LECTURE V.

Fifth Sunday in Lent.

PRAYER, THE CHARACTERISTIC ACTION OF RELIGION.

S. Matt. vii. 7.

Ask and it shall be given you.

RELIGION is the bond between the soul and God; which sin, by virtue of its very nature; breaks up and destroys. It is of importance to inquire whether man can strengthen and intensify that which he can, it seems, so easily ruin if he will. Does his power lie only in the direction of destruction? Has he no means of invigorating and repairing a tie, in itself so precious, yet in some respects so frail? The answer lies in our Lord's promise. Prayer is the act by which man, conscious at once of his weakness and of his mortality, puts himself into real and effective communication with the Almighty, the Eternal, the Self-Existent God. I say, effective communication. For prayer, as our Lord teaches in the text and elsewhere, is not without results. God answers prayer in many ways. His answers to the soul's petition for health and strength
collectively described as grace; grace being the invisible influence whereby He on His part strengthens and quickens the tie which binds the petitioner to Himself. "Ask and it shall be given you." Prayer then braces the bond of religion from the side of man; and grace, God's highest answer to prayer, braces it in a different and far more powerful sense on the part of God.

It is not too much to say that the practice of prayer is co-extensive with the idea of religion. Wherever man has believed a higher power to exist, he has not merely discussed the possibility of entering into converse with such a power; he has assumed, as a matter of course, that he can do so. Upon desert plains and wild promontories, not less than in crowded thoroughfares and gorgeous temples, priest-hoods, and kings, and multitudes have taken prayer for granted, as being the most practical as well as the most interesting and solemn concern of life. The surface of the earth, of parts of our own island, is still covered with the relics of some among these ancient worships. And if the implied conceptions of deity were degraded, and the rites cruel, or inhuman, or impure, and the minds of the worshippers not seldom imbruted by the very acts which should have raised them heavenward; still the idea of worship as the natural correlative of belief in the superhuman was always there. To know that a higher Being existed, and interested Himself, in whatever way, in the destinies of man, was to feel that it was at once a right and a duty to approach Him.
And as we pass the historical lines within which, as Christians believe, mankind has enjoyed a knowledge of God's successive revelations of His true self and His true will, we find that prayer is the prominent feature, the characteristic exercise of man's highest life. Sacrifice begins at the very gates of Eden. The life of early Patriarchs is described as a "walking with God," a continuous reference of thought and aspiration to the Father above, Who yet was so near them. And after the Mosaic Law was given, when the idea and range of sin had been deepened and extended in the mind of Israel, we find prayer organized in a system of sacrifices, suited to various wants and moods of the human soul, consciously dealing with its God as the King, both of the sacred nation and of the individual conscience. Penitence, thanksgiving, intercession, adoration, each found an appropriate expression. Later still, in the Psalter, prayer—the purest, the loftiest, the most passionate—took shape in imperishable forms. And when at length a new revelation was made in Jesus Christ, there was little to add to what was already believed as to the power and obligation of prayer, beyond revealing the secret of its acceptance. Our Lord's precepts and example are sufficiently emphatic; and His Apostles appear to represent prayer not so much as a practice of

1 Gen. iv. 4.  
2 Gen. v. 21; vi. 9.  
3 Levit i-vii  
4 S. Matt. vi 9; S. Luke xi. 2; S. Matt. xxvi. 41; S. Mark xi. 24; S. Luke xviii. 1, &c.  
5 S. Matt. xiv. 23; S. Mark vi. 48; S. Luke vi. 12; iv. 28; S. John xvii. 1.
the Christian life, as its very breath and instinctive movement. The Christian must be "continuing instant in prayer;" he must "pray without ceasing." ¹

I.

Each faculty, or endowment, or form of activity that belongs to man has, over and above a number of more indirect effects, its appropriate and characteristic action, in which its whole strength is embarked, and in which it finds its full play and impetus. To this law religion is no exception. While its influence upon human life is strong and various in proportion to its high aim and object; while it is felt, when it wields real empire, in every department of human activity and interest, as an invigorating, purifying, chastening, restraining, guiding influence, it too has a work peculiarly its own. In this work it is wont, it we may so speak, to embark its collective forces, and to become peculiarly conscious of its direction and intensity. This work is prayer. Prayer is emphatically religion in action. It is the soul of man engaging in that particular form of activity which presupposes the existence of a great bond between itself and God. Prayer is, therefore, nothing else or less than the noblest kind of human exertion. It

¹ Rom. xii. 12; 1 Thess. v. 17.
is the one department of action in which man realizes the highest privilege and capacity of his being. And, in doing this, he is himself enriched and ennobled almost indefinitely: now, as of old, when he comes down from the mountain, his face bears tokens of an irradiation which is not of this world.

That this estimate of the value of prayer is not universal among educated people in our day, is only too notorious. If many a man were to put into words with perfect honesty and explicitness what he thinks, he would say that prayer is an excellent thing for a clergyman, or for a recluse, or for a sentimentalist, or for women and children generally; that it has its uses as a form of desultory occupation, an outlet for feeling, a means of discipline. For himself, he cannot really think that much prayer would help him much. It implies a life of feeling—perhaps, he would say, of morbid feeling; and he prides himself upon being guided only by reflection. It is sustained, he thinks, by imagination, rather than by reason; and he deems imagination puerile and feminine. His religion, whatever it is, has nothing to do with imagination, and is hard reason from first to last; and accordingly prayer seems to him to be altogether less worthy of the energies of a thinking man than hard work, whether it be work of the hands or of the brains, whether it be study or business. The dignity of real labour is proverbial, but where, he asks, is the dignity of so sentimental an occupation as prayer? "For his own part, he thinks," (I am quoting words which have actually been used) "that
Serious prayer is a form of hard work. Religion is not worship, but only another name for doing good to our fellow-creatures."

- Now, without saying one word to disparage the intimate connection between religion and philanthropy, let us examine the idea of prayer, which is taken for granted in such language as the foregoing. Is it true that prayer is, as is assumed, little else than the half passive play of sentiment which flows languidly on through the minutes or hours of easy reverie? Let those who have really prayed give the answer. They sometimes, with the patriarch Jacob, describe prayer as a wrestling together with an Unseen Power, which may last, not infrequently in an earnest life, late into the night hours, or even to the break of day. Sometimes, with S. Paul, they refer to common intercession as a concerted struggle. They have, when praying, their eyes fixed upon the Great Intercessor in Gethsemane, upon the drops of blood which fall to the ground in that Agony of Resignation and Sacrifice. Importunity is of the essence of successful prayer. Our Lord's references to the subject especially imply this. The Friend who is at rest with his family, will rise at last to give a loaf to the hungry applicant. The Unjust Judge yields in the end to the resistless eagerness of the widow's cry. Our Lord's blessing on the Syro-Phænician woman is the consecration of importunity with God. And importunity means, not dreaminess, but sustained work. It is through prayer especially that "the

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1 Gen. xxxii. 24.  
2 Rom. xv. 30.  
3 S. Luke xxii. 44.  
4 S. Luke xi. 8.  
5 S. Luke xviii. 5.  
6 S. Matt. xv. 27, 28; S. Mark vii. 23, 29.
kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force." It was a saying of the late Bishop Hamilton of Salisbury, that "no man was likely to do much good at prayer who did not begin by looking upon it in the light of a work, to be prepared for and persevered in with all the earnestness which we bring to bear upon subjects which are, in our opinion, at once most interesting and most necessary."

This indeed will appear, if, looking to an act of real prayer, we take it to pieces. Of what does it consist? It consists always of three separate forms of activity which, in the case of different persons, co-exist in very varying degrees of intensity, but which are found, in some degree, in all who pray, whenever they pray.

To pray, is first of all to put the understanding in motion, and to direct it upon the Highest Object to Which it can possibly address itself, the Infinite God. In our private prayers, as in our public liturgies, we generally preface the petition itself by naming one or more of His attributes. Almighty and Everlasting God! If the understanding is really at work at all, how overwhelming are the ideas, the truths, which pass thus before it; a boundless Power, an Existence which knows neither beginning nor end. Then the substance of the petition, the motives which are alleged for urging it, the issues which depend upon its being granted or being refused, present themselves to the eye of the understanding. And when prayer is not addressed to our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, the fact that it is addressed to

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1 S. Matt. xi. 12.
the Father through Him, and in reliance on His merits and mediation, opens upon Christian thought the inmost mysteries before the Eternal Throne. And thus any common act of real prayer keeps, not the imagination, but the understanding, occupied earnestly, absorbingly, under the guidance of faith, from first to last.

Next, to pray is to put the affections in motion; it is to open the heart. The object of prayer is the Uncreated Love, the Eternal Beauty; He of Whose beauty all that moves love and admiration here is at best a pale reflection. To be in His presence in prayer, is to be conscious of an expansion of the heart, and of the pleasure which accompanies it, which we feel, in another sense, when speaking with an intimate and loved friend or relative. And this movement of the affections is sustained throughout the act of prayer. It is invigorated by the spiritual sight of God, but it is also the original impulse which leads us to draw near to Him. In true prayer, as in teaching, “out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh.”

Once more, to pray, is to put the will in motion, just as decidedly as we do when we sit down to read hard, or when we walk up a steep hill against time. That sovereign power in the soul, which we name the will, does not

1 This sentence has been altered to obviate a misapprehension of the writer’s meaning.
2 Eph. vi. 18; S. John iv. 22-29; Rom x. 14; Heb. xi. 6.
3 S. Matt. xv. 8; 1 S. John iii. 21, 22.
4 S. Matt. xii. 34; S. Luke vi. 46.
5 S. John ix. 31; S. Matt. vii. 21; S. James iv. 7, 8. These passages all imply that prayer in which the will is not engaged is worthless.
merely, in prayer, impel us to make the first necessary mental effort, but it also enters most penetratingly and vitally into the very action of the prayer itself. It is the will which presses the petition; it is the will which struggles with the reluctance of sloth or with the secret opposition of sinful passion; it is the will which perseveres; it is the will which exclaims; "I will not let Thee go, except Thou bless me." The amount of will which we severally carry into the act of prayer is the ratio of its sincerity; and where prayer is at once real and prolonged, the demands which it makes upon our power of concentrating determination into a specific and continuous act are very considerable indeed.

Now, these three ingredients of prayer are also ingredients in all real work, whether of the brains or of the hands. The sustained effort of the intelligence and of the will must be seconded in work no less than in prayer by a movement of the affections, if work is to be really successful. A man must love his work to do it well. The difference between prayer and ordinary work is that in prayer the three ingredients are more equally balanced. Study may in time become intellectual habit, which scarcely demands any effort of will: handiwork may in time become so mechanical as to require little or no guidance from thought: each may exist in a considerable, although not in the highest degree of excellence, without any co-operation of the affections. Not so prayer. It is always the joint act of the will

1 Gen xxxii. 26.
and the understanding, impelled by the affections; and when either will or intelligence is wanting, prayer at once ceases to be itself, by degenerating into a barren intellectual exercise, or into a mechanical and unspiritual routine.

The dignity of prayer as being real work becomes clear to us if we consider the faculties which it employs. This will be made clearer still if we consider the effect of all sincere prayer upon the habitual atmosphere of the soul. Prayer places the soul face to face with facts of the first order of solemnity and importance; with its real self, and with its God. And just as art, or study, or labour in any department is elevating, when it takes us out of and beyond the petty range of daily and perhaps material interests, while yet it quickens interest in them by kindling higher enthusiasms into life; so in a peculiar and transcendent sense it is with prayer. Prayer is man's inmost movement towards a Higher Power; but what is the intellectual view or apprehension of himself that originally impels him to move? Under what aspect does man appear to himself in prayer? In a former lecture we have encountered the mystery which lies enclosed within each one of us,—the mystery which is yet a fact,—of an undying personality. It is that which each human speaker describes as "I." It is that of which each of us is conscious as no one else can be conscious. Its existence is not proved to us by a demonstration, since we apprehend it as immediately obvious. Its certainty can be shaken by no sophistical or destructive argument, since our conviction of its reality is
based upon a continuous act of primary perception. No sooner do we withdraw ourselves from the importunities of sense, from the wanderings of imagination, from the misleading phrases which confuse the mental sight, than we find ourselves face to face with this fact, represented by "I." For it is neither the body which the real self may ignore, nor a passionate impulse which the real self may conquer, nor even that understanding which, close as it is to the real self, is yet distinct from it. The body may be in its decrepitude; the flames of passion may have died away; the understanding may be almost in its dotage; yet the inward, self-possessed, self-governing being may remain untouched, realizing itself in struggling against the instincts of bodily weakness, and in crushing out the embers which survive the fires of extinct passions. Now it is this self, conscious of its greatness, conscious of its weakness, which is the real agent in prayer. In its oppressive sense of solitude, even in the midst of multitudes, this self longs to go forth, and to commune with the Father of spirits Who gave it life. This real self it is which apprehends God with the understanding, which embraces Him with the affections, which resolves through the will to obey Him; and thus does it underlie and unite the complex elements of prayer, so that in true heartfelt prayer we become so conscious of its vitality and power. It is in prayer especially that we cease to live, as it were, in a single faculty, or on the surface of our being: it is in prayer that we cease to regard ourselves as animal forms, or as social powers, or as family characters
and look hard, for the time being, at ourselves; as being what we really are; that is to say, as immortal spirits, outwardly draped in social forms and proprieties, and linked to a body of flesh and blood, but in our felt spiritual solitude looking steadily upwards at the face of God, and straining our eyes onwards towards the great eternity which lies before us.¹

Prayer is then so noble, because it is the work of man as man; of man realizing his being and destiny with a vividness which is necessary to him in no other occupation. But what shall we say of it, when we reflect further that in prayer man holds converse with God: that the Being of Beings, with all His majestic attributes, filling and transcending the created universe, traversing human history, traversing each man’s own individual history, is before him: that although man is dust and ashes, he is, by prayer, already welcomed in the very courts of heaven? It is not necessary to dwell on this topic. Whatever be the daily occupations of any in this Church, be he a worker with the hands or a worker with the brain, be he gentle or simple, be he unlettered or educated, be he high in the state or among the millions at its base, is it not certain that the nobleness of his highest forms of labour must fall infinitely below that of any single human spirit entering consciously into converse with the Infinite and Eternal God?

II.

But granted, men say, the dignity of prayer—granted even its dignity as labour: what if this labour be misapplied? There are many functions in many states, very dignified and not a little onerous, yet in a social and human sense not very productive. Is prayer, in its sphere, of this description? Has it no tangible results? Does it end with itself? Can the labourer in this field point to anything definite that is achieved by his exertions?

The question is sufficiently serious at all times, but especially in our own positive and practical day. And it is necessary to make two observations, that we may see more clearly what issue is precisely before us.

In the first place, there is here no question as to the subjective effect of prayer; the effect which it confessedly has upon the mind and character of the person who prays. Such effects have been admitted on the part of those who unhappily do not pray themselves; just as the Jews, at the time of the Betrayal, were so alive to tokens in the disciples of companionship with Jesus. That all the effects of Christian prayer upon the soul, or most of them, are natural, a Christian cannot admit: he believes them to be chiefly, due to the transforming power of the grace of God, given, as at other times, so especially in answer to prayer. But that some effects of prayer upon the soul are natural consequences of directing the mind and the affections.
towards a superhumin object, whether real or ideal, may be fully granted. Thus it has been observed that persons without natural ability have, through the earnestness of their devotional habits, acquired in time powers of sustained thought, and an accuracy and delicacy of intellectual touch, which would not else have belonged to them. The intellect being the instrument by which the soul handles religious truth, a real interest in religious truth will of itself often furnish an educational discipline; it alone educates an intellect which would otherwise be uneducated.¹ The moral effects of devotion are naturally more striking and abundant. Habitual prayer constantly confers decision on the wavering, and energy on the listless, and calmness on the excitable, and disinterestedness on the selfish. It braces the moral nature by transporting it into a clear, invigorating unearthly atmosphere: it builds up the moral life, insensibly but surely remedying its deficiencies, and strengthening its weak points, till there emerges a comparatively symmetrical and consistent whole, the excellence of which all must admit, though its secret is known only to those who know it by experience.² Akin to the moral are the social effects of prayer. Prayer makes men as members of society different in their whole bearing from those who do not pray. It gilds social intercourse and conduct with a tenderness, an unobtrusiveness, a sincerity, a frankness, an evenness of temper, a cheerfulness, a collectedness, a con-

¹ Ps. cxix. 100. ² Ps. xxvii. 4, 5, 6.
stant consideration for others, united to a simple loyalty to truth and duty, which leavens and strengthens society. Nay, it is not too much to say that prayer has even physical results. The countenance of a Fra Angelico reflects his spirit no less than does his art: the bright eye, the pure elevated expression, speak for themselves. It was said of one who has died within the present generation,¹ that in his later years his face was like that of an illuminated clock; the colour and gilding had long faded away from the hands and figures, but the ravages of time were more than compensated for by the light which shone from within. This was what might have been expected in an aged man of great piety; to have lived in spirit on Mount Tabor during the years of a long life is to have caught in its closing hours some rays of the glory of the Transfiguration.

Secondly, prayer is not only—perhaps in some of the holiest souls it is not even chiefly—a petition for something that we want and do not possess. In the larger sense of the word, as the spiritual language of the soul, prayer is intercourse with God, often seeking no end beyond the pleasure of such intercourse. It is praise; it is congratulation; it is adoration of the Infinite Majesty; it is a colloquy in which the soul engages with the All-wise and the All-holy; it is a basking in the sunshine, varied by ejaculations of thankfulness to the Sun of Righteousness for His light and His warmth. In this

¹ Rev. J. Keble.
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larger sense, the earlier part of the Te Deum is prayer as much as the latter part; the earliest and latest clauses of the Gloria in Excelsis as truly as the central ones; the Sanctus or the Jubilate no less than the Litany; the Magnificat as certainly as the fifty-first Psalm. When we seek the company of our friends, we do not seek it simply with the view of getting something from them: it is a pleasure to be with them, to be talking to them at all, or about anything; to be in possession of their sympathies and to be showing our delight at it; to be assuring them of their place in our hearts and thoughts. So it is with the soul, when dealing with the Friend of friends—

with God. Prayer is not, as it has been scornfully described, "only a machine warranted by theologians to make God do what His clients want:" it is a great deal more than petition, which is only one department of it: it is nothing less than the whole spiritual action of the soul turned towards God as its true and adequate object. And if used in this comprehensive sense, it is clear that, as to much prayer, in the sense of spiritual intercourse with God, the question whether it is answered can never arise, for the simple reason that no answer is asked for.

But whether prayer means only, as in popular language it does generally mean, petition for a specific object, or the whole cycle of possible communion between the soul and God, the question whether it is heard is a very practical one. We do not address inanimate objects, however beautiful they may be, except in the way of
poetical apostrophe. We do not enter into spiritual colloquy with the mountains, or the rivers, or the skies, with a view to discharging a duty to them, or really improving ourselves. If there is really no being above who does hear us, what can be the use of continuing a practice that is based upon an altogether false presumption? The subjective benefits of prayer depend upon our belief in its real power. But even if they did not, who would go through a confessedly fictitious exercise at regular intervals with a view to securing them? Who would continue to pray regularly, if he were once well persuaded that the effect of prayer is after all only like the effect of the higher philosophy or poetry; an education and a stimulus to the soul of man, but not an influence that can really touch the mind or will of that Being to Whom it is addressed? Nobody denies the moral and mental stimulus which is to be gained from the study of the great poets. But do we read Homer, or Shakespeare, or Goethe each morning and evening, and perhaps at the middle of the day? Or if such were the practice of any of us, should we have any approach to a feeling of being guilty of a criminal omission, if now and then we omitted to read them? No: if prayer is to be persevered in, it must be on the strength of a conviction that it is actually heard by a Living Person. We cannot practise any intricate trickery upon ourselves with a view to our moral edification. We cannot

1 The apostrophes of the Psalms and the Benedicite are really acts of praise to God, of which His creatures furnish the occasion.
pray, if we believe in our hearts that in prayer we are only holding communion with an ideal world of our own creation; that we are like children, with overheated imaginations, vainly endeavouring to pass the barriers which really confine us to our dark earthly prison-house; while, in our failure, we half consciously, half unconsciously, cheat ourselves with the consolation of talking to shapes of power or benevolence traced by our fathers or by ourselves upon its inexorable walls. We cannot fall into the ranks of the Christian Church, lifting up the holy hands of sacrifice and intercession on all the mountains of the world, if in our hearts we see in her only a new company of Baal-worshippers gathering upon the slopes of some modern Carmel, and vainly endeavouring to rouse her idol into an impossible animation; while the Eldjahs of materialistic science stand by to mock her fruitless efforts with the playful scorn of that tranquil irony to which their higher knowledge presumably entitles them.

The question whether God hears prayer, is at bottom the question whether He is really alive; whether in any true sense of the term He exists at all. No word is used more equivocally than the word "God" in the present day. If by "God" we mean only a product of the thought or consciousness of man, to which it cannot be certainly presumed that any being actually corresponds; the highest thought of man—yet only man's highest thought; then there is of course no one who can hear us. It has been said that if a man talks out loud to himself, apostrophizing what are in
truth only his own conceptions, it is difficult not to credit him with a certain tinge of madness; and it would be just as practical to address our prayer to the carved and gilded idols of Babylon, whose manufacture roused the sternest satire of the Evangelical Prophet, as to the unreal abstractions, which, labelled with the Most Holy Name, are sent us from the intellectual workshops, ancient and modern, of Alexandria or of Berlin. And if by “God” is meant only the unseen force of the universe, or its collective forces; if He is the principle of growth in the plant, the life-principle in the animal or in man; we need not read Spinoza in order to convince ourselves of the fruitlessness of prayer. A self-existing force or cause, if such can be conceived, without intelligence, without personality, of course without any moral attributes, may be a thing to wonder at, but it certainly is not a being to speak to. We may of course ejaculate to such a thing if we like; but we might just as well say litanies to the winds or to the ocean. The question may be safely left to our utilitarian instincts. Time and strength, after all, are limited, and we shall not in the long run spend “our money,” at least in this direction, “for that which is not bread, or our labour for that which satisfieth not.”

If, on the other hand, God exists, whether we think about Him or not; if He be not merely the mightiest force, the first of causes, but something more; if He be a personal Being, thinking with no limits to His thought, and willing

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1 Isaiah iv. 2.
with no fetters around His liberty; then surely we may reach Him, if we will. What is to prevent it? Cannot we men, at our pleasure, embody our thought, our feeling, our desires, our purposes in language, and so make them pass into and be apprehended by the created finite personalities around us? Where is the barrier that shall arrest thought, longings, desires, entreaties, not as yet clothed (why need they be clothed?) in speech, as they mount up from the soul towards the all-embracing Intelligence of God? And if God be not merely an infinite Intelligence, but a moral Being, a mighty Heart, so that justice, and mercy, and tenderness are attributes of His character, then to appeal to Him in virtue of these attributes is assuredly to appeal to Him to some purpose. If an Omnipresent Intelligence is a sufficient guarantee of His being able to hear us; an interest such as Justice and Mercy imply on His part towards creatures who depend upon Him for the original gift, and for the continued maintenance of life, is a guarantee of His willingness to do so.

It is on this ground that God is said to hear prayer in Holy Scripture. That He should do so follows from the reality of His nature as God. Elijah’s irony implics that He is unlike the Phoenician Baal in being really alive. A later Psalmist contrasts Him in like manner with the Assyrian idols, in that “they have eyes but see not, they have ears but hear not.” They do but fill their temples with gorgeous impotence. But Israel’s God is the author

1 Kings xviii. 27. 2 Ps cxv. 5
of the very senses whereby we are conscious of each other's presence and wishes, and can enter into a companionship of thought and purpose. Is He debarred from the use of the gifts which He Himself bestows with so bountiful a hand? "He that planted the ear shall He not hear, or He that formed the eye shall He not see?" Is it not, on the contrary, reasonable to believe that these powers must exist in a much higher and more perfect form in the one Being who gives them than in the myriads upon whom they are bestowed, and by whom they are only held in trust? And if it is improbable that, amid the innumerable beings who are alive to the sights and sounds of His creation, the Creator alone should be blind and deaf; is it more probable that He who has implanted in our breasts feelings of interest and pity for one another should be Himself insensible to our pain and need? Our hearts must anticipate and echo the statement of the Psalmist, that God does hear the desire of the poor; that the innocent, the oppressed, the suffering, have especial claims upon Him. And, to omit other illustrations, our Lord reveals Him as a Father, the common parent of men, of whose boundless love all earthly fatherhood is a shadow and a delegation. If the earthly parent, being evil, does not yet give a stone when his child cries for bread; the heavenly Father will not fall short of the teachings of an instinct which He has Himself implanted, by failing to give the Holy Spirit to them that ask Him.

1 Ps. xciv. 9.  
III.

If a man is a good Theist—we need not say, a good Christian—he must believe that the Father of Spirits is not deaf to the voice of the human soul; that the thanksgiving and praise, the intercessions and supplications, the penitence and the self-surrender of beings to whom He has given moral and intellectual life, is not utterly lost upon the Giver. But will He indeed answer prayer, when prayer takes the form of a petition for some specific blessing which must be either granted or refused? There is no doubt as to the reply which the Bible and the Church have given to this question. But what do some modern thinkers say about it? Do they not deny the power of prayer, by surrounding the Throne of God with barriers, which, as they would have it, oblige Him, while “the sorrowful sighings of the prisoners” of this vale of tears incessantly “come before Him,” to make as though He heard not, and to shorten His hand as if it could not save?”

The first presumed barrier against the efficacy of prayer to which men point is the scientific idea of law, reigning throughout the spiritual as well as the material universe. This idea, as we are constantly reminded, is one of the most remarkable conquests of modern thought; and no man, so it is said, can enter into it with an intelligent sympathy without abandoning the fond conceit that God will grant a particular favour to one of His creatures upon being asked
to do so. It may have been pardonable to pray for rain, for health, for freedom from pestilence and famine, when these things were supposed to depend upon the caprice of an omnipotent will. But the scientific idea of law renders these prayers absurd. We know that a shower is the product of atmospheric laws, which make a shower, under certain circumstances, inevitable; that the death of an individual is the result of physiological laws which absolutely determine it. The idea that a shower or the death of a man are contingent upon the good pleasure of a Being Who can avert or precipitate them at pleasure is unscientific; it belongs to days when the idea of law had not yet dawned upon the intellect of civilization, or when, at any rate, large margins of the physical world, and the whole of the spiritual world, were supposed to be beyond its frontiers, as being abandoned to the government of a capricious omnipotence. Surely, it is added, we have really attained to a nobler idea of the universe, than was this old theological conception of the Bible and the Church: the superiority is to be measured by those fundamental instincts of fitness within us, which assign to law and order a higher place in our minds than can belong to a personal will.

Does not the very word law, by reason of its majestic and imposing associations, here involve us in some indistinctness of thought? What do we mean by law? When we speak of a law of nature are we thinking of some self-sustained invisible force, of which we can give no account except that here it is, a matter of experience? Or do we
mean by a law of nature only a principle which, as our observation shews us, appears to govern particular actions of the Almighty Agent Who made and Who upholds the universe? If the former, let us frankly admit that we have not merely fettered God's freedom; we have, alas! ceased to believe in Him. For such self-sustained force is either self-originating, in which case there is no Being in existence who has made all that constitutes this universe. Or otherwise, having derived its first impact from the creative Will of God, this force has subsequently escaped altogether from His control, so that it now fetters His liberty; and, in this case, there is no Being in existence who is Almighty, in the sense of being really Master of this universe. If, however, we mean by law the observed regularity with which God works in nature as in grace; then, in our contact with law, we are dealing, not with a brutal, unintelligent, unconquerable force, but with the free will of an intelligent and moral Artist, Who works, in His perfect freedom, with sustained and beautiful symmetry. Where is the absurdity of asking Him to hold His hand, or to hasten His work? He to Whom we pray may be trusted to grant or to refuse a prayer, as may seem best to the highest wisdom and the truest love. And if He grant it, He is not without resources; even although we should have asked Him to suspend what we call a natural law. Can He not then provide for the freedom of His action without violating its order? Can He not supersede a lower rule of working
by the intervention of a higher? If He really works at all; if something that is neither moral nor intelligent has not usurped His throne,—it is certain that “the thing that is done upon earth He doeth it Himself;” and that it is therefore as consistent with reason as with reverence to treat Him as being a free Agent, Who is not really tied and bound by the intellectual abstractions with which finite intellects would fain destroy the freedom of His action.

No; to pray for rain or sunshine, for health or food, is just as reasonable as to pray for gifts which the soul only can receive—increased love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith. All such prayers presuppose the truth that God is not the slave of His own rules of action; that He can innovate upon His work without forfeiting His perfection; that law is only, our way of conceiving of His regularized working, and not an external force which governs and moulds what we recognize as His work. It dissolves into thin air, as we look hard at it, this fancied barrier of inexorable law; and as the mist clears off, beyond there is the throne of the Moral King of the universe, in Whose eyes material symmetry is as nothing when compared with the spiritual well-being of His moral creatures.

A second barrier to the efficacy of prayer is sometimes discovered in the truth that all which comes to pass is fore determined in the predestination of God. How is the efficacy of prayer to be reconciled, asks the fatalistic predestination, with the boundless power and knowledge of God?
Is not everything that happens to us the decision of an Almighty, Wise, Beneficent Will; a Will which, in human phrase, has ordained it from all eternity? Could this Will have been, could it be, other than It is? Has time any meaning for It? Is It not in Its Omniscience and Omnipotence eternally what It is? Where, then, is there any room for the effect of prayer? Can it be conceived that the erring understanding and finite will of the creature will be allowed to impose its decisions on the infallible Mind and resistless determinations of God? Surely if we are to go on praying, after recognizing the Sovereignty of God, we must give up the notion of exerting a real influence upon the Divine Will: we must content ourselves with resignation, with bringing our minds into conformity with that which, as a matter of fact, is quite beyond the range of our influence.

This language does but carry us into one department of the old controversy between the defenders of the sovereignty of God on the one side, and the advocates of the free will of man on the other. The very idea of God, as it occurs to the human mind, and the distinct statements of revelation, alike represent the Divine Will as exerting sovereign and resistless sway. If it were otherwise, God would not be Almighty, that is, He would not be God. On the other hand, our daily experience and the language of Scripture both assure us that man is literally a free agent: his freedom is the very ground of his moral and religious responsibility. Are these two truths hopelessly incompatible with each
other? So it may seem at first sight; and if we escape the danger of denying the one in the supposed interests of the other, if we shrink from sacrificing God's sovereignty to man's free will with Arminius, and from sacrificing man's freedom to God's sovereignty with Calvin, we can only express a wise ignorance by saying, that to us they seem like parallel lines which yet must meet at a point in eternity, far beyond our present range of view. We do know, however, that being both true, they cannot really contradict each other; and that in some manner, which we cannot formulate, the Divine Sovereignty must not merely be compatible with, but must even imply the perfect freedom of created wills. So it is with prayer and the Divine predestination. God orders all that happen to us, and, in virtue of His infinite knowledge, by eternal decrees. But He also says to us, in the plainest language, that He does answer prayer, and that practically His dealings with us are governed in matters of the greatest importance as well as of the least by the petitions which we address to Him. What if prayers and actions, to us at the moment perfectly spontaneous, are eternally foreseen and included within the all-embracing Predestination of God, as factors and causes, working out that final result which, beyond all dispute, is the product of His good pleasure? Whether I open my mouth or lift my hand, is, before my doing it, strictly within the jurisdiction and power of my personal will; but however I may decide, my decision, so absolutely free to me, will have been already incorporated by the All-seeing.
All-controlling Being as an integral part, however insignificant, of His one all-embracing purpose, leading on to effects and causes beyond itself. Prayer too is only a foreseen action of man which, together with its results, is embraced in the eternal predestination of God. To us this or that blessing may be strictly contingent on our praying for it; but our prayer is nevertheless so far from necessarily introducing change into the purpose of the Unchangeable, that it has been all along taken, so to speak, into account by Him. If then, with "the Father of Lights" there is in this sense "no variableness, neither shadow of turning," it is not therefore irrational to pray for specific blessings, as we do in the Litany, because God works out His plans not merely in us but by us; and we may dare to say that that which is to us a free self-determination, may be not other than a foreseen element of His work.

A third barrier supposed to interfere with the efficacy of prayer is the false idea of the Divine dignity which is borrowed from our notions of human royalties. It is assumed that a supreme governor cannot be expected to take account of trifling circumstances, or to decide between petty and conflicting claims. He legisلاتs for the universe; but it is not to be supposed that He will also discharge all the minute and harassing duties of a local executive. The power of prayer implies a special providence, and a special providence, we are told, is beneath the dignity of God. We have already encountered this line of thought, not in its practical bearings upon prayer, but as it affects our belief as to the Divine
Nature. "Do you imagine, men ask, when you reflect upon the vast universe in which we live—upon that immeasurable space—upon those innumerable worlds—upon those systems beyond systems of suns which are discovering themselves slowly but surely to our telescopes—that He who made this mighty whole has nothing to do but to listen to the little story of your wants and hopes and fears? He has instituted some good and universal rules of government under which you live: if they sometimes bear hardly upon you, your case is only that of others, and you must take your chance. To expect Him to suspend or to revoke His legislation on your particular account, is to sacrifice common sense to outrageous egotism; the egotism which can suppose that a petty individual life, 'a worm crawling on the surface of one of His smallest planets, can be an object of this particular consideration and interest to the Almighty Creator."

Even at the risk of representing human egotism, it must be here and again asserted that man's place in the creation is not determined by the considerations which this objection supposes. In the eyes of an intellectual and spiritual being, material bulk is not the only or the highest test of greatness. If God is not to be supposed to be mainly interested in vast accumulations of senseless matter; if there be in the estimate of a Moral Being other and worthier measures of greatness; if the organic be higher than the inorganic; and that which feels than that which has no feeling; if that which thinks be higher than that
which only feels; and that which freely conforms to moral will higher than that which only thinks; if a fly be really a nobler thing than a granite mountain, and a little child than a rhinoceros or a mammoth,—then we need not acquiesce in this depreciatory estimate of man’s place in creation, or of his claims upon the ear of God. On his bodily side man is insignificant enough. As a spirit conscious of his own existence, and determining his action in the freedom of his will, he does not deceive himself in believing that God has crowned him with an especial glory and honour among the visible creatures. But even if man were not thus honoured, it is, as we have seen, no part of the Divine dignity to be inattentive even to the lowest creatures of His hand. The Throne of heaven is not modelled upon the type of an Oriental despotism, and God’s Greatness is not compromised by the duties of administration any more than it is heightened by the enactment of law. The Infinite Mind is not less capable of formulating the most universal principles because He enters with perfect sympathy and intelligence into each of our separate wants and efforts, the wants and efforts of creatures who are really greater, because infinitely more like their Creator, than are the largest stars and suns.

A fourth barrier to the efficacy of prayer is thought to be discoverable in an inadequate conception of the interests of human beings as a whole. To suppose that God can answer individual prayers for specific blessings is incon-

1 Ps. viii. 5.
sistent, we are told, with any serious appreciation of human interests. One man or nation asks for that which may be an injury to another. The Spaniards prayed for the success of their Armada: the English prayed against it. Both could not be listened to. The weather cannot consult the convenience of everybody at once: and therefore the specific prayers of well-meaning villagers, if they could be attended to, could only be attended to by a God who, instead of being the Father of all His creatures, reserved special indulgences for His favourites.

Here it is natural to remark that if God should think fit to grant a large proportion of the particular requests which would be found among the daily prayers of an earnest Christian, He would not, to say the least, thereby do any injury to others, whether they were Christians or not. Prayer for the highest well-being of any human being may be granted without damaging other human beings. If God should condescend in answer to prayer to teach one of His servants more humility, purity, or love, this would not oblige Him to withdraw spiritual graces from any others in order to do it. Nor are other persons the worse for coming into contact with one whom God has made loving, or pure, or humble, in answer to prayer. Is it not nearer the truth to say that they are likely to be much better, and therefore that a large number of answers to prayer for personal blessings necessarily extend in their effects beyond those who are immediately blessed?

But observe further that every prayer for specific bless-
All prayer tacitly conditioned.

ings in a Christian soul is tacitly, if not expressly, conditioned. The three conditions which are always understood are given at the beginning of the Lord's Prayer—"Hallowed be Thy name, Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done." In effect these three conditions are only one. If a change of weather, or a restoration to health or any blessing whatever be prayed for, a Christian petitioner deliberately wills that his prayer should be refused, supposing that to grant it should in any way obscure God's glory in other minds, or hinder the advance of His kingdom, and so contravene what must be His will. Every Christian tacitly adds to every prayer, "Nevertheless not my will but Thine be done." All Christian prayer takes it for granted, first, that the material world exists for the sake of, and is entirely subordinate to, the interests of the moral; and, secondly, that God is the best judge of what the true interests of the moral world really are. Therefore, if his specific petition is not granted, a Christian will not conclude that his real prayer is unanswered. His real prayer was from the first that God's Name might be hallowed among men by the advance of His kingdom and the doing of His Will, through God's granting a particular request which he urges. He knows that his own highest object may be best secured by the refusal of the very blessing for which he pleads; and he puts his finite knowledge and his narrow sympathies into the hands of Infinite Wisdom and Infinite Love, with perfect confidence that the final decision will be the best answer to his real and deepest
prayer. It is thus that he realizes the promise, "Every one that asketh receiveth." He too receives that which he really wants, though his specific petition should be refused.

A last barrier to faith in the efficacy of prayer is really to be discovered in man's idea of his own self-sufficiency. It can scarcely be doubted that one of the excellences of our character as a nation is constantly a source of danger to our faith in the power of prayer. Pelagius, if not a Saxon, was a native of Britain; and the old heresy of substituting human self-sufficiency for dependence on the grace and help of God is congenial to the temper which Englishmen cultivate, with such success, in individual action and in political life. "After all," we say, "do we not depend on our own efforts for being what we are, and for doing what we do?" Whatever God may see fit to do for us, our best form of prayer is work; it is the determination to secure what we want by personal efforts to get it. The indolent or the imaginative may be left to lengthen out their litanies; but practical men will fall back upon the wise proverb, that "God helps those who help themselves."

Here, however, it must be insisted on by the one side, and admitted by the other, that many objects of prayer are altogether out of the reach of human effort, and that if they are to be secured at all, they must be given freely by God. But the fact of our moral freedom, as felt in the capacity for work, to which Pelagianism appeals, is not more clear than the fact of our dependence. Do what we will, we
depend on others. We are linked to them by a thousand ties; we are, all of us, acted upon most powerfully by the circumstances which surround us; the governing moods of thought and feeling within ourselves are often determined by these circumstances. This is true of "self-made men," as we call them, not less than of others. How much did not Faraday owe to Sir Humphrey Davy! And this dependence upon circumstances is in fact dependence upon things which God controls. Facts are not less facts because they seem to be incompatible; because the effort to reconcile them teaches our reason that its limits are narrower than we wish. It is easier to say that man is entirely free, that he depends on nothing; or to say that man is simply the creature of circumstances, that he is never really free; than to say, what is the real truth, that man is, in his entire freedom, absolutely dependent, that he is, in his entire dependence, absolutely free. Yet this apparent paradox is the literal truth, which refuses to ignore facts in order to make the task of reason easier, and to enable it the better to round off its trenchant but inconclusive theories about human action. And because life is so subtle an intermixture of dependence and action, prayer is the most practical of all forms of work; it is at once the activity of man’s freedom, and the expression of his dependence; and the answer which it wins is not less, in one sense, the result of human effort, than in another it is the work of God.

And thus it is in and by prayer that the two governing
elements of religious life, thought and work, alike find their strongest impulse and their point of unity. Such is our weakness, that we constantly tend to a one-sided use of God's gifts. We are either exclusively speculative and contemplative on the one hand, or we are absorbingly practical and men of action on the other. Either exaggeration is fatal to the true life of religion, which binds the soul to God by faith as well as by love; by love not less than by faith; by a life of energetic service not less truly than by a life of communion with light and truth. It is in prayer that each element is at once quickened in itself, and balanced by the presence of the other. The great masters and teachers of Christian doctrine have always found in prayer their highest source of illumination. Not to go beyond the limits of the English Church, it is recorded of Bishop Andrewes that he spent five hours daily on his knees. The greatest practical resolves that have enriched and beautified human life in Christian times have been arrived at in prayer; ever since the day when, at the most solemn service of the Apostolical Church, the Holy Ghost said, "Separate Me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them."¹ It is prayer which prevents religion from degenerating into mere religious thought on the one side, or into mere philanthropy on the other. In prayer the man of action will never become so absorbed in his work as to be indifferent to the truth, which is its original motive. In prayer the man of

¹ Acts xiii. 2.
study and contemplation will never forget that truth is
given; not so much that it may interest and stimulate our
understandings, as that it may govern and regenerate our life.
And thus it is that prayer is of such vital importance to
the well-being of the soul. Study may be dispensed with
by those who work with their hands for God: handiwork
may be dispensed with by those who seek Him in books
and in thought. But prayer is indispensable; alike for
workers and students, alike for scholar and peasant, alike
for the educated and the unlettered. For we all have to
seek God’s Face above; we all have souls to be sanctified
and saved; we all have sins and passions to beat back and
to conquer. And these things are achieved pre-eminently
by prayer, which is properly and representatively the
action of religion. It is the action whereby we men, in all
our frailty and defilement, associate ourselves with our
Divine Advocate on high, and realize the sublime bond
which in Him, the One Mediator between God and man,
unites us in our utter unworthiness to the Strong and
All-holy God.

That prayer, sooner or later, is answered, to all who have
prayed earnestly and constantly, is, in different degrees,
a matter of personal experience. David, Elijah, Hezckiah,
Daniel, the Apostles of Christ, were not the victims of an
illusion, in virtue of which they connected particular events
which would have happened in any case with prayers that
preceded it. They who never pray, or who never pray with
the humility, confidence, and importunity that wins its way
to the Heart of God, cannot speak from experience as to the effects of prayer; nor are they in a position to give credit, with wise and generous simplicity, to those who can. But, at least, on such a subject as this, the voice of the whole company of God's servants may be held to counterbalance a few *à priori* surmises or doctrines. It is the very heart of humanity itself which from age to age mounts up with the Psalmist to the Eternal Throne—"O Thou That hearest prayer, unto Thee shall all flesh come."¹ And Christians can penetrate within the veil. They know that there is a majestic pleading, which for eighteen centuries has never ceased, and which is itself omnipotent—the pleading of One who makes their cause His own: they rest upon the Divine words, "Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in My Name, He will give it you."²

A time will probably come to most of us, if it has not come to some already, when we shall wish that the hours at our command, during the short day of life, had not been disposed of as they have. After all, this world is a poor thing to live for, when the next is in view. Whatever be their claims, created beings have no business to be sitting on that highest throne within the soul that belongs to the Creator. Yet, for all that, too, often they do sit there. And time is passing. Of that priceless gift of time, how much will one day be seen to have been lost; how ruinous shall we deem our investment of this our most precious stock! How many interests, occupations, engagements,

¹ Ps lxv. 2. ² S. John xvi. 23.
friendships—I speak not of the avowed ways of "killing time," as it is termed with piteous accuracy—will be then regarded only as so many precautions for building our house upon the sand: as only so many expedients for assuring our failure to compass the true end of our existence! It may not now seem possible that we should ever think thus. Life is like the summer's day; and in the first fresh morning we do not realize the noon-day heat, and at noon we do not think of the shadows lengthening across the plain, and of the setting sun, and of the advancing night. Yet, to each and all, the sunset comes at last; and those who have made most of the day are not unlikely to reflect most bitterly how little they have made of it. Upon whatever else they may look back with thankfulness or with sorrow, it is certain that they will regret no omissions of duty more keenly than neglect of prayer; they will prize no hours more highly than those which have been passed, whether in private or in public, before that Throne of Justice and of Grace upon which they hope to gaze throughout eternity.
LECTURE VI.

Palm Sunday.

THE MEDIATOR, THE GUARANTEE OF RELIGIOUS LIFE.

S. Matt. xxiii. 41.

Jesus asked them saying, What think ye of Christ?

At length, we reach the limits which the season assigns to our scanty treatment of a subject that is in itself inexhaustible. The relationship or bond between God and the soul of man, which we term religion, is obscured and interrupted on man's side by sin; it is reasserted and strengthened by prayer. But no human efforts can of themselves avail to establish or to restore it. If God answers the prayers of individuals, has He answered the prayer of prayers; the great prayer of humanity in all the ages? Has He deigned to grant the prayer that He, too, would on His side give some sign or pledge of real communion with us; that He would not leave us to ourselves, walking after our own ways, feeling after Him if haply we might find Him, but only feeling on, century after century, in the twilight of reason; that He would, in prophetic language,
rend the heavens and come down, and bid the skies pour forth righteousness? Is religion only a human instinct or effort upon which no encouragement, no sanction, no corresponding and invigorating acknowledgment has been bestowed from on high! Or has God spoken? Has He unveiled Himself? Have the clouds and darkness that are round about Him rolled away, so that the righteousness and judgment which are the habitation of His seat might become clearly manifest to us?

If we really believe God to be a Moral Being, we shall be prepared to find that He has not wholly disappointed us. The strength of the confidence with which we anticipate a revelation will vary exactly with our faith in the morality of God. If He were only an intelligence, or a force, there would be no reason or apology for listening to hear whether any voice breaks the silence of the spheres. But if He has, or rather is, a Heart; if the moral qualities which are discoverable in ourselves have any transcendent and majestic counterpart in Him; then, supposing the question whether He has given a revelation to be for us still unanswered, or even unexamined, we do well to traverse all the corridors of history, to take counsel with the current wisdom and experience of the living, and to cross-question the recorded convictions of the dead, until we see reason to hope that a solution is at least at hand; until "the day dawn and the day-star arise in our hearts."

Already, indeed, and almost at each stage of our progress, we have ever and anon halted our steps, and hushed other
disputants around us, that we might listen to One Whose place among men, at least as a Master and Teacher of religion, does not really enter into controversy. It is He Who has set forth in its fulness the parental character of God. It is He who has fully unveiled to the eye of the human soul the secret of its boundless capacities, and of its disheartening impotence. It is He Who by His life of unassailable purity, and by His death of voluntary sacrifice, has lighted up the dark realities of moral evil. It is His example, His precepts, it is widespread faith in His assistance and intercession, which have popularized prayer, without degrading its idea. It is through Him that prayer has come to be the most serious and welcome occupation of the noblest and purest in the human family; the continuous expression of a desire to assert and strengthen the link which binds man to the Source and End of his existence. And thus, besides placing before us the idea of religion, He has, as no other, taught us to know the Being between Whom and ourselves religion is a bond; and what it is, call we it disease or antagonist, that breaks religion up; and what is the spiritual action in which religion is especially embodied and reasserted. Has He done more for religion than this? Is His relation towards it only an external one, such as was that of a Raphael or a Michael Angelo towards their majestic creations, such as was that of a Newton or a Cuvier towards the great subjects of their lifelong study? Or is He, besides being a Master and Teacher of religion, something more, and altogether distinct from this? Is He the
masterpiece of His own art? Is He the subject of His own teaching? Does He enter into the object-matter of religion as an integral part of it? Is He not merely the greatest of religious teachers, but also the first and greatest of religious lessons which God has given to man? Is He, in short, God's answer in history to man's constant aspiration heavenward; the impersonated bond between God and man; a "Mediator," as Scripture terms it, Who bridges over the chasm which sin had opened between earth and heaven?

In pausing to consider this question, it is natural to every Christian heart to express the joy of finding ourselves at His blessed feet, Whose Name is above every name that is pronounced, whether in His temples or elsewhere. On the last five Sundays in which you have accompanied me with your generous sympathy, it has often happened to us to stray for a while into schools of thought where He, our Lord, is either unknown, or denied His due. We have occasionally been listening to teachers and glancing at systems which profess, in whatever sense, to be able to dispense with Him. No men love home as do those whose duty has for awhile obliged them to reside abroad; and the atmosphere of the New Testament and of the Church is not the less welcome, because it is a change from that of human literatures and of earthly philosophies. To-day we cease, at least in the main, to measure the forms and density of the clouds which veil the face of heaven from sad but eager multitudes. We pass into the light and warmth
of the Sun of Righteousness, to occupy ourselves from first to last with His glory and His beauty; we advance to recognize, as I trust, in Him the living bond of unity between the great empire of souls on the one hand, and the King Eternal, Immortal, Invisible on the other.

Jesus Christ is a Name around which a vast accumulation of histories, ideas, beliefs, have gathered. Christianity has many aspects; literary, philosophical, moral, historical, political, theological, spiritual, practical. What is the religious aspect of Christianity and of Christ? What is the aspect which exhibits our Lord’s relation to religion, considered as the bond between God and the human soul?

I.

“What think ye of Christ?” Is He a subject of the highest historical interest? No educated man, at least, whatever be his faith or his life, can deny the reality or the greatness of Christ’s place in human history. Nothing is more certain in the annals of mankind than this, that Jesus Christ lived in Palestine, and was put to death eighteen centuries and a half ago. This fact belongs to general human knowledge, just as much as does the life of Julius Caesar, or of Alexander the Great, or of Socrates, or of Mahomet. Nobody, indeed, does deny the general fact.
Strauss, for instance, though he endeavours to distinguish between the residuary historical element in the Gospels, and the incrustation of legend, which, in his opinion, has somehow become associated with it, yet fully admits that there is history in the Gospels; he admits that Jesus Christ lived and died in the age of Tiberius. And if even this be admitted, the life and death of Jesus Christ must possess for any intelligent man the highest possible degree of interest. He must feel that, in point of social and historical importance, it stands alone. No doubt, at the time, the Cæsar Tiberius was everywhere on the lips and in the minds of men; while the retired religious Teacher, as He seemed to be, in Palestine, was by His teaching, His acts, and the opposition which they aroused, only furnishing a little conversation and excitement to the peasantry and to the officials of a remote province. But if the importance of a life is to be measured by its results in history and to civilization, even although we should put all religious and even moral considerations aside, who would think most of the Emperor? What is the lasting and living influence which Tiberius now exerts upon the world, except it be to furnish a thesis now and then to clever essay writers, who wish indirectly to attack or to defend modern imperialism? But who can deny that at this moment, explain it how we will, Jesus Christ, His life, His work, His Person, lives in the hearts of multitudes as the object of most cherished and devoted homage; that He governs the ideas, the aspirations, the social and political action of millions of mankind; that
the most active and enterprising section of the human family, still, in various senses, places itself under the shadow of His Name and patronage; and that if He has many opponents, there is no serious probability of His being spiritually or intellectually dethroned? All this is a matter of simple observation. The truth of it is most obvious to those who know most about human affairs and human history. And it at once invests the earthly Life of Christ, and all that illustrates and belongs to it, with the highest practical and speculative interest; with the interest which belongs to the great problems of past history, and with the interest which belongs to those great living forces that make themselves felt day by day around us, and contribute powerfully towards determining the current of events.

Not to be interested in the life of Jesus Christ, then, is to be, I do not say irreligious, but unintelligent. It is to be insensible to the nature and claims of the most powerful force that has ever moulded the thought and swayed the destinies of civilized man. But to feel this interest, it is almost unnecessary to add, a man need not even profess to be a Christian. He may indeed be, earnestly opposed to Christianity: and his opposition can scarcely in any case be formidable, unless he has given his mind to the careful study of that which he opposes. To such men as Celsus, or Lucian, or Porphyry, or the apostate Emperor Julian, or the philosopher of Ferney, Christianity was a matter of the deepest intellectual interest. Men do not write like Celsus, or act like Julian, or epigrammatize with the
bitterness of Voltaire, about a doctrine in which they feel little concerned. Nay, in order to have such an interest, a man need not be an active opponent of Christianity. Looking upon it with the eye, and only with the eye, of a philosopher; jealously excluding from his estimate every trace of passion, whether it be the passion of hatred or the passion of affection; he may yet understand that it is too great, too powerful, in a word, too original a phenomenon, to be ignored, or rather not to be investigated with patient perseverance. Such might seem to have been the case with that most accomplished of modern critics, the late M. Saint-Beuve. His History of Port-Royal betrays an intimate acquaintance with the most delicate and beautiful forms of Christian faith and Christian love. None knew better than he the claims of Jesus Christ—of His life in itself, and of His place in history—upon the attention of all earnest students of nature and of man. No pages are more marked than his by a sustained and rigid justice which is incapable of condescending to a phrase that is dictated by any but that which the writer intends and believes to be a severely critical judgment. This lofty impartiality could not but make him write at tines like a devoted Christian in virtue of his moral and literary sympathies; and many men have read him without suspecting his real place in the world of thought. Yet, at his last hours, we are told, he purposely declined the ordinary consolations of a Christian deathbed: his interest in Christianity did not imply a bond to any living person with Whom, in the most solemn and
critical moments of existence, there are histories to be reviewed, and accounts to be settled.

That a literary and historical interest in Christianity, and Christ has its value, who would deny? It may, in union with faith and love, achieve services of no common order for the kingdom of the truth. It may, under any circumstances, enable Christians to realize the historical settings of their faith, more truly and vividly than would otherwise be possible. Thus, in a very creditable sense, it may hew wood and draw water for the sacred camp, and we must thank it with all our hearts for its services. But it is not of itself a religious interest. It is only an intellectual and scholarly taste dealing with a religious subject-matter. It is one thing to cleanse the glasses of a powerful telescope; it is another to use them as they should be used by an observer and student of the heavens.

II.

But the question must occur, What was it in Jesus Christ which gave Him, in spite of social and political insignificance, so commanding, so unrivalled a position in history? The least answer that can be given—I am far from implying that it is an adequate answer—is, that His character made a profound, an ineffaceable impression upon
His contemporaries; an impression so deep and abiding, that it moved them, peasants and paupers as they were, to achieve the moral revolution of the civilized world. And we are told that admiration for Christ's human character is still the sustaining element in Christianity; that it explains its perpetuation as it explains its original victories; that it furnishes, in fact, the true answer to the question, "What think ye of Christ?" Undoubtedly the appreciation of moral character is a higher and more religious thing than the appreciation of any external historical fact, however imposing. In order to enter into the political consequences of a decisive campaign, a man requires only a well-stored and cultivated intellect; in order to do justice to a saintly character the observer must have that which is infinitely higher in itself, though of less account among men—a sensitive moral instinct, a tender and penetrating heart. And yet, happily, the higher gift is the more common. The questions which may be raised about our Lord's genealogies in the first and third Evangelists can only be answered by a few well-trained scholars. But every child can feel the pathos of the relief suddenly given to the hungry multitude; of the visit to the house of mourning at Bethany; of the successive incidents of the stern conflict with the Jews of Jerusalem; of the Last Supper; of the Agony; of the Betrayal; of the Cross. A great character, even more than a great picture, or a great poem, or a magnificent mountain, speaks for itself. It commends itself to average men, even although
they cannot take their sympathies to pieces and say precisely what is the feature in it that attracts them most powerfully. There is that in their humanity which responds, however imperfectly, to the form of moral beauty before them, and they surrender themselves to an instinct which they do not explain, but which they can implicitly trust.

Thus it is that our Lord's simplicity, His self-sacrifice, His love of the humble and of the poor, joined to His resistless moral ascendancy, His fearless courage, His strength which is so entirely compatible with the utmost tenderness, touches us all. Nothing perhaps shews Jesus Christ more clearly to us than the circumstances under which He delivered the Sermon on the Mount. For here we are convinced that His character was so far from being a product whether of His nation or of His age, as to be in marked opposition to some of their ruling tendencies. In the Jew of the age of Tiberius, the national feeling, intensified by the Roman conquest, had almost killed out the human. The children of the men who under David and Solomon had ruled Western Asia, beheld on every side the symbols of their political slavery. The Roman legionaries were keeping guard near the temple; the Roman tax-gatherer was making his presence felt in every home. And so the Jew wrapped himself more and more closely and sullenly in devotion to the ideas and institutions of his ancestors, and looked forward to a time when the prophecies would be fulfilled in the rigid political sense which he read into them; when the Roman invader would
be driven by an indignant people, headed by their King Messiah, from the sacred soil. There were adventurers in that age who really endeavoured to meet this predominating national temper, and the effort led to some well-known catastrophes. And doubtless it was such a political expectation as this which was kindled in the breast of multitudes by the announcement throughout Galilee that "the Kingdom of Heaven was at hand." The phrase fired their imaginations. They followed the Teacher Who uttered it out of their towns and villages to a distant hill-side, that they might listen, as they trusted, to His plan for an approaching insurrection or for a decisive campaign. And what was His manifesto? He uttered the Beatitudes; He compared the Pharisaic with the true morality; He proclaimed the law and unfolded the prospects of a spiritual empire, of the kingdom of the truth.

It is not in the unrivalled exhibition of any one form of human excellence, whether purity, or humility, or charity, or courage, or veracity, or self-denial, or justice, or consideration for others, that we best appreciate the significance of our Lord's human character. It is in the equal balance of all excellence, in the absence of any warping, disturbing, exaggerating influence, that modern writers have been forward to recognize a moral sublimity, which they can discover nowhere else in history. The subject has been handled by a distinguished living layman, who certainly cannot be supposed to have approached it with any strong ecclesiastical bias. He observes that "there
are many peculiarities arising out of personal and historical circumstances, which are incident to the best human characters, and which would prevent any one of them from being universal or final as a type. But the type set up in the Gospels as the Christian type seems to have escaped all these peculiarities, and to stand out in unapproached purity, as well as in unapproached perfection of moral excellence."¹ Accordingly he argues that it can be said to belong exclusively to neither of the "two hemispheres in the actual world of moral excellence—the noble and the amiable, or, in the language of moral taste, the grand and the beautiful." It belongs to both of them, "perfectly and undistinguishably, the fusion of the two classes of qualities being complete, so that the mental eye, though it be strained to aching, cannot discern whether that on which it gazes be more the object of reverence or of love."² This type is equally free from sexual peculiarities; it combines the strength of manhood with feminine tenderness so completely as to leave no room for a supplementary female type that should complete the ideal of Christian humanity.³ It sets before us an image of pure beneficence, disengaged from all peculiar social circumstances which would disqualify a character from being universal and the ideal, yet adapted to all.⁴ If that type of character was constructed by human intellect, we must at least bear in mind that "it was constructed at the confluence of three races, the

² Ibid. p. 10.
³ Ibid. p. 17.
⁴ Ibid.
Jewish, the Greek, and the Roman, each of which had strong national peculiarities of its own. A single touch, a single taint of any one of those peculiarities, and the character would have been national, not universal; transient, not eternal. It might have been the highest character in history, but it would have been disqualified for being the ideal." Supposing it to have been "human, whether it were the effort of a real man to attain moral excellence, or a moral imagination of the writers of the Gospels, the chances, surely," he urges, "were infinite against its escaping any tincture of the fanaticism, formalism, and exclusiveness of the Jew—of the political pride of the Roman—of the intellectual pride of the Greek. Yet it escaped them all."\(^1\)

In like manner, the character before us in the Gospels cannot possibly be regarded as a reaction from something else: it is not an antinomian protest against Pharisaism; it is not a fanatical patriotism protesting against servility to the Roman rule, it is not an exaggerated cosmopolitanism in revolt against the narrow patriotism of the Jew: it is the highest self-denial, without having the character of a formalized asceticism; it is, in short, "the essence of man's moral nature, clothed with a personality so vivid and intense as to excite, through all ages, the most intense affection; yet divested of all those peculiar characteristics, the accidents of place and time, by which human personalities are marked." "What other notion than this," asks

the writer, "can philosophy form of Divinity manifest on earth?" ¹

These eloquent and sincere words of Professor Goldwin Smith will need no recommendation or comment. And yet they suggest a question, which is in the path of our subject, and which, under any circumstances, cannot be overlooked. This ideal Character of the Gospels is, on one side, at issue with what we should abstractedly conceive to be a perfect human ideal. For He who presents it to us proclaims Himself, in terms and to an extent which are altogether inconsistent with any true ideal of a purely creaturely perfection. In the words of another writer of our day, "The unbounded personal pretensions which Christ advances, remain throughout a subject of ever-recurring astonishment. It is common, in human history, to meet with those who claim some superiority over their fellows. Men assert a pre-eminence over their fellow-citizens or fellow-countrymen, and become rulers of those who were at first their equals; but they dream of nothing greater than of some partial control over the actions of others for the short space of a lifetime. Few, indeed, are there to whom it is given to influence future ages. Yet some men have appeared who have been as levers to uplift the earth and roll it in another course. Homer, by creating literature; Socrates, by creating science; Caesar, by carrying civilization inward from the shores of the Mediterranean; Newton, by starting science upon a career of steady progress,—may be said to have attained this eminence. But

¹ Ibid. p. 22.
these men gave a single impact, like that which is conceived to have first set the planets in motion: Christ claims to be a perpetual attractive power, like the sun, which determines their orbit. They contributed to men some discovery, and passed away: Christ's discovery is Himself. To humanity, struggling with its passions and its destiny, He says—'Cling to Me: clinging ever closer to Me.' . . . He represented himself as the Light of the world, as the Shepherd of the souls of men, as the Way to immortality, as the Vine or Life-Tree of humanity. . . .

He commanded men to leave everything and attach themselves to Him; . . . He declared Himself King, Master, and Judge of men; . . . He promised to give rest to all the weary and heavy-laden; . . . He instructed His followers to hope for life from feeding on His body and His blood.'

If this statement suggests less than the whole truth, it is true as far as it goes. It might be sustained by a hundred texts. That which is so striking, so overpowering in the Gospels, is perhaps less the precise language which our Lord uses about Himself, than the consistent bearing which He assumes towards His disciples and mankind. His attitude is that of One Who takes His claims for granted; Who has no errors to confess, no demands to explain, or to apologize for; no restraining instinct of self-distrust to keep Him in the background; no shrinking from high command, based upon a sense of the possible superiority

1 "Ecce Homo," pp. 176, 177.
of those around Him. It is the bearing of One Who claims to be the First of all, the Centre of all, with entire simplicity indeed, but also with unhesitating decision.

Let us dwell more in detail upon some of the language which Jesus Christ really uses about Himself. He is greater than the most venerable names in Jewish antiquity; greater than the men whose greatness had been felt most widely and deeply beyond the boundaries of Israel. He is greater than Jonah, whose preaching brought Nineveh to penitence;\(^1\) greater than Solomon, in whom not Israel only, but the whole East, recognized the wisest of men.\(^2\) Not merely is He David's descendant; He is David's Lord.\(^3\) When Abraham was yet unborn, He was already in existence.\(^4\) Thus He could refer to "the glory which He had with the Father before the world was,"\(^5\) and to the fall of the rebel-spirit, which he had witnessed.\(^6\) God is, in an entirely unique sense, His Father;\(^7\) the Jews feel that He uses the word in a manner which implies a tremendous claim.\(^8\) For, indeed, He is conscious of being "from above,"\(^9\) of having "come down from heaven,"\(^10\) of having come forth from being

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\(^1\) S. Matt. xii. 41.  
\(^2\) S. Matt xxii. 41-46; Ps. cx. 1.  
\(^3\) S. John viii. 56, 57, 58; cf. i. 15, 27, 30.  
\(^4\) S. John xvii. 5; cf. verse 24.  
\(^5\) S. Luke x. 18.  
\(^6\) S. Matt. x. 32; xv. 13; xvi. 17; xviii. 19; xxvi 39, 42; S. Luke xxiii. 46; xxiv. 49; S. John v. 30; x. 29; xiv. 2, 6.  
\(^7\) S. John v. 17-18, πατέρα θεον ἔχει τὸν Θεόν, ἵναν ἐναντίον τοὺς παῖδες ἑαυτοῦ.  
\(^8\) S. John viii. 28, ἐγώ ἐκ τῶν ἀνω εἶμι.  
\(^9\) Ibid. vi 38, καταβέβηκα ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ; v. 51 ὁ ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ καταβαίνει.
with the Father, of having come forth out of God. He knows, not merely that He lives; but that He has in Himself, that He is, the Life; Life in the deepest sense of the term, perfect, blessed, absolute existence; eternally received from the Father, yet shared with Him thus from everlasting to everlasting. Although, then, He is visibly upon the earth, He is still really in Heaven. He is united to the Father not merely by a moral, but by a natural union, and so intimately, that “to have seen Him is to have seen the Father,” to have known Him is to have known the Father.” He is in the Father, and the Father is in Him, by a perfect reciprocity. Of the Father He only has adequate knowledge: He Himself is known only by the Father. As a consequence, He has all things in common with the Father. Men, whom He wills to redeem, are already His own. The Kingdom of God is His Kingdom. The Angels are His Angels. The “Church of the Living God” is His Church. Power is

1 Ibid. xvi. 28, ἐξῆλθον παρὰ τοῦ πατρὸς, καὶ ἔλθει ημᾶς εἰς τὸν κόσμον.
2 Ibid. viii. 42, ἐκ τοῦ Θεοῦ ἐξῆλθον καὶ ἦκο. Cf. S. John xvii. 8; xvi. 30; Ps. ii. 7; Micah v. 2.
3 S. John v. 26; xi. 25; xiv. 6; cf. S. John i. 4; i S. John i. 1, 2; v. 20.
4 S. John iii. 13, ὁ δὲ τούτου ἀνθρώπου ὁ ὄν ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ.
5 S. John x. 28-30, ἐγὼ καὶ ὁ πατὴρ ἐν ἑσυχίᾳ.
6 Ibid. xiv. 9.
7 Ibid. viii. 19.
8 S. John xiv. 10; xvii. 21, 22.
9 S. Matt. xi. 27. Cf. S. John vi. 46, ὁ δὲ παρὰ τοῦ Θεοῦ, οὗτος ἐξάκειται πατέρα. Ibid. x. 14, 15.
10 S. John xvi. 15; xvii. 10; cf. S. Matt. xi. 27; Heb. i. 3; S. Matt. xxi. 38; Acts x. 36.; S. John i. 11.
11 S. John x. 14, 15, 27, 28; xvii. 10-12.
12 S. Matt. xiii. 41; S. John xviii. 36. Cf. S. Luke i. 38; Rev. xi. 15.
13 S. Matt. xiii. 41; xvi. 27; xxiv. 31.
14 1 Tim. iii. 15.
15 S. Matt. xvi. 18; cf. Rom. xvi. 16.
given Him not merely over the human race, but also without any assigned limits in heaven and in earth, and the glory with which He will appear at the last day is not other than His Father's. His working in the sphere of sense and time corresponds to the ceaseless activity of the Father. He too quickens and will raise the dead. He too forgives sins, as to the Paralytic; He too will save the world; He will seek and save the lost; He will give eternal life. To Him all judgment is committed, and all nations shall one day be gathered before His Throne. Even now all men are to honour Him, even as they honour the Father.

His words are familiar to our ears; but do we dwell upon their real and awful meaning? What should we think of a religious teacher now who could permit himself to say that Eternal Life consisted in the knowledge of himself as well as in knowledge of the Father; that dislike of himself implied dislike of the Father; that belief in himself secured eternal life; that disbelief in himself involved present condemnation? What, if he should tell us that without him we could do nothing; that united with him, we should bring forth much fruit;

1 S. John xvi. 2. 2 S. Matt. xxviii. 18. 3 S. Matt. xvi. 27. 4 S. John v. 17, 19, 20. 5 Ibid. verses 21, 28, 29; xi. 25, 40. 6 S. Matt. ix. 2-7; S. Luke vii. 33-50. 7 S. John iii. 17. 8 S. Luke xix. 10; ix. 56. 9 S. John xvii. 2. 10 S. John v. 22, 27; S. Matt. xxv. 31-39. Cf. Is. xi. 3. 11 S John v. 20-23. 12 S. John xvii. 3; xii. 44. 13 S. John xv. 23; S. Luke x. 16. 14 S. John iii. 16; v. 40; vi. 47. 15 S. John iii. 18; viii. 24. 16 S. John xv. 5; xiv. 6. 17 S. John xv. 4.
VI.] Himself be tolerable in any other? 225

that, although leaving this world before us, he was going to prepare places for us in the Eternal Home;¹ that his name would have resistless power with the Father;² that in his name his pupils would cast out devils;³ that he would send the Divine Spirit from the Father⁴ Who, when He came, would glorify the sender?⁵ What should we say of the promise of a perpetual presence,⁶ of the pretension to found an imperishable society,⁷ of the delegation of power to forgive sins,⁸ of the claim to be so faultless that in him the Prince of evil had no part whatever?⁹

Much else to the same purpose might be quoted from the three earlier Gospels, as well as from the last. And the question arises, how to account for this earnest self-assertion on the part of Jesus Christ; how to acquit such language of the charges to which it would expose any religious man who should use it at the present day? How are we to adjust it, on the one hand, with the sobriety and truthfulness of a perfect human character; on the other, with a due recognition of the rights of God?

There are men who decline to entertain this inquiry. They are not by any means forgetful of God. He weighs upon their conscience, upon their imagination, upon their life of daily thought and action, as the greatest and most solemn of all facts. They are not insensible to the moral beauties of the earthly life of Jesus Christ; on the contrary, they profess to be so enamoured of these beauties, or of

some of them, as to be impatient of all other aspects of our 
Lord's Work and Teaching. But they do not allow them-
selves to reflect steadily upon the question whether their 
loyalty to the supreme rights of God, and their love for 
Jesus Christ, do not alike oblige them to "consider the re-
lation which exists between Christ and God." Christian 
theology appears to them in the light of a wanton importa-
tion of worthless metaphysics into the heart of a moral 
history of simple and faultless beauty; but they do not 
reflect that their moral ideal itself must fall to pieces, unless 
they are prepared in some way to attempt the chief problem 
with which Christian theology deals.

Is our Lord's language imposture? The suggestion can 
only be mentioned to be condemned by the entire drift and 
atmosphere of His Life. Is it the hallucination of an en-
thusiast, so entranced in his idea as to be insensible to the 
world of facts around him? But even Channing has pointed 
out that the enthusiasm takes a turn which would be incon-
ceivable, for a deranged enthusiasm, under the circum-
stances of Jesus Christ: "I can conceive," he says, "of His 
seating Himself, in fancy, on the throne of David, and secretly 
pondering the means of His appointed triumphs; but that 
a Jew should fancy himself the Messiah, and at the same 
time should strip that character of all the attributes that 
fiend his youthful imagination and heart; that he should 
start aside from all the feelings and hopes of His age, and 
should acquire a consciousness of being destined to a 
wholly new-carrier, and one as unbounded as it was new—
VI.] unlike anything in the Hebrew Prophets. 227

this is exceedingly improbable."¹ Was it, then, only the natural manner of an oriental mind; the habit of seizing truth intuitively and enunciating it authoritatively, in contrast with our western methods of demonstration and argument? But this explanation, even if on other accounts it could be admitted, does not cover the ground required. It does not justify the actual substance and contents of our Lord’s language about Himself. It does not explain the fact that His language about Himself is unlike anything which we find in the Hebrew prophets. The prophets, if you will, announce truth in the intuitive manner; but they do not make themselves the subjects and centres of the truth which they announce. They draw the deepest distinctions between themselves and their Master: they are sinners, and He is the All-holy; they are foolish and incapable, He is All-powerful and All-wise. The relation in which Christ claims to stand, both towards the Father and towards mankind, is utterly unanticipated by anything that can be traced in the prophetic literature of Israel; it reveals a Personality distinct in kind from any that had previously appeared in Hebrew history.

And at this point we cannot but observe that our Lord’s language about Himself is entirely in harmony with the character of certain of the miracles ascribed to Him in the Gospels. The miraculous element cannot be weeded out of the Gospel narratives, without altogether impugning the historical value of those documents; and to do this mainly

¹ Channing: Works, ii. 56.
because one department or one age of human experience does not positively correspond with what we know as yet about another, is not reasonable. Now, the Gospel miracles fall, speaking roughly, into two classes; they are acts of mercy, or acts of power. In one sense, they are all acts of power; but the motive of compassion towards human suffering apparently predominates in the one class; while, in the other, the reason for working them must be chiefly looked for in the need of demonstrating the personal power of the Agent. Thus, among the miracles of mercy, there are seventeen cases on record of His healing bodily disease; there are six cases of the cure of demoniacal possession, each of which is described in detail; there are three cases of restoration to life. On the other hand, the miracles at Cana in Galilee, and of feeding the four and the five thousand, suggest, first of all, the creative power of the Worker, although it was wielded with a philanthropic object. The element of power is more distinctly and exclusively apparent in His stilling the tempest, and walking on the sea; in His rendering Himself invisible to a hostile multitude; in His awing by a glance the traders in the temple, and the multitude that came to take Him; in His cursing the barren fig-tree. Some of this class of miracles are, in fact, objected to by a recent writer,\(^1\) on the specific ground that they only befit a superhuman personality. We therefore do not strain the import of such miracles in saying that they are, at least, in harmony with Christ's language about His claims and His superhuman Person.

\(^1\) Schenkel: Characterbild Jesu. Absch. iv., Kap. 11, p. 123.
But our Lord's references to Himself are also in keeping with another phenomenon. He was sinless. Upon the positive side of Christ's character we have already dwelt; upon the balanced perfection, the ideal universality of the type. It was a life such as Paganism had not conceived; it was higher than, and distinct from, the unimpeachable justice, the calm superiority to misfortune, the proud self-respect, which constituted, in various proportions, the Pagan ideal. It was a life of love and humility, of the highest forms of holiness, expressed by example as well as recommended by precept. But the most startling moral feature in this life is that we can trace nowhere in it any—the faintest—consciousness of guilt. The best men ordinarily feel the taint of moral evil most constantly and acutely: their language about their sins and shortcomings seems even exaggerated to those who live at a greater distance from the Source of sanctity than they themselves. But Jesus challenges His enemies to convince Him of sin, if they can. He never hints that He has done or said any one thing which needs forgiveness. He teaches His disciples to pray, "Forgive us our trespasses:" He never prays for pardon Himself. Sorrow makes all of us think of that in our past lives, which, as conscience whispers, has but too well deserved it: Jesus, in His sorrow, thinks only of the sins of others. Certainly He is tempted; but there is nothing within Him that can respond to the temptation: He is "holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners." And no attempts to fasten sin upon Him
have had a trace of success, except so far as they have gone hand in hand with a denial of His personal claims. Strauss, for example, thinks it not merely fanaticism, but "unjustifiable self-exaltation, for a man to imagine himself so separated from other men, as to set himself before them as their future judge."¹ Strauss, we must admit, is perfectly right, if the claim of Christ to judge the world is not strictly based upon fact. It is strictly impossible to maintain our faith in the faultlessness of His character if we deny that a fundamental necessity of His Being forced Him to draw attention so persistently, so imperiously, to Himself. But, on the other hand, if His words about Himself are sober truth, they only afford another illustration of His compassionate love for those whom He came to enlighten and to save.

Doubtless it has been a favourite object with a modern school, as men have said, "to bring down Jesus from the clouds, and to restore Him, by criticism, to the domain of history." This enterprise assumes that "the theological and metaphysical Christ of the creeds," is a very different person from "the living Christ of the Gospels." But when such criticism enters upon its task, what happens? If, instead of declaring vaguely against dogma, men really wish to get to the bottom of this problem, they will find that, of two things, one becomes absolutely necessary. Either they must consent to forfeit the moral ideal which they admire in the Gospels, and which, to do them justice, they

¹ Leben Jesu für das Deutsche Volk, p. 242.
are sincerely anxious to preserve; or they must fall back upon those very statements of the creeds which, by affir-
ing Christ's personal Divinity, really and only justify His constant references to Himself, and His unbounded claims upon mankind. His precepts about humility are contradicted by His example, unless His statements about Himself are dictated by that true humility which would rather incur the suspicion of pride than conceal the simple fact. His enforcement of sincerity ceases to awe us, if, in His language about Himself, He was indeed guilty of consistent and almost boundless exaggeration. His very charity loses its lustre, and becomes suspected, if we are forced to feel that He is ever capable of putting Himself unduly forward; its highest forms cease to represent in our eyes the Universal Love; they remind us rather of the efforts of this or that tribune of the people, who conceals a personal ambition beneath the activities of an ostentatious disinterestedness, and whose efforts are at last crowned by a catastrophe which they have really deserved.

If, on the other hand, we bow before the general impression produced by Christ's character, and He be taken at His word, He must be believed to be, in the absolute sense, Divine. There is no room for an intermediate being, such as Arianism imagined, who is neither God nor an angel, in a serious theistic creed. And our Lord's words are strictly inconsistent with what would be sober and true in any creature, however exalted. They are not surpassed; they are only unfolded by the later teaching of apostles and of
creeds. The Christ of S. Paul's Epistles is really the 
Christ of the earliest Evangelist; the Christ of S. John 
is the Christ of S. Paul; the Christ of the Creeds, 
and the great Councils is the Christ of S. John. He 
Who alone knows the Father, and Whom none but the 
Father knows, is the Image of the Father, is in the Form 
of God, is the Effulgence of God's glory and the exact 
Impress of His Being, is over all, God blessed for ever. He, 
the only Begotten Son, or God, Which is in the bosom of the 
Father, is of one substance with the Father, as being "God 
of the substance of the Father, begotten before all worlds." The later statements may be more elaborate, but they are 
IMPLIED, in all their completeness, by the earlier. Just as 
an anatomist, from his knowledge of the animal frame, can 
pronounce upon the age and size of a skeleton of which he 
only possesses the fragment of a single bone; so with our 
eye upon S. John, and the Nicene confession, we can see 
statements in S. Mark which can only be maintained when 
men acknowledge the consubstantiality of the Son with the 
Father. There are deep harmonics in truth which, from 
first to last, bind it in its integrity rigidly together. 
They cannot be set aside or trifled with; for truths which 
we in our narrowness deem obscure or unimportant, are 
often vitally necessary to the maintenance of others 
which we are better capable of appreciating. Our 
Blessed Lord's Divinity, instead of obscuring His true

\[ 1 \text{ S. Matt. xi. 29.} \quad 2 \text{ Col. i. 15.} \quad 3 \text{ Phil. ii. 6.} \quad 4 \text{ Heb. i 8.} \\
5 \text{ Rom. ix. 5.} \quad 6 \text{ S. John i. 18.} \quad 7 \text{ Nic. Creed.} \quad 8 \text{ Athan. Creed.} \]
Manhood, is the safeguard and justification of its moral perfection; and we do the most beautiful of moral histories a fatal injustice, if we forget that, in the words of the Creed, its subject "is perfect God and perfect Man, of a reasonable soul and human flesh subsisting; equal to the Father as touching His Godhead, and inferior to the Father as touching His manhood; Who, although He be God and Man, yet is He not two, but one Christ." ¹

This is the full and solemn truth; that Jesus Christ is not merely the Teacher but the substance of Christianity; not merely the author of the faith which Christians profess, but its central object. For Christians the popular phrase, "the religion of Christ," does not mean, as Lessing suggested, only or chiefly the piety which in the days of His flesh He exhibited towards the Father. It means the piety, the submission of thought and heart, the sense of obligation, the voluntary enthusiastic service, of which He, together and equally with the Father, is the rightful and everlasting Object; which, when He was on earth, He claimed as His due; and which has been rendered to Him now for more than eighteen hundred years by the best and noblest of the human race.

¹ Athanasian Creed.
III.

In Jesus Christ, then, we have the guarantee or bond of religion; He is the means of an actual communication between the soul of man and the Eternal God. "There is one Mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus."¹ He is the Mediator in virtue of the very terms of His Being: His office of Mediation is based upon the two Natures which are united in His Single Person. On the one hand, as the Eternal Son, He is One with the All-Holy and Infinite God; on the other, as the child of Mary, He shares all the finiteness and weakness of our manhood; He shares with it everything except its sin. Thus He impersonates and maintains, by the very fact of being what He is, a true vital bond between earth and heaven. To us men, He is the last and most complete unveiling of the interest which God takes in the well-being of His moral and reasonable creatures; the Highest Organ of the Divine Mind and Will; the only and certain channel of those "unspeakable riches"² which flow down from the Fountain of all goodness upon the beings whom He has made. Before the Majesty of God He is the unique and ideal Representative of our race: He represents us, not as being what we are, but as being what we were meant to be by the Great Author of our existence. And yet, although we are only weak and sinful, we may unite ourselves to Him by faith, and love, and contrition for the

¹ 1 Tim. ii. 5.  
² Eph. iii. 8.
past, and be "accepted in the Beloved." ¹ His obedience as Man, reaching its climax in the self-sacrifice of the Cross, becomes ours through His free grace and mercy. His invigorating life, which restores our race to its original strength and beauty, is still communicated to us by His Spirit and His Sacraments; so that all who will, may "put off the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts; and be renewed in the spirit of their minds; and put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness." ² This cannot be done by fallen man for himself, and out of the resources of his warped and impoverished nature. But "what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh; that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit." ³ Being as He is, Divine as well as Human, Jesus is "made unto us Wisdom, and Righteousness, and Sanctification, and Redemption." ⁴ Thus in union with Him, those religious aspirations, which are part of our natural outfit, find their true exercise, their full satisfaction. As the Light of the world, He is the satisfaction of the intellect. As "Fairer than the children of men," He is the delight of the heart. As "Holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners," He challenges the submission of the will. Intellect, feeling, moral effort, each have their part in Him. He recognizes, He con-

¹ Eph. i. 6. ² Eph. iv. 22–24. ³ Rom. viii. 3, 4. ⁴ 1 Cor. i. 30.
secretes them. He leads them upwards, in and through His own Holy Humanity to the All-wise and All-beautiful. The soul finds that in Him "is the well of life, and that in His Light it will see light."

Does it seem inconceivable that the Eternal Son of God should have, indeed, thus come among us men, to teach and to save us; to make reconciliation between us and the Almighty Father; to bestow on us the priceless gift of a new Nature; and to lead us back, first one and then another, to our true home and peace? Certainly, it may well move our wonder to think of such grace and mercy. The Christian creed, when once it becomes precious to us, takes us altogether out of the daily range of earthly thoughts and interests, lifting us into a better, and brighter, but not more mysterious, or less real, world than this. The Incarnation and Death of the Everlasting Son seem impossible, only because we do not steadily reflect upon the simple but momentous truths which lie at the root of all religion, and which all who are not Materialists or Pantheists generally admit. Is the Incarnation so improbable, think you, if God is indeed a moral Being; if man has an immortal soul; if moral evil is inherently deadly in itself and in its effects? Do we not name "God," "immortality," "sin," without thinking what we mean; as if these tremendous words were the symbols of trivial commonplaces, which implied nothing beyond themselves? And is not this careless treatment of these solemn truths which we profess to own, the reason why many of us do not understand the
truths beyond them? If the awfulness and magnificence of God, the reality of eternity, the power and sting of moral evil, were more often subjects of our thought, would our imaginations be as startled, as they often are, by those doctrines of grace which adjust and harmonize what else is so full of perplexity; by the Incarnation of the Blessed Son of God; by His plenary Atonement on the Cross for the sins of men; by His unceasing Intercession for us with the Father; by the sanctifying energy of His Holy Spirit; by the power of His Sacraments, to renew and sustain our life? Surely the earlier truths are just as full of difficulties for the imagination and the reason as the latter. We put them out of sight as being less importunate; but there they are. That the All-foreseeing and Holy God should have created us at all, is at least as startling as that, having created, He should have redeemed us. Or rather, when we reflect upon His morality, upon His justice, upon His love, must we not think that His Redemption of the fallen is really less wonderful than His Creation of a race capable of such signal failure? Must we not find in our daily experience of life, and of the crimes and sufferings, which so largely compose it, more embarrassment and distress for reverent reason than can be furnished by critical speculations upon the explanatory and consoling truth, that “God so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on Him should not perish, but have everlasting life?”

1 S. John iii. 16.
"Whosoever believeth in Him." It is not then, you say, a matter of strict mathematical demonstration. No; it is not a matter of strict mathematical demonstration. If it were, there would be no more room for faith than there is in the process of learning a proposition of Euclid. Not to acquiesce in the conclusion of a proposition of Euclid, is to be intellectually deficient; but to refuse assent to the Christian creed does not necessarily imply intellectual deficiency. Why not? Because for such assent, moral dispositions are necessary as well as intellectual capacity. The evidence for Christianity, intellectually viewed, is something short of mathematical; and intentionally so. Christian truth makes a demand upon the will as well as upon the intellect; and the will, to avoid the foreseen consequences of assent, will often prevent the intellect from doing its work, honestly and thoroughly, in investigating the claims of Christ. This is a reason why so much store is set upon faith in St. Paul's Epistles. Faith is a test of the moral drift of our whole being, and not merely of the soundness or acuteness of our understandings. If an act of faith in Jesus Christ implied no more than an act of assent to the conclusion of a demonstrated proposition; if faith were nothing higher and nobler than the forced result of a victorious assault upon the human understanding, conducted by columns and batteries of mathematical evidence; then all that is said about its moral and spiritual worth, about its purifying and elevating power, would be simply unintelligible. The most accomplished mathema-
tician is not necessarily moral; and the most fervent believers, ancient or modern, have not been always Pascals and Newtons.

Our Lord did, indeed, by His miracles, and notably by His resurrection, address Himself to the experience of His contemporaries in enforcing His claims; and by certain portions of His teaching, He appealed no less truly to the operations of their natural reason. But, in order to accept Him as He is, reason and observation must be seconded by the heart and the conscience. There must be a true desire to know all that can be known of the Author of the law of right and wrong within us. There must be a real anxiety to escape from the moral anomalies of life; a recognition, and sense of human goodness; a strong anticipation that He Who is its Source cannot have left us in weakness and darkness to struggle alone. Why this temper is found in one man and not in another, is a question which carries us back into the deepest secrets of our several moral natures; into the varying histories of our loyalty or disloyalty to God's original gift of natural light. But upon the existence or non-existence of such moral dispositions depends our way of looking at the evidence which Jesus Christ has thought good to set before us on behalf of His claims. In one case that evidence will appear sufficient; insufficient in another. It will be held insufficient by the man who thinks to become a believing Christian, as he would become a mathematician, without any reference to the temper of his heart, or even in spite of its decided
bent against the moral teaching of the Gospel. It will be deemed sufficient—nay, more than sufficient—for those who amid perplexities are "waiting for the consolation of Israel." They understand that religious truth, to be embraced at all to any purpose, must be embraced not simply by a dry assent of the logical understanding, but by a vital act of the whole inward man; by moral sympathies even more earnestly than by an intellectual grasp. Christ, our Lord, in various ways, teaches us as much as this; and Christian apologists can only make that portion of the act of faith which belongs to the understanding easier to it, by removing obstacles to the reception of truth or by exhibiting its inward harmonies. They cannot, if they would, do the work of the Divine Spirit, and control the fevers, the prejudices, the cowardice, the rashness of the heart. He only Who made the heart can soften, or subdue, or change it. He only Who made the light to shine out of darkness can so shine in the hearts of men, as to "give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ."  

And they to whom He has taught this great lesson will know and feel, that believing in the Divinity of our Incarnate Lord, we stand, as it were, upon the heights of Pisgah; and that a new and vast prospect, grateful to eyes that are wearied with the long glare of the desert, is opening before us. Before us is a land of vineyards and oliveyards; a land flowing with milk and honey. It is a region of repose.

1 S. Luke ii. 25.  
2 2 Cor. iv. 6.
for faith and love; it is an atmosphere where communion with God is easy and natural. It is the proper home of spirituality and benevolence, of that internal and external practice of religion, day by day, which is so altogether higher and better a thing than the profoundest study of its theory. For the Divinity of the Son of God is the adequate warrant of all His promises; of the power of His death; of the gift of His Spirit; of the efficacy of His sacraments; of the converting and hallowing power of His written word; of the Divine character of that society of souls which, by His Spirit, He has organized into His Church since the Day of Pentecost. How vast in their range, how interesting in their idea and scope, how energetically practical in their bearings on all earnest life, are these great Christian doctrines which form the hills and vales of our Gospel Land of Promise! We strain our eyes; we would fain go forward to study their beauties, to try, if it might be, to understand and to surmount their difficulties. But it cannot be;—at least now. If only we sincerely cling by faith and love to our Divine and Human Lord, all else will follow. For the present, like the Magdalen, we can but hold Him by the feet, and entreat Him to teach us that personal devotedness to Himself, which is the secret and soul of genuine religion; since without it the love of God soon dies away into an attenuated mysticism, while the love of man is eventually hollowed out into a mechanical philanthropy. Thinking of Him, praying to Him, working for Him day by day, as
our living, tender, mighty, infallible Friend, we strengthen our hold upon the one certain bond between earth and heaven; upon Him through Whom, in all our feebleness and sin, we have real access in one Spirit unto the Father.\(^1\)

Personal devotion to Jesus Christ is the exercise of thought, and of affection, steadily directed upon His adorable Person. But it is also the exercise of will: it is predominantly practical. There is much to be abstained from for His sake; there is much to be done and to be endured; there is some danger, perhaps, of our doing nothing very definite, where the opportunities of action are so various and so complex. And, therefore, that you may do something for Jesus Christ now and here, you are asked to support with your alms the St James' Penitentiary. Its object is to carry out our Lord's work in the world as the Healer of souls, whom sin has separated from God, by bringing them back to purity and peace through a recovered union with Himself. It has been said that Penitentiaries are too costly a method of restoration from sin. They who speak thus can have thought little to any purpose about either the malignity of moral evil, or the meaning of the Self-sacrifice of the Son of God. The institution which I have named has done and is doing good, and, as we trust, lasting work among our unhappy sisters, who may well be so much less guilty in the eyes of the

\(^1\) Eph. ii. 18.
Eternal Justice than are many upon whom, in this present world, and often to their own endless loss, the breath of censure never falls. *Be our case what it may, we surely do well to support an undertaking which honours our Lord, by its disinterested work of unwearied compassion; and which, while labouring for the social recovery of our poor countrywomen, aims much more directly at promoting the eternal well-being of their souls,—as capable as our own of enjoying; through the Divine Mediator, the present and future blessings of religion.