the Resurrection and the Life" closes our series of meditations on the *I am's* of our Lord. It will be noticed that these have not been treated in the exact order in which they appear in Scripture. But if any apology be needed for this, one can point to the precedent set by the author of the Fourth Gospel himself, who arranged his material in such a way as would best serve the end he had in view—the presentation of Jesus to the world as Christ the Son of God. The purpose aimed at in this little

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book (to compare small things with great) has been to present what may be called a ladder of spiritual progress, by climbing the several steps of which the follower of Christ may experience His response to each successive need. The order of such experience is not, of course, the same in every case; it is capable, indeed, of infinite variety. But the order followed here would seem to be one in which our Lord often presents Himself to His people, as affording a gradually increasing satisfaction for needy souls. We are in darkness, and He reveals Himself as a Light that we may see, and follow, and possess. This Light, however, serves but to show the poverty of our estate; and accordingly His next offer is that of a Door to shelter us; a home where we can remain and dwell with Him. But even this resting-place reminds us that we have still far to travel ere we reach our journey's end; and our cry for direction is met by a Way—a way of Truth and Life by which we shall at length reach the Father. Even on the way, however, we are helpless; we wander from

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it, we faint, we are scattered abroad ; we want a living guide, a Good Shepherd who will give His very life for us, and who knows us all by name. Scarcely is this want in its turn supplied, when we are conscious of yet another ; the need of a strength within as well as without ; something that will make us less like sheep and more like men. This we find in the Bread of Life ; Christ within us as our strength and hope. Then the union between Him and us becomes closer still ; we begin to work for Him as well as He for us ; we become branches of the True Vine, abiding in it and bringing forth fruit. And finally, He, who has done all else for us, destroys that last enemy which is death ; gives Himself to us as the Resurrection and the Life ; confers upon us, maintains in us, an eternal fellowship with God. Thus, leading us on from strength to strength, does Christ fulfil for us the great *I am* of the Apocalypse, inclusive of all the rest—"I am Alpha and Omega, the First and the Last."

APPENDIX

SOME ADDITIONAL READING

THESE sayings of our Lord are treated with more or less fulness in the various exegetical works on St. John's Gospel. Among them may be mentioned the commentaries by Milligan and Moulton, Godet, and Marcus Dods; and (more popular in character) Maclaren in *Bible - Class Expositions*, and Campbell Morgan in *The Analysed Bible*.

More special treatment is given to the various titles of our Lord in Westcott's *Revelation of the Father*, Spurgeon's *The Messiah*, Warfield's *The Lord of Glory*. Miss Annie Small, in her recent illuminative little book, *Studies in the Gospel of St. John*, has a chapter entitled "The Sevenfold 'I Am.'"

Of the individual names and titles, *The Light of the World* has been oftener used than

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any of the others as a title for works dealing with our Lord's Person and work. In many cases, however (as in Sir Edwin Arnold's poem, and the able collection of essays entitled *Lux Mundi*), the reference is rather to His whole personality than to this particular aspect of it. His claim and its justification are well stated in Row's *Manual of Christian Evidences*, Part I. ch. i. See also Phillips Brooks's sermons, "The Light of the World," "The Candle of the Lord," "The Mystery of Light."—*The Way, the Truth, and the Life* receive careful if somewhat laboured treatment in Dr. Hort's Hulsean lectures published under this title. See also Paget's *Christ the Way*. But the best commentary on the "Way" is *The Pilgrim's Progress*.—On *The Good Shepherd* there are sermons by F. W. Robertson (2nd series) and Newman (vol. viii. p. 230). The specially pastoral work of Christ is ably dealt with in Latham's *Pastor Pastorum*.—*The Bread of Life* is treated of in many manuals on the Holy Communion. See also John Macleod Campbell, *Christ the Bread of Life*; James M. Campbell, *The*

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Christ in Man; and sermons by Newman (vol. vi. p. 136), and by Phillips Brooks (*The Candle of the Lord*, p. 232—"Christ the Food of Man").—On *The True Vine*, see Macmillan, *Bible Teachings in Nature*, p. 74; A. Murray, *Abide in Christ*; and, for a beautifully developed allegory of the Vine, Mrs. Hamilton King's poem, *The Sermon in the Hospital*.—*The Resurrection and the Life* will be best studied in connection with our Lord's Resurrection and its bearing on our own. On this subject Professor William Milligan's *Resurrection of our Lord*, and the same author's *Resurrection of the Dead*, will be found of value.

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