

# A Sermon

By the late REV, ROBERT MURRAY M'CHEYNE, Dundee.

“And when he [the Comforter] is come, he will convince the world of sin,  
and of righteousness, and of judgment” – John 16:8.

When friends are about to part from one another, they are far kinder than ever they have been before. It was so with Jesus. He was going to part from His disciples, and never till now did His heart flow out toward them in so many streams of heavenly tenderness. Sorrow had filled their heart, and therefore divinest compassion filled His heart. “I tell you the truth, it is expedient for you that I go away.”

Surely it was expedient for Himself that He should go away. He had lived a life of weariness and painfulness, not having where to lay His head, and surely it was pleasant in His eyes that He was about to enter into His rest. He had lived in obscurity and poverty – He gave His back to the smiters, and His cheeks to them that plucked off the hair; and now, surely, He might well look forward with joy to His return to that glory which He had with the Father before ever the world was, when all the angels of God worshipped Him; and yet He does not say: It is expedient for Me that I go away. Surely that would have been comfort enough to His disciples. But no; He says: “It is expedient for you.” He forgets Himself altogether, and thinks only of His little flock which He was leaving behind Him: “It is expedient for you that I go away.” O most generous of Saviours! He looked not on His own things, but on the things of others also. He knew that it is far more blessed to give than it is to receive.

The gift of the Spirit is the great argument by which He here persuades them that His going away would be expedient for them. Now, it is curious to remark that He had promised them the Spirit before, in the beginning of His discourse. In chapter 14, verses 16-18, He says: “I will pray the Father, and He shall give you another Comforter, that He may abide with you for ever; even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth Him not, neither knoweth Him: but ye know Him; for He dwelleth with you, and shall be in you. I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you.” And again: “But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, He shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you” – verse 26. In that passage He promises the Spirit for their own peculiar comfort and joy. He promises Him as a treasure which they, and they only, could receive: “For the world cannot receive Him, because it neither sees nor knows Him;” and yet, saith He, “He dwelleth with you, and shall be in you.” But in the passage before us the promise is quite different. He promises the Spirit here, not for themselves, but for the world – not as a peculiar treasure, to be locked up in their own bosoms, which they might brood over with a selfish joy, but as a blessed power to work, through their preaching, on the wicked world around them – not as a well springing up within their own bosoms unto everlasting life, but as rivers of living water flowing through them to water this dry and perishing world. He does not say: When He is come He will fill your hearts with peace and joy to overflowing; but: “When He is come, He will convince the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment.” But a little before He had told them that the world would hate and persecute them: “If ye were of the world, the world would love his own; but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you” – John 15:19. This was but poor comfort, when that very world was to be the field of their labours; but now He shows them what a blessed gift the Spirit would be; for He would work, through their preaching, upon the very hearts that hated and persecuted them: “He shall convince the world of sin.” This has always been

the case. In Acts 2 we are told that when the Spirit came on the apostles the crowd mocked them, saying: "These men are full of new wine;" and yet, when Peter preached, the Spirit wrought through his preaching on the hearts of these very scoffers. They were pricked in their hearts, and cried: "Men and brethren, what must we do?" and the same day three thousand souls were converted. Again, the jailer at Philippi was evidently a hard, cruel man towards the apostles; for he thrust them into the inner prison, and made their feet fast in the stocks; and yet the Spirit opens his hard heart, and he is brought to Christ by the very apostles whom he hated.

Just so it is, brethren, to this day. The world do not love the true ministers of Christ a whit better than they did. The world is the same world that it was in Christ's day. That word has never yet been scored out of the Bible: "Whosoever will live godly in the world, must suffer persecution." We expect, as Paul did, to be hated by the most who listen to us. We are quite sure, as Paul was, that the more abundantly we love you, most of you will love us the less; and yet, brethren, none of these things move us. Though cast down, we are not in despair; for we know that the Spirit is sent to convince the world; and we do not fear but some of you who are counting us an enemy, because we tell you the truth, may even this day, in the midst of all your hatred and cold indifference, be convinced of sin by the Spirit, and made to cry out: "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?"

#### *I. The first work of the Spirit is to convince of sin.*

1. Who it is that convinces of sin: "He shall convince the world of sin, because they believe not in me." It is curious to remark, that wherever the Holy Ghost is spoken of in the Bible, He is spoken of in terms of gentleness and love. We often read of the wrath of God the Father, as in Romans 1: "The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men." And we often read of the wrath of God the Son: "Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and ye perish from the way;" or, "Revealed from heaven taking vengeance." But we nowhere read of the wrath of God the Holy Ghost. He is compared to a dove, the gentlest of all creatures. He is warm and gentle as the breath: "Jesus breathed on them, and said, Receive ye the Holy Ghost." He is gentle as the falling dew: "I will be as the dew unto Israel." He is soft and gentle as oil; for he is called "The oil of gladness." The fine oil wherewith the high priest was anointed was a type of the Spirit. He is gentle and refreshing as the springing well: "The water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up unto everlasting life." He is called "The Spirit of grace and of supplications." He is nowhere called the Spirit of wrath. He is called the "Holy Ghost, which is the Comforter." Nowhere is he called the Avenger. We are told that He groans within the heart of a believer, "helping his infirmities;" so that He greatly helps the believer in prayer. We are told also of the love of the Spirit – nowhere of the wrath of the Spirit. We are told of His being grieved: "Grieve not the Holy Spirit;" of His being resisted: "Ye do always resist the Holy Ghost;" of His being quenched: "Quench not the Spirit." But these are all marks of gentleness and love. Nowhere will you find one mark of anger or of vengeance attributed to Him; and yet, brethren, when this blessed Spirit begins His work of love, mark how He begins – He convinces of sin. Even He, all-wise, almighty, all-gentle and loving though He be, cannot persuade a poor sinful heart to embrace the Saviour without first opening up his wounds, and convincing him that he is lost.

Now, brethren, I ask of you, Should not the faithful minister of Christ just do the very same? Ah! brethren, if the Spirit, whose very breath is all gentleness and love, whom Jesus hath sent into the world to bring men to eternal life – if He begins His work in every soul that is to be saved by convincing of sin, why should you blame the minister of Christ if he begins in the very same way? Why should you say that we are harsh, and cruel, and severe, when we begin to deal with your souls by convincing you of sin?" "Am I become your enemy, because

I tell you the truth?" When the surgeon comes to cure a corrupted wound – when he tears off the vile bandages which unskilful hands had wrapped around it – when he lays open the deepest recesses of your wound, and shows you all its venom and its virulence – do you call him cruel? May not his hands be all the time the hands of gentleness and love? Or, when a house is all on fire, when the flames are bursting out from every window when some courageous man ventures to alarm the sleeping inmates, bursts through the barred door, tears aside the close-drawn curtains, and with eager hand shakes the sleeper, bids him awake and flee – a moment longer, and you may be lost – do you call him cruel? or do you say this messenger of mercy spoke too loud, too plain? Ah, no. "Skin for skin, all that a man hath will he give for his life." Why, then, brethren, will you blame the minister of Christ when he begins by convincing you of sin? Think you that the wound of sin is less venomous or deadly than a wound in the flesh? Think you the flames of hell are less hard to bear than the flames of earth? The very Spirit of love begins by convincing you of sin; and are we less the messengers of love because we begin by doing the same thing? Oh, then, do not say that we are become your enemy because we tell you the truth!

## II. *What is this conviction of sin?*

I would begin to show this by showing you what it is not.

1. It is not the mere smiting of the natural conscience. Although man be utterly fallen, yet God has left natural conscience behind in every heart, to speak for him. Some men, by continual sinning, sear even the conscience as with a hot iron, so that it becomes dead and past feeling; but most men have so much natural conscience remaining, that they cannot commit open sin without their conscience smiting them. When a man commits murder or theft, no eye may have seen him, and yet conscience makes a coward of him. He trembles and is afraid; he feels that he has sinned, and he fears that God will take vengeance. Now, brethren, that is not the conviction of sin here spoken of, that is a natural work which takes place in every heart; but conviction of sin is a supernatural work of the Spirit of God. If you have had nothing more than the ordinary smiting of conscience, then you have never been convinced of sin.

2. It is not any impression upon the imagination. Sometimes, when men have committed great sin, they have awful impressions of God's vengeance made upon their imaginations. In the night time they almost fancy they see the flames of hell burning beneath them; or they seem to hear doleful cries in their ears telling of coming woe; or they fancy they see the face of Jesus all clouded with anger; or they have terrible dreams, when they sleep, of coming vengeance. Now, this is not the conviction of sin which the Spirit gives. This is altogether a natural work upon the natural faculties, and not at all a supernatural work of the Spirit. If you have had nothing more than these imaginary terrors, you have had no work of the Spirit.

3. It is not a mere head knowledge of what the Bible says against sin. Many unconverted men read their Bibles, and have a clear knowledge that their case is laid down there. They are sensible men. They know very well that they are in sin, and they know just as well that the wages of sin is death. One man lives a swearer, and he reads the words, and understands them perfectly: "Swear not at all" – "The Lord will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain." Another man lives in the lusts of the flesh, and he reads the Bible, and understands these words perfectly: "No unclean person hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God." Another man lives in habitual forgetfulness of God – never thinks of God from sunrise to sunset, and yet he reads: "The wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the people that forget God." Now, in this way most unconverted men have a head knowledge of their sin, and of the wages of sin; yet, brethren, this is far from conviction of sin. This is a mere natural work in the head. Conviction of sin is a work upon the heart. If you

have had nothing more than this head knowledge that you are sinners, then you have never been convinced of sin.

4. Conviction of sin is not to feel the loathsomeness of sin. This is what a child of God feels. A child of God has seen the beauty and excellency of God, and therefore sin is loathsome in his eyes. But no unconverted person has seen the beauty and excellency of God; therefore, even the Spirit cannot make him feel the loathsomeness of sin. Just as when you leave a room that is brilliantly lighted, and go out into the darkness of the open air, the night looks very dark; so when a child of God has been within the veil – in the presence of his reconciled God – in full view of the Father of lights, dwelling in light inaccessible and full of glory – then, when he turns his eye inwards upon his own sinful bosom, sin appears very dark, very vile, and very loathsome. But an unconverted soul never has been in the presence of the reconciled God; and therefore sin cannot appear dark and loathsome in his eyes. Just as when you have tasted something very sweet and pleasant, when you come to taste other things, they appear very insipid and disagreeable; so when a child of God has tasted and seen that God is gracious, the taste of sin in his own heart becomes very nauseous and loathsome to him. But an unconverted soul never tasted the sweetness of God's love; he cannot, therefore, feel the vileness and loathsomeness of sin. This, then, is not the conviction of sin here spoken of.

What, then, is this conviction of sin? Ans. It is a just sense of the dreadfulness of sin. It is not a mere knowledge that we have many sins, and that God's anger is revealed against them all; but it is a heart-feeling that we are under sin. Again, it is not a feeling of the loathsomeness of sin – that is felt only by the children of God; but it is a feeling of the dreadfulness of sin, of the dishonour it does to God, and of the wrath to which it exposes the soul. Oh, brethren! conviction of sin is no slight natural work upon the heart. There is a great difference between knowing a thing and having a just sense of it. There is a great difference between knowing that vinegar is sour, and actually tasting and feeling that it is sour. There is a great difference between knowing that fire will burn us, and actually feeling the pain of being burned. Just in the same way, there is all the difference in the world between knowing the dreadfulness of your sins and feeling the dreadfulness of your sins. It is all in vain that you read your Bibles and hear us preach, unless the Spirit use the words to give sense and feeling to your dead hearts. The plainest words will not awaken you as long as you are in a natural condition. If we could prove to you, with the plainness of arithmetic, that the wrath of God is abiding on you and your children, still you would sit unmoved – you would go away and forget it before you reached your own door. Ah, brethren! He that made your heart can alone impress your heart. It is the Spirit that convinceth of sin.

1. Learn the true power of the read and preached Word. It is but an instrument in the hand of God. It has no power of itself, except to produce natural impressions. It is a hammer, but God must break your hearts with it. It is a fire, but God must kindle up your bosoms with it. Without Him we may give you a knowledge of the dreadfulness of your condition, but He only can give you a just sense and feeling of the dreadfulness of your condition. The most powerful sermon in the world can make nothing more than a natural impression; but when God works through it, the feeblest word makes a supernatural impression. Many a poor sermon has been the means by which God hath converted a soul. Children of God, oh that you would pray night and day for the lifting up of the arm of God!

2. Learn that conversion is not in your own power. It is the Spirit alone who convinces of sin, and He is a free agent. He is a sovereign Spirit, and has nowhere promised to work at the bidding of unconverted men. He hath many on whom He will have mercy; and whom He will He hardeneth. Perhaps you think you may take your fill of sin just now, and then come and repent, and be saved; but remember the Spirit is not at your bidding. He is not your servant. Many hope to be converted on their death-bed; and they come to their death-bed, and

yet are not converted. If the Spirit be working with you now, do not grieve Him, do not resist him – do not quench Him; for He may never come back to you again.

### III. *I come to the argument which the Spirit uses.*

There are two arguments by which the Spirit usually gives men a sense of the dreadfulness of sin.

1. The Law: “The law is our schoolmaster to bring us to Christ” – “Now we know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them that are under the law, that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world become guilty before God.” The sinner reads the law of the great God who made heaven and earth. The Spirit of God arouses his conscience to see that the law condemns every part of his life. The law bids him love God. His heart tells him he never loved God – never had a thought of regard toward God. The Spirit convinces him that God is a jealous God – that His honour is concerned to uphold the law, and destroy the sinner. The Spirit convinces him that God is a just God – that He can by no means clear the guilty. The Spirit convinces him that He is a true God – that He must fulfil all His threatenings: “Have I said it, and shall I not do it?” The sinner’s mouth is stopped, and he stands guilty before God.

2. The second argument is the Gospel: “Because they believe not on Jesus.” This is the strongest of all arguments, and therefore is chosen by Christ here. The sinner reads in the Word that “he that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life;” and now the Spirit convinces him that he never believed on the Son of God – indeed, he does not know what it means. For the first time the conviction comes upon his heart: “He that believeth not the Son, shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him.” The more glorious and divine that Saviour is, the more is the Christless soul convinced that he is lost; for he feels that he is out of that Saviour. He sees plainly that Christ is an almighty ark riding over the deluge of God’s wrath, – he sees how safe and happy the little company are that are gathered within; but this just makes him gnash his teeth in agony, for he is not within the ark, and the waves and billows are coming over him. He hears that Christ hath been stretching out the hands all the day to the chief of sinners, not willing that any should perish; but then he never cast himself into these arms, and now he feels that Christ may be laughing at his calamity, and mocking when his fear cometh. O yes, my friends! how often on the death-bed, when the natural fears of conscience are aided by the Spirit of God – how often, when we speak of Christ, His love, His atoning blood, the refuge to be found in Him, how safe and happy all are that are in Him – how often does the dying sinner turn it all away with the awful question: But am I in Christ? The more we tell of the Saviour, the more is their agony increased; for they feel that that is the Saviour they have refused. Ah! what a meaning does that give to these words: “The Spirit convinceth of sin, because they believe not on me.”

1. Now, my friends, there are many of you who know that you never believed on Jesus, and yet you are quite unmoved. You sit without any emotion, you eat your meals with appetite, and doubtless sleep sound at night. Do you wish to know the reason? You have never been convinced of sin. The Spirit hath never begun His work in your heart. Oh! if the Spirit of Jesus would come on your hearts like a mighty rushing wind, what a dreadful thought it would be to you this night, that you are lying out of Christ! You would lose your appetite for this world’s food, you would not be able to rest in your bed, you would not dare to live on in your sins. All your past sins would rise behind you like apparitions of evil. Wherever you went you would meet the word, “Without Christ, without hope, and without God in the world;” and if your worldly friends should try to hush your fears, and tell you of your decencies, and that you were not so bad as your neighbours, and that many might fear if you feared, ah! how you would thrust them away, and stop your ears, and cry, There is a city of refuge, to which I have never fled; therefore there must be a blood-avenger. There is an

ark; therefore there must be a coming deluge. There is a Christ; therefore there must be a hell for the Christless.

2. Some of you may be under conviction of sin – you feel the dreadfulness of being out of Christ, and you are very miserable. Now,

(1) Be thankful for this work of the Spirit: “Flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father.” God hath brought you into the wilderness just that He might allure you, and speak to your heart about Christ. This is the way He begins the work in every soul He saves. Nobody ever came to Christ but they were first convinced of sin. All that are now in heaven began this way. Be thankful you are not dead like those around you.

(2) Do not lose these convictions. Remember they are easily lost. Involve yourself over head and ears in business, and work even on the Sabbath-day, and you will soon drive all away. Indulge a little in sensual pleasure, take a little diversion with companions, and you will soon be as happy and careless as they. If you love your soul, flee these things; do not stay, flee away from them. Read the books that keep up your anxiety, wait on the ministers that keep up that anxiety. Above all, cry to the Spirit, who alone was the author of it, that He would keep it up. Cry night and day that He may never let you rest out of Christ! Oh! would you sleep over hell?

(3) Do not rest in these convictions. You are not saved yet. Many have come thus far and perished after all: many have been convinced, not converted; many lose their convictions, and wallow in sin again. “Remember Lot’s wife.” You are never safe till you are within the fold. Christ is the door. “Strive to enter in at the strait gate; for many shall seek to enter in and shall not be able.”

[November 1905]

## Death of John the Baptist

A Sermon by the REV. RICHARD CECIL, A.M., 1806.

Mr Cecil, whose name is well known, was an honoured minister of Christ in the Church of England – ED.

“And the king was exceedingly sorry; yet, for his oath’s sake, and for their sakes which sat with him, he would not reject her. And immediately the king sent an executioner, and commanded his head to be brought; and he went and beheaded him in the prison” – Mark 6:26,27.

On a former occasion we considered the mission, character, and preaching of John the Baptist; we shall now endeavour to make a few practical remarks on the circumstances and manner of his death. Let us notice –

I. The occasion of his death.

II. Those general instructions which it presents to us.

I. The occasion of the death of John the Baptist. This may be summed up in a single consideration; the faithful discharge of his duty in reprovng a notorious public scandal. Here was the sore provocation. For we are particularly informed in the chapter before us that king Herod, (*i.e.* Herod Antipas, son of Herod the Great, who slew the infants in Bethlehem, and who had succeeded his father,) when he had heard of the fame of Jesus spread abroad, said: “It is John whom I have beheaded: he is risen from the dead, therefore mighty works do show forth themselves in him;” “for Herod himself had sent forth and laid hold upon John, and bound him in prison for Herodias’ sake, his brother Philip’s wife; for he had married her. For John had said unto Herod, It is not lawful for thee to have thy brother’s wife.” Here, then, we see the source of the flagitious murder that was afterwards perpetrated. But before we pass on to the consideration of it we cannot but remark, from the passage just read, the ignorance of a court concerning facts of the highest consequence. We cannot but express surprise, that, amidst the variety of information, which must have been brought to the court of Herod, there should have been a question as to who it was that wrought those mighty acts; that it should have been matter of conjecture whether they were wrought by John the Baptist, who, having been barbarously murdered in prison, had risen again from the dead! that, at the centre of intelligence and information, it should not have been distinctly known that they were the miracles of Christ, whom John himself had proclaimed as the Messiah, whom all nations expected about that time to appear in the world. I say we cannot but feel surprise when contemplating these things!

My dear hearers, I very much fear that this is a too faithful picture of what courts have generally been; nay, of what they too generally at present are: where every thing is eagerly caught up, except that which it most of all concerns them to know – I mean that which relates to the kingdom of Jesus Christ; a kingdom which involves and affects the interests of every other kingdom on the face of the earth; nay, that kingdom upon which they all hang, although the wise men of this world are in general ignorant of these things.

But we may here also remark the power of guilt. For it is probable that Herod’s conscience flew in his face when he heard of mighty works being put forth by one, whom he therefore feared might be John the Baptist risen from the dead. “For John had said to him, It is not lawful for thee to have thy brother’s wife;” as though he had said, It is an act of adultery: it is an act of incest; it is an abominable public scandal. I, therefore, as an honest man, and the minister whom ye frequently hear, am bound to tell you plainly, though you are my sovereign, that you ought not to do this thing.

And here let me notice the obligation of such as minister in high places – who preach to the great – who have access to princes, – to reprove faithfully whenever religion and public morals are insulted, lest their blood and the blood of the people be required at their hands. It is most distressing to reflect with what a bold front vice and profligacy sometimes walk about in high circles: how they are tolerated, and even countenanced, and what few rebukes they meet with. I say it is distressing to think of these things; and how much the tone and temper of society are affected by them. Here is, if I may so speak, the spring-head of national

corruption: and is it necessary to say more, to show the importance of keeping the spring clear? But however this may be, here is before us the example of that great prophet, John the Baptist, and, all other argument apart, that is quite sufficient to satisfy us on the point of duty. Let public instructors then regard themselves as the guardians of the public morals; and let their zeal and fidelity rise with the occasion, and let them not shrink when the highest motives call for rebuke, even on the highest characters.

But to return to the history. John having declared the connection of Herod unlawful, “therefore” it is said, “Herodias had a quarrel against him, and would have killed him; but she could not.” Mark here the murderous purpose of a woman whose wicked passions were opposed. Mark, too, the limit Providence sometimes places to such designs – “and would have killed him, but could not.” We see here that God has invisible chains wherewith to bind the wicked until His own time arrives: “and she could not; because Herod feared John, knowing that he was a just man and a holy, and observed him,” or (as it is in the margin) “kept him and saved him:” “and when he heard him he did many things, and heard him gladly.” Here we see distinctly the chain of Providence – the restraint of circumstances; and thus for a time an invisible hand withheld the axe from the head of the Baptist; for John was a just as well as a holy man, and a holy as well as a just man. He not only did that which was right before man, but he considered the rights of God; he was just, and he was holy. Herod was struck with the piety and sacred consistency of John’s character, and therefore feared him; therefore he could not immediately act against him, and therefore Herodias “could not,” notwithstanding her murderous purpose was stimulated by the vilest passions.

But I must not omit to notice here the effect of truth, combined with a holy and just example, on the mind of Herod. My dear hearers, let us hence learn the power of truth, joined to a holy consistency of character, so great was it that it could convince such a man as Herod – a man so fortified by circumstances against conviction, and even excite him to do many good things. Let us learn also the absolute vanity of that religion which spares a single wicked passion, and consider how sad a fact it is that there is a great number of people, calling themselves Christians, whose religion only amounts to this – that, like Herod, they are convinced that the preacher tells them the truth, and that he is in earnest!

At length, however, “when a convenient day was come, that Herod on his birthday made a supper to his lords, high captains, and chief estates of Galilee; and when the daughter of the said Herodias came in and danced and pleased Herod and them that sat with him, the king said unto the damsel, Ask of me whatsoever thou wilt, and I will give it thee.” It may be here observed that public festivities are generally seasons of temptation; for in those revels, if I may so speak, fire is added to gunpowder; and the dancing of a young female before so large an assembly, and before such a company, seems to have in it the very nature of an immodest act. But, however this may be (for I know the world of fashion and sensuality will be ready to dispute the point with me), I say, however this may be, she bewitched Herod, and caused him to exclaim, like a man who had lost his senses, “Ask of me whatsoever thou wilt, and I will give it thee;” and (as though this were not rashness and extravagance enough), “he swore unto her, Whatsoever thou shalt ask of me, I will give it thee, unto the half of my kingdom.” “And she went forth, and said unto her mother, What shall I ask? and she said, The head of John the Baptist.” You see here that lust paves the way to murder; that it will prefer even so horrid a gratification as this to the half of the kingdom; and that the revenge it will inspire, even in a woman, will hesitate at nothing, however horrible. “And she came in straightway with haste unto the king, and asked, saying, I will that thou give me by and by in a charger the head of John the Baptist.” Prodigious! Give me in a charger! – such a dish as this to be added to the festivity! And shall a young damsel have the heart to bear such a request as this, and shall she go “with haste to deliver it to the king?” My dear hearers, you see here the curse of a wicked mother! you here see the daughter who had first countenanced the adultery of her parent, now



countenancing her in murder, and acting with her in the business. You see a hardness of heart, a cruelty of disposition in this young person, which, no doubt, shocked even Herod himself; for the history proceeds, “And the king was exceeding sorry; yet, for his oath’s sake, and for their sakes which sat with him, he would not reject her,” not considering that rash and unlawful promises are far better broken than kept – not considering that he was a just and holy man, and that he had frequently heard him gladly, from a conviction of the truth of what he said. Herod did not sufficiently call all these things to mind, or is it possible that he could not have recalled his order? The truth is, my brethren, you can have no hold of a man who is the victim of a criminal passion. Sin is a net which so entangles a man, that he cannot help even himself. A point of false honour has destroyed its thousands; not only in that day, but in every day; in our own day particularly. A victim of sin; a slave of the devil (to speak as plain as I can, where I ought to speak plain) is implicated in a quarrel about a dog or a harlot, and then a point of false honour is to be settled, and he is to be dragged into the field to put his life and soul into jeopardy; he is to destroy himself, or his friend, in order to settle a point of false honour. Surely, my brethren, nothing but the wickedness, can equal the folly and madness of such a proceeding as this! Still the enormity of such cases yields to that of the history before us. The king was exceeding sorry, yet, “for his oath’s sake, and for their sakes which sat with him,” he could lend himself to the most flagitious murder rather than do this, for he immediately sent an executioner, and commanded the head of John to be brought; “and he went and beheaded him in the prison, and brought his head in a charger, and gave it to the damsel, and the damsel gave it to her mother.”

We have now seen, plainly, the occasion of the death of this holy man; let us proceed to consider –

II. The General Instructions which the circumstances of the death of John the Baptist present to us.

1st Brethren, let, us learn (what I have already glanced at, in pursuing the thread of the history before us) the vast influence which a consistent profession of the truth has upon the consciences of the worst of men. And Herod was certainly one of the very worst of men that have ever lived upon the face of the earth.

“Herodias had a quarrel, and would have killed” John before, but Herod feared him. John had made such an impression upon his conscience, and upon the consciences of the people; he was so fully convinced that he was a just and holy man, that “he observed him, and when he heard him, he did many things, and heard him gladly.” Such was the effect of the Baptist’s holy consistency of character upon a bad man, upon Herod. So true it is, that, as ministers, “the weapons of our warfare are not carnal.” We have no occasion for armour, for the sword, for crafty policy, for tempting flatteries. Our weapons are not carnal, but spiritual, and “mighty through God, to the pulling down of [the] strong holds” of sin and Satan. The Word of God; the evidence of truth, seconded by the power of conscience; a holy integrity and consistency of character; these, under the direction and influence of the Spirit of Might, are the weapons of our warfare. Many Christians have received their first impressions of truth from what they have seen of its effects on others. And thus Herod seems to have said, Whatever be the history of priests; whatever iniquities have been mingled with sacred things and holy professions, yet this is an honest man; this man carries his high commission in his look; he is a mortified man; a devoted character; a man of God; and, whatever may be observed in the history of some others, it is only what may be found in the everyday history of mere human nature; but I see here quite a different character – a man whom my conscience forces me to approve; against whom my prejudices can object nothing; a man who speaks the truth, and acts the truth; whom I can hear gladly, and, in many things, desire to imitate. But, brethren, let us beware of mistaking our approbation of the truth for the possession of truth.

Herod heard John gladly, yet, after all, he sent and beheaded him in prison! And I have seen many who would run round a town, and say, Here is the truth! and there is the truth! while anyone who knew these men might have said, Wherever the truth is, it is not with you. Like Herod, indeed, you may do “many things,” but have you done the right thing? Have you chosen, from the heart, the one thing needful? You may have been charmed, as Herod was, by one that played skilfully on an instrument; but what is your character? You may have even heard the truth gladly; but where is the proof that it has made you free from the bondage of sin? Let us, therefore, brethren beware how we imitate Herod; or, how we imitate Balaam, in saying, “Let me die the death of the righteous,” when we have no true desire to live the life of the righteous. It will indeed be a lamentable close to our profession, if, after all, we have no hope in death, and find, at that moment of anxious thought, that in life we had only amused ourselves with the shell of Christianity, and have for ever lost the salvation which it offered to us. But let us remark –

2dly. The hardening tendency of sin, and how dangerous a thing it is to trifle with conscience. – A man may hear a preacher of righteousness, even gladly; be convinced of the truth, and do many things, and yet, after all, be a slave of the devil, and a victim of some lust. And although his passions may seem to sleep for a time, a temptation, or occasion, will at length arise to bring him out; to make him manifest, not only to himself, but to others. “Be sure your sin will find you out.”

Observe here the case of Herod. He was not aware that festivity and public revelling, that a gay circle, was the temptation which was not only to draw out his character as a man of pleasure, but to disclose the features of a man of blood. He did not foresee the enormous lengths to which such a temptation might conduct him. He did not know that the evil of his heart would be so prompted by a light assembly, by wine, by a song, by a dance! – that he should meet with such a powerful temptation; first, in the lust of his eye, and then, from a false sense of honour, that he should proceed to murder; that this murder would be one of the most atrocious that ever was committed; that it would be aggravated to the highest degree by its circumstances! What a victim of sin was this man! hearing John the Baptist one day; convinced in his conscience that he was a messenger from heaven; that he was a holy and just man; and the next, in order to gratify a wicked and abandoned woman, to fulfil a wicked oath, and to stand well in the opinion of a wicked court, to send and put this just man, this holy prophet, to death! No doubt, if Herod had been told, while he was hearing John preach, when his conscience was touched, and he felt inclined to do many things – I say, if he had been told, while thus hearing, Very soon, in order to please a malignant and base woman, and from other bad motives, thou wilt murder that holy and just man! – I question but he would have been ready to reply, in the language of Hazeel, “Is thy servant a dog, that he should do this thing?” Yet, placed in the midst of temptation, on a festive occasion, you see what the man was capable of!

My young friends, let me especially warn you to learn a lesson of caution, as to bad company, from the tragedy now before us. A young man is very apt to say to his father who is concerned for his best interests and watching over him, What harm is there in this, that, or the other gay circle into which I may enter? Among other evils there is this – that, like Herod, you are in the midst of a contagious atmosphere; you are drawing in poison that may destroy you. You know not, when you go in, what a bait, what a trap the devil may have there laid for you. You know not to what lengths he may lead you, step by step, beyond the boundary you may have prescribed for yourself. Young man, remember that the beginnings of sin are more easily resisted than the progress. Therefore, says the wise man (and young people especially cannot too frequently have admonition pressed upon them), “Go not in the way of evil men, avoid it, pass not by it, turn from it, and pass away.” Do not go near temptation, for many stronger men than you, know how weak they would feel themselves in temptation which you

think lightly of. Much more do not “enter into” the temptation – but consider the deceitfulness and hardening nature of sin, as we learn it from the instance before us.

3dly, The death of the Baptist warns us against dependence on this world’s friendship. It speaks to Christian people, to religious, conscientious men – I say, stand warned by this example, against depending on the friendship of the world. A man such as I now address – a godly, a sincere man – may think he has, in his trouble, found some friend to lean upon, one that he can trust to, that he can confide in, that will stand by him in his necessities – though this friend be not a religious man. Let the man I speak to, stand warned with respect to such dependence as this. It may seem hard, but it is safe for me to give you this advice. It is possible that some persons might have formerly said, Whatever mischief may be contrived by Herodias – a woman of no conscience and no principle at all – whatever mischief she may be contriving against John, there will be no moving Herod, for he knows John’s true character: he knows him to be a faithful, godly, devoted man; and though he does say to Herod, “It is not lawful for thee to have thy brother Philip’s wife,” yet, at the same time, he does it from principle, with simplicity and sincerity, having no enmity against Herod, or desire to injure or offend him; therefore, Herod will still stand by his friend, and will shield the prophet at whose bidding he hath done many things. But we know the contrary, brethren; therefore, I return to my proposition, and say, that no dependence whatever should be placed on carnal connexions. I insist upon it, from the Scriptures and from observation, and it will be found a fact, that any such person as I have described, on whose friendship you venture to depend, will only go with you a certain length – as it is said of some of the hearers of Christ himself, “from that time, many went back and walked no more with him.” The doctrine was too strong; the truth became too vivid; the edge of it was too sharp; it went too deep into the conscience; it could be borne with no longer; therefore they would walk no more with him, until at length Jesus found himself called to say, even to his disciples, “Will ye also go away?” And thus you will find it as to worldly dependence. There is a line which the world will not pass with you. If your religion be not mere profession; if you show your true character on a point that calls for decision and fidelity; if you refuse to listen to the world’s sophisms; if you reject the principle on which the world proceeds, depend upon it, brethren, that, from that time, there will be either a secret or an open rupture with a worldly man. The foundation of your dependence, feeble as at all times it was, is gone. And well it may be that it is gone; for there is a snare in all such connexions. The fear of displeasing the world plunges thousands into perdition. I shall lose an interest; I shall miss a pleasure; – I cannot sacrifice so much to the truth. By such pretences are many betrayed still deeper into temptation, when they are once entangled in worldly connexions and ensnared by worldly dependences. I say then, if you are Christian men, stand warned as to dependence on this world’s friendship. I do not say, that we should not be thankful for every friendly act; though it may proceed from a wrong motive. Doubtless we should receive the thing as it is presented to us, and as it appears to be intended. We should show gratitude. We should manifest a desire to serve those who, in this way, declare their friendship for us. But I am speaking of dependence on the world, and, I repeat my assertion, there is no stability in such a dependence. Worldly men will bear the truth only so far as it does not cross their lusts, interests, and inclinations. Bring home the truth to their business and their bosoms, and they will bear it no longer. Nay, a worldly spirit, rather than bow to the truth, will set it at open defiance; will proceed, as we have seen, even to murder a prophet for the sake of a rash promise; to sacrifice a man of God to a dance! I will read you a passage, from Bishop Hall, that expresses exactly what I mean. “A carnal man,” says the Bishop, “like a hollow parasite, or a fawning spaniel, flatters only for his own turn; if that be once either soured or crossed, like a churlish cur, he is ready to snatch us by the fingers;” “and, is there,” says he, “a worldly-minded man, that lives in some known sin, yet makes much of preachers; frequents

the church; talks godly; looks demurely; carries it fair; is there such a one? Hurt him not, for he will prove, after his furious fits, like a restive horse, which goes on, some paces regularly and easily, but anon either stands still or falls to flinging and plunging, and never leaves off till he has cast his rider from his back." I say, therefore, again, Christian, stand warned as to placing any dependence on the world's favour or friendship. I remark,

4thly, The passage before us strongly instructs us as to the nature and real character of those idols, for which men are ready to sacrifice body, soul, and reputation. A prominent instance of this stands before us. One of the world's idols, the daughter of Herodias, danced before Herod, with his high estates, and lords, and captains, and exceedingly pleased him; nay, quite infatuated him, or else what could have induced him to make such a promise, that he would give her even to the half of his kingdom? Because the damsel might be beautiful! accomplished! brilliant! is the king to lose his reason, and to talk in this random manner? Now learn from this, to guard against the danger of the world's idols. If anything catches your attention; if you fix your mind and heart upon it, because you see it beautiful, accomplished, and brilliant; remember, so were Herodias and her daughter. But the question is, What were these idols in fact? what were they in reality? Why, very infernals; painted putrefactions, splendid sepulchres! You may remember, in the history of a neighbouring country, that one of its heroes fell suddenly ill, and, after his death, was so soon in putrid state, that he was not fit to be shown as a public spectacle, as they intended he should: so, what was to be done with this disgusting object of their idolatry? Why, they painted and adorned him; they varnished over his deformity, and then exhibited him to the public! Verily, such, in a moral sense, was the putrefaction, such the deformity of Herodias and her daughter.

"Give me," said this wicked young woman. "I will give thee," says Herod, "to the half of my kingdom." "Ask." "Give me," says she; what? more splendid apparel? a more magnificent palace? a retinue more superb and imposing? a better opportunity of distinguishing herself as an accomplished young woman? a higher rank? a greater mark of my favour than you have yet received? No – I want a dead man's head, swimming in blood! Yes, this she demanded; that her mother and she might, if they pleased, toss with their profane hands the head of that man who was sanctified from the birth; who was "a burning and a shining light;" who was seeking their salvation; who was standing as the harbinger of the Sun of Righteousness. Let me and my mother have that man's head swimming in blood; that we may treat it with scorn, and show that we have got rid of our chief disturber. What! are you not, as a damsel, as a young woman, shocked at such an idea? would you not shudder to look upon such a spectacle, as the head of John the Baptist swimming in blood, in a charger? "Give me the head of John the Baptist in a charger!" – as if she had said, I will demonstrate you, that sin can rage in the fairest bosom! I will show you that hell can burn high under all these brilliant trappings and accomplishments!

Ah! my dear hearers, if the spear of Ithuriel, as the poet describes it, could touch many of the distinguished and admired characters that the world looks up to and idolizes, what transformations would take place! what discoveries would be made! what horrors would be disclosed, instead of the charms which are so much admired! How quickly would the enchantment be dissolved! Let us then learn, from the history before us, the real nature and character of those idols for which men sacrifice body, soul and reputation.

5thly. I remark, that such a fact as the beheading of John the Baptist in prison, strongly confirms Christ's declaration with respect to the present world – that it is not our portion; that God has reserved something else for his children. Such a fact is a proof of it, for "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" It is a proof that there is a reversion; that a reward remaineth for the children of God; that this is "not their rest." "If ye were of the world," said our Lord, "the world would love his own; but because ye are not of the world, but I have

chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you.” And, perhaps, a natural conviction of something like this made the poet say, “This world was made for Caesar!” Verily, it was not made to be the portion of such holy characters as John the Baptist. “Among those that are born of women,” said Christ, “there hath not risen a greater prophet” – a more eminent preacher, a more “burning and shining light,” “than John the Baptist.” Then where, I ask, is this reward? where is the portion of this remarkable character? where is the testimony of the judge? what account can be given of such a matter? Brethren, the account is given. Our Lord himself gave it when he said to his disciples, “Ye are they that have continued with me in my temptations. And I appoint unto you a kingdom, as my Father hath appointed unto me; that ye may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom” – that is your home – that is your rest – that is your reward.

Let us, therefore, from these considerations, cease to wonder when we find men outraging and trampling upon religion; upon justice; upon humanity. Let us not wonder if we even see characters like Herod’s men of war, reviling and mocking Jesus Christ, or, after the example of Herod himself, destroying a man, who, like John the Baptist, stands in the way of his lust. I say, brethren, let us not wonder at these things, for there is a bright and solid reversion for the saints; there is an everlasting recompense; “a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens;” while, with regard to the wicked, however mighty and prosperous, we can say in our day what the Psalmist said in his, “I have seen the wicked in great power, and spreading himself like a green bay-tree; yet he passed away, and lo! he was not; yea, I sought him, but he could not be found.” He was a poor sensual Herod, that “strutted and fretted his hour upon the stage, and then was heard of no more!”

If we look at Herod’s father, who slew the infants, we shall soon see him dying of a loathsome disease; a painful and humbling disease. If we look at his nephew, the Herod that followed, who “killed James, the brother of John, with the sword;” if we look at this Herod, even in all the pomp of his royalty, seated on his throne, and flattered by the multitude, as though he spake like a god, we shall see him smitten down, as in a moment, from the height of his glory, eaten of worms, and giving up the ghost.

It is evident, then, from these facts before us, which show the tyranny of such characters, and what men of God have met with in this world, in endeavouring to recover them from their miserable state; it is evident that there is indeed a reward for the righteous: that there is verily a God who “judgeth in the earth!” In the midst of the alarms and persecutions, by which the wicked seek to terrify and destroy the righteous, the voice of the Lord is heard, saying to his saints: “Fear not, little flock, it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom.” But, “my kingdom is not of this world.” Look forward, therefore, to that which is “incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away;” wait for it, as the Scriptures teach you to wait for it, and you shall not be disappointed in your expectation of attaining it. Brethren, that we may all thus attain it, God of his infinite mercy grant, for Christ’s sake. [G. H. - 1804.]

[December 1905 & January 1906]

## Notes of a Sermon.

By the late REV. CHRISTOPHER MUNRO, Strathy.

“Therefore, behold, I will allure her, and bring her into the wilderness,  
and speak comfortably unto her” – Hosea 2:14.

In the preceding context the Lord through the prophet declares unto Israel their sin in forsaking Him, and in going after idols, and threatens them with chastisement; but after He chastises them, He promises to return, and have mercy on them. The manner in which He is to do this is to allure her, and bring her into the wilderness, and there to speak comfortably to her, or to her heart. This was likely spoken in allusion to the way in which He led them from Egypt to the land of Canaan. He might have led them by a different and far shorter route, but to lead them directly to the promised land was not the way which seemed good to Him. It was after several years of bondage in Egypt, and after forty years of pilgrimage in the wilderness, that He fulfilled his promise to them. Their long abode in the wilderness was owing, not only

to the fact that the full time of the promise being fulfilled was not come, but to their sins, and to His design of teaching them many lessons of which they were yet ignorant, but which were necessary for them to know and practise. This, too, might have been the cause of their long abode in Egypt. They, while enjoying the sunshine of Royal power, might have forgotten the Lord's promise, and have begun to make light of it and of the land of promise, content with Egypt, its people, its customs, and its gods; and so they were left to experience the misery of tyranny and bondage, and see the sin of despising the Lord's promise, and the land He chose out for their inheritance. The fertile plains of the Nile might appear to them much preferable to the hilly country of Judea, and the religion of the Egyptians more desirable than that of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph. Thus they provoked the Lord to chastise them, which He did till their groans came up to Him, whose Throne is in the Heavens, and who in their extremity remembered His grace and truth to the House of Israel. It would appear that men at their best, while here, are not less exposed to danger in prosperity than in adversity; yea, the latter state is more favourable to a life of godliness than the former.

At the time this prophecy was written they had been many generations in the land of Canaan, and after frequent relapses into idolatry and severe rebukes and sore chastisements, they had again gone backward and after idols, and therefore they are threatened with far heavier judgments than any experienced by them since their departure from Egypt. But still He declared unto them that He would not altogether forsake them, nor cast them away, but remember His Covenant to Abraham, and His promises to David and his House. The manner in which He was to do this is indicated here, "I will allure her, and bring her into the wilderness, and there speak comfortably to her," which statement contains a rule, according to which He deals with His Church now, and not only so, but with individual members thereof. God's purpose towards His elect people is to bring them out of an estate of sin and misery and bring them to a state of perfect and glorious salvation through Christ their Redeemer, and each one of them He brings, it may be said, from Egypt to Canaan, through the wilderness, and the way He does this is set before us here, "I will allure her and bring her into the wilderness." In attempting to enlarge a little on the passage, I will speak –

- I. On His alluring her;
- II. On the wilderness through which she is brought; and
- III. Notice the purpose for which He brings her there, viz. – to speak to her heart; and then conclude with some hints by way of application.

I. I am to offer a few hints in the way of explaining the manner in which He brings her into the wilderness, which is by alluring her. To allure is to persuade one by some artful means to follow another. We may here take His leading Israel out of Egypt to the wilderness as an illustration of the manner in which it is effected. If, as hinted, Israel began to forget His Covenant with Abraham, and His promise to give to his seed the land of Canaan; to induce them to leave Egypt, He rendered it a state of hard bondage from which they were at last too willing to escape, and to go forth at the Lord's command, and follow his directions as to the route they should take. And in giving such commands, He declares unto them that He was to bring them to a land flowing with milk and honey, and having so lately seen such wonderful displays of power in their behalf, they, without any hesitation, fled away, or left Egypt, and took, without any doubts or questioning, the way pointed out to them, which led to the wilderness – the great and howling wilderness – through which they were to be led to Canaan.

In the same way, He reveals the sinner's state to him as one of bondage and misery, out of which he cries and groans for deliverance. This He does by opening his eyes to see the real nature of his condition as a sinner, and besides He so deals with him as to embitter all those objects that attracted his attention and entangled his affections, in such a manner as to make

that state tolerable and pleasant to the soul. The effect of this is that the soul is not only willing to be saved from a state of sin and misery, but also to abandon all his idols, to abandon and hate all his former ways, and look upon every created object with which his heart had been carried away, as mere vanity as a portion for his soul. He now looks upon the opinions, customs, and ways of the world as the broad way which leads unto death, and therefore is made willing to abandon them, and join himself to those who walk in the fear of the Lord according to His Word. He makes choice of Christ as his Saviour, of God as his God, of Heaven as his home, of the truth as his rule of faith and practice, of the Holy Ghost as his Comforter and his Teacher. In finding a well-grounded hope here, he rejoices with great joy, and in the ardour of his first love he is ready to follow the Lord whithersoever He leads him. Thus he is allured, he is drawn by loving-kindness and mercy, by Divine power, or by the Holy Ghost working powerfully to him, both to will and to do. In a similar manner He deals with a soul in order to heal him from his backsliding state, sinful and grievous to him, a wretched and miserable condition from which he is willing to be delivered, and from which he is allured and drawn by Divine power, and by the application of the promises of the new Covenant. The blessing and good held forth in these commend themselves unto him as the one thing needful, as the good portion; and, having an additional proof of the emptiness of all other objects as a portion to the soul, he is anew drawn and allured to follow God the Saviour; that is, to believe as He the Lord speaks, to act as He directs, to live as He commands in the Gospel of His Son. This is the will of God, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit; to do His will is, to follow Him and to be content with the disposal of all matters connected with the present life, and look upon all such things not as the chief end of his being, but only as what is necessary for a few short years. When a soul follows the Lord in this way He brings it to the wilderness, on which condition I would now proceed to make a few remarks.

II. This statement is an allusion to the wilderness through which Israel went to Canaan, and is not to be understood as if they went a second time in their history to be brought to it, and were led through it to a place of rest, but as meaning that He would lead them to a state analogous to that in which their forefathers had been in the wilderness of Sinai. It points to their captivity in Babylon and elsewhere, and perhaps also to their dispersed state at the present time.

At present I would confine my remarks to the manner in which this statement may apply to believers in all ages. The soul's state after conversion is often spoken of as a wilderness, or as a journey through a wilderness to the land of promise. Their condition is to be looked upon as a wilderness, not in respect to their outward condition, so much as to their inward feeling or experience, or the Lord's dealings with their soul. The lively joy experienced on the believer's finding a Saviour, and in Him the hope of eternal life, is not as a general rule of long continuance, but in this respect may be compared to the joy and triumph of the Israelites on finding themselves on dry land after passing through the Red Sea, and seeing their oppressors strewn dead on the shore, which was speedily forgotten in the trials that soon occurred. When they found themselves in a wilderness, without bread or water, and could not see how their wants were to be supplied, they murmured and rebelled against Moses, and not only against Moses, but against the Lord. And this temper or spirit manifested itself on various occasions after its first outward outbreak, for, although relief was obtained from that which excited this spirit, yet as soon as a second trial arose, it showed itself again, and thus they continued to behave themselves, until, by many chastisements, they were made willing to obey the Divine commandments. The experience of most believers is parallel to this. Their first transports of joy, of gladness, and of praise, are soon, perhaps, succeeded by trials and temptations, that put their faith, their hope, their patience, to a severe test. They are in circumstances that require all needed for them to come directly from God, just as the Israelites were as to bread, water, guidance, and protection. They could not procure either of



the necessaries of life in the usual manner, and would have perished unless a provision had been made for them in a preternatural manner. Like to this is the case of the believer, who is a spiritually quickened man, and therefore needs spiritual sustenance. He has no stores of this provision in himself, neither can a fellow-creature supply his wants; he must, therefore, depend on Him who is the author of every good and perfect gift. Whilst, however, his state renders it necessary that he should depend on God for all that he needs of spiritual nourishment, he has enough in himself and around him to put to the trial his faith, his hope, and faithfulness to his Lord and Master. He is thus in a wilderness, or his condition here, as compared with the promised rest, is a wilderness. In it he has no abiding city, no rest, no perfect peace, no full enjoyment of God, no uninterrupted communion with the Father and His Son Jesus Christ. In it he is thirsty and hungry and weary and faint. The pools, prepared for the water that descends, prove often dry cisterns. I mean that he often finds the ordinances of grace like dry wells, and like barren trees on which he finds no fruit. He feels himself as a stranger and sojourner; as one unknown, though well-known. If his affections have been entangled by objects, with regard to which he should sit loose, he is either deprived of these, or else they are made bitter to him. He is surrounded with dangers and enemies, against whom he has to be always on his guard, and with whom, sometimes, he has to wage war. All these, on the one hand, try him, and bring to light the evil of his heart, such as unbelief, pride, self-sufficiency, disobedience, and rebellion of spirit, and spiritual idolatry; and, on the other hand, show him his need of pardoning mercy, of renewing and sanctifying grace, of being brought down from his high places, from his self-seeking and self-glory. They are also fitted to impress on him his need of Divine guidance, protection, and living by faith on the Word of God, or on Christ in the Word of promise, in the doctrine of the Gospel of God, of living upon Him and to Him. Thus he is in a wilderness – a dry parched land – but he is not alone.

III. We have mentioned some of the elements that render the condition of believers here like unto a wilderness. We now proceed to notice the end why God brings them into such a condition, and that is in order to speak comfortably to them.

Man in his natural state has no taste or relish for the consolations that are in Christ. His ears are deaf to the voice of God; his heart is hard and insensible to the great things of which God speaks, and his mind is engrossed by carnal considerations, that never entertain any thoughts about Divine and Heavenly things. He is like one with whom a friend would begin a close and intimate conversation, which it was his interest to attend to, but who was so much taken up by some trifling business as that it prevented him from paying any attention to what his friend said. The only way to attract the attention would be to withdraw him from that which so much engrossed him, and take him aside, and then when he was disposed to listen, to tell him the matter of communication. The Lord has thus to withdraw man's heart and affections from created objects, and to dispose him to listen to Him, or to attend to His Word, believe it, and obey it. It is then only that one derives true comfort from the truth. The comforts of Christ are bestowed only on the needy. In Him there is a fulness of consolation sufficient for every one who feels his need of it, and suited to convey comfort under every circumstance in which a believer may be.

The need of comfort arises from various causes, and comfort bestowed, implies sorrow, or grief, or misery, of some kind or other. Some times it is a sense of guilt and wrath in God against sin that distresses the soul, so that the comfort he needs is a sense of pardon. At other times his hope is low, and so he needs its revival in order to be comforted. Sometimes he walks in darkness, and so needs light. At other times a sense of evil dwelling in him makes him sad and wretched; then he needs grace to subdue and resist evil in order to enjoy any relief. Sometimes he mourns over an absent Lord and Saviour; then it is a view of Him as his beloved that can cheer him. At other times his barrenness causes him fear and grief; then it is a revival of the graces of the Spirit that can raise his soul. In this wilderness he also mourns

over a world lying in wickedness, and can only be comforted in this matter by laying hold of God's promise, and submitting to His will as to the manner and time of its accomplishment. Here, also, he learns more and more of the bitterness of a state of absence from God, and sees that nothing can give him relief but communion with Him here, and far more intimate communion with Him above. Thus he is prepared and ripened for being transplanted into the Paradise above, where perfect rest is at last enjoyed. It is God who can speak comfort as to these matters. It is not the wilderness, it is not a sense of its barrenness, of its dangers and trials that does this, but the God of all consolation, whom outward difficulties or inward obstacles cannot prevent from coming near and from speaking to the soul, whom he has prepared for enjoying the consolations that are in Christ. When He speaks it is done; unbelief is silenced, the hardness of heart is melted, and the proud bearing is brought low, even to the dust, and, on the other hand, the wounded spirit and the torn heart are healed. The weak is made strong, the fearful is rendered hopeful and courageous, the halting is made to go forward with steadfastness and increased speed.

In conclusion, I would apply this subject, first in the way of self-examination. Have you come out of Egypt, out of a state of sin and misery? Or, are you still there, at peace with sin and Satan, and his service? Or, have these been made an intolerable bondage to you? "Have you come out to follow Christ? Are you in a wilderness? Are you learning there what you are and what you need? This is God's manner of dealing with His people. It is He that has brought you to this place. Endeavour to attend to the purpose why you are brought. It is first to prove, try, and show you what is in your heart, and then to comfort you, He does this. Then you may look for the spoiling of every creature comfort, and letting you see that true comfort is to be enjoyed in perfect holiness, and fellowship with Himself.

The subject, too, may be improved for comfort or consolation to the poor, weary wanderer. Christ is with her even in this dreary condition, and as it was He who led her there, so He shall lead her out of it. "Who is this that cometh up from the wilderness, leaning on her beloved?" That will be a glorious issue! Christ leading his spouse and coming up from the waste howling wilderness, from Lebanon, from the top of Amana, from the den of lions and leopards, coming home with his long lost one, with her who had been frequently weary, and tossed to and fro – with her whom He found weltering in her blood, ready to perish, now clothed in robes of needlework, and all glorious within, now cleansed from idols and from all sin – about to enter the gates of the New Jerusalem, through which nothing unclean shall enter, and these gates wide opened to admit the bridegroom with his bride. The wonder and glory of this coming up is set before us in that question, "Who is this that cometh up from the wilderness, leaning on her beloved?" Is it she that in the day of her nativity was cast out into the open field, wallowing in her blood, and ready to perish, none to pity, none to help her? It is the very one. Is it she who, after being preserved alive by a miracle of power and love, after being washed and adorned with beautiful garments, and then married to Him, who proved her deliverer; but after that, played the harlot with many lovers? Yes; it is she of whom all this is true. Why did He who is so high, so excellent, so full of majesty and glory, condescend to look on one who is so miserable and low? It was because He was sovereign, and rich in love and grace. Why did He restore her into favour after being guilty of such conduct? It was, because that having espoused her in justice, in righteousness, truth, and loving-kindness, He is unchangeable in His love, in His purpose, in His promise, and so bound by His Covenant of Peace, which must not be broken. O wonder of wonders, to behold such a sight!

"Ye gates lift up your heads on high,  
Ye doors that last for aye,  
Be lifted up that so the King  
Of glory enter may."

Think of this poor, weary, hungry, and thirsty soul, and be concerned to be found in Him, that this may be the outlet to you from a very weary wilderness. Will you come with Him who calls you to arise and come away with Him from a state of sin and bondage and wrath? He will deliver you; and though He will lead you to a wilderness, He will not leave you there, but carry you hence with Him; and won't this be better than to be cast into hell for ever?

[January 1906]

## Notes of a Sermon

By the late REV. DONALD MACDONALD, Shieldaig.

*(Taken by a hearer.)*

“Now when he had left speaking, he said unto Simon, Launch out into the deep,  
and let down your nets for a draught” – Luke 5:4.

When Christ was in the world, He was not fond of being in the company of the rich; He preferred the poor. He worked miracles so as to convince people that He was not only man, but the eternal God.

In this chapter we find Him preaching in a ship to the people who followed Him. After preaching, He came to Peter and told him to launch out into the deep. Simon replied that they had toiled all night and had taken nothing. They had been out in the darkness and were tossed to and fro in the sea. What causes darkness to God's people? The hiding of Christ's face. Darkness is very disagreeable; in the dark you don't know where to put your foot. God's people are sometimes in darkness through backsliding, and they find their hearts cold and far away from God. You find yourself out of a prayerful frame of mind, and then that wild beast, the devil, takes advantage of you. Oh, “be sober, be vigilant, because your adversary, the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour.” There is another beast which tries to devour you and to weaken your hope, and that is unbelief. “The floods have lifted up their waves and made a mighty noise.”

“But yet the Lord that is on high,

Is more of might by far  
Than noise of many waters is,  
Or great sea billows are.”

Christ fed five thousand people with a few loaves and fishes, but when even came, He left His disciples alone. They went into a ship and were toiling in the dark. So with God’s people; often after a glorious deliverance, and after they are ravished with His love, they are left in darkness. God has His own way, and He sends you that to keep you humble and self-denying, and that you may not boast in anything except the Cross of Christ. Peter had been on the sea on this occasion. What sea are God’s people often in? The sea of His wrath, experienced in their souls. Christ came where he was, and the darkness disappeared. When Christ comes to you, He will dispel all your doubts and fears and darkness, and you will be able to say that it was good for you that you were afflicted. Simon complained to Christ that he had toiled all night and had caught nothing. That’s the experience of God’s people when they are in darkness; they toil and try to deny themselves; they toil, trying to get near to God. There is guilt on their conscience, and that brings darkness of a spiritual nature on their souls. They toil, trying to find out if they are converted or not. They toil, searching the Scriptures, trying to get a promise suitable to their case, and when it does not come, they are discouraged. They toil, searching the Word, and are sensible of a hard and filthy heart, and they have this prayer, “Give me a new heart.” You toil, praying that God would give you deliverance from your sad condition, and it is a sad time when you don’t get an answer. You toil, wrestling with Satan, who tries to convince you that you are not in Christ, and tries to drive you to despair. When Christ comes He persuades us to look to “the blood of sprinkling.” “For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.” We toil against unbelief, and often get no encouragement or promise.

“Toiled all night and caught nothing.” You have no tears of repentance; these would be exceedingly precious when wrestling with Him for the pardon of sin. You toil, that you might be favoured with the blessings you enjoyed in past days. You toil to get room in the favour of God. Has God forgotten to be gracious? No. It is wonderful that the Lord has sworn to His people that He will not forsake them. I heard a preacher once say that the Lord Jesus would rather be crucified a second time than that He should lose any of His people.

In the gospel by John chapter 21, verse 6, Jesus commands Peter to cast the net on the right side of the ship. Peter put it on the right side. The soul is like a ship, and it is often in the sea of trial and affliction. Your own folly often brings this on you. Christ taught Simon how to get the fish, and when Christ comes to you, there will be no darkness; you will have abundance of consolation and spiritual comfort. You must put your net on the right side of the ship. The left hand is not so powerful as the right to preserve life when you are in danger. The right hand is faith in exercise. Faith quenched the flames in the fiery furnace. Faith shut the mouths of lions. You must say, “I was all wrong till Christ put me right.” Oh, exert yourselves to get near Christ, to enjoy communion with Him. Go forth in faith, so that His blessing may make you rich.

“The net” is the thoughts, and emptiness, and hungerings, and thirstings after Christ. Oh, lay aside unbelief, doubts, fears, and weakness. “The just shall live by faith.” “Without faith it is impossible to please him.” Job says, “Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him.” And another says, “My flesh and heart doth faint and fail, but God doth fail me never.” You are not safe but when you obey Christ and allow Him to teach you. False professors keep too near the world; they cannot say, “I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ.” Some pant after gold and silver and wealth, and turn their backs on Christ. Oh, take care and don’t follow the world.

“Launch out into *the deep*.” You are in shallow water when you follow God’s people who are in a backsliding condition. You are so fond of money, of riches. “They that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition.” You are in shallow water when you are trying to court the favour and friendship of the rich. Oh, launch out into the deep. The power of the carnal mind is fascinating you, and keeping you in shallow water. Some will not suffer anything for Christ; they would rather the smiles of the world. Do not be content with the hearing of the Word, but be doers of it. Do not be content hearing about Christ, but embrace Him. Launch out into the deep of divine truth. Dr. Love says, “Have you entered through the porch of divine truth, so that you can apprehend the teaching of the Holy Ghost in the truth?” Oh, launch away from the world into the glorious mystery of redemption. “Oh,” says one, “that I might know Christ.” Launch out into the depths of the real knowledge of Jesus Christ. Have you left the shallow water, and the things of time and sense, and those who introduce heresy? Leave them, and launch out into the deep, and it will be profitable for you. Launch into the depths of the deceitfulness of your own heart, and you will pray, “Lord, create in me a clean heart.” “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked.” When a deceitful heart and an old devil meet and attack you, you will find it difficult to get out of their clutches. Watch and pray, lest ye fall into temptation. Launch into the depths of the moral law – the ten commandments – so that you may do your duty to God and man. Launch into the depths of the covenant of grace: “He hath made with me an everlasting covenant.” Launch into the depths of the decrees of God – His eternal purposes.

Peter would not be so successful if he had not obeyed Christ. He let down the net and enclosed a great multitude of fishes. Deny yourself, and with your empty soul, launch out into the deep, and if you are hungering and thirsting, there is provision ready, and grace for the time of need. Launch out into the deep, and you will get an extraordinary measure of the presence of God. If you have launched out into the deep you can say, “The Lord discovered Himself to me.” Oh, it would be a good thing for you if you got something substantial from God. When you are wrestling with God in private, you can ask more boldly, and when Christ’s love is kindled in your heart, you plead that you might see more of His glory. Try and get nearer access to God in prayer, so that you may enjoy full communion with Him.

[February 1906]

## Notes of a Sermon

By the REV. JOHN R. MACKAY, M.A., Inverness.

“But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners,  
Christ died for us” – Romans 5:8.

The theme of this verse is an unspeakably great and precious one, the love of God, as it is revealed in the Gospel. What the nature of this love is, God hath found out a way of making conspicuously clear; He hath so ordered all things connected with the Gospel as that His love becomes most impressive and intelligible to us His creatures if so be that we are born and taught of His Spirit. To those who are not born of His Spirit, the love of God must be for ever an enigma – John 3:3.

We shall take up a few things which our text teaches us must receive attention, if we would have a Scriptural view of God’s love, as it is revealed in the Gospel.

I. This love is, on our part, unmerited, and therefore on His part free. How unmerited it is, is here brought out by its being said that it was for sinners Christ died. Christ’s death is everywhere in Scripture given as the greatest possible proof of God’s love to sinners (John 3:16; 1 John 4:10), and thus is it seen that, as it was for sinners Christ died, they were sinners whom God loved. It was His love to sinners that God shewed in the death of Christ.

In order to impress the truth of the freeness of God’s love the more upon us, let us consider what is implied in this word “sinner.”

Sinners are so called because they practise sin, and are defiled with it. Sin is just lawlessness – lawlessness not in regard to the law or will of any temporal king, but in regard to the revealed will of Him who is the King of kings and Lord of lords. God hath required

that every thought, every word, every action of man should lovingly be in submission to that holy and just and good law under which in all these regards He has placed us. But so far have we been, as a race, from this submission that God is not by nature in all our thoughts, and the language of our corrupt nature, whether we express it in words or not, is – “Who is the Lord that I should serve Him?” We set up our own and Satan’s will in opposition to God’s. That cannot but bring misery in its train. God must, as He would not deny Himself, vindicate the claims of His holy law. Now, the marvellous thing is that God’s free love was set upon sinners, who for their rebellion against His law in heart and life deserved to die the second death. For a people in such a case as this, Christ died, and that because God loved them with a free unaccountable love, a love that had its springs in the good pleasure of Jehovah’s will. In order that we may still better apprehend how unmerited this love of God is, we may consider the word “sinners” not intensively only, as we have been doing, but extensively also, by looking at some concrete cases. The Ephesians, to whom the Apostle Paul wrote one of his Epistles, are a case in point. The Ephesian people had for many generations been wandering away from God, sinking deeper and still deeper into idolatry, and were so given over of a just God to greater and still greater wickedness. Were the generation of Ephesians, to whom the Gospel came for the first time in the days of Paul, more worthy of God’s love than the generations that preceded them, and who had been passed over? By no means. The longer they were left without the Gospel the more corrupt in habit they became. But when God’s set time to visit them was fulfilled, not all their idolatry, nor the mountains of their provocations because of corruption, could hinder God’s love, and that because this love is sovereign and unmerited and free. To the praise of the glory of His grace, He finds occasion in the uttermost unworthiness of the objects of His love, to magnify its nature, even its freeness. And thus we read that “God who is rich in mercy, for the great love wherewith He loved” those Ephesians of whom we have been speaking, loving them even when they were dead in sins, quickened the spiritually dead together with Christ, raised them up together with Him, and set them down in heavenly places together with Him. The case of the Romans whom God also visited with His Gospel for the first time in the days of Paul, was not, to begin with, a whit more promising. Is it not evident that those heathens had done nothing to merit this favour? On the contrary, they had set up mountains of provocations between themselves and God, if He were to have any regard at all to worthiness in them as that which should move Him to love them. Christ died for the heathen, He died for idolaters whom the justice of God had been giving over to work all manner of corruption, and Christ died because God loved. And surely we may say, by the way, that this aspect of the nature of God’s love will serve as an encouragement to those who, through the teaching of the Spirit, learn in some measure what are the plagues of their own heart. The Apostle Paul, careful though he had been brought up according to the letter of the law, realised when he got a new heart, that his own bed in which he had lain in his natural state was not more desirable than that in which the Ephesians had so long lain, and we too in the measure in which we shall receive of the Spirit, whereby Paul was taught, will join him in saying – “Among whom we all had our conversation in times past, doing the will of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others.” Well, but be it so. The fact that Christ died for such sinners, is the proof that God loved such sinners, and reveals in a wonderful way, how unmerited on our part, and how free on His part that love is.

Sinners may, in the words of our text, be taken as equivalent to “persons in the state of nature.” That is seen from the circumstance that in the following verse they are contrasted with “the justified.” “Much more then, being now justified by his blood we shall be saved from wrath through him.” “The justified” are in the state of grace; “sinners” are those who are in the state of nature. God’s love then is seen in this, that those for whom Christ died, were people in the state of nature. That does not mean that He did not die for their whole life,

or that their sins after justification demanded not the death of Christ, if they were to be saved from them. But all those sins they owed not to grace, but to nature. Christ found His bride a captive under the law. In the day in which she passed from death to life, all the sins of a life time were forgiven, and that is what constitutes the great difference between those who are in a state of grace, and those who are in a state of nature. The people whom God loved were beheld by Him as in a state of nature, and for this people Christ died. Now, the state of nature is held forth to us in the Scriptures as an exceedingly deplorable one. "There is none righteous, no, not one. . . . Their throat is an open sepulchre . . . Their feet are swift to shed blood." But, in as much as it was for a people of this character that Christ died, it was a people in such a state as this that God loved, and that shews the freeness and the unmerited nature of God's love as revealed in the Gospel. This marvellous love is one of which no account can be given, but that God will have mercy upon whom He will have mercy, and that He will be gracious unto whom He will be gracious.

II. In the second place, we observe that we shall not have a Scriptural view of the love of God unless we regard it as an unspeakably great and self-sacrificing love. Christ's love was a self-sacrificing love. He made Himself of no reputation; He was obedient unto death, even the death of the Cross. Although we cannot fail to have the feeling here that language fails us, we must say that the love of the Father is also a great and self-sacrificing love, and that this is brought out in the declaration of our text, that it was Christ who died for sinners; for Christ was dear to the Father. He loved sinners with a free, unchangeable, unmerited love, but He loved Christ as His own Son with a necessary, eternal and unchangeable love. This love of God to His Son was as necessary as the relations which exist in the incomprehensible unity of the Godhead between the Persons of the Godhead. Christ was not *made* a Son; His Sonship is as necessary and eternal as the Fatherhood of the first Person, or as the Divine nature itself. God, who is love, loved His Son with a love as infinite and as necessary as Himself. In Him, as in the second Person, He beheld His own identical nature – in a Person who was His own equal – a Person eternally begotten by Him. This second Person is the object of His eternal and necessary love in the Holy Spirit, even of that "love" which "God is." Nor are we to think that this love experienced any change when the second Person became incarnate; in its own nature this love is necessary, and unchangeable. This love has for its object a Person, and although in the fulness of time this Person assumes a finite nature, that makes no difference in God's love, for the finite nature was taken up into the Person of the Son, and so the love of God to His Son embraced the Person in His two natures. The large number of intimations which the Scriptures give us of God's love to His Son, are places in which that Son is Immanuel, God incarnate – See Matthew 3:17 and 17:5. This infinite and necessary love of God to Christ did not cease when Christ was upon the Cross, and if we should maintain that it did, we would do what in us lay to rob the Cross of its glory. What was it that rendered Abraham's obedience in sacrificing Isaac so great? It was Abraham's love to Isaac. If Abraham's love to Isaac were an indifferent quantity, he might sacrifice Isaac without manifesting much self-sacrifice. But seeing that he loved Isaac so intensely, his love to God was made very manifest, when, at God's command, he shewed himself ready to sacrifice even Isaac. And similarly, we may say with regard to God – what shews the greatness of God's love to sinners is just this, that Christ who died for them was the object of God's intensest, infinite, necessary love. God's free love shines most gloriously upon Calvary, in that it was against the necessary object of His heart's love that, on behalf of sinners, the sword of justice got its command to awake – Zechariah 13:7.

For in setting forth how great and self sacrificing the love of the Father to sinners is, we must regard not only the infinitely worthy and dear-to-God Person of the Son; we must also regard the intensity of the sufferings of that Son. "Christ," says the Apostle, "died for us." He died in our room and stead, as well as for our benefit. Now, what was our desert? What was



the desert of those who had been long dead in trespasses and sins, who had walked after the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, doing the will of the flesh and of the mind? The wrath of God; they were the children of wrath; and all that wrath came upon God's dear Son. God did not lay a burden upon Christ heavier than even He was equal to. He had power to lay down His life, and He had power to raise it up again. He travelled in the greatness of His strength. He spoke in righteousness. He was mighty to save. But the Father did entrust a work to Him which none other could perform; He laid a burden upon Him which none else than He could bear up under.

Hell is the sum total, one might say, of all miseries, and Christ bore our hell, if we are believers in Him. He bore the hell, the wrath deserved by those Ephesians to whom we have been referring; He bore the hell deserved by an innumerable company of people. The Father laid that indescribable burden upon His own dear Son, and in laying it upon Him shewed how great and self-sacrificing was that love of His to sinners, that unmerited love which is the cause of our salvation.

III. Our text holds forth also that this love of God to which sinners owe their salvation is like God Himself, a holy love.

Some people vainly reason, that if God loved sinners before the foundation of the world, there was no reason why Christ should die for those who were loved already. But it was not Christ's death that caused the Father to love sinners; rather it was the Father's love to sinners that provided a Mediator, just as it was His justice which made it necessary that there should be a Mediator between God and sinners, if such as they were to experience all that the love of God implies. There is that in God which demands that only on the basis of satisfaction being given to Divine justice can God's love be experienced by sinners. Hence, God is said to have reconciled us to Himself – not to another, but to Himself – for His justice is just Himself. Now, seeing that God's love to sinners has the death of His dear Son as its channel to sinners, this is because this free love of God is most holy love. The character of God as a God, that delighteth not in iniquity, and that hates ill-doers, underlies all that the Apostle says concerning that manifestation of God's love to sinners which was given in the death of Christ. Through the death of Christ it has come about that the law of God is established when the burden of the guilt of a lifetime is removed from off the sinner, even in the moment in which that sinner closes in with Jesus Christ. God's love, which is shed abroad in the heart by the Holy Ghost, is the love of One the foundations of whose throne are justice and judgment, even when mercy accompanied with faithfulness to His promise goes before His face. In this love mercy and truth meet, righteousness and peace kiss one another. In God's love to sinners through Christ crucified, all the attributes of Jehovah are magnified unspeakably. This glory of God which is seen in the face of Jesus Christ, when it shines in the heart, when it is apprehended truly, is itself eternal life. It is because of how this glory is revealed and apprehended in heaven, that heaven is that place of light and life and happiness which the Word of God assures us it is.

IV. This love is incompatible with the destruction of its objects. True, He loved sinners, He loved those that were without strength, the ungodly, even enemies, but it was with a purpose, not to leave them for ever enemies, or ungodly. If this love left the ungodly, ungodly for ever, how should the ungodly profit by it? But seeing that He loved sinners with so great a love as to deliver up His Son for them, it cannot be that He should leave them to rot in the flesh, or in spiritual death all the days of their lives here below. In His own good time He quickens them, and enables them to read what was from all eternity in His heart towards them. And assuredly, if this love cannot leave its objects dead in sins for all time, it cannot suffer that those who were quickened together with Christ, and whose sins were forgiven should again fall back into that state of wrath from which they were delivered. "Much more

being justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him. For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled unto God by the death of His Son, much more being reconciled, we shall be saved by His life.”

These then are some of the things which, although they be here touched upon but so superficially, must be attended to by us if we should have a Scriptural view of that love concerning which the psalmist prayed: –

“Remember me, Lord, with that love,  
Which thou to thine dost bear;  
With thy salvation, O my God,  
To visit me draw near.”

that love which God, through His dear Son’s death, for sinners commends.

In conclusion, let me ask, What do we think of this love? Are we being taught that we are sinners, that we do not deserve to be saved, and that, if we shall be saved, we shall owe that salvation to a love that is free, that passeth knowledge, and with which the destruction of its objects is incompatible? God is wont thus to empty those whom He is about to satisfy with the provision of Zion. Would you have an interest in this love, and in the blessings wherein it is revealed? “Whosoever will,” is the Divine announcement, “let him take of the water of life freely.” This provision is certainly suited to the case of each sinner, and none ever longed to have an interest in it, but thereby shewed that this love had prevented him, had sought him ere he sought it. Many are afraid to draw near to God because they find not that in themselves which should commend them to God. But even if our feeling is that we were never born again, let us seek, upon the Divine invitation and warrant, to draw near, remembering that those whom God loved He loved in their natural state, that those for whom Christ died were regarded by Him as a people “under the law.” Then, the light of His countenance, scattering our iniquities, and giving us to realise a rest that passeth knowledge, will intimate in our heart that this salvation is not only suited to our case, but intended for our person.

[March 1906]