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The Vastness

OF THE

Universe

and other Sermons

BY

J. IRWIN BROWN

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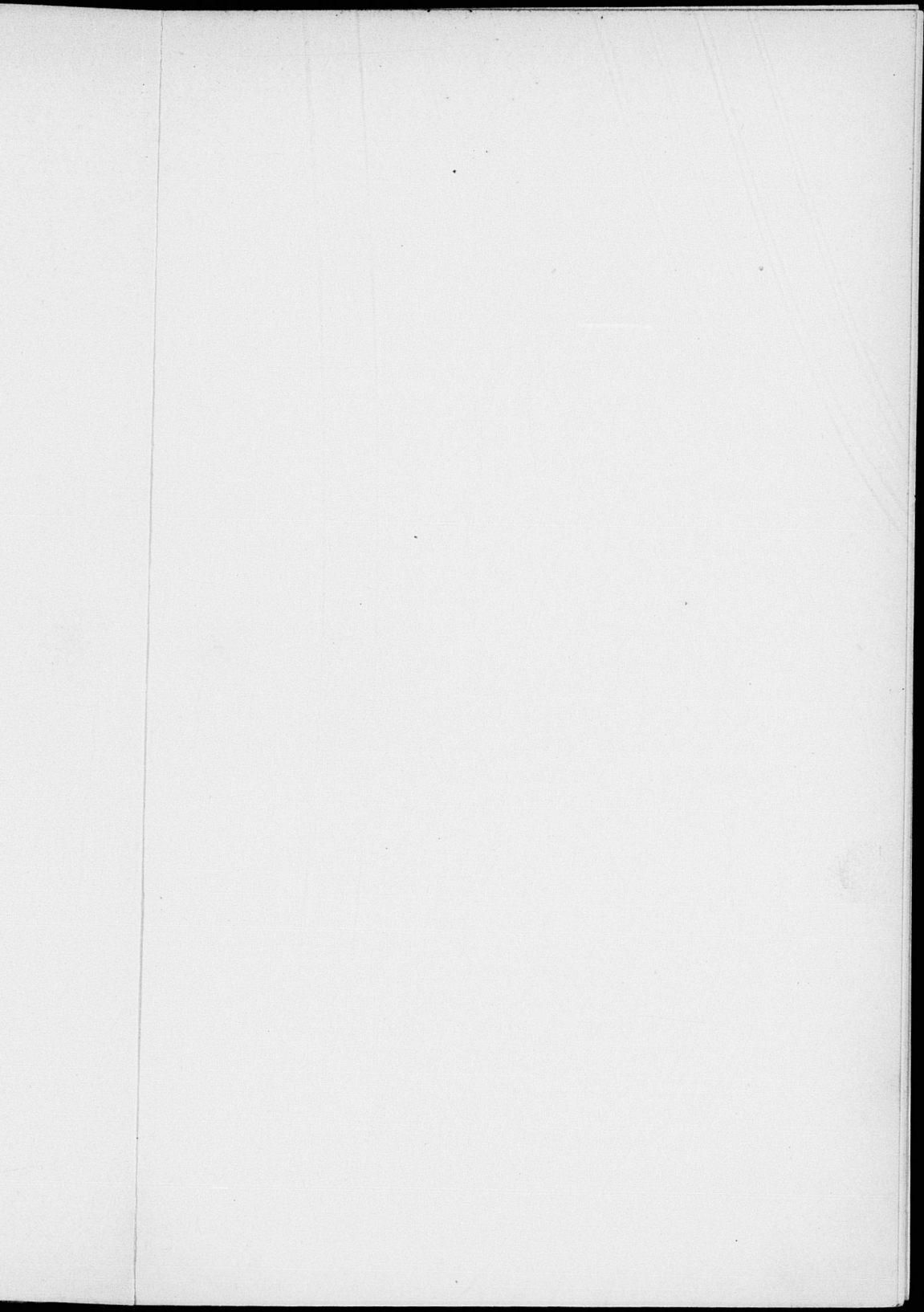
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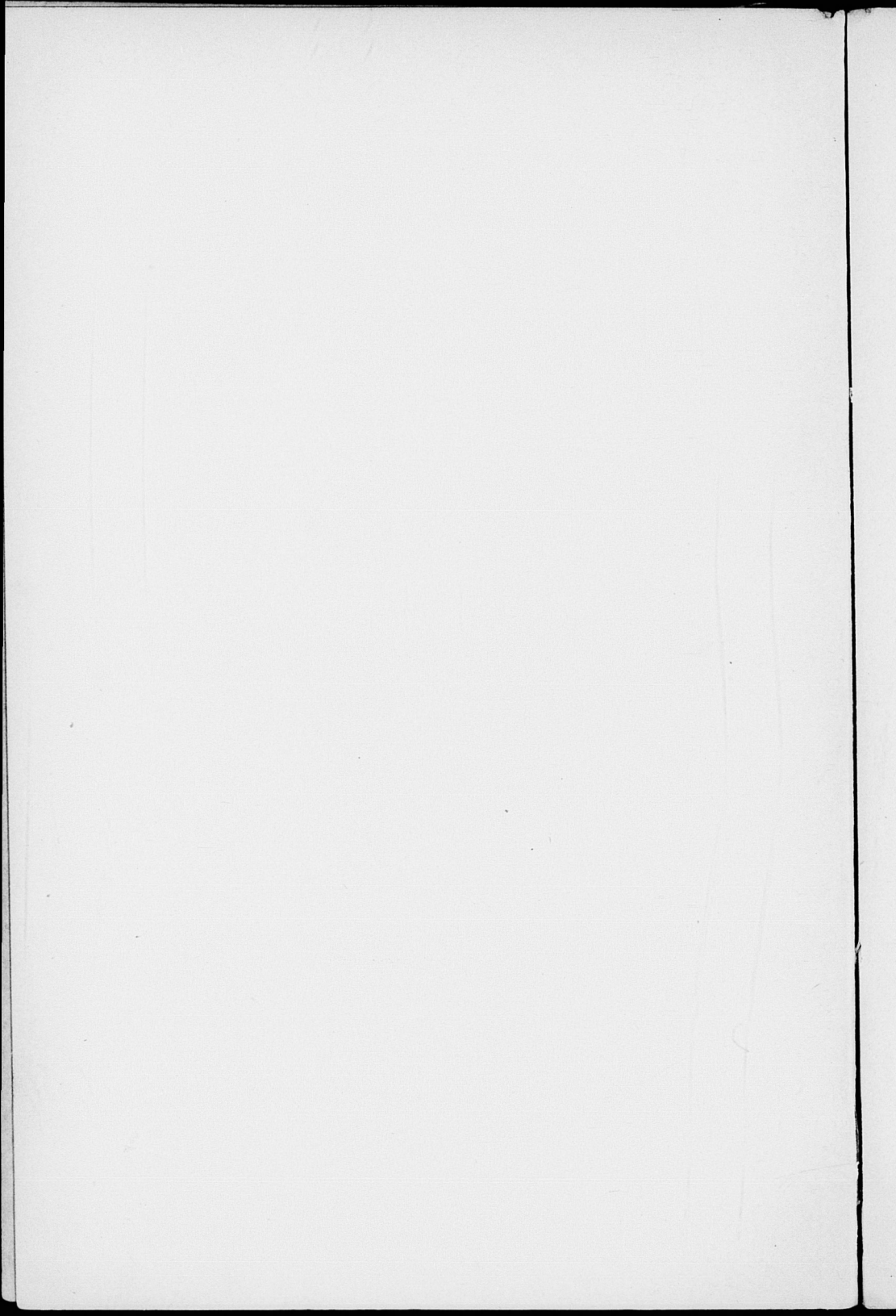
with all good wishes

& kindest regards

from J. S. B. —

As a souvenir of 12 April, 1910. —





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THE VASTNESS
OF THE UNIVERSE
AND OTHER SERMONS

BY

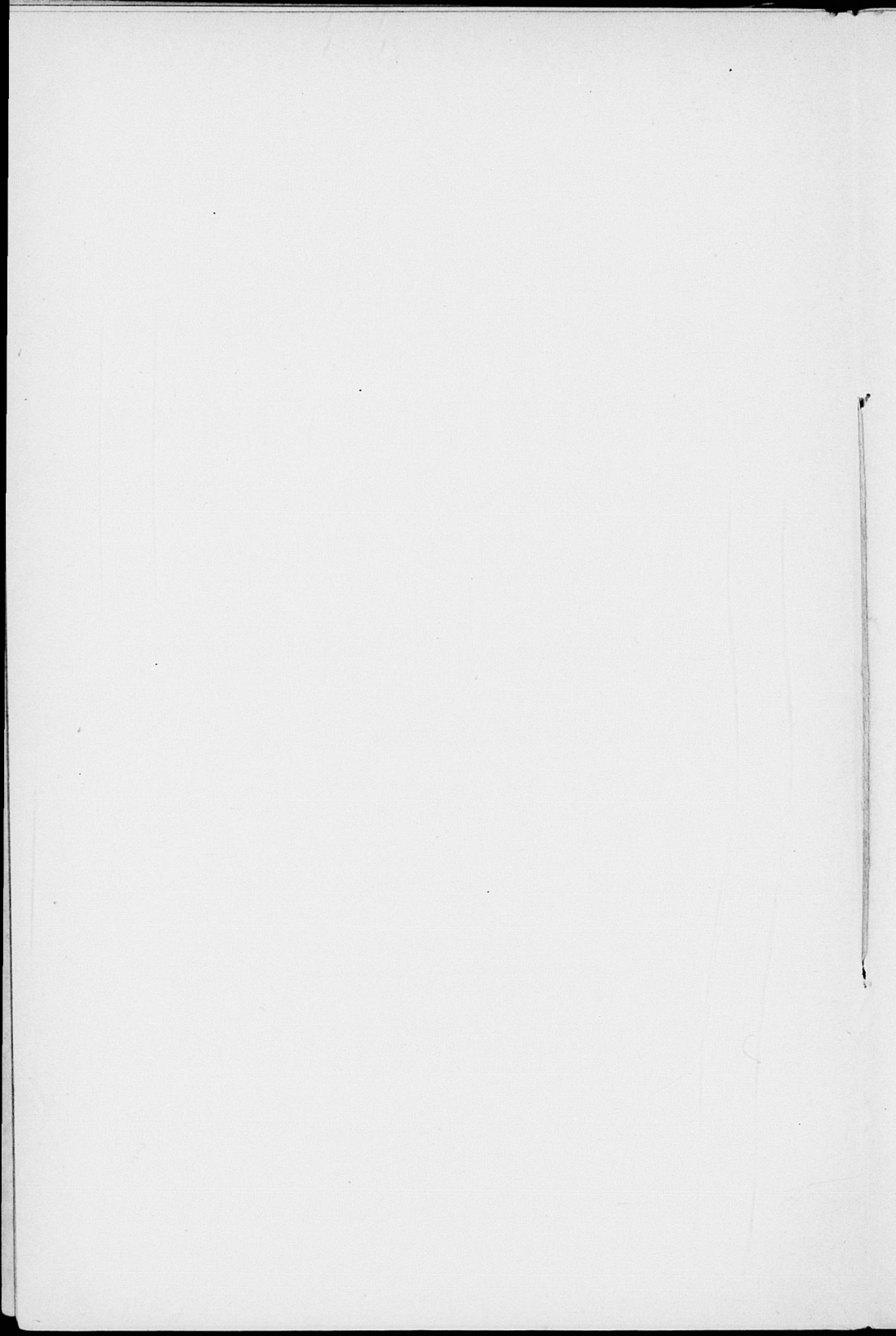
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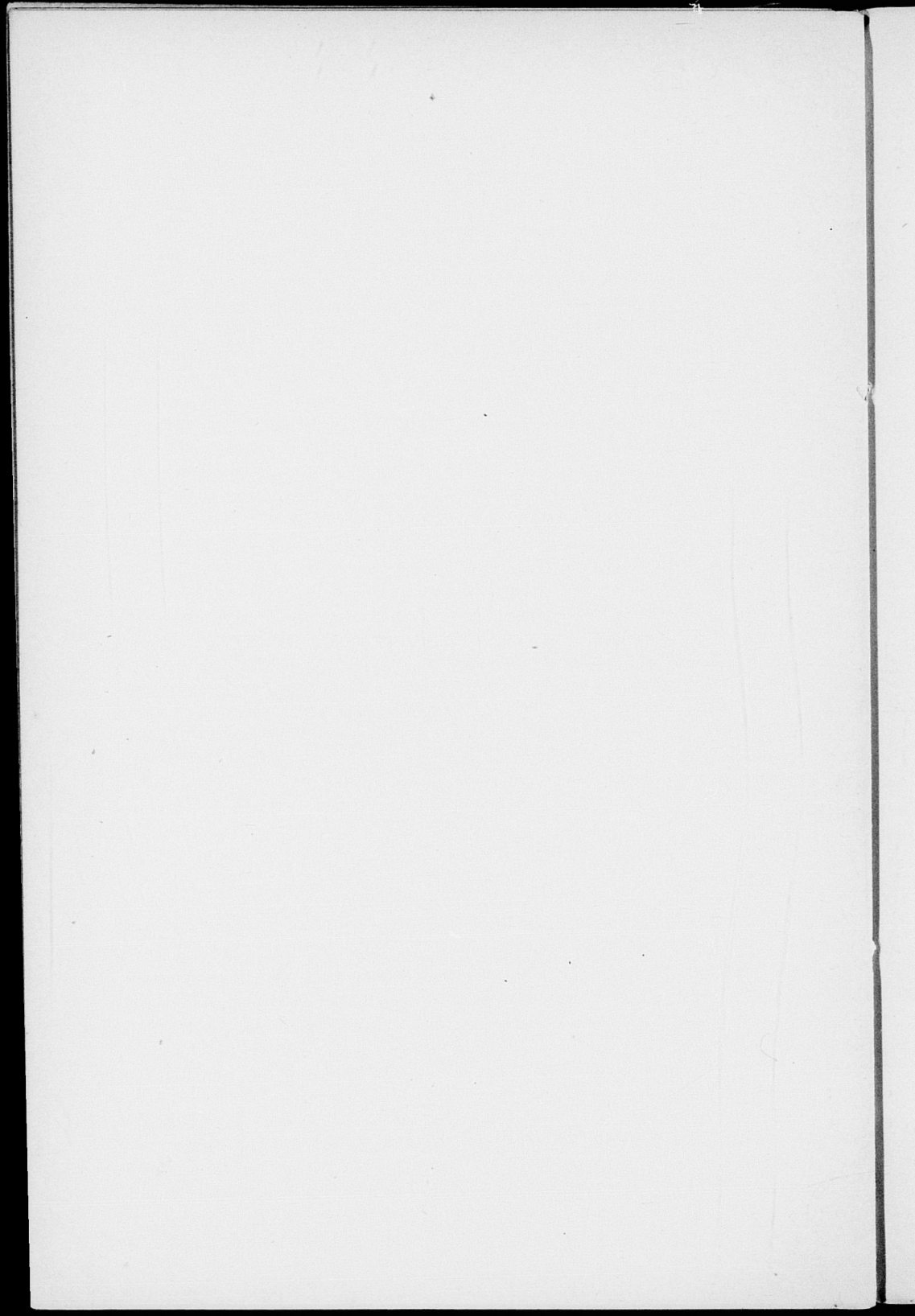


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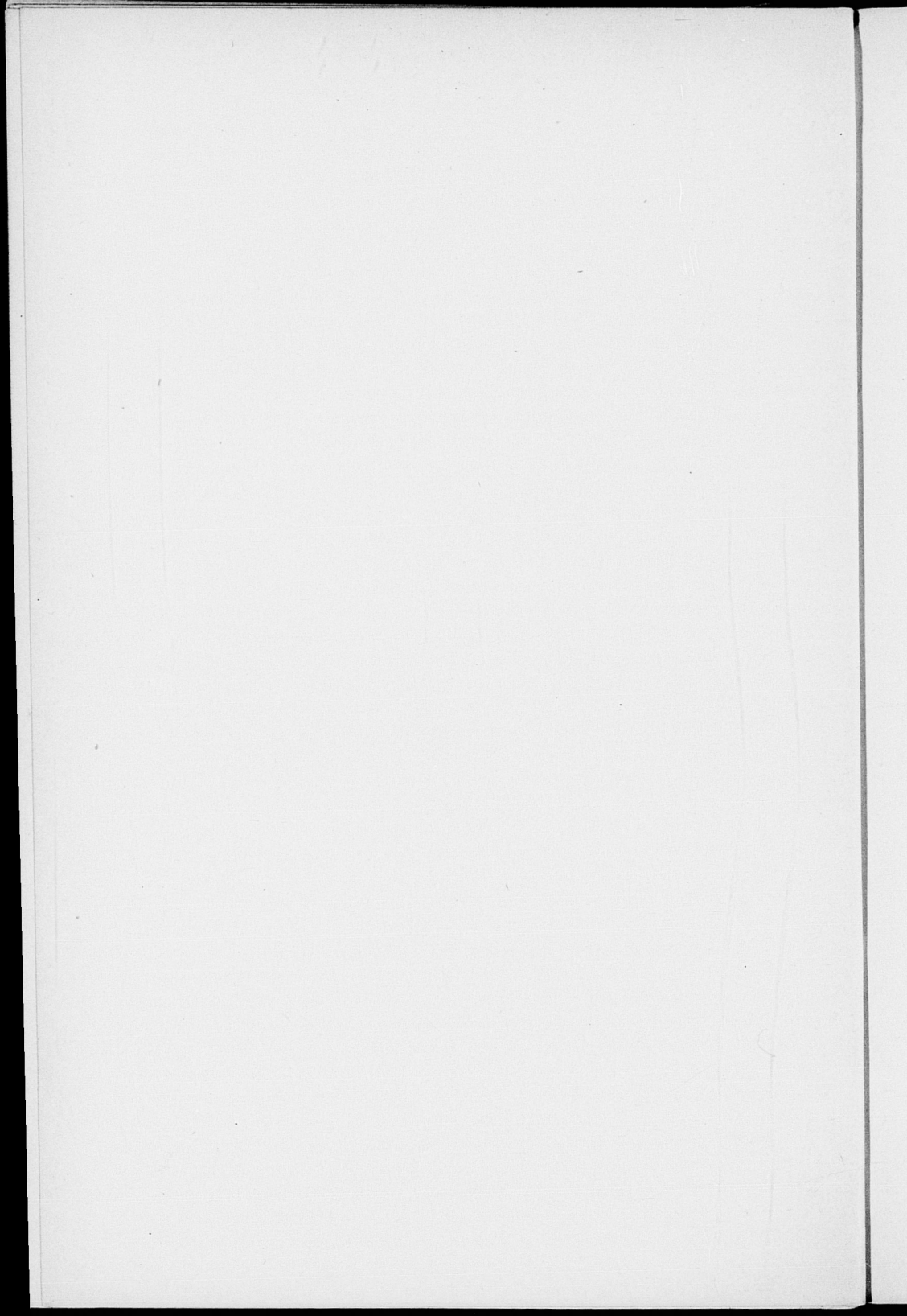
TO MY MOTHER.



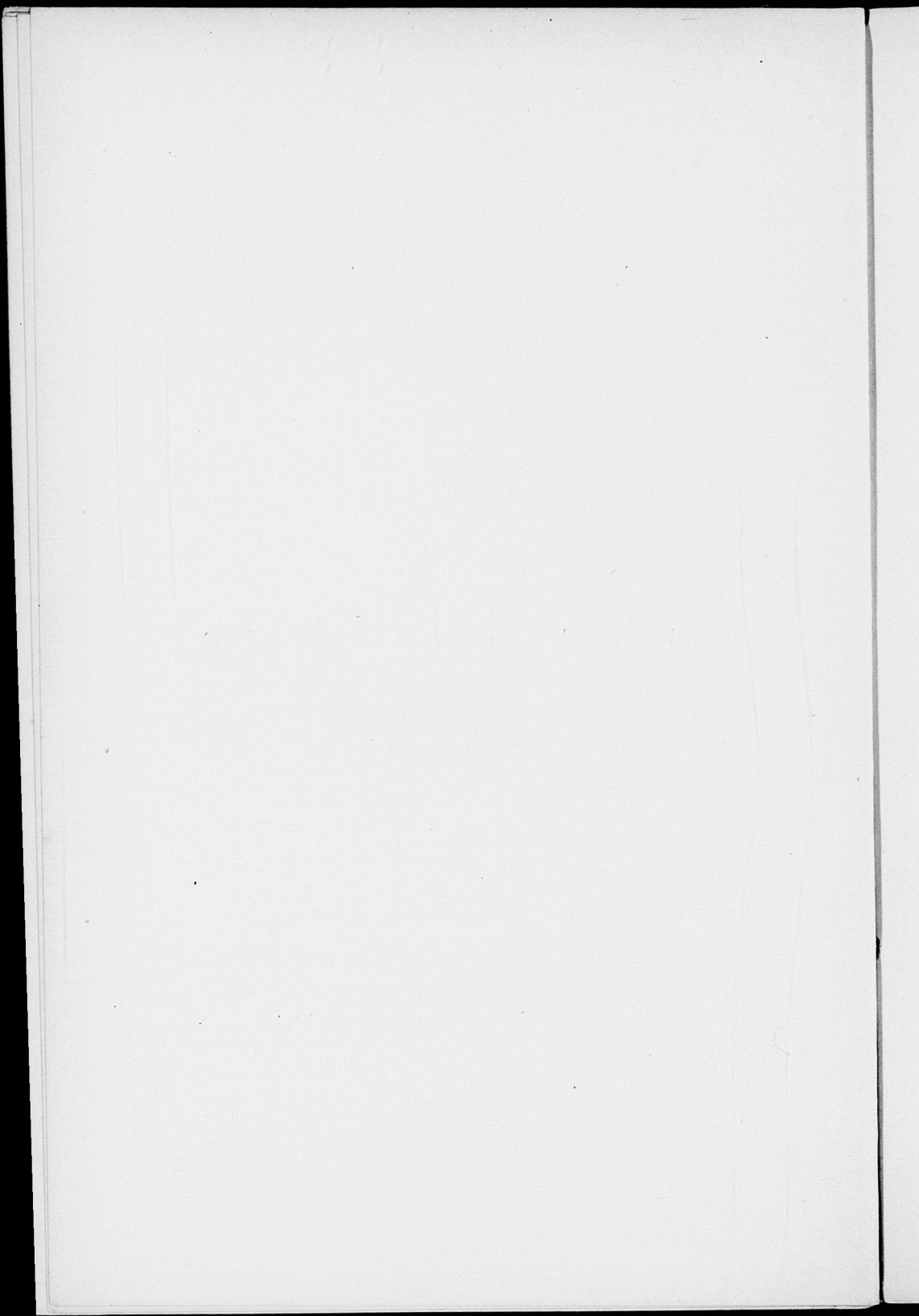
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Vastness of the Universe.



Vastness of the Universe.

When I consider thy heavens, the
work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars,
which thou hast ordained:

What is man, that thou art mindful
of him? and the son of man, that thou
visitest him?

Psalm VIII. 3, 4.



From the earliest ages of which History gives us any account men have considered and wondered at the stars. As night fell and the wanderers from out the fastnesses of primeval forests encamped in the open, with what amazement would they see the points of fire far above them gleaming in the overarching vault. Then as men grew venturesome and wandered farther, with what awe would they observe that, go where they might, these same glittering eyes watched them when the darkness came.

Let them climb the mountain or voyage forth upon the deep, it was the same—the hundred eyes of night were upon them; nor could they find a land free from that cold and silent scrutiny. Then little by little this terror would abate, when they saw that the orbs above shone on serenely, bringing, some affirmed, but little harm at worst.

They seemed like friends at last—these far off luminaries—so regular in their courses, so familiar to the eye; and all the lore of the East became a lore founded on or compiled with reference to the movements of the stars.

Men first had thought them deities, gods, remote but watchful, beings powerful beyond all human imagining, passionless and calm. Then they had fancied that in the relationship of star to star there might be deciphered lines of significance—symbols of the dead and deified—emblems of mortal fate. And they had but to look up to the nightly sky to see the warrior's sword and shield and spear, the implements of husbandry, the creatures of the chase. Nor was there wanting what we now would call the element of romance, could they not discern in outline the hapless queen, the valiant hero and rescued Beauty?

What did not the fresh fancy of Greece descry in the pictured firmament? What did it fail to find emblazoned there as on a resplendent scroll? Love and jealousy and fate unkind—reward and punishment—the pettiness and the magnanimity of Earth raised from the lower plane and painted on the sky for all men to read.

But the contemplative and melancholy East had reached its own interpretation long before. Its seers had discovered for themselves another meaning than that of poetry in the movement and the mystery of the host of heaven.

These, they taught, were centres of power; and if the unconsidering, earlier nations had fallen down and worshipped what night showed them in the sky, they only did reverence to these illimitable and elemental forces that presided over the destinies of man. Astrology—the investigation of the influence of the natal star over each human being's career—seemed to the Persian and the Babylonian the most fitting, the most profound study to which a man might aspire.

Idolatry, superstition, dread, were the characteristics of that study; and to its votaries without exception it proved itself in the last degree weakening to the will and degrading.

Antiquity in general regarded the heavens with superstitious awe; and when in early days men thought of explanation at all of the wonders they beheld, it was but to invent weird, curious stories—whimsical fancies—or to suggest hypotheses that were hopeless and full of terror—but never to draw measurably near the truth.

The Israelites were surrounded by idolaters such as these, who worshipped sun and moon and stars and the host of heaven. Thus there is scarcely a page in Israel's early history on which we do not find some stern prohibition of this degrading cult.

How needful such warnings were we can well imagine. Like all ancient peoples the Hebrew nation had an overwhelming sense of the mystery of God's handiwork in the heavens. And that feeling of awe, which on the lips of the Psalmist finds expression so devout, might readily, if left uncontrolled, have become debased and superstitious.

But the feeling is a true one though it may be distorted and misdirected. It is true that God's universe is, like God Himself, incomprehensible. And the Hebrew Psalms reach no higher range of sublimity than when they consider the heavens the work of God's fingers, and wonder with reverent amaze at God's goodness to the sons of men.

Profound however as was the Hebrew's sense of the vastness of the Universe, the view of creation from which in part it sprang must have been absolutely superficial compared with the view which modern knowledge has made possible, the view of the astronomer and of the histologist.

Let us try to realize, if we can, some of the truths suggested by science regarding the extent of the "things that are made".

You are endowed, let us assume, with the power of traversing space with a rapidity of an express train. The sun has just set behind the low sandy dunes on the Dutch coast; the stars have come out—one or two—and you launch forth upon your voyage of investigation, leaving the earth behind. The whole scene drops from below you; and after a few seconds not a sound is heard.

There is sunset yet lingering on church towers here and there amid the trees, and on the opulent cities that dot the plain. There is the sea, its waves mere ripples now, breaking along the beach apparently without a murmur.

Now all the Netherlands are at your feet, a green plain crossed with silver streaks. You see England and Scotland on the horizon, and France and Germany in part. And what you notice distinctly is a dark shadow creeping from East towards the West. That is night following close on the sunset.

We have ascended many miles in the air. A vast area is outspread before us. The journey however is not yet really begun. At the rate at which we travel a lifetime would not suffice for the inspection even of the fringe of our solar system. It would require almost two centuries to reach the sun.

We must increase our speed. Let us suppose that we travel with the velocity of light. A few minutes — and we have far passed the moon, black, burnt up and desolate; we have passed some of the planets, Venus flashing back its coloured rays to the sun, Mercury rapidly revolving; and we are nearing the sun, a blazing mass of light and heat.

We take our stand upon the photosphere and we look back. Where is the earth? We cannot see it at first. Is it lost to view entirely? No, there it is, a tiny star, pale green, but dim and inconspicuous.

Jupiter is a bright sphere easily found. We use a telescope and make out Mars with its double canals; Saturn shows its yellow rings; Uranus gleams far away; and we can even catch sight of the still more distant Neptune. About our earth there is nothing remarkable to be noted. It has a few indistinct markings on the surface, and it has one moon. That is all. How diminutive and insignificant it is! Some of its companion planets surpass it in size many hundred times. The sun is in bulk more than a million and a quarter times as great.

We see the centre of our solar system: it is the sun, on the photosphere of which we have taken our stand. From that vantage-ground we look around and see fixed stars — luminous points — beyond our sun's immediate influence. What *are* these stars? Are they on the edge of the universe, on the boundary line of creation? Let us see.

We take our flight to one of them; to one of the stars,

say, in the belt of Orion. Years pass, and still we are travelling — travelling at the speed of light; and when we do arrive at the star which we approach, we discover that point is a new sun of vast size — a centre of a system of its own with planets revolving round it, some perhaps as small as the earth, many immeasurably larger.

There is no limit — no line of separation — no boundary line here to be discerned.

Let us go farther. On we fly to another and yet another. Still there is no indication, no trace, of any break in the continuity of creation. These fixed stars are but the first mile-stones in trackless space. We pass beyond them all, we outrun the light for swiftness, and direct our course to that faint glow we call the "Milky Way".

If we travelled no quicker than light, we should need, say some astronomers, more than 2000 years to reach its nearest point — to touch the nearest of the stars of which it is composed.

We have done so. We have even reached the centre of the Milky Way, and stand amid that brilliant Galaxy of constellations.

What do we find? Have we touched the outer walls of creation? No. Far from it. We are but at the beginning of our quest as yet. We have hardly as yet taken the initial step of our wanderings through the Universe. We are on the threshold still; the vast illimitable palace is unexplored. For this Milky Way, this Galaxy, is but the outward bound of that great stellar congregation to which our sun, and other suns, — fixed stars — belong. But in the depths of space inconceivably far beyond this Milky Way with its related suns and worlds and constellations, there are systems and groups of systems each as large as all we have already noticed, and many doubtless indefinitely larger.

Our Galaxy and its related suns form nothing but *one unit*. Beyond it there are other units so distant that (as Sir JOHN HERSCHELL tells us) the rays of light from some of the remoter nebulae must have been two millions of years on their way to

us. In other words, flying like the light we should spend two millions of years in reaching certain stars that are visible.

And what then? Would that be all, if we reached the centre round which these circle?

Where is the *end*? Where is there a blank wall and darkness?

There is none. There is no division, no line of demarcation separating creation from non-creation.

Can you conceive of such a line? What would it be? Could the imagination picture to itself the other side of such a line? Can we so much as think of the absence of space; or by any effort of the intellect imagine creation as extending *just so far* — up to a certain circumvallating limit — and then extending no further?

The mind feels its weakness. It is thrown back upon itself.

We are led by Science through the Universe and *we can find no limit to it*, no barrier, no break, no end.

Where Science fails us, we set the Imagination to work; but we cannot conceive of such a limit, such a terminating wall. What can we say but this: there is no such boundary; creation is illimitable? To this conclusion at all events the evidence points.

But can we *conceive* of such a universe? Impossible. Thus creation baffles us.

We follow up the idea that Science has opened out for us. We cannot go on for ever seeking the boundary. Nor, having once learnt the nature of the firmament, can we logically stop short anywhere before we find an end. And such an end does not exist.

We must content ourselves with words which at best are negative, which conveniently express our ignorance. *Creation is infinite. Our intellects are finite. We cannot comprehend, we can not imagine any merely human being comprehending, God's Universe.*

The light that was reflected from our earth almost 2000 years ago, on the morning of the Crucifixion, is still upon its way. The light reflected from Jerusalem and Calvary, from the cross where the Saviour suffered, from His wounded side, from the moving, scornful crowd, from the weeping women — the sun's

rays as thrown back from that scene upward into space — have not yet been lost. They never will. They are palpitating onwards through the Infinite. They have not reached the outward boundary of that system of fixed stars which we gaze on every night.

That picture will flash onwards for a hundred years longer ere it impinges on the confines of the Milky way. There above you, every cloudless night plain to be seen, is that belt of star mist, which we name the Galaxy. The light from the crucifixion morning speeding upwards ever since, will not reach those far off worlds till long after we are dead.

And when it does it will merely register its message, and speed on... whither?

How many units are there? Or how many millions form a new group, a vaster collection, a more comprehensive system?

How overwhelming the thought that in this way our deeds are still held in remembrance. Every moment of sunlight, every labour that has been wrought under the sun forms a picture which is now vibrating on its way through space.

If there are beings on these stars who can see all that each gleam of brightness from our earth contains — see it namely in its parts undiminished by distance — what histories of the past are being read to-day, what histories will be read in ages to come! The retreating waters of the Deluge with the sunlight painting the bow in the cloud — Abraham's wanderings and that awful ascent of Moriah, the mount of sacrifice — the broad gleaming Nile with Pharaoh's daughter on the bank, peering astonished into the opened ark — the Red Sea foaming to the very feet of the delivered Israelites as they look down upon the flood that has engulfed their enemy — the lightnings of Sinai and the desert march — the vicissitudes of rule in Canaan with the Exile and the Return — our Saviour sitting by the well amid the cornfields—His taking the children in His arms—His feeding the multitudes — His curing the sick and raising the dead — all these scenes are speeding forth as pictures.

From century to century how many strange events are thus impressing themselves upon the light reflected from our globe!

From the brilliant flash that shone around Saul of Tarsus journeying to Damascus, down to the latest deed of heroism in the Mission Field — what records must be living still in the History of Christ's Church!

Of your life too, from the days when in the sunny meadow you sat by your mother's side or chased the butterfly — from childhood and youth to your later years, how many hours must thus have sent forth their message into the Infinite!

To the dreams and fancies suggested by science the Psalmist was of course a stranger. But he had the poet's imagination; and inspiration quickened his thought. The truths, revealed to him, were too great for utterance, too great even for human comprehension. And as at night he looked away into the boundless creation that stretched above him, intellect reeled under the strain. He feels lost in the vastness of the Universe and cries: "What is man that Thou art mindful of him, or the son of man that Thou visitest him?"

What answer shall we give to this question of the heart? Where shall we obtain comfort? What assurance can we have that our little lives are of value in this great sum of things, that they are watched over and cared for?

For answer we must go to God Himself. The thoughts of consolation are of different kinds and they reach us from different sides.

I. In the first place there is comfort to be derived from what we know of the *Nature of man*. To begin with, man has life, and life is greater than material extension. Self-conscious life must be something of an immeasurably higher grade than mere mass or bulk. How much higher must we reckon an intelligent, reasoning life to be, a life such as man possesses?

The thoughts that "wander through eternity" mark out their possessor as akin to the Great Architect. Man was created in the Divine image, and that image, although in part obliterated, is still retained. Sin has affected all parts of human nature; has left its impress even on the world in which we live; but it has not destroyed the Divine likeness. Man to some extent resem-

bles his Maker. The truths which the Creator has interwoven with His creation can up to a certain point be grasped by man; and many of them have been discovered by him. Not to speak of genius or of learning, not to think of feats of memory or any wonders of the imagination — the intuitive judgments of the unlettered man have in them something of the Divine.

What can be finer than the thought of Pascal: "Man is a feeble reed, trembling in the midst of creation; but then he is endowed with thought. The universe does not need to arm for his destruction. A breath of wind, a drop of water, will suffice to kill him. But though the Universe were to fall on man and crush him, he would be greater in his death than the universe in its victory; for he would be conscious of his defeat but it would not be conscious of its triumph."

But the mind of man has a further dignity, for it can conceive a *moral world*. God breathed into man's nostrils the breath of life and man became a living *soul*. His soul conceives of moral relations and moral distinctions. The capacity to do so is Godlike; the faculty that does so is in truth a part of God Himself. The spiritual nature is the highest part of our being; there we meet God; there we hold communion with God's Spirit; there we are conscious of the presence of a Power not of the earth, not material, not physical, but supreme, whose commands are absolute, whose will is Law.

How can we institute a comparison between the material universe and the universe of spirit? They are incommensurable, to be sure; and strict comparison is impossible. But who can fail to see how much loftier in the scale of creation *mind* is than *matter*? The mind accepts and cannot but hold the truth that goodness is eternal, like the very being of God: "Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, to-day and for ever."

There is a saying of Augustine: "There is but one object greater than the soul, and that one, the Creator." If it were worthy of God to create such a moral being at first, it is worthy of Him to care for it afterwards when it is created. That is a thought of comfort. The nature of man constitutes him one of

the most important parts of all creation. Nay, we may go further. Humanity is the highest range of God's universe.

Even the human body has been assumed by Christ. And it is saved by Him. His human body is now in Paradise. And the soul assumed by Him, He possesses still. The Incarnation has raised humanity to the highest honour. The Holy Spirit abides with the believer, in heart, conscience and will; and He dwells in the temple of the body. And as though to remove all doubt from the mind, our Saviour speaks often of the worth of the individual soul. Its value in God's sight exceeds that of many worlds. And the Apostle is inspired to reveal that believers are so dear to the heart of Jesus, that they may be called the Bride, the Lamb's wife, His eternally beloved.

II. Another consolation may be found in the *Nature of God*. We see His infinite power in the vastness of creation. We begin to see that in relation to the Creator our words *great* and *small* may be meaningless.

As to Him one thousand years are as one day, and one day as a thousand years; so may we not say our whole solar system is as one atom, and one atom as the universe?

For see the finish and workmanship of the minutest structures. Take your microscope and examine them. Here is a crystal; note the perfection of sides and angles, mark the unerring Geometer's handiwork.

Bring under your most careful and painstaking scrutiny some fragment of vegetable filiment, or of animal tissue. It is a fern leaf, say, with the spores upon its under-surface; or it is a fly's wing covered with down. Let it be as minute as you please. What do you find? A cell, perhaps, if you be successful, and your apparatus exceptionally good.

Magnify that cell with the most powerful microscope within your reach. Do you meet the ultimate particles of matter, do you come to a region so minute that no law reigns there, that no finished workmanship is observable? No, as far as we go we are struck with the minute and delicate beauty and the adaptability shown in every part, as to form, and colour, and strength.

Bring a more powerful instrument still. We look; but the obscurity that seemed to characterise our later experiments — even when strong sunlight fell upon the field of view — is increased. The more you magnify the object, the darker it becomes, because you observe only a small fraction of it. Increase the light by reflectors or by artificial illumination; so far as you can see all is perfect. So the process goes on, till our means of illumination and our means of magnifying fail us. There is no end, no limit, no boundary line, here to be discovered, no ultimate atoms or molecules are discernible, and we are left peering into the Infinite and the Incomprehensible, and asking regarding molecules the same vain questions as we have already asked regarding the systems of stars. The infinitesimally minute escapes from our scrutiny and disappears before us into darkness. The infinitely great eludes us equally and stretches into darkness over our heads.

From infinity to infinity stretches the Cosmos of the Eternal; and we stand at our allotted posts along that line, and with our science toil over and investigate this parenthesis between two infinities, which is all we can comprehend. The character of the Creator is seen in the incalculably minute. The structures of these things imply attention, care, and power on the part of their Fashioner and Sustainer.

Our Saviour speaks of this attribute of the Almighty, — His Perfection in what is small and apparently insignificant. The sparrow does not fall to the ground without His knowledge. The hairs of the head are all numbered. Indeed our Lord expressly claims for the Father this carefulness, and minutely loving Providence over all His works. There is no part of creation where the greatness of God is not manifest. Perfection characterizes His handiwork in the little as in the great. "Be perfect as your Father in heaven is perfect." God is perfect. Let us build our faith firmly on that foundation. He is perfect in wisdom and power, but also in holiness and justice, and — what is the special revelation of His Son — in pity and in love.

God's greatness is the measure of His nearness to us.

If He is infinite in power, is He not also infinite in goodness and mercy? Think of the drops of water and the creatures therein finely fashioned, delicately moulded, with organism adapted to their surroundings, with unspeakable beauty throughout the details of their structure. There we see His minute care physically. In astronomy we see Him touching the extremity of omnipotence. In histology we see Him touching the extremity of Providence. May we not expect in some other field of existence to see Him touch the extremity of *love*? God reaches infinity on all sides; in Him is perfection both in things great and small; the Father is perfect in the moral and spiritual world as well as the physical world.

Where does He touch the Infinite of Love but in the Gospel, in Christ's words, in Christ's work?

The Gospel of Christ is the suitable and indispensable complement, the fitting counterpoise, to the infinite majesty of His infinite creation. The perfection of His character demands that love. Take away that Gospel, and we have a Deity whose highest display would be that of unlimited force and boundless knowledge. Without the Revelation whose centre is Christ, we should know little of the Creator beyond His omnipotence and His omniscience. Other attributes might be surmised to exist; but we could not have that certainty regarding them which our hearts desire. There would be much wanting in such a partial manifestation of His character. We should be groping in the dark. And our ignorance would place a veto on all honest worship, the worship of the heart.

We could not offer adoration to a Deity who was merely strong and wise, even though His strength and His wisdom were infinite. Such a Power would inspire no feelings but those of dread and hatred. Our souls demand what alone can satisfy them, goodness. God has met this need, for He Himself created it. His mercy and His justice are as real as His omnipotence. He is of boundless compassion and tender regard. He knoweth our frame; He remembereth that we are dust. Yet is He of purer eyes than to behold iniquity. His greatness and His goodness stand together; they are so united as to be inseparable.

arable. "He healeth the broken in heart, and bindeth up their wounds. He telleth the number of the stars; He calleth them all by their names. Great is our Lord and of great power; His understanding is infinite."

Our best comfort therefore for the seeming insignificance of human life is the comfort we derive from the character of God. We have learnt from Nature that the Creator has a care not only for the great and immeasurable, but for the small and minute; we are taught in Scripture that He watches not only over material things, whether great or small, but more closely, more tenderly still over those creatures whom He hath made in His own image; we have it revealed that the perfection of His nature includes goodness, that the Creator is "Our Father in heaven," and that towards the most sinful and the most obscure among men the Father's heart is a universe of Love.

It is the Incarnation that makes these truths clear. Therein we see God's love. "God so loved the world that He sent His only begotten Son that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish but have everlasting life". Therein we see God entering a lost world to save it. Higher honour could not be set upon human nature than our Lord set upon it when He became a partaker of flesh and blood, and "took on Him the seed of Abraham". Our Saviour's work was nothing merely general or abstract. His ministry was particular and individual. No unit was lost sight of in the mass; no prayer was ever offered that He did not hear; no desire for blessing ever expressed to Him that He did not answer. And Christ's relation to mankind remains as intimate for ever.

What assurances of individualised, particularised love are contained in His simplest utterances! "The Son of man is come to seek and to save that which is lost." "There is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth." Christ reveals the Father for an express and definite purpose. Men may not turn away and live as though they had never known God's willingness to save. We are to worship, in spirit and in truth, Him Whose name is Love. We are to obey

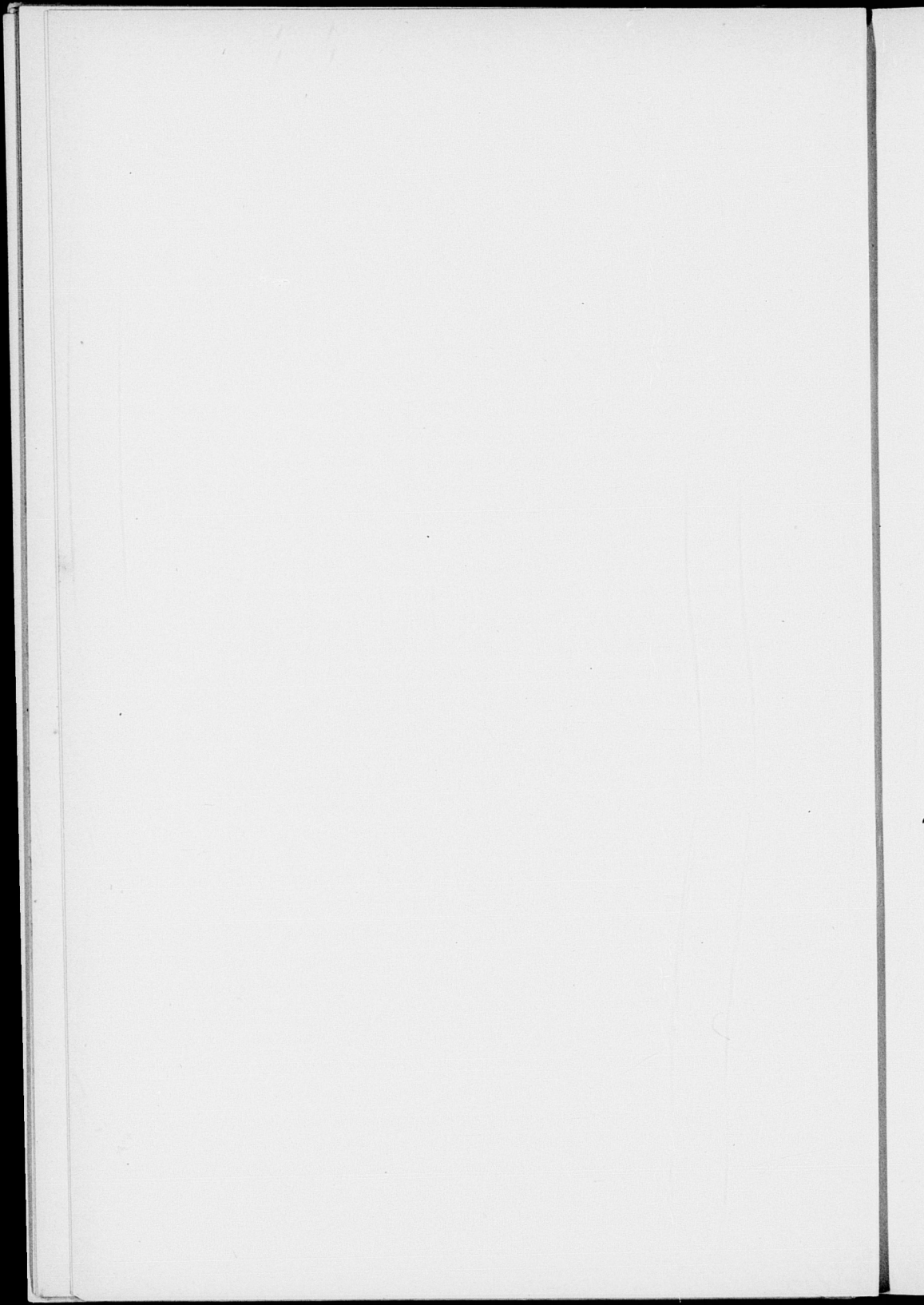
without inward reserve Him Whom now we know as the Father. We are to repose an absolute trust in Him Who for our sake spared not His own Son. In Christ the promised pardon is ours, for He hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God.

In Him is the promised power by which we become the sons of God. And He offers the gift of everlasting life. In our Saviour indeed are united the only consolations that can help us, when we are overborne with the sense of the littleness of human existence. He shows us what the *Nature of man* was intended to be, and what through Him it may yet become. He shows us what the *Nature of God* is, and how special and intimate is the Father's love for all His children. *Thus He combines in His own Person all those elements which are necessary to our spiritual comfort.* In every relationship of His life the God-Man seemed to say to men: "Ye are to the Father of infinite worth".

May we not say that the human soul with its illimitable capacities and its aspirations is, as it were, a universe in itself, the greatness of which is implied in the Incarnation and attested by the Lord's priestly sacrifice of Himself on Calvary? If the infinite worth of that sacrifice indicates the deadly character of sin — whose dominion He thus broke, whose guilt He purged away — does it not also prove how precious to Him, how dear to His heart is every immortal soul? And the soul that is knit unto His by faith, the heart that responds to His call with joy unfeigned, need never dread being overlooked or abandoned by its Creator amid the vastness of His Universe. For I am persuaded, says His servant speaking by the Spirit, I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus, our Lord.



Wisdom in Creation.



Wisdom in Creation.

O Lord how manifold are thy works!
in wisdom hast Thou made them all; the
earth is full of thy riches.

Psalm CIV. 24.

O the depth of the riches both of
the wisdom and knowledge of God!

Romans XI. 33.



There are few lines of study more fascinating than that of tracing analogies between Nature and Grace.

That such analogies exist it needs but little consideration to show; and although fanciful resemblances between the two realms have at times led men astray by the hasty assumptions they involved, and have thrown discredit on the whole comparison, yet no reader of Scripture can fail of being impressed with the manifest parallelism between Creation and Redemption.

That Redemption is immeasurably the greater is attested not alone by our Saviour's Incarnation and by the whole course of His Condescension to man, but by the infinite worth of that sacrifice of His on which the economy of Redemption rests.

Its greatness is not merely indicated as by the lonely years at Nazareth and the persecutions and tribulations that followed but proved by the agony, the bloody sweat, and the atoning suffering upon the cross. How stupendous a work Redemption is and how far it transcends the glories of Creation is evinced even in this, that through Redemption alone is revealed that whole side of the Divine Nature, which Creation

hid — God's mercy, His pardon, His unutterable love. Viewed aright, indeed, these realms of the Divine operation are hardly comparable the one with the other, so distinct are they in essence, so disproportionate in what they cost.

While Creation needed but the fiat of omnipotence to call it into being, did not Redemption demand the sacrifice of God's Son? Yet widely dissimilar as these Kingdoms must be deemed, they lend themselves in at least one respect to a comparison which is neither strained nor fanciful; for seeing both are the works of the Infinitely Wise, both may be expected to disclose — though each in its own degree — the Wisdom of Him who doeth all things well.

How natural then that the same feeling of reverent amazement which awoke in the Psalmist's heart at the spectacle of the visible universe, should be called forth in the Apostle's soul by the mysteries of grace!

"O Lord, how manifold are Thy works! in wisdom hast Thou made them all; the earth is full of Thy riches!" If such adoring wonder was evoked by the mere sight of the things which do appear, how much more significant, how much more profound is that other expression of praise which arises to the Apostle's lips as he ponders over the marvels of Redemption: "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are His judgments, and His ways past finding out".

Let us look at some of the tokens of this wisdom which appears equally in the material and in the spiritual world.

I. Wherever we look in the material Creation we see *order*. That is the supreme principle upon which all things are based. It is more than a poetic conceit, it is a literal and demonstrable truth that "order is heaven's first law."

The planets that travel ceaselessly in their appointed orbits, — the millions of distant constellations that never become intermingled or confused, — the revolutions of our own globe and all the movements on its surface reveal the unbroken reign of law.

So also do the most elusive of chemical changes, the

subtlest effects of electricity or of light, the most obscure properties of matter. There is no part of Creation where order has not entered and where it does not hold sway. Whether we consider the alternation of day and night and the procession of the seasons, or examine the winds and the tides and the ocean currents, or investigate the distribution and the growth of living things, we meet everywhere with regularity, uniformity and system.

The same element of regularity is manifest in the drift of the polar ice and in the course of the tropical cyclone; it is present in the tracery of a snow crystal and in the configuration of a continent; it greets us in the trill of the blackbird and in the reverberations of a crash of thunder. All things have their places and their laws. And the further our knowledge extends, the more clearly does it indicate that nothing is aimless, nothing fortuitous, nothing insignificant. Each atom has its allotted task, its properties, its bounds which it cannot pass.

What chains of correlated events moreover attest this wisdom of order and uniformity in Nature!

Yonder lies the wide ocean rolling its billows to the shore. From that turbulent surface by what strange yet familiar processes are the rivers fed, and the mountain rills supplied, and the earth made fruitful! Who is ignorant of the main principles on which evaporation and rainfall depend? Yet who shall estimate the boundless knowledge, the infinite exactitude, the unwearied calculation, which has devised the numbers, the masses, the proportions involved herein, and which has ordained the plan of their working! "Who hath measured the waters in the hollow of his hand and meted out heaven with the span and comprehended the dust of the earth in a measure and weighed the mountains in scales and the hills in a balance?"

There is order everywhere, and everywhere it is the expression of the Will and the Nature of God. "The day is thine, the night also is thine; thou hast prepared the light and the sun. Thou hast set all the borders of the earth; thou hast made summer and winter." "He giveth snow like wool; he scattereth the hoarfrost like ashes. He sendeth out his word, he melteth them; he

causeth his wind to blow and the waters to flow." "He watereth the earth from his chambers; the earth is satisfied with the fruit of thy works." "For he commanded and they were created, he hath made a decree which shall not pass."

There is order in the spiritual world; order is indeed its fundamental characteristic. Without it God would not be supreme ruler, His Kingdom would become chaos. Moral order is justice; and in justice God governs His creation. He must punish sin, repress disorder, disobedience, rebellion. There is no respect of persons with Him. He will render to every man according to his deeds.

But as all have sinned, in view of God's justice all the world becomes guilty before God. What then is our hope? It is in the salvation which God has wrought for us — a gift bestowed in accordance with His own Nature, in accordance with His Love.

II. Another element of this wisdom, which is to be seen in creation, is the *care which the Creator shows for the preservation of what He has made*. This is something entirely different from *order*. The strictest law might be exemplified in a world where everything should be in a state of flux, where forces should be merely terrible; where nothing of beauty or grace should be allowed to exist. But this is not the kind of order we find around us. There order is specialized, and tends towards the preservation of what has been made. Beneficent care is visible all through the world. The mysteries of God's Providence may often puzzle and confound us, but we see that there is a Power at work which produces the conditions which render life possible.

Marvellous as are all the laws of gravitation and heat and light and chemical affinity, they are simplicity itself compared with that repose in which they issue. There is stability amidst change; and the most fragile and delicate organisms have their own safe homes, where forces incalculably powerful are balanced the one against the other and guided into rest. Who can form any conception of the wisdom that directs and adjusts these unnumbered forces? We can only look at results and

guess at the skill that lies behind all that we see. The dew-drop trembling on the blade of grass is a centre of powers so destructive that their inharmonious action would shatter at one blow a great part of this earth. So it is with our globe as a whole, so it is with every spot on its surface where a blade of grass can grow or any living thing exist.

As there is order everywhere, so everywhere there is this balance which brings about all that external show which we call beauty, and those varied and complex conditions without which there could be no life. God cares for what He has created; He preserves it by continued acts of power and wisdom; in it He delights. He rejoices in all His works.

In the sphere of Redemption is there not something analogous to the protecting care which the Creator manifests for what He has made — something, too, analogous to that delight which He takes in His works? The Wisdom which the Lord possessed "in the beginning of his way before his works of old", wherewith He 'prepared the heavens' and 'set a compass upon the face of the depth', is represented as rejoicing in the *habitable part* of his earth and as having delights "*with the sons of men*". Man made in the Divine Image is not merely one of the many objects of the Creator's solicitude; he is the highest of created things, he evokes a special concern. To him God is more than a God of Providence; He is the Father in Heaven Who "so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life". But just as God's care for creation is consistent with overruling law, so God's love for man does not militate against His justice. The salvation of mankind is not effected by setting aside the eternal principle of order but by a particular application of it.

The moral order of the Universe is justice. "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" Infinitely holy, He is of purer eyes than to behold evil. He cannot palliate sin or ignore transgression. To do so would be to deny His nature. It would be to make compromises with evil, and to admit disorder into

His Kingdom without the possibility of its removal. The Kingdom of Redemption is founded on the absolute and unbroken Righteousness which lays on Man the punishment of man's sin. Order is restored when the God-man is obedient even unto death, and when by that death He gathers into His own heart the bitterness of the penalty entailed upon humanity by a broken law. And though the storm of Divine wrath grew dark over the cross, yet the gloom that overshadowed the sinless Sufferer was but the point of contact between the Eternal Order on which creation rests and that Preserving Care which through sacrifice was accomplishing the salvation of mankind. Justice was met and directed by Love, but it was not overthrown or destroyed. Order is specialized, but it remains order.

"All's Love, yet all's Law".

He that laid upon Christ the iniquities of us all, was *in* Christ reconciling the world unto Himself. He that is the justifier of the believer manifests even in that act of justification His perfect righteousness. He pardons, but every principle of His moral government is maintained. "If we confess our sins, He is *faithful* and *just* to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness".

III. The most bewildering problems with which creation confronts us are those that arise from our investigations into the *nature of life*. To define life or to describe its characteristics exhaustively is apparently impossible. Its ultimate principle is unknown to science. Its processes and functions have been as yet ascertained only in part, and those that are best known have been merely traced back to changes which remain inscrutable.

Where shall we lay our finger on the ultimate force operative in cell-formation whether in the way of gemmation or of cleavage? Penetrate where you will into the hidden places of nature, life refuses to yield up its secret. The enigma but retreats a step; it continues to be an enigma still. When the problem is expressed in terms of cell and of protoplasm it is no less tantalising than when it was more crudely stated in terms relating to genera and species.

Who can comprehend for instance that most elementary of processes, *nutrition*? How dead matter entering a living organism, can be caught into the current of life and become a part of that which is alive, must to our present knowledge wear the aspect of a miracle. What was without life a few moments before is allotted its place in a great commonwealth or kingdom, — an animal or a vegetable organism, — which is held together for a little space in work for a common end. And the life that animates that commonwealth or kingdom is but *one* and indivisible — a unit of energy, which though indefinitely potent to control or to change matter, is yet somehow dependent on what it changes and controls so that it can be modified or destroyed by matter in its turn. The nutrition even of the simplest plant involves a sort of daily resurrection. The central force is persistent; and however diverse the materials on which it is supported, it remains a unity and indivisible.

And when we speak of *growth*, the problems only multiply. There is the acorn, shapely but insignificant, and giving no hint in its structure of the form or size or colour of the tree of which it is the germ. It is planted and grows; the rootlets sink an inch deep in the soil; the tiny leaves unfold. We know its type even the family to which it belongs; but we cannot as yet guess the peculiarities that hereafter will distinguish this oak tree from all others of its kind. You could not sketch what it will look like when it is fifty years old. So in each plant and flower and tree there is a something corresponding to what in a higher range of life we call individuality. For no one living thing is the exact copy or the duplicate of any other.

Think how mysteriously the growth of any animal or plant is guided into conformity with its type, and yet how distinctive are the peculiarities of each individual. Though determined by the common type, each living thing has characteristics of its own. And the possession of such characteristics is one of the marks of life.

To these wonders of the natural world Christ has given an analogy in Redemption. As in nature God dwells in all, "from life's minute beginnings up at last to man", so it is

in grace. From the minutest beginnings of spiritual life up to the perfection of the sanctified in glory, God abides in the human heart. His Spirit regenerates, and the new life is begun. That life is His; and daily from the dead works of outward obedience is built up a Christlike character, a living soul. Duty becomes religion; for the acts of duty are governed, controlled, organized by a principle of life, love to Christ. Come joy, come sorrow, come what may — all things work together for good to them that love God. That life is a unity; it proceeds from God and points to him. It cannot be constructed from without, but must be “born from above”.

Every living soul is bound by the laws of spiritual growth, and cannot live save as it acts in accordance with those laws. It is to grow into the likeness of Christ, Who is the Type, the Example, the Elder Brother of the race. To His image we are to be conformed. The disposition and motives, the love and the obedience, that characterized the Master are to characterize His followers. His mind is to be in them, His delight is to be their delight — to do the Fathers will; His gift is to be in them as a well of water springing up to everlasting life. This growth is not left to mechanical effort or to imitation. It is the result of a living energy, acting from within. Where His spirit dwells, it will be operative on the whole nature; on the heart to awaken pity and tenderness; on the will to arouse to courage and self-sacrifice; on the conscience to whisper warning and stimulate to duty; on the imagination to inspire pure and holy thoughts. Nor will the judgment and the memory be uninfluenced. Prejudice will vanish, and the remembrance of past deliverance and blessing will be made vivid when His Spirit illuminates the soul.

Yet every man is to be himself. Diversities of character are encouraged by Christian liberty. There are diversities of gifts, and diversities of operation, but it is the same God that worketh all in all. Free individuality is allowed to the Christian whilst he yet grows into conformity with the type — the Lord from Heaven. It is only thus that sin can be resisted. A fuller life is man's only protection against fresh transgression; and such

a life is to be obtained from Christ alone. Sin is the negation of all that makes for the true development of the soul. It is the stunting of the whole nature, the refusal to use one's highest powers. But it has more than a negative aspect. It is moral discord, the disturbance of eternal order; and with discord comes deterioration, and deterioration must end in death. The secret longing of the human soul is against this transgression of law, this selfconscious degeneration. Man's great desire is to escape the consciousness of his own imperfections; but this escape lies in the removal of the imperfections through the growth of a new life, not in the destruction of consciousness.

No life that breathes with human breath

Has ever truly longed for death.

'Tis life, whereof our nerves are scant,

Oh life, not death, for which we pant,

More life, and fuller, that I want.

As sin enters the world through the misuse of freedom, so it must be by the right and due use of freedom that it is expelled. Seated in the will and the heart it must be driven forth by activities that leave the will and the heart free. Constraint and compulsion are mechanical; they cannot sanctify, they only deaden. Christ's Spirit implants a new principle. He persuades the heart to love Him, He enables the will to obey Him, He moves the whole nature harmoniously in accordance with its laws.

Do not fear to allow your individuality its just scope. In the Christian life each man has his allotted task, and each man his own methods of working. No one can take another's place, nor exert influence in another's way. Be yourself. Follow the inner light. While performing duties as they arise let your best energies be given to those which you are convinced at the time are the most important. Cultivate sedulously your own moral faculty. Give your strength to what you can do best. The more vigorous the life, the more distinctive will be its characteristics. And vigour of spiritual life is what is promised to those who yield Christ an unreserved and whole-hearted obedience. The principle of this life is — to use the phrase of Dr. Chalmers

— the expulsive power of a new affection, whereby loving Christ, we desire what He desires, and hate what He hates. Thus in Him alone there is for the soul growth and nutrition. "As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself except it abide in the vine, no more can ye except ye abide in Me. I am the vine, ye are the branches. He that abideth in Me and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without Me ye can do nothing".

Perhaps the most astonishing characteristic of life are its *provisions*. The needs incident to the particular mode of existence to be hereafter pursued by any organism may be discovered by an examination of the organism long before the needs arise. The bird ere it is set free from the shell is being prepared for a life which is to be spent for a great part in the air. The larva of the dragonfly or of the bee or of the ant is being moulded to meet exigencies that have not yet arisen. Birth looks forward to maturity, maturity makes provision in regard to death. The young of each species form the object of the parents care till they can care for themselves. Everything in life has a forward aspect: the stream is ever hastening onwards; to-day is joined to to-morrow; to-morrow to the day after. Nature refuses to shut her eyes to the future. True, it is but a future extending over a few months or a few years that she in any separate instance keeps in view. But let that period pass and she has already resumed her task and has made provision for lustrums yet to come. This prevision is nature's presage of immortality. Generation after generation she looks steadily onwards, and were there no outward intervention she might perpetuate certain types for ever.

With what solicitude she equips each of her creatures in its youth for the coming struggle! As yet the struggle has not come, but it is impending; and no trainer for the Olympic games ever disciplined the competitors with more minute and scrupulous attention to each individual than she disciplines and exercises those she means to preserve. They are furnished beforehand with the weapons of offence and defence which they will require. They are endowed with the faculties, capacities,

instincts which they are to use hereafter; and each separate organ is designed and fitted for its coming work. With what delicate adjustment has the eye been made for light, the ear created "hungry for music", the senses adapted to the external world!

But this is not the most wonderful of nature's previsions. Each part evinces a predetermined relation to every other part. The organs of sight, hearing, breathing, nutrition, locomotion are so arranged and adjusted as to answer a common purpose to the best advantage. It is the principle of interrelation that brings most prominently into view the true perfection of the separate organs and the distant end implied in their structure.

Replying to the objection of Helmholtz that the eye was imperfect as an optical instrument a recent writer says: "To compare an instrument from the optician's with the human eye is unreasonable. Take an operaglass or microscope for example, a fall destroys it, a film of dust renders it useless till cleansed, it cannot be adjusted automatically but must be moved with wheelworks till correctly focussed. If we broke the optic lens every time we fell, no child would learn to walk without losing its sight. The beautiful arrangement whereby the eyeball is kept bright and clean ensures clear sight where we use our eyes. We look at a printed page now, and the next moment at a distant view, there is no more blurring of the outer portion of the field of vision in the one case than in the other, we cannot procure spectacles to act like this, unless by the clumsy device of a divided lens.

But when we consider the eye as a living organ formed of membranes, nerves, tissues and water, and not of hard glass or other imperishable material, our wonder at the constant renovation of its power and perfection is increased. But after all, the eye itself is the least wonderful part of the visionary process, it is the power behind the eye which interprets the ocular image, and turns the process into sight. The instrument itself is the least portion of the wonder, the nerve power which sees and the brain which translates is the miracle which no artisan can imitate".

The extraordinary complexities of structure and of function which distinguish the various parts of all the higher organism betray one and the same aim — the attainment of as complete and vigorous a life as is possible for the individual and the species.

A similar aim and end in the spiritual world is revealed for each man and for humanity in general, provided the New Life is begun. The Eternal Life promised by Christ, — that complete and harmonious use of all our powers in the perfect service of God, — has its provisions in our earthly estate. As the higher nature unfolds itself, it does not find in the "seen and temporal" any fitting home; powers are developed that fit it for the Unseen World. There is not one faculty of the soul that has its adequate exercise in the visible world. Man cannot help seeing that every capacity of the spiritual nature points forward to ampler conditions and a wider sphere.

He owns the fatal gift of eyes
That read his spirit blindly wise
Not simple as a thing that dies.

Here sits he shaping wings to fly:
His heart forebodes a mystery:
He names the name Eternity.

What qualities are elicited and exercised by Christ in man? Love, sympathy, sacrifice, truth, purity, patience, hope, faith. Such gifts, such graces, such attributes of the soul are in their nature eternal. They are heaven begun in heart; they are indestructible; time cannot efface them; they belong to the moral and spiritual world; and their growth and development lifts the horizon of existence from time to eternity. As the eye is made for the light, and the ear for sound, as our bodies here are fitted for life here, so faith is created by and in the Faithful and Everlasting Father, so love is created by and for our Saviour and Elder Brother, hope is created in and through the Spirit of Consolation, of Light, of Wisdom. Where the earnest of the inheritance is bestowed, the

inheritance itself will follow. It was natural for Christ to say regarding His true followers, partakers of His Spirit: "And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand. My Father which gave them me is greater than all, and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand". By no possibility can the trusting spirit fail to find its true place, its home with God for evermore.

And with all this spiritual activity both here and hereafter there must go joy. Joy accompanies healthy and unimpeded life. All living things have a certain delight in mere existence. Broken though it may often be, or stifled by pain or fear, the feeling remains as an outstanding mark of vigorous life in any fit environment. This joy the Almighty has in all that He has made. "The Lord shall rejoice in His works".

"God tastes an infinite joy
In infinite ways — one everlasting bliss
From Whom all being emanates, all power
Proceeds: in whom is life for evermore,
Yet whom existence in its lowest form
Includes; where dwells enjoyment there is He
With still a flying point of bliss remote,
A happiness in store afar, a sphere
Of distant glory in full view".

To joy unutterable God invites His children. Although the gladness of spiritual service must needs be often in eclipse and often lost in a world of sin, few Christians are without their seasons of sacred contentment, comfort, peace; while for all is it not written, Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him.

In humble submission to the Redeemer, strive earnestly

to live this life to which He calls you; giving diligence to make your calling and election sure, but ever mindful that, though arduous, this life with all its complexity of relations and of duties is made possible daily to every believing soul, and that He Himself will enable you to obey the command to "add to your faith virtue, and to virtue knowledge, to knowledge temperance, to temperance patience, to patience godliness, to godliness brotherly kindness, to brotherly kindness charity, for if these things be in you and abound they make you that ye shall be neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.



Imperfections of Creation.

Imperfections of Creation.

For the creature was made subject
to vanity.

Romans VIII. v. 20a.



The imperfections of creation have formed a subject of thought since the dawn of history.

From the youngest child, conscious of the existence of wishes that cannot be gratified, whose unfolding perceptions have become aware of the inevitable discord between faculty and environment, up to the philosopher, pondering over the fate of nations, and the problems of famine, pestilence, and war, and the still grimmer problems of competition, the struggle for existence, and economic life, — from the one extreme to the other, men everywhere and always have been forced to acknowledge that the world is unquestionably imperfect.

“What a saddening and depressing theme!” you exclaim; “let us avoid it, forget it if we can, and banish painful thought let us turn from all the misery around us — which is but too well known — and find relief in the Gospel of hope, the good news of the Kingdom.” Who would not welcome hope? Who does not long for good news for himself and for his kind? But for this very reason we must look well at near realities, lest our wishes deceive us; lest in our eagerness to be blest we fail to understand our Saviour’s work, fail to appropriate as we should, the Redemption which He brings.

It is not enough that the Gospel be in itself true; it must repose upon an unassailable foundation. And our Lord sternly brushes aside our easy optimisms, our sophistries, our half-truths, when, assuming our nature, He descends into the field of actual human life, with its many incompletenesses, its many limitations, not merely to reveal God but to redeem man, and to found upon the basis of solid fact His City of Salvation, His Kingdom which cannot be moved.

Because He purposes to raise that City of the Lord so high and firm above all the contradictions of time, all the incongruities of earth, all the bewilderments of sense, therefore He goes deep down to the core and heart of things, to the very centre of our need, and by His Apostle proclaims — what indeed all men may perceive — that Creation is "*subject unto vanity*".

How pitilessly accurate are these words! Echoing indeed in altered form, but with deadlier significance, the mournful pronouncement of Israel's wearied sage: "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity".

The recognition of our infinite need of God is the one basis of salvation; and no superficial good nature, however kindly, no indolent acquiescence with things as they appear, must blind our eyes to the world's desperate estate, or divert the student of the Word from dealing with verities, repellant though they sometimes be, throughout all his labours; for it is no exaggeration to say that when we abandon truth, we in like proportion abandon Christ. "We know", says the Apostle speaking as of something that required no proof, "We know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now".

I. The first element of this vanity or imperfection is negative. Nature is unstable and fugitive. It is under "the bondage of corruption".

1. There is mutation and loss in all we see. Who does not know of the changes that are being wrought all over the globe, how the everlasting hills are crumbling down; the

rivers furrowing out for themselves new channels; how the lakes are drying up, and continents altering their outline?

Who does not know in how great a measure is being fulfilled, literally before our eyes, the presage of the poet, that

“The cloud-capp’d towers, the gorgeous palaces,

The solemn temples, the great globe itself

Yea, all which it inherit shall dissolve;

And like an insubstantial pageant faded,

Leave not a rack behind”.

Though the elements are not destroyed even when earth shall melt with fervent heat, and though after the greatest convulsions these same elements will doubtless enter into new relations to fashion worlds afresh, yet our earth as it is, is daily, hourly, suffering change. And with every change there is loss. Something passes away that will never return.

Life comes and goes, but the same life does not come back again. Alike in its simplest and in its most complex forms it passes through the same stages, of youth, maturity, and decay, to end in the same mysterious extinction — Death.

Comparatively permanent though the type may at first sight appear, the life period of the individual is at the longest, short; and during its brief existence each living thing is subjected to a thousand chances of destruction.

You examine those masses of shells that form calcareous deposits — the chalk cliffs of England or the Limburg hills — they are all the remains of life. Millions of years ago these microscopic shell-fish lived there their little life, endowed with instinct, capable of movement and sensation, and dying, left behind them their tiny habitations, to be succeeded in turn by numberless others of their kind. All that to raise the limestone half an inch!

And that is but one example out of a score of Geologic eras, which stretch from to-days coral reefs and silting shores and alluvial deposits, away back to these minutest workers of the world’s youth, back still far past them to an antiquity incalculably remote.

And what is the crust of the globe but one vast burial ground wherein lie the relics and memorials of all antecedent life? Here at all events is *loss*.

Viewed from the standpoint of merely animal existence, is not creation subject unto vanity?

In the process of development, and as a condition of that process, whole classes and species have been lost; certain types have totally disappeared. This has happened even in the memory of man, for we know that there were living in certain regions creatures of beauty and grace, which have become entirely extinct. Little wonder then the poet sings:

“Are God and Nature then at strife,
That Nature lends such evil dreams?
So careful of the type she seems,
So careless of the single life?
‘So careful of the type?’ but no
From scarped cliff and quarried stone
She cries ‘A thousand types are gone
I care for nothing, all shall go’.”

2. As we ascend the scale of being the sense of loss becomes immeasurably keener.

The great nations of the ancient world have passed away, leaving no successors in their special spheres. Entire races too as in South America, cultured, refined, and intellectual, have vanished, leaving hardly a trace of their existence. Who can assure us that such a fate may not overtake the civilizations of to-day? Nations and peoples seem to be subject to the same laws, of growth, expansion, decay, as hold good for organisms. “They have their day, and cease to be.”

In other words, the types and races of humanity, and all our vaunted discoveries and institutions, are fleeting and perishable.

And yet how trite are all these truths till they touch ourselves!

You enter church this morning happy. You have been

prosperous: fortune smiles upon you: success has crowned your efforts: you go to meet the future with a brave heart and with high hope.

Take an extended view of that future however: and, instead of looking forward a few weeks or months, look forward thirty years. What do you see? Yourself, altered beyond all recognition. You would not know your own portrait, could you now obtain a glimpse of what it then will be. Many people that you love dearly, many that take the deepest interest in your welfare, will be long dead and long forgotten. Homes are broken up, households scattered. The little children of to-day will then be the weary men and women, fighting — sometimes with scant enough success — the great battle of life. Of those beyond middle age now, it will be true of almost all without exception, that 'the place thereof shall know them no more'.

Look forward a hundred years. A century is but a brief period in the world's history, but it will be long enough for most of us to be forgotten. The worshippers in this church then — if indeed this congregation will still exist — will be considered quite learned antiquarians if they have a correct knowledge of the name and occupation of any church-member belonging to the present generation.

And where the names are preserved — in some musty record perhaps, in one of your letters, or in a book with your signature and the date on the fly leaf, what clue will your descendants have to your actual life — to your thoughts and ideals, your fears and hopes, your hatreds and your love? None whatever, save in cases the most exceptional.

Some general impression is all that will be retained about any of us, even in the most fortunate instances. And that general impression may be quite wrong.

If you skip two generations, those in the direct line are strangers to their forefathers. Make the interval longer, and you begin to lose sight of every thing, character, name, individuality — all that distinguishes man from man. The Eighty Years' War was a struggle that brought into prominence an

extraordinary number of men on both sides; how many of these are accurately known to us? Not two perhaps for every year. Names we have in abundance, but what do we know of the men and women save of a very few? Our fathers — where are they? Were it not for the hope given in our Saviour's Resurrection should we not have to answer: Lost irretrievably, leaving hardly a memory behind.

Life is an endless stream pouring into the abyss, and not returning. It is a stream made up of units, countless as the drops of water, units which come into the light in wave after wave of humanity, and hurry forward, palpitating with high hopes and passionate longings; which are each susceptible of the most exquisite happiness and pain as exquisite; which are capable of penetrating far into nature's mysteries, of accumulating boundless stores of knowledge, of acquiring skill, refinement and culture; capable, too, of rising high by sheer force of will and splendid daring — yet destined to pass away. The grave hides all. To stand by the remains of some one stricken down in prime of life, is to realize vividly that creation is subject unto vanity.

3. But this ineffectiveness is also a feature of man's spiritual condition. His moral nature is in bondage. Inability is its leading characteristic. 'To will' is present with him, but 'how to perform that which is good' he finds not. This is the result of sin; it is the consequence of turning from the living God. Sin primarily involves deprivation, loss. By it man loses God — God's favour, God's fellowship, God's life.

Go where you will, you find that men have parted with their innocence. They have left God consciously; *that* is the meaning of sin. The savage is found habitually practising what he condemns in others; he knows he has *lost* something — the image and likeness of the Divine.

That divine image is brought to man by the Incarnation. The Word became flesh to pass through the stages of youth, maturity and death, to conquer sin, make an end of imperfection and preserve the Divine Likeness in humanity for ever. The Incarnation is primarily God's subjecting Himself in the Son to the kind

of limitation spoken of here. Christ left the glory He had with the Father before the world was. Therein we see sinless deprivation and loss, willingly endured for man's sake. He "made Himself of no reputation and took upon Him the form of a servant and was made in the likeness of men". As with the first Adam there came conscious loss as the result of transgression, so with the Second Adam was there conscious loss as the result of His own unutterable love. In the cleft that sin made between man and God, Christ in His human nature has taken the side of man leaving aside everything but His own holiness. Identifying Himself with man, He is able by His perfect life and by His atoning death, to reveal the righteousness of God, and redeem man from his estate of unrighteousness and vanity. Those who accept Him are accepted by the Father. In the Father's sight the solidarity of the believer with Christ is as firm a bond as the solidarity of Christ with Himself. In Christ humanity is restored to the Father, and the Father to humanity.

Apart from Christ there is no such restoration. The sense of loss will therefore pursue us everywhere, till we are freed from it in Christ. Nothing from the first beginnings of Creation can be considered as lost that *led up to* the Saviour. These forgotten ages were all parts of the Divine plan, of the Divine preparation for the Redeemer's work. He has taken them all up in that work; they were necessary to Him; He has claimed them; He has used them. Rill, rivulet, and stream have fallen into the Great Ocean. And the Ocean continues to supply freshness to an arid world. Christ lives; He reigns for evermore. Whatever enters into His life cannot be dead. Whoever has His spirit has that which raises him above loss and change and decay. To exercise true faith in the Restorer of humanity is to be restored to God, to receive the free gift of pardon, to be inspired with the New Life, the life hidden with Christ in God. All who trust Him have the assurance, 'Because Christ lives, ye shall live also'; and in a new heaven and new earth where dwelleth righteousness there will be no more death.

II. The second element in the Imperfection of Creation is positive, — pain, cruelty, injustice, disorder.

1. What need to dwell on the agony that pulsates through animate creation? From the lowest creeping thing, the worm upon our path, up to the most complex of beings, man himself, every creature bears witness to the truth "Creation groaneth and travaileth in pain."

Nature's smile is deceitful. "She decks herself with colours over the grave where our heart is breaking, and shows herself implacable in her very beauty". Around us we find the savage law, the law of destruction, which every hour, every minute, pursues its silent way. On all sides bloodshed, on all sides cruel immolation; life comes forth only from death.

The lower creation look up to man with inarticulate appeal, whose meaning requires little imagination to interpret. "Spare me", they seem to say, "spare me as much as may be possible". Yet day after day, the beasts of burden, the oxen and sheep for the slaughter, the wild creatures of the chase, suffer incalculably more than they need.

Verily of itself Nature, "red in tooth and claw with rapine," is far from revealing Love as its final Law.

2. Look higher; and the disorder is even more marked. The circle of life is an electric coil through which, whatever else may pass, one current is certain — the unceasing throb of pain. Man, who lords it over the lower creation, is not master of his fate in respect to suffering. Not to speak of the cruel destruction occasioned by wars and pestilences, are there not all manner of laborious crafts which can be carried on only at the cost of recurring or of incessant toil? Think of the miner, the sailor, the factory operative. Our physical frame, our intellectual constitution, are made subject to this imperfection — suffering.

"The whole Creation groaneth and travaileth in pain". The innocent suffer with the guilty; children, whose very helplessness should plead for them, perish of neglect or cruelty or want; and civilization, so far from diminishing the sum total of misery, seems but to add to it, pouring its thousands of healthy lives out of

the open country into narrow squalid streets, where, for the young, crime and disease might almost seem the predestined lot.

"The Creation travailleth". Man raises his hand against his brother and injures him wittingly, crippling him in will, enterprise, or courage, in mind, body or estate. And the tyranny of malice and selfishness and hatred even in the most civilized lands holds thousands in thralldom to this hour.

And who can think of those long corridors of pain, where in hospital wards the whole year through, the tide of human agony flows constantly along — who can think of these terrible realities without a shudder?

Still it is not the unavoidable pangs of disease that one deems the most mysterious of these imperfections of our world. They seem an integral part of Nature, as Nature is known to us. But those distresses that are avoidable, those inflicted by carelessness and wanton cruelty, those given in sport and in indifference — such permissions on the part of a good God awaken our wonder. And were it not for the revelation of Divine Love in Him who suffered the just for the unjust, that wonder might easily deepen into despair.

It is quite useless, for instance, to try to explain pain on the supposition that it is needed to serve some valuable purpose in the animal economy. No doubt many kinds of pain are of this kind, but by no means all. And such a theory will leave the greater number of physical sufferings unaccounted for. So with mental distress. The self-reproach of the voluptuary who has let slip some opportunity of indulgence, has been pronounced one of keenest forms of suffering. Some have mistakenly regarded remorse as a sentiment evolved by society for its own protection. But who can class under this utilitarian head the self-reproach of the wrongdoer who is overcome with regret that he has not done more wrong? The fact is that doctrines of mere utility, (whether it be the welfare of the body or of the mind or of society that is kept in view) are not sufficient to explain life's problems. We can only say, verily man is subject to vanity.

3. Nor is man's moral and spiritual nature exempt from

suffering. Here indeed the anguish is keenest, for here apprehension may play its most dreadful part. As the fear of death can hold men a life-time in bondage: so thoughts of the Hereafter may darken their days; and the shadow of a coming Retribution cast its chill into their inmost soul. The awful Unseen World presses in upon us on every side; and conscience, the avenger, cries guilty, guilty!

Apart from the true knowledge of God, what nameless and unimaginable terrors have crowded the human mind in every age at the thought of Judgment to come! And not only is the offender condemned by his conscience but he is condemned justly and by God. The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against the guilty. And man is conscious that his sin is positive; that it is no mere error, or mere loss, but the witting violation of a holy law, involving punishment as a consequence. All have sinned; and all feel that 'indignation, wrath, tribulation and anguish' are but the reward due to every soul of man that doeth evil.

When we examine carefully the negative and the positive elements of man's 'subjection unto vanity' we find it hard to say which is the more pitiable, the ineffectiveness of his life — or its pains and anguish.

These two features are the outstanding characteristics of man's condition apart from the Gospel of Christ. And indeed were human life to be judged merely from the Pagan standpoint it might seem adequately enough summed up in the poet's bitter chant:

"Before the beginning of years
There came to the making of man
Time, with a gift of tears;
Grief, with a glass that ran;
Pleasure, with pain for leaven;
Summer with flowers that fell;
Remembrance, fallen from heaven;
And madness, risen from hell;
Strength, without hands to smite;

Love, that endures for a breath;
Night, the shadow of light,
And life, the shadow of death.

And wrought with weeping and laughter,
And fashioned with loathing and love,
With life, before and after,
And death beneath and above,
For a day and a night and a morrow,
(That his strength might endure for a span
With travail and heavy sorrow)
The holy spirit of man

His speech is a burning fire;
With his lips he travaileth;
In his heart is a blind desire
In his eyes foreknowledge of death
He weaves, and is clothed with derision;
Sows, and he shall not reap;
His life is a watch or a vision,
Between a sleep and a sleep”.

Such is a just view of the futility and suffering of man's fallen estate. But in Christ this suffering and this futility are done away. As our Saviour restores to man what he had lost, so He puts an end to the curse of a broken law: removes moral disorder; destroys evil; transmutes suffering into blessing.

Sin and the punishment of sin, He set aside by His action on our behalf. That action is His sacrifice. By the Incarnation He placed Himself by our side; by the Atonement He brings us back to God. For bringing about man's restoration the Redeemer fitted Himself by His *Humiliation*. One element of that Humiliation we have seen — He emptied Himself. But He did more. He placed Himself under all the limitations of our nature — positive as well as negative — sin alone excepted. And though sinless He bore the consequences of the sin of a lost world. He did not protect Himself on any side of His nature

against pain or injustice or temptation. He did not use His Divinity as a shield. It was not mere loss our Lord incurred in the Incarnation; mental and spiritual suffering fell to His lot more than to any of the sons of men. Physical pain He knew, and it formed part of His dying agony. Cruelty and injustice followed His steps for years, and at last betrayed Him and crucified Him. "Being found in fashion as a man, He humbled Himself, and became obedient unto death even the death of the cross". Submitting to the *loss*, subjecting Himself to the *pain* which are incidental to fallen humanity, our Lord entered His own creation, and wrought out therein a perfection of life well pleasing to God, — which God accepted. By His obedience He separated a part of true humanity — Himself — from sin; by His sacrifice He condemned sin and made atonement for the sinner.

That lifted the reproach from Creation. The cross of Christ and Christ's resurrection give it meaning, bring back to it its purpose. For it was sin, the Apostle Paul tells us, that produced these cosmic changes under which creation laboured. Man's relation to the Universe, then, may be compared to his relation to his own body. As evil in the heart and will affects the body, writing its expression on the face, so evil in the human race has influenced man's temporal abode, the world.

As the first Adam destroyed the world's harmony, so the second Adam restored it. God gives us the hope that also the Creation itself will be liberated from the bondage of corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God. For this revelation of the sons of God Nature now is waiting. Its present state is temporary, like that of the prisoner who listens for the footsteps of the deliverer.

This very expectancy on the part of Nature is a proof that the results of sin will be done away, and Nature and man set free. Is not this the thought that inspired the poet's words: —

O yet we trust that somehow good
 Will be the final goal of ill,
 To pangs of nature, sins of will,
 Defects of doubt and taints of blood.

That nothing walks with aimless feet,
That not one life shall be destroyed,
Or cast as rubbish to the void
When God hath made the pile complete.

That not a worm is cloven in vain;
That not a moth with vain desire
Is shrivelled in a fruitless fire,
Or but subserves another's gain.

It is only the final refusal of the Divine Gift that can remove a man beyond the limits of our Saviour's Restoration. But such a refusal must do so. "How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation?"

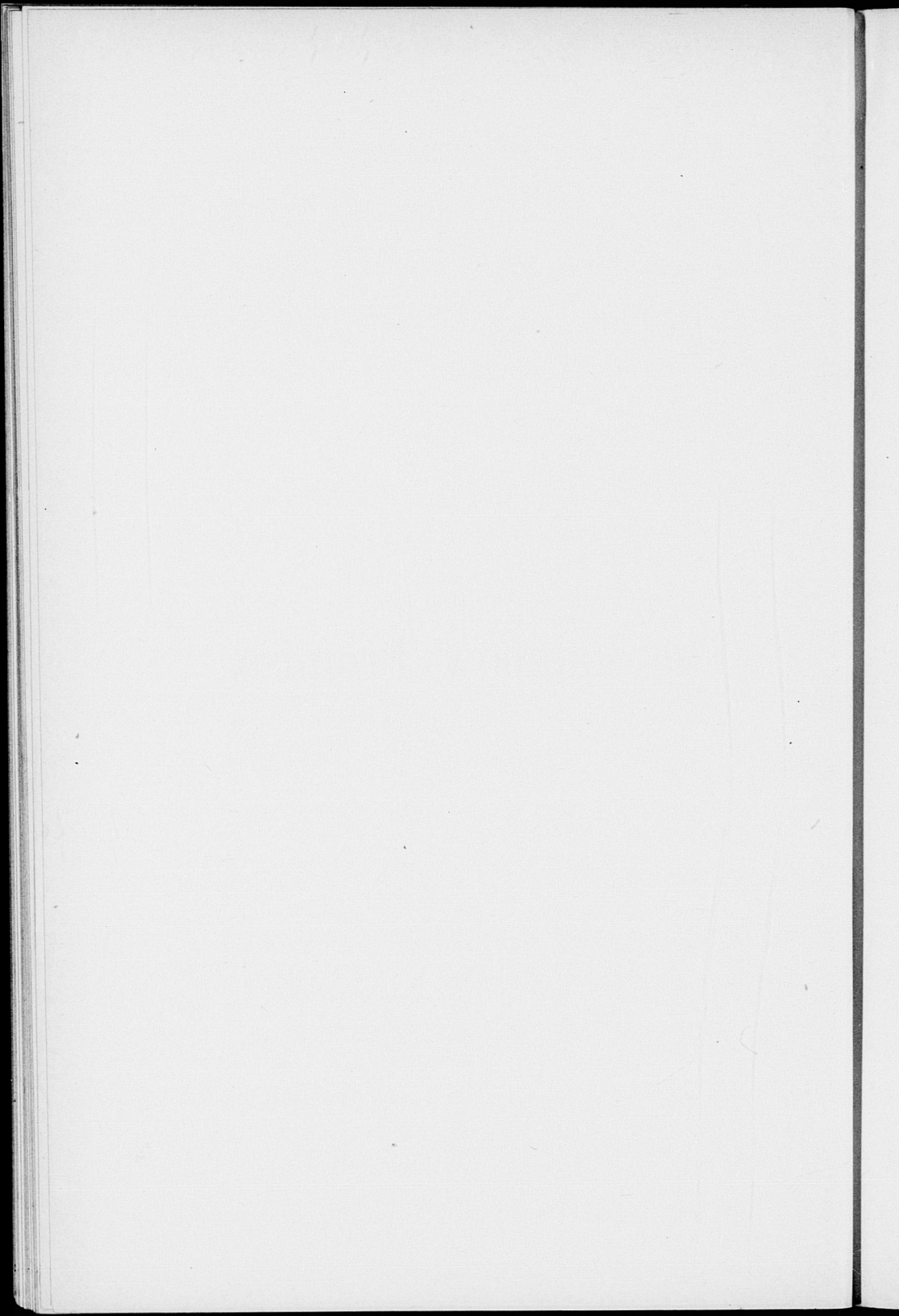
We shall get our burden of imperfection removed only in Him Who stands related to us in that lost world as Brother, and to the Just and Holy Creator as Only Begotten Son. It is He that has broken our fetters and set us free from the bondage of corruption. From all loss, from all pain, from all sin, He is the Deliverer. His sacrifice meets our infinite need. His atonement is perfect. Its basis is secure. Neither "things present" nor "things to come" will be able to separate us from the love of God in Him.

Into the new heaven and new earth no imperfection of any kind will enter. The redeemed will be made perfect in Christ.

"And God Himself shall be with them and be their God. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain, for the former things are passed away."



The Rainbow Promise.



The Rainbow Promise.

I do set my bow in the cloud.
Genesis IX. 13.



There is no emblem in the whole range of Scripture more natural or more beautiful than that of the rainbow as denoting Hope.

When we consider it well and try to think ourselves back into the position of primitive man, its significance is obvious and irresistible.

The cloud is passing, is already passed. The sun shines forth again flooding, the land with light. The drenched fields glisten, as the raindrops hang from every blade and leaf; and the rugged tear-stained face of Nature beams on us with a smile.

Hidden from view a moment ago, the birds now venture from out their leafy shelter; and with a twitter here, a flutter there, evince their inarticulate delight. As the larks rise, one after another, to greet the returning sun, your eye seeks to follow this or that impetuous little songster, as he darts up from your very foot, and you turn to watch his flight; when lo! before you, against the retreating shower, the wide span of the tinted arch, God's bow in the cloud.

This is how we view it; and we talk of the spectrum and the analysis of light. But that is not what came to the mind of the wondering first observers in distant Eastern valleys the cradle of our race. They connected the bow with the cata-

strophe whence their universal history dated itself anew. And the relation between the bow of promise and the Deluge was one of hope. The Flood would come no more to devastate the earth.

Tradition would never weary telling the story of that awful time and of the judgment of God. Men would tell of the sultry, fertile plains where wickedness walked unabashed, and the prophet of the Lord toiled at his double work of warning the ungodly, and of building the Ark; and they would add how, during those slow years of labour and of impassioned appeal, the preacher had met, as the result of his teachings, the jibe, the proverb of contempt, the sneer at God, God's servant, and God's law. O melancholy lapse of season after season, when year followed year and the ark grew taller and expanded under the workman's hand; and the toiler Noah grew more painfully alarmed for those that mocked at God's punishment of sin, — till at last the day came unexpected and appalling, when men's hearts quailed. Noah's heart too would shrink within him (prophet of the Lord though he was); for he, more than the rest, could attach moral significance to the lowering darkness, deepening every moment. Was it too late that day for those that had derided? Not yet; there was yet time.

Higher and higher rose the ragged storm-clouds, piled with doom. Day became night; the bravest shuddered; and the muttered whisperings of the timid were broken in upon by the cries of the beasts of the field; while finally the fire of heaven broke loose, and, like a dagger through the murky twilight, darted with steel-like glitter, crash following crash. Then as the proud towers and granite obelisks toppled and fell, and the wail of terror rose from the stricken multitudes, there was not a conscience throughout all the land that did not justify Noah the preacher. Too late! Too late! For the ark was closed; and the swollen river bore it up and onward.

"But perhaps the tempest will abate", says one, "it cannot last like this much longer". Vain hope; for the windows of heaven were opened and the fountains of the great deep too; and the pitiless rain and the pelting hail continue to destroy.

What sights then met the eye when, with momentary brilliance, the lightning flashed upon the scene! A surging sea, rising wave upon wave, far to the black horizon, — cities engulfed, disappearing without a sound, amid the whirling waters, — groups of living creatures, men and women and beasts of prey, huddled together upon temple roofs and upon the steep hill sides, and retreating upwards, step by step, before the advancing billows, — the waters leaping, roaring, hissing, as they clashed together in their fury, and surrounded hill after hill and mountain after mountain, carrying down into their turbid depths all living things thereon, — the waters not yet content, but hastening on, hungry for fresh victims, bearing their dead with them, raging without limit, — till the end came, the end of all that life, — till the devastation was complete, and the dying cry of the last survivor rang forth, echoless, across a shoreless sea.

Imagine that picture graven on the brain of Noah and his sons — enough to bring madness and snap the threads of thought. Think of what they must have seen and suffered even when the waters were abating. As the flood retreated from the drowned mountain tops, what would appear but the ooze and scum that had silted everywhere, and everywhere, in torn riverbeds, the traces of decaying life.

Lonely and waste were the once fertile valleys, dreary the silent forests; all was emptiness, and death. With what mingled relief and dread would the preserved family creep forth from the shelter of the ark! As the clouds would gather, now and then, along the summits of the neighbouring hills, how certainly would vague apprehensions chill their heart. What if there should come a second Flood! To them, in such an hour, the earth would seem but one vast desolation, and the heavens appear only veiled menace.

This then is the standpoint from which to judge of the historian's interpretation of the symbol; this is the moral standpoint from which to estimate the promise: And I, behold I establish my covenant with you and with your seed after you: I do set my bow in the cloud; and it shall be for a token of a

covenant between me and the earth. And it shall come to pass when I bring a cloud over the earth that the bow shall be seen in the cloud, and I will remember my covenant.

The bow is always in the cloud, when the cloud is viewed aright. God said, I set it there for the obedient; I let it be a token of my covenant with you. Look for it without fear, and you shall see it.

That desolate earth, that dread-inspiring sky call for the assurance of Hope to make them fit for man.

And that same voice of God is needed in every life. For who shall have gone to his grave and escaped his own tempestuous flood of trial? The heart will be overwhelmed by some great incoming tide of agony, when conscience, judgment, feeling, seem submerged, when fond hopes and cherished purposes will be swept away. Purifying no doubt is that bitter flood, when it is past and gone; but it seems like the end of all things at the time. Well for the sufferer if his hopes can breast the storm, and float secure upon the billows of adversity. A worldly hope cannot. Well, for the sufferer if there be within the spirit that which is not of the earth, but a true ark of safety — God's presence.

The world after the Deluge is the emblem of the heart after a great sorrow. Whether the desolation be complete or partial, there is in every tried heart the sense of need. Confessed or unconfessed, there is ever a longing for some such revelation as is given here, "Behold I establish my covenant with you, — and will remember it". Life is unbearable without hope.

Those clouds came after long delay; but when they did come they were laden with judgment. Wickedness is punished often manifestly enough in this world. And the rising of a little cloud, no bigger than a man's hand on the far horizon must have sufficed for ever after to bring a pang to Noah's heart. If others had suffered for wrongdoing and had gone down in the waters, Noah, the preserved was not guiltless.

I. The clouds are primarily those of punishment. They are the visitations upon wrongdoing. Are we heedless and scornful of wise counsel, then we know the day will come when our

heedlessness will have brought us into direst peril. Conscience says, for every sin expect a blow. We know we deserve punishment; and if judgment overtook us in rebellion and impenitence, could we say it was unjust?

It is easy to be careless before the tempest gathers; but when it does, it is hard to realize that there is any hope. While outwardly certain consequences invariably follow certain misdeeds, yet inwardly and spiritually there is, in God's great mercy, always the possibility of forgiveness. Let but one cry for pardon go forth from the bruised and penitent heart, and God will not turn that prayer away unheard.

Your cloud may be apprehension of God's vengeance for a broken law. Then the only ark of safety is the atonement of the Saviour. In Him abiding you cannot be destroyed. True, you may suffer hardship, as the survivors of the Flood did, but you cannot be lost. No penitent ever came to the Saviour in vain.

"In Christ," says one, "the sinner finds shelter for himself and destruction for his sins. It is God's wrath against sin that saves us by destroying our sins; just as it was the Flood which devastated the world, that at the same time and thereby saved Noah and his family."

This promise evidently meets the case of those who have sought life in Christ, who though, saved and restored, have yet their fears. Pardoned and accepted though the true believer is, he cannot help feeling himself circumstanced as NOAH and his sons were after the Flood.

II. There is a cloud ever hovering on the horizon, which may some times arise and spread and blot out the light,—The sense of sin. That is something else than the feeling of guilt, though it accompanies that feeling and creates it. It is the darkest of all clouds, but it has by far the brightest rainbow.

With such clouds Christ Himself cometh. It is His Spirit that reveals the sad significance of our imperfections, and traces the faults of daily life to their true source within.

We may be aware of our infirmities, admit our mistakes of judgment, confess our offences against man, and all the while

be without any deep sense of sin. But once that consciousness is aroused, we are brought into relation with the unseen and eternal. It is God's presence that awakens it, by His law in the case of the unforgiven, by His holiness in the case of the justified. Man cannot convince himself of sin; and when he perceives it and feels it and abhors it in his heart, it is because God is present in that heart. And the believer may see in that work of the Spirit the pledge and presage of final deliverance.

God's promise to the renewed is absolute: "For as I have sworn that the waters of NOAH should no more go over the earth; so have I sworn that I would not be wroth with thee nor rebuke thee. For the mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed; but my kindness shall not depart from thee, neither shall the covenant of my peace be removed, said the Lord that hath mercy on thee". By that promise He abides, "I have blotted out, as a thick cloud, thy transgressions, and as a cloud, thy sins".

Those whom He has justified are safe. He would not have them give way to dread, when the mists and clouds gather round them.

Daily infirmities there are; and these need a daily pardon, "Forgive us our debts". "This, "it has been well said," does not imply that forgiveness is daily lost by the sins and imperfections to which human infirmity is liable, or that by these sins the once forgiven man is thrown daily back into the fear and terror of God's condemnation. The great forgiveness remains; the peace of it should be unbroken."

The flood of Divine wrath returns no more against those whom He has once accepted in the Beloved. There is "*no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus*".

III. Is your cloud perplexity? You lose heart: for at times you literally know not what to do. Life is bitter perhaps; and there is no way to make it less so. It is wonderful how soon the feelings change when we perceive there is some hope; and there is always hope for us in God.

Let the clouds be what they may, — anxiety, fears for the

future, certainty of approaching trouble and loss, doubts concerning the victory of good over evil, — be certain that, for the believer, each one brings its promise: I will not destroy.

Look boldly at the trouble. Let the light of God's Word shine on it. Let the light of Christ's presence illumine it.

When earthly trouble comes it brings a purpose with it — God's purpose, and a promise with it, — God's promise. When the purpose is in part fulfilled, we see the promise. The bow is not seen till the cloud is going away. Let the trial do its work. Do not be discontent if the consolations are not all, at once, fully yours. Take duty quietly; wait patiently on God. Above all keep in the light of Christ's love. Take His promises one by one, and make them pleas in prayer. He will not turn your supplication away or deny Himself. You cannot remove the cloud; but you can get much comfort under it, if only you keep your faith.

Hope thou in God; rejoice in hope; hope to the end. Cast all your care upon Him; for He careth for you. Has He not said, I will not leave you comfortless, I will come to you? Does He not still say, My grace is sufficient for thee; for My strength is made perfect in weakness? And does He not add, According to your faith be it into you?



No More Sea.

No More Sea.

And there was no more sea.
Revelation XXI. I.



To understand the Apostle's meaning aright we must suppose ourselves transplanted from our modern western civilization to the distant East in the first century of our era. Among the peoples shut out by Nature from the sea, or debarred by a rugged coast-line from acquiring skill in navigation, the most eminent, as it was the most typical, was unquestionably Israel.

To the average Jew the ocean was an object of vague distrust, a source of ill-concealed alarm.

Always in the hands of his enemies, it was a symbol of foreign rule. Used from the earliest times by his oppressors, it was the ally of arrogant force and cunning, a path of dominion, ready spread, for Phenician and Alexandrian, Greek and Roman.

It was the line of separation that in early days divided him from the unknown, from the culture and the splendour and the corruption which he feared and loathed; and though it became in later times to the Hebrew — what it had been long to others — the highway to remotest regions, still the Palestinian Israelite knew well that across that sea his kinsfolk were exposed to persecutions and spiritual perils undreamt of amid the hills and dales of Canaan.

However far the Hebrew nation spread, however distant the cities where finally they found a home, there clung to the race, with an obstinate, conservatism the race's moral traditions, and amongst them this ancestral abhorrence of all connected with the deep.

And the natural language that grew up and changed under these influences, never ceased to retain, whether as Hebrew or as Aramaic, this characteristic impress amongst many others; so that, to the man whose thoughts found utterance in the Aramaic tongue, no words were fraught with more mysterious, more fateful significance, than the words referring to the ocean.

The uneasiness of Greek sailors in the open sea, an uneasiness betrayed by many a phrase in the *Iliad*, was boldness itself compared with the feelings of the Hebrew. At every point the sea was alien to his life.

Yonder on the solitary headlands of Patmos stands a representative of that Hebrew race, looking out over that boundless expanse of waters — the type to him of so much that is cruel and malign. A prisoner there in Patmos by order of Domitian, an exile for conscience' sake, condemned to labour in the hillside quarries or in subterranean mines, he yet has time to ponder deeply over the problems of human destiny and life beyond the grave. There to the Apostle John was vouchsafed the most awesome and vivid of all revelations, — the New Jerusalem, the Holy City, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband; having the glory of God; and her light like unto a stone most precious; with walls of jasper, and in the foundations of them the names of the Twelve Apostles of the Lamb.

But whether he paces the rocky shore or climbs the hill, alike when he toils and when he meditates, there is ever audible that restless beat of the surf upon the strand — the melancholy undertone of the waters. Was it for human life they sobbed forth their inarticulate complaint, grieving for its loneliness and instability? or did they exult over the ineffectiveness of human effort?

He cannot think without that sign before his eyes, nor dream without that moaning in his ear.

What wonder then that when at last the Lord rolled back the portals of the light, and the new heavens and new earth appeared in vision before the Apostle's exstatic gaze, he should have noticed among the first tokens of security and joy within the upper Zion some qualities for which he can find no other expression than this, "there was no more sea".

What qualities were these?

I. Perhaps we may put in the first place the *absence of estrangement*. The *sea* was the great element that *separated nation and nation*. To be confined to an island in the Agean, was to be cut off for the most part from Christian companionship. Ships passed to and fro; sails were seldom absent in the summer season from that much frequented sea; but Patmos was lonely. The ocean was the dividing element, let communication come as often as it might. Here near at hand, yet separated by many a weary mile of stormtossed sea, lay Ephesus, the scene of John's labours many a year. Yonder towards the sunset lay Rome, whither the Apostle of the Gentiles had gone a prisoner, to carry the Gospel into Caesar's household. Far to the East lay Palestine and Antioch, and the cities of Asia, and the Seven Churches. In his isolation the Apostle could hardly look upon the waters without thinking of that deep heart-ache of humanity, which we express in so many different ways as loss, or bereavement, or loneliness, or unrequited love,—in a word, separation.

The present life is full separations and of the estrangements which separation brings. The air is full of farewells. With what sad frequency we may perceive that, at every port, in every railway-station, by every open grave. At the threshold of every new career, at the turning-points of the least eventful life, there is ever some Good-bye said, which, consciously or not, runs as a dividing line across the whole life-history.

Short words they are; and often, God knows, lightly enough spoken. But they are fraught sometimes with a meaning we little realize. For there is always a last Good-bye: to how few is it given to guess when they have said it.

'Tis strange! For dearest friend and bitterest foe
We've but one word of parting when they go;
We say it with close hand-clasp, with disdain,
In cold indifference, or with bitter pain —
Good bye! Good bye!

We say it, when our eyes are blind with tears,
To those we may not meet thro' the long years,
Who leave their native land, and one by one,
Seek distant lands beyond the setting sun.

We whisper solemnly with bated breath
Our last farewell beside the bed of death,
"May God be with you, our beloved", we pray,
Through the dark valley be thy guide and stay,
Where He has gone before to show the way.
Good bye! Good bye!

But even apart from its separations, life has its estrangements. Every soul is a closed book to every other on some side of its nature.

Men can have but few intimates at best; and must often be without spiritual companionship altogether. Where the means of communication are inadequate and, as is the case with human language, liable at times to mislead, there of necessity the closest companionship remains incomplete. Language conceals thought, says one. It may do so effectually: and is, in any case, powerless to reveal fully either thought, or emotion, or character.

Yes, in the sea of life enisled,
With echoing straits between us thrown,
Dotting the shoreless watery wild,
We mortal millions live *alone*.
The islands feel the enclasping flow,
And then their endless bounds they know.

In God all estrangements are at an end. The brethren are united. In His immediate presence they understand each

other as they never could have done on earth. There is nothing now to divide them. There are no more partings and no more tears. The misunderstandings of time are done away; and all false estimates of one another rendered impossible. For the veil that hides the inner life of each is for ever removed; soul recognizes soul; and the saints at last see as they are seen and know as they are known.

There with Him, in His companionship, the long lost and long estranged will be given back to the arms of patient tireless love; and those that would have been true friends, could they only have been brought once heart to heart, will meet before the throne and recognize one another as kindred souls: and those others, that somehow missed the friendships of earth as they stumbled here in the shadows, will find all that satisfies their inmost longings. No heart will crave sympathy and love in vain. No friendships will change or wane or be liable to misunderstanding any more. For the union of the ransomed will be complete in Christ. They shall see His face and His name shall be in their foreheads.

II. But these words "no more sea" denote also the absence unrest and of peril.

What is there in nature more restless, more habitually unstable, than the troubled sea? Calm and unruffled as it may be to day, smooth as molten glass, reflecting as in a burnished mirror the azure of the sky, how speedily its mood may change! The tiny wavelets lisp their soft murmurs to the slumbering shore, attracting the infirm and helpless to their charmed embrace, enticing the children to plunge sportive in the pellucid depths. How happy is the song the ocean sings; it lulls and soothes anxiety; and to one and all it whispers peace.

A day has passed; perhaps but a fitful afternoon. Yet see that frown, inscrutable as fate, upon the darkening waters furrowed over now by long ridges of destruction; and see where, white with rage, and hoarse with the rising storm, the fierce onriders of the deep charge squadron-like upon the suffering land.

Look where you will, there are the white manes of those

foaming steeds, that breathless and innumerable sweep onward, troop after troop, with shocks that overbear man's puny opposition.

You stranded vessel at the bar, how will it fare against the recurrent crash of that impetuous assault? Need we ask, seeing it is man's handiwork? Goodly the bark is, and brave the crew, but what are they against these leagued powers of the sea?

You look again. Where is the vessel? Gone, dismembered, scattered far and wide upon the yeast of waves. The blackened hulk alone remains to mark the scene of the disaster when tranquillity returns upon the deep.

The unrest of the sea has its counterpart in every phase of our earthly life. There is nothing that is absolutely stable in any career. Every lot has its ups and downs. Like the tides that rise and fall, so are the fortunes of men. One day prosperity, the next adversity; one day unbroken success, the next the sudden overthrow of cherished plans, or loss and disappointment that render all plans and all successes worthless.

And as to the inner life, how brief and uncertain are its periods of repose! Is not the soul of man a wind-swept sea, which, for all it is unruffled at times, is yet so sensitive to disturbing influences that at every slightest breath its waves rise high in sudden turmoil, to subside again but slowly, and heave long in passionate agitation when the tempest is past.

Peace is a precarious possession — the peace of the world, the peace of prosperity, or success, or name, or fame, or fortune. A wind arises we know not whence; a cloud appears no bigger than a man's hand; and the tranquillity that imaged heaven in your soul is gone.

The nations watch each other with a fixed intentness that may pass for peace. A breath stirs; idle words and unadvised are spoken; and we see the medium of our political life is sensitive to the last degree. Men cannot trust that stillness or reckon upon it. An armed vigilance is not repose.

The unrest is everywhere — in social and industrial life — between employers and employed. — in the world of thought itself. New theories supercede the old; the old emerge

again. There is endless striving after the unattainable on all sides — striving and failing and striving again.

Discontent and doubt and misery drive on their weary round. The waters fall into the sea, yet is the sea not full; unto the place whence the waters came, thither return they again. All things are full of labour. The thing that hath been is the thing that shall be, and there is nothing new.

With the unrest of life is closely associated the element of peril. Evil is all around us and we cannot escape it. We cannot find any environment where we are perfectly secure from temptation. Monasticism did not and could not afford such immunity. Make the surroundings of life as favourable as you may to the spirit's well-being, you cannot get rid of danger; and a sudden turn of fortune may any day reveal how exposed is the most sheltered career. You cannot trust life without God.

Subtle and treacherous, the evil of the world lets itself appear tamed and subdued by times. It has become tolerant, and harmless, you would think, the counsellor merely of wise neutrality, dissuasive only of fanaticism and other crudities. "Be not righteous overmuch", it whispers; "why shouldst thou destroy thyself?" It throws a glamour round the forbidden, and confuses the judgment. It conjures up visions of some undefined but all-desirable good, and lures the unwary to destruction. There is a fascination about it at times that tends to paralyse the will, a witchery hard to account for, when we reason merely in terms of matter and physical law. For what does it not seem to promise? Is there any limit to its offers?

Deep satisfaction, and the praise of men, and all worthiest success it will make ours, it urges, ours for ever, if we but cross an altogether needless, an imaginary line drawn by the over-scrupulous — the line of right.

At such a moment let a man argue out the question at his peril. It is just when evil seems least evil, that it is to be dreaded most. Its nature never alters; it is never tamed, never civilized or refined into good. Refinement and culture cannot work the cure of evil, but they may become deadly weapons in

its hands. Wrong often wears a puzzling guise; but one thing is certain, it can never become the willing instrument of good. No circumstances can ever justify a truce with sin.

The hatred and the apprehension with which whole races used to regard even the sleeping waters of some land-locked bay, — an apprehension not without parallel in an age that has coined the phrase, “cruel, crawling, creeping sea”, — is an apprehension, and a hatred that ought to colour every estimate we form of that mysterious principle of evil, of which the sea is so menacing an emblem. Under every fairest seeming, despite every specious promise, sin remains sin, unchanged and deadly. It will deftly enter the heart, insinuating itself unseen, as the waters fret the crumbling cliff and little by little wear away miles of coast. It will crush and overwhelm the stoutest will, as the stranded vessel is overwhelmed and crushed. It will drive painstaking vigilance far out of its course, and shroud the light in mist, till disaster overtake the bravest and most careful.

But Christ has stemmed the tide, and bound it, and rolled it back. “Peace be still”, He says; and with a word He calms the storms of human life. His presence brings good cheer.

But how, it may be asked, how does it do so? In this way.

The heart’s unrest arises from the fact, that what is temporal can never satisfy a spiritual being. Hence it is not the denials of God — the losses and bereavements — the shiftings and changings — the limitations of a narrow lot — the being poured from vessel to vessel — that awaken the keenest dissatisfaction. Unrest seems to be deepest where much has been given by God, much enjoyed from His hand, but where God Himself has been shut out. When with the abundance of good things a man does not receive the Giver of it all; where there is a refusal, tacit or defiant, to acknowledge God, His presence, His law, and the law of self-surrender in Christ, then the abundance of good things is powerless to satisfy. It ceases to be good; for God is excluded. It but enkindles a fiercer desire to possess more and more of that which promises satisfaction yet proves to be ashes and Dead Sea fruit.

The unrest of the human heart is spiritual; it arises from the spirit's infinite needs. It is the craving of the soul for communion with the Eternal. The soul asks not God's gifts, but God Himself: and will be content with nothing else. True, it may mistake its need; and often does. Then the results are calamitous. Made for God and in the image of God, man cannot find this inward peace till he return to Him, the Creator. And in his pursuit of that fleeting shadow we call rest, he is driven to and fro and suffers endless loss.

It is the contrite and humble that obtain this desired end. They have the secret of God. God dwells with them. His presence fills the heart. He chastens their desires; He directs their vital powers; He rules their spirit as King. He restores the soul; and with His rod and staff He comforts them even in the Valley of the Shadow.

The law of Christ has been accepted by them, the law of giving rather than demanding — the law of ministering rather than claiming to be ministered unto. The cross in one form or another has entered their lives. He has redeemed them — redeemed them by sacrifice, by sorrow, by voluntary surrender of things desirable and good. He humbled Himself, He made Himself of no account, He became obedient unto death to redeem them; and they have not turned away when He said, "The disciple is not above his Master". They have bowed the head with resignation, and faltered "Be it so", when He repeated, "Let a man take up his cross".

Christ, once admitted, changes the heart, filling it with a new love; and the changed heart responds ever less and less to the old influences. It is no longer at the mercy of circumstance. It is fixed, set on things above. It has found at last its true resting-place. Thus in Christ there is made attainable for man, what Nature all along possessed, — deep peace subsisting at the heart of endless agitation. Begun amid the cares, temptations and disquietudes of this world of sense, this peace will be fully realized only in that other world, where sin cannot enter, and where there remaineth a rest for the people of God.

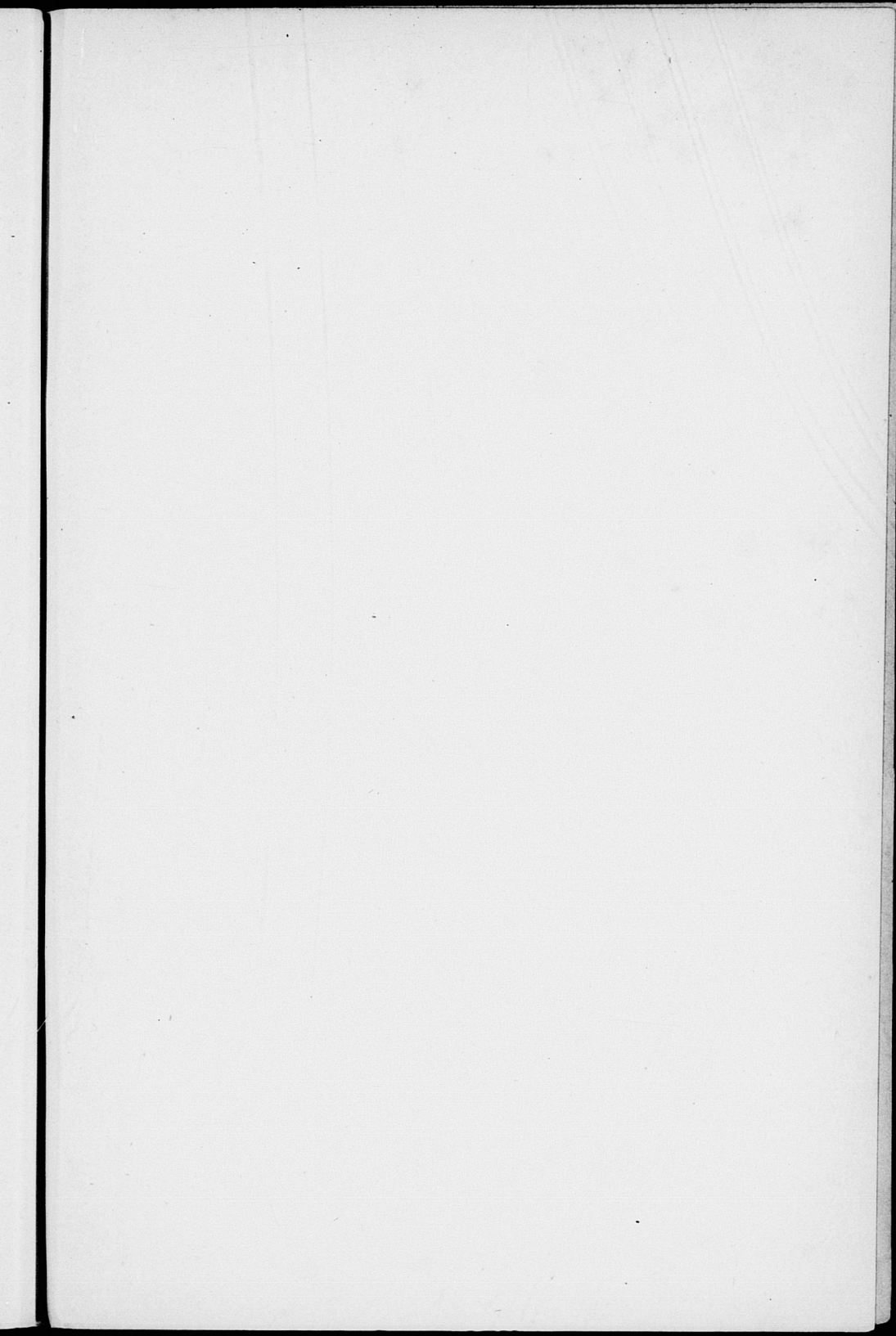
But all these hopes repose upon our Lord's Atonement. It is that which gives peace to the conscience. It is that alone which gives the human heart confidence that sin may be forgiven, that the guilt of sin may be removed, and its power broken and its stain washed for ever away. For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God. It is His presence that banishes all danger, and overcomes every sense of unrest and of isolation. And it is the New Life, His gift, as it floods the soul, that is the pledge and earnest of Heaven.

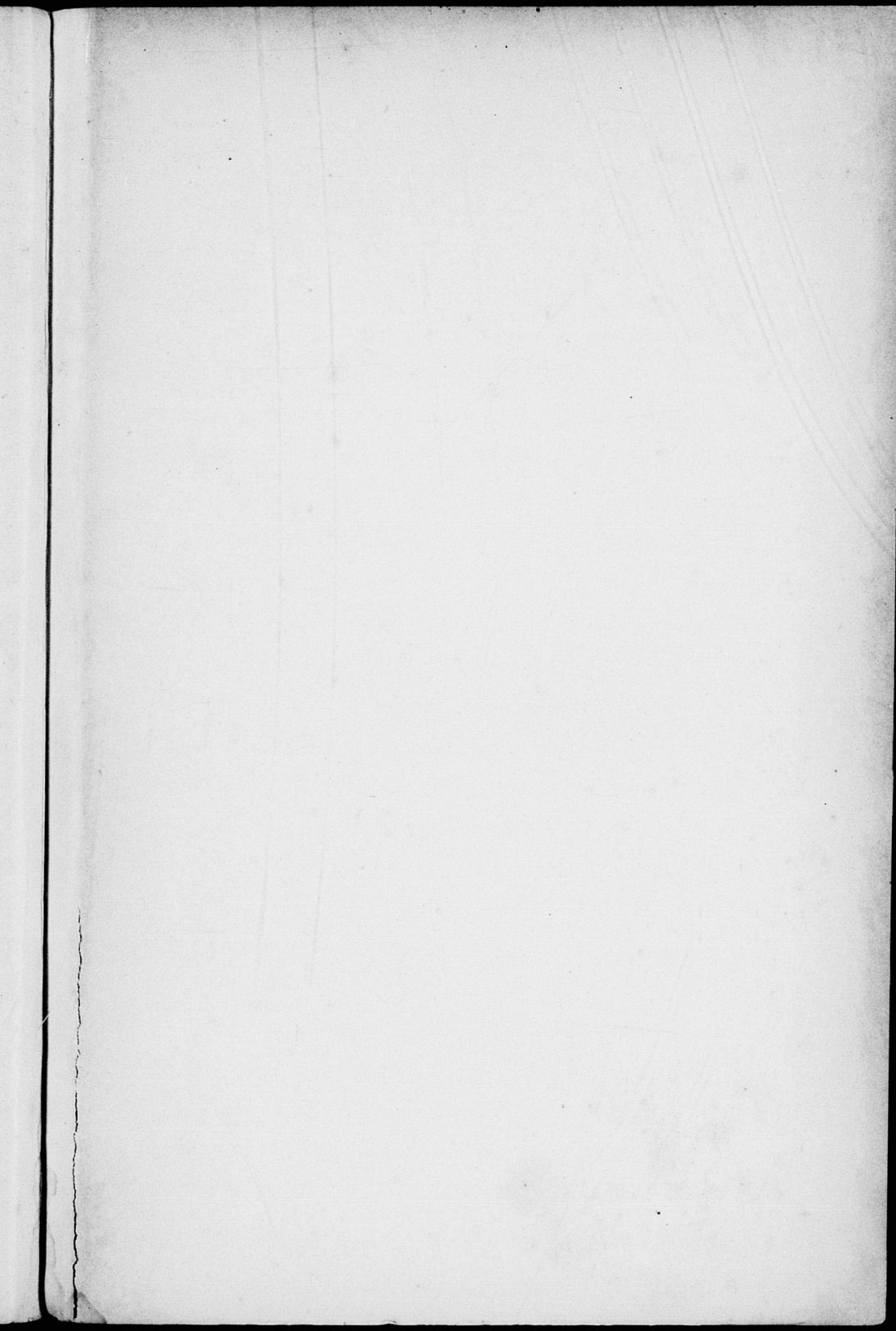
We know not when, we know not where,
We know not what that world will be;
But this we know; it will be fair
To see.

With heart athirst and thirsty face
We know and know not what shall be:
Christ Jesus bring us of His grace
To see.

Christ Jesus bring us of His grace,
Beyond all prayers our hope can pray,
One day to see Him face to face,
One day.







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