

**Aspects of  
Christian  
Character --  
Beatitudes**

**J. Howard B. Masterman**

# Aspects of Christian Character

A Study of the Beatitudes

By J. Howard B. Masterman,

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[Spelling has been Americanized. Roman numerals have been converted to Arabic. Footnotes have been moved into their place of citation.]

## Introduction

This is rather a different book to those which as a rule have been written for our Lenten reading. It is written for the thoughtful layman who has heard the teaching of the Gospel criticized as being Utopian or out of date, and who is honestly grateful to anyone who will show him that, as a matter of fact, it is not only consistent with the highest common sense, but is the secret of the best happiness known to man.

This, in my opinion, the writer most successfully does. He is a man of wide reading and great experience of life, and, although at the first reading what he says on each "blessing" may seem by its very restraint to lack the appeal to devotion which marks many Lenten books, yet the more the thoughtful reader ponders over the terse sentences, packed with thought, the more food he will find on which to feed his devotional life.

The English layman, as a rule, likes to do his devotion for himself. If he can be persuaded that to be "poor in spirit," to be "pure in heart," to be "merciful," to be "mournful," to be "meek" – greatest difficulty of all – to be "hungry," to be "persecuted," and to be a "peacemaker," are reasonable and possible things to be, that indeed to be all this is to be a Christian, and that not at any rate to attempt to be this is to give up the vision which opened out before men at the Incarnation, then he will not want anyone to pray for him; he will pray for himself in his own words; he will aim at this ideal which has now been shown to be *his* ideal, and he will set his face once again towards the mountains and step by step, in his dull, plodding but effective English way, begin the ascent again.

This is what I hope will be the effect of reading this book upon many laymen and laywomen who may be at this moment rather on the outskirts of the Church. It is a reasoned defense of the sanity of the Christian character, and it is a defense which it will be hard to break through.

Many a wife might give this to her husband this year for his Sunday reading, or it might be given by mothers to their sons at the Universities or in the

Sixth Forms of their Public Schools.

These are days when everything is questioned, and everything is put to the proof. It is our belief that what will shine out white and clear is the attractiveness and consistency of the Christian character, and it is with this belief that we send out this year the *Aspects of Christian Character*.

A. F. London.

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## Preface

When the Bishop allowed me the privilege of writing a book for Lenten reading, the subject of the Beatitudes at once suggested itself to my mind as specially suited to the needs of our time. For, imperative as is the call to the activities of Christian service, our power to serve effectively depends on our willingness to sit at the Master's feet as learners in His school. In an age of moral confusion, when idealism is baffled by the inertia of convention and the complexity of economic and political problems, there is an imperative call to all Christian men and women to think out prayerfully and earnestly the ethical implications of their Creed. The Resolutions of the Lambeth Conference of last year have set before Church people an inspiring program of Christian service; but before we can hope to assert the supremacy of the Christian law in the public life of the community, our own lives must be lifted to a higher standard. As Churchmen, we are bound to conform to the rules of conduct imposed on us by the society to which we belong; but our obedience has moral value only in as far as it is the expression of an ideal that we have made our own.

In the Beatitudes Jesus answered, once for all, the question that men are

still asking today, What is the kind of life that is best worth living? If our study of them strengthens the conviction that His ethical ideal is at once the noblest and the most practical ever offered to men, we shall be encouraged to face whatever sacrifice may be involved in a more wholehearted effort so to live that Christ may approve our lives; while the recognition of our failure to exhibit the Christian character in all the fullness of its strength and beauty will reawaken the sense of dependence, without which the Christian life must remain forever impossible. We still need St. Augustine's prayer, "Give what thou commandest, and command what thou wilt."

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### I – The Ethics of Jesus

Come back with me to the first of all,  
Let us lean and love it over again,  
Let us now forget and now recall,  
Break the rosary in a pearly rain,  
And gather what we let fall.  
Browning.

Should we be threatened with doubts as to what Jesus meant, we must steep ourselves again and again in the Beatitudes of the Sermon on the Mount. They contain His ethics and His religion, united at the root, and freed from all external and particularistic elements. – Harnack.

It is generally agreed among those who hold that Christianity has failed that the failure has been on its ethical side. Nietzsche's attack on the moral teaching of Jesus has not perverted the vast majority of men from the conviction that in that teaching there is offered to the world the highest moral ideal. We are impeached, not for presenting to men an inadequate ethical standard, but for not practicing what we preach. Indeed, it was Jesus Himself who first warned His disciples that orthodoxy without moral effort was valueless. It is no doubt true that our age needs the restatement of Christian doctrine, but it needs much more the reassertion of the ethical principles of Jesus. For the same process that buried the Law under a vast superstructure of glosses and interpretations, till the word of God was made of none effect by the traditions of men, has concealed the simple grandeur of the ethical teaching of Jesus under a complicated system of compromises and casuistry. Yet under the accumulated debris of centuries the foundations of the temple still remain; the original script is still faintly visible through the comment of the scribes. It is true of Christian ethics, as of Christian

doctrine, that men have built on the foundation gold, silver, precious stones; wood, hay, stubble. And the crisis of human history through which we are passing is testing, as by fire, the superstructure that we have built.

It is too soon as yet to say how the war has affected the attitude of the world towards the moral claims of Christianity. The depreciation of the moral currency of which we are all conscious may be only a temporary ethical exhaustion following on the long strain; but, on the other hand, it may represent a more far-reaching repudiation of the ethical standards of Christianity, not as undesirable, but as impracticable.

Any attempt to reassert the moral teaching of Jesus is certain to involve two consequences. In the first place, we shall find that the real difficulty of our religion lies in its moral rather than in its doctrinal side. It is far easier, for most men, to believe all the articles of the Christian faith than to be meek and merciful and pure in heart. "If ye know these things," Jesus told His disciples, "ye are blessed if ye do them." And, in the second place, we shall find the moral claims of the Christian faith not less an offence than its dogmas. "The very last things that will attract is a Christianity with the supernatural left out and all the old moral ideals intact." [Dr. Figgis, *The Will to Freedom*.] The opposition will probably come from a different quarter, but it will be more vigorous and unrelenting, for while doctrinal controversies seem to leave the practical affairs of life unaffected, the moral challenge of Jesus strikes at the heart of the social and economic life of men and demands of every man an answer to the question, Are you for the Kingdom of God or against it?

It is true that the ethics of Jesus have worked like leaven in human society, and have affected the conduct of men far beyond the confines of the Christian Church. The whole world has become Christianized to an extent that we sometimes fail to recognize, and in as far as this is true, the penalty that the follower of Jesus must pay has become less severe; but the kingdoms of the world are not yet the kingdoms of our God and of His Christ, and no one has a right to expect that an attempt to live out the Christian ideal will bring comfort and prosperity. Unpopularity is not necessarily an evidence of goodness, yet we still need the warning, "Woe unto you when all men speak well of you."

There are two lines of thought that have tended, in our own time, to make the ethical teaching of Jesus of none effect. The first of these is the tendency to "spiritualize" His teaching till it almost seems as though He did not mean what He said. Because His commands are difficult to obey, we are asked to assume that His language is figurative and metaphorical, and his moral ideal an exotic flower that must be sheltered from the rough winds of actuality.

The attention recently directed to the eschatological aspects of His teaching has brought with it another danger. Jesus, we are told, regarded the end of the age as close at hand. His ethical system was suited to the “little while” that was to intervene before the final catastrophe; it cannot be applied to a condition of society wholly unlike that which He contemplated. What amount of truth is there in this view? Jesus Himself told His disciples that as Son of Man He did not know when the end would be –that they were to live as men who wait for their Lord, at midnight, or at cock-crowing or in the morning. But however long the end might be delayed, for every individual life the time was short. His teaching was not an *interimsethik* in a permanent world, but an appeal to permanent ethical standards in a world that, for every individual, was passing away.

One more preliminary question needs to be considered. The conditions of the society in which Jesus lived and taught were far simpler than those of our own time. The complications of modern commerce, the social problems involved in the growth of great industrial communities, the moral issues involved in international relationships, make the application of the ethical teaching of Jesus extraordinarily difficult. The moral foundations of Wordsworth’s life were overturned for a time when he passed from the simple moral ideals of the Cumberland dalesmen to the “sorrow barracadoed evermore within the walls of cities.” Can we hope for any better fate if we attempt to translate the Beatitudes of Jesus into terms of modern life? The challenge is fundamental. Unless the moral ideals of Jesus are as valid today as when first they were spoken, Christianity is not what it claims to be, and we must turn wearily to the task of building up an ethical ideal with only self-interest and expediency to guide us. From this dreary alternative of a world passing into the shadow of disillusionment we can escape only by coming back to the guarantee that lies behind the teaching of Jesus, the life that lived out His moral ideal

In loveliness of perfect deeds

More strong than all poetic thought.

The earliest summary of the ethics of Jesus is given in the Beatitudes that open the Sermon on the Mount in St. Matthew’s Gospel. Before we consider the conduct of the children of the Kingdom, we are invited to study their character. We are to consider these in detail in succeeding chapters, but before doing so it may be well to say something about the way in which they illustrate the character of our Lord’s ethical teaching. The first feature of His teaching which impressed itself on His hearers was its assertion of independent authority. His

precepts were not founded on argument, or on appeals to the authority of the great moral teachers of the past. He assumed that the conscience of men of goodwill would respond to the truth that He presented to them. This claim to independent authority was shown in His treatment of the Mosaic law. It is difficult for us to realize what men who had been taught to believe that every detail of the Law was directly given by God must have felt as they heard Jesus claiming the right to supplement or supersede it with His “but I say unto you.” He accepted the foundation principles of the Law – love to God and our neighbour – as unquestionably the expression of the will of God, but the attempt to construct an ethical code in the form of explicit commandments altogether failed to satisfy His moral instinct. In a community where the tribal or civic consciousness is more strongly developed than the individual and personal, it is of supreme importance that men should be compelled to act rightly. But Jesus refused to dissociate action from motive. Yet He was no moral anarchist, setting men free from all external regulation to follow the guidance of impulse. While relaxing the stringency of ceremonial observance, He claimed for the moral law a more absolute authority than it had claimed for itself. In regard to marriage, oaths, the duty of forgiveness, He swept away the qualifications of the older law as concessions to an imperfectly developed moral consciousness. The “inwardness” of the teaching of Jesus was balanced by the recognition of an absolute ethical standard of which the law of the Old Testament was a real, though imperfect, expression.

It was in the prophets rather than in the Law that He found the framework for His ethical teaching. For while the Law looked back to the ideals of the past and the things that our fathers have told us, the prophets looked for the fruition of their hopes in the future, when the mountain of the Lord’s house should be established in the top of the mountains. Apocalyptic literature gathered all the hopes of the prophets into the one phrase “the Kingdom of God”. Very various were the interpretations given to the conception of the Kingdom. In the centuries immediately before the Christian era it tended to become narrowly national and sometimes almost grotesquely materialistic. It became the refuge of the moral despair that saw no destiny before the existing world order but destruction. Yet it never wholly lost its ethical character, and on the lips of Jesus it became once more what it had been in the teaching of the earlier prophets, the name for a world order yet to be realized, in which righteousness should be the natural expression of a transformed character.

The idea of the Kingdom of God, built up within this prophetic framework,

was at once individual and social. A kingdom founded on character must find its earliest realization in the life of the individual. A kingdom superimposed on an unwilling or apathetic world could not represent the victory of an ethical ideal. So Jesus took the Apocalyptic idea of a kingdom breaking into the world order, and applied it to the life of the individual. For conversion is always Apocalyptic, since it is the response of the soul to the *Apokalupsis* of God.

Yet the idea of the highest good is not realized in the mere perfecting of the individual. By making the idea of the Kingdom the basis of His ethical teaching, Jesus established Christian ethics on an essentially social foundation.

“The need of a world of men” is implied in every summary of the Christian character that Jesus gave to His disciples. The attempt to realize the idea of the Kingdom in an organized society was an inevitable outcome of His teaching. In so far as the attempt has failed, the failure has been due to the fact that the essentially ethical basis of church membership has been forgotten.

Another aspect of the idea of the Kingdom that Jesus restored was its universality. A Kingdom founded on an ethical basis could not be limited to a privileged class or a privileged nation. So the Kingdom that Jesus preached was a society that would welcome all who accepted its moral ideal. The only qualifications required for admission were repentance – willingness to abandon false standards of conduct – and faith – willingness to accept the status of sonship. Nothing in the ethical teaching of Jesus was more profoundly original than the interpretation that He gave to the impartiality of God. He did not present even virtue as a passport to the Divine favour. God does not love men because they are good, but because they are needy and helpless and hungry. It is not because He loves them less that He sends the rich empty away, but only because love cannot flow freely into unresponsive hearts.

The ethical ideal of Jesus was universal in another sense. The medieval idea of “counsels of perfection” has no place in His teaching. There is one moral standard for all – one way to the blessed life that is open to all who seek it. The application of the moral law will vary with the circumstances of every individual life, but the Christian character is the same, whatever the circumstances of life may be; for it is the character of Jesus Christ Himself, reproduced in those who follow Him. And as it is the same for all men, so it is the same for all times. We constantly hear the demand for a modern gospel, a modern Christology, a modern interpretation of Jesus. But what we really need is not the translation of Christianity into terms of modern life, but the translation of modern life into terms of Christianity. Nothing is more remarkable in the ethical teaching of Jesus than the way in which He disentangled permanent truth from its



contemporary setting. The Beatitudes suited the needs of the simple hearted men to whom they were first spoken; and just for that very reason they suit the needs of simple hearted man of every age. Only it is so hard to be simple hearted – to become as little children that we may enter into the Kingdom of God. According to a well authenticated reading of St. Mark 10:24, the actual words of Jesus were: “Children” – almost the only recorded occasion on which He used this tender word to His disciples [Cf. St. John 13:33. In St. John 21:5 the Greek word is different.] – “how hard it is to enter into the Kingdom of God” – hard, not only for the rich, though specially hard for them, but hard for all, because pride and selfishness and greed enslave and complicate life, and teach men to despise the childlike spirit that Jesus loved.

In yet another way the Beatitudes illustrate the universality of the ethical teaching of Jesus. For they represent, not different ways to the life of blessedness, but different aspects of one ideal of life. Gautama invited his followers to think of life as renunciation; the best of the Stoics were only saved from moral inertia by their conception of public service; but Jesus gathered all the coloured rays of the moral values of the world into the white light of the Christian ideal. His moral teaching was catholic as no other moral teaching had ever been.

Different periods and nations have tried to give expression to aspects of the moral ideal of Jesus. The mendicant Orders tried to show the blessedness of poverty; prerevolutionary Russia thought especially of the blessedness of the meek; modern England recognizes the blessedness of the merciful, and sees the essence of the Christian character in the kindly benevolence that is reluctant to condemn and ready to condone. So men have parted among them the seamless robe of the Master. But the life of blessedness that Jesus offered to men was not a life of moral excellence in some one direction, but a living whole like some perfect work of art from which no part can be detached without marring the perfection of its unity.

The foundation of all His teaching was the essentially ethical character of God. It was this essentially ethical character that He expressed by habitually speaking of God as the Father. The idea of God as an inscrutable despot, whose decrees have no relation to the moral law laid down for His creatures, is a direct contradiction of everything that Jesus taught men about the Father. And the goodness of God is shown in His desire that all His children should be like their Father in the heavens. Jesus Christ never belittled men by contrasting them with God. Knowing in Himself how the Son of God could also be the Son of Man, He

sought to raise all the sons of man to the recognition of their status as sons of God. In the opening clauses of the prayer that He taught His disciples, He summed up the significance of sonship in the three ideas of reverence, loyalty and obedience – reverence that is eager that no dishonour shall be brought on the Name, loyalty that desires the coming of the Kingdom, obedience that sees in the fulfilment of the Father's will the supreme good for which it prays.

The most striking characteristic of His teaching still remains to be considered. It is probably true that much that seems distinctive in His ethical ideas can be paralleled in the teaching of other great moralists. But His teaching was unique not only in the balance and catholicity of His moral ideals, but even more in the intimate relationship between His teaching and His person. The element of personality enters into the work of every teacher; but there is no other body of moral teaching behind which we are conscious, as we are in the moral teaching of Jesus, of the glow of intense personal life. "Never man spake like this man." It was not only that He exhibited in His own life the moral ideal that He taught; it was not only that behind His words lay a calm assurance of knowledge, as of One who shared the intimate secrets of God; it was most of all that He made men feel that the touch of the Eternal had rested for a moment on the fevered life of the world. They might turn from the call of Jesus, like the young ruler, and go away sorrowful, but they knew that the Kingdom of God had come nigh unto them.

Jesus offered to men a new ideal of human character, but He also offered to them the power without which that ideal would have remained forever out of reach. As He draws the outlines of the character of the children of the Kingdom, we feel "the desire of the moth for the star"; but the star that shone in the East as a far off point of light came down and stood over the outhouse where the Holy Child was born. The Christian character is not a natural product but a supernatural gift, not only something that we attain by effort, but also something that we recognize and welcome. It is the Christ in us who lives out still the life that He lived in the days of His flesh, up to the limit that our self-surrender makes possible.

## II – Blessedness

There is in man a higher than love of happiness; he can do without happiness and instead thereof find blessedness. Was it not to preach forth this same Higher that sages and martyrs, the poet and the priest, in all times, have spoken and suffered; bearing testimony, through life and through death, of the Godlike that is in man, and how in the Godlike only has he strength and freedom. – Carlyle.

Blessed are they that shall be in those days; for they shall see the good things of the Lord which he shall bring to pass for the generation that cometh, under the rod of the chastening of the Lord Christ in the fear of his God. – Psalms of Solomon.

A true account of human nature will recognize that it has a power of aiming at something which is different from happiness, and something which may be intelligibly described as higher, and that on the predominance of this higher aim the nobility of life essentially depends. – Lecky.

All ethical teachers are agreed in the assumption that the attainment of the true end of life (if it can be attained) brings happiness. It does not follow that happiness is itself the end that we are to seek. Happiness is rather the symptom of the well-being of an organism that is at unity with itself because it is fulfilling the law of its being. There are various kinds of happiness, as there are various kinds of well-being. A low type of character finds happiness in low pursuits; and the fact that a man is happy does not prove that all is well with him. So the moral teachers of the ancient world were obliged to search for a word that should express the kind of happiness that is ethically desirable, and the Greek word μακάριος (blessed) became the recognized term for the happiness that has moral content and value.

To the Greek dramatists the possibility of attaining to this blessedness seemed remote, for the gods were jealous of men who aspired to share their blessedness, and human well-being rested on a precarious foundation. So the man who would attain to blessedness must walk humbly before the gods and observe with care the ceremonies of worship that they demanded. Hence another name for happiness was ευδαιμωνία (possession by a good spirit). The happiness of outward prosperity was of little worth unless the inner life was in tune with the infinite. ευδαιμωνία was, in the teaching of Socrates, the equivalent to moral excellence – such moral excellence as a man may attain under the conditions of human life. Blessedness is the attribute of the gods alone, and may be shared only by the fortunate few who can tread the difficult path of fellowship with the Divine. Plato carried the thought of blessedness into the higher realms of idealism. Man attains to blessedness by rising above the tyranny of things to the contemplation of the ideal good. Aristotle, treating ethics from the practical standpoint, recognized pleasure as a legitimate outcome of rightly directed energy. But blessedness is to be attained only by transcending the ethical ideas of practical life by the power of contemplation. “The energy of the Deity, as it surpasses all others in blessedness, must be contemplative; and therefore of all human energies that which is nearest to this must be the happiest.” We cannot

follow out the idea of happiness in Stoic and Epicurean philosophy. Stoicism aimed at the attainment of the Supreme Good by rising above the changes and chances of mortal life; while the followers of Epicurus sought for happiness in the harmonious exercise of natural faculties, undisturbed by inordinate desire or unattainable ambitions. "It is impossible," says Epicurus, "to live agreeably without living prudently, decently and uprightly."

Strait was the gate and narrow the way that the Greek philosophers offered to men as a means of attaining to blessedness, and few there were that found it. For the wisdom that could lift a man into the godlike atmosphere in which alone blessedness is possible was beyond the reach of the sinful and the ignorant. The gods had no desire to further the blessedness of men. The citadels of heaven must be won by human effort; no hand reached down to lift men to the Supreme Good that he longed for. Only rarely do we find such a sentence as Plato's, "The gods can never neglect a man who determines to strive earnestly to become just, and by the practice of virtue to grow as much like God as man is permitted to do." Even the Eros of Plato is something far different from the Agape of Christian thought. It is the emotional love that lifts men to God, not the moral love that brings God down to serve and suffer for men.

In the Old Testament blessedness has, from the first, an essentially ethical character, though it is closely associated with material well-being. As the disillusionments of the present threw men's thoughts forward to the idea of the Messianic kingdom, blessedness came to be the special good that the elect people would enjoy in the new Kingdom. "Blessed is he that shall eat bread in the Kingdom of God."

Hebrew thought differed from the Greek philosophers in thinking of blessedness, not as a human attainment but as a Divine gift. And as religion touched more intimately the life of the individual, blessedness becomes, in the Psalms, the name for that fellowship with God in which all human desire is satisfied. "Blessed is the man to whom the Lord imputeth not iniquity"; "blessed is every one that feareth the Lord"; "blessed are they that dwell in Thy house"; "blessed is the man whose strength is in Thee." Blessedness is now independent of all outward circumstances; it is the present possession of the man who has entered into the secret place of the Most High.

It was this word (or perhaps its Aramaic equivalent) that Jesus chose to express the Supreme Good that He came to bring to men. But He swept away all that limited its full significance. Blessedness was no longer represented as a far-off good, to be attained by the wise and prudent; it was no longer a special boon

granted to an elect nation. It was God's gift to the poor, the sorrowful, the hungry. No man need be excluded from life's Supreme Good, for God's great desire is to share His blessedness with all His children. It is not material wealth, nor immunity from sorrow, nor the overcoming of desire, nor high-mindedness (μεγαλοψυχια), nor passionless justice, nor victorious self-assertion, that brings blessedness. It is like the river that flows by the road-side, of which all may drink who will.

And because it is offered freely to all it becomes the expression of a good that is universal. It is not a condition to be realized in the life of the isolated individual. It is as the member of a class, the sharer in a common experience and hope, that men are blessed. *They* shall be comforted; *they* shall inherit the earth; *they* shall see God. So at every stage we are reminded of the essentially social character of the Christian ideal. The blessedness that the Psalmist felt in being alone with God is now the blessedness of a redeemed society, drawn by the love of the Father into the fellowship of a gladness that shineth more and more unto the perfect day.

The Sermon on the Mount represents the Gospel of the Kingdom just emerging from its Jewish sheath. The later ethical teaching of Jesus was developed in the atmosphere of controversy and contention. Disputes about the Sabbath, about ceremonial defilement, about tribute money or divorce, afforded the opportunity for the enunciation of the great ethical principles of the Kingdom. But in the Sermon on the Mount we feel the freshness of the morning of the new world. There is a sunny optimism in the picture that Jesus draws of the life of the children of the Kingdom, a sense of freedom and gladness in the awakened consciousness of a Father in the heavens who loves and cares for all His children. The Sermon is not the sum total of the Christian message; it is – shall we say? – the alphabet that the children must learn before they pass on to deeper things. But because we all need from time to time to be converted and become as little children, it is good to return to the simple outlines of these first sketches of the Christian character as they fell from the lips of Jesus.

At the gateway of the old Law the ten commandments stand like sentries on guard. They tell us of a moral law, hard to keep, dangerous to disobey. At the gateway of the Christian age the Beatitudes stand like white-robed angels, welcoming us into a great society of those whom Jesus has blessed. [Might not the Beatitudes sometimes be substituted for the Commandments in the Holy Communion Service?] Is this all that the Christian life asks of those who would share it?

Yet is it, after all, so easy to attain the blessed life? The moral teaching of

Jesus was never hard to understand, but it was always hard to carry out. In a world that overvalues wealth, we are told of the blessedness of the poor; in a world that is ready to push with side and with shoulder we are told of the blessedness of the meek; in a world full of contest and rivalry we are told of the blessedness of the peacemakers. There is a revolutionary power in these simple sketches of the true ideal of life. The *Magnificat* begins with the same idea of blessedness – “all generations shall call me blessed” – and then the recognition of the holiness and mercy of God passes on to the revolutionary war-song of the new Kingdom – the proud are scattered, potentates are put down from their thrones, the humble are exalted, the hungry are fed. We must not ignore this side of the Beatitudes of Jesus. Blessedness is God’s gift to all who are qualified to receive it. But how can we dare to claim that gift – we who are neither poor in spirit nor pure in heart, who hunger after other things than righteousness, and have forgotten the way of peace? The Christian ideal judges us more sternly than the old law, for it asks, not for outward obedience, but for inward transformation. So Jesus told one who came to ask about the conditions of admission to the life of blessedness, “Except a man is born anew, he cannot see the Kingdom of God.” The power that conquers covetousness and pride, that awakens contrition and mercy and the hunger for righteousness, cometh down from the Father of lights. The Christian ideal must remain for ever unattainable unless we are transformed by the renewal of our minds, that we may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God. The Beatitudes of Jesus are a call to high adventure and the faith that dares to live dangerously that it may live nobly.

The Beatitudes are not, and do not profess to be, a complete catalogue of Christian virtues. Jesus did not undervalue such virtues as courage, honesty, chastity and justice. But every ethical system has recognized these as essential, and the purpose of our Lord’s teaching was to bring into prominence aspects of the Christian character that were liable to be undervalued or forgotten. The “natural” virtues of ancient philosophy are superficial compared with the virtues that Jesus commended. Courage without meekness, justice without mercy, temperance without aspiration, are of little ethical value; and, on the other hand, meekness is only real when it is courageous, mercy is only true when it is just, and hunger after righteousness and purity of heart involve all that is included in the idea of temperance. One great difference between the ethical teaching of Jesus and that of the moral teachers of the Greek world was that while they were chiefly occupied with the relation of the individual to the present, He saw the

present as a training school for the future, and taught His disciples to live as the children of a Kingdom that was yet to be revealed.

The Beatitudes have often been regarded as presenting an ideal of life unsuited to the needs of a world where men must struggle and suffer. We seem to hear in them the ripple of a stream flowing gently through quiet meadows. But under the apparent calm there is a force that can overcome. They are the war cry of a mighty conflict, a challenge to the moral standards of the world. St. Luke recognized this when he set the four Woes against the four Beatitudes. To miss the way to blessedness through love of riches, or low contentment, or careless cheerfulness, or desire for the praises of men is to turn life into a tragedy. Nietzsche only gave expression to a thought vaguely present in the minds of many men when he impeached the slave morality of Jesus. But he was wrong. It needs more courage to be meek than to be arrogant, it needs more strength to be merciful than to be vindictive; self-sacrifice is nobler than self-assertiveness; it is a manlier thing to serve with Jesus than to conquer with Thor.

It is accepted  
The angry defiance,  
The challenge of battle!  
It is accepted,  
But not with the weapons  
Of war that thou wieldest!

Cross against corslet,  
Love against hatred,  
Peace-cry for war-cry!  
Patience is powerful;  
He that o'ercometh  
Hath power o'er the nations!

Stronger than steel  
Is the sword of the Spirit;  
Swifter than arrows  
The light of the truth is,  
Greater than anger  
Is love, and subdueth!

[Longfellow, The Saga of King Olaf.]

It is still true that the Kingdom of heaven suffereth violence and the

violent man taketh it by force. “The unlit lamp and the ungirt loin” are the secret of failure; for the life of blessedness is attained, not by withdrawing into some quiet haven away from the tumult and temptations of the world, but by flinging ourselves with courage into the battle of life. “Blessed is the man that endureth temptation, for when he hath been approved, he shall receive the crown of life.” So the sevenfold picture of the Christian character is followed by an eighth Beatitude. “Blessed are they who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the Kingdom of heaven.” The way of blessedness is also the way of danger; a man must be prepared to sell all that he hath if he wants to make the pearl of great price his own.

But first he must be able to recognize that it is a pearl worth the sacrifice. In the Beatitudes, Jesus describes, in different aspects, the type of character that His disciples are to set before themselves. Discipleship involved the acceptance of the moral ideal that He presented to them. No man need be excluded, however imperfect his attainment, if he keeps the ideal before him as the goal of unceasing moral effort. So Christian baptism is the admission of the individual into a society that has a common ethical ideal; only in as far as we make that ideal our own can we be said to be, in any full sense, members of that society. We become inheritors of the Kingdom of heaven from the moment when we accept the Christian character, as Jesus lived and taught it, as the guiding impulse of our lives. We must abide the challenge of Bishop Brougram’s question: –

Like you this Christianity or not?  
It may be false, but will you wish it true?  
Has it your vote to be so if it can?

### III – The Blessedness of the Poor

The blessing of the Old Testament was prosperity, but the blessing of the New Testament is adversity. – Bacon.

In that condition (humble and rustic life) the elemental passions of the heart find a better soil in which they can attain their maturity; are less under restraint, and speak a plainer and more emphatic language; in that condition our elementary feelings co-exist in a state of greater simplicity; and are more accurately contemplated, and more forcibly communicated. – Wordsworth.

Who are the “poor in spirit” who are commended in this Beatitude? Some commentators, influenced by St. Luke’s version of the Beatitude, have supposed that the words “in spirit” are a later addition designed to “spiritualize” our Lord’s original commendation of poverty. On the other hand, it has been



asserted that Old Testament usage had dissociated the word “poor” from any material associations, and that what our Lord commended here was lowliness of spirit. The truth lies between these two views. In all the other Beatitudes, Jesus is dealing, not with circumstance, but with character. Their whole significance depends on the fact that the characteristics that bring blessedness belong to the inner life, and can be cultivated by any man, whatever his outward circumstances may be. It is therefore almost certain that what our Lord is commending here is not the outward condition of poverty as such, but the attitude of mind and heart that poverty helps to foster. Yet He was certainly thinking of actual poverty, not of spiritual destitution. The idea that happiness is to be found in the accumulation of material possessions, and that the favour of God finds expression in the well-filled basket and store, was the first illusion that Jesus set Himself to correct.

In the Old Testament, we can detect two lines of thought that run parallel for a time. On the one hand there is the idea that outward prosperity is a sign of Divine favour. On the other hand, the poor, afflicted and oppressed, are regarded as under the special care of God. In the later psalms the “poor” are the God-fearing remnant who have learnt through suffering to depend on Him. Their trust would not go unrewarded; the blessings of the Messianic Kingdom would be theirs. “God will show mercy to the poor in the gladness of Israel.” [Psalms of Solomon.] This Hebrew idea was in marked contrast with ordinary Greek thought. “It was not till they were employed to translate the Old Testament ideas of poverty that the Greek words for ‘poor’ and ‘needy’ came to bear an honourable significance.” [Adam Smith, Isaiah.]

“A poor man in the East has not only a hunger for food; he has the hotter hunger for justice the deeper hunger for God. Poverty in itself, without extraneous teaching, develops nobler appetites. The physical becomes the moral pauper; poor in substance, he grows poor in spirit. It was by developing, with the aid of God’s Spirit, this quick conscience and this deep desire for God, which in the East are the very soul of physical poverty, that the Jews advanced to that sense of evangelical poverty of heart, blessed by Jesus in the first of His Beatitudes as the possession of the Kingdom of heaven.” [*Ibid.*]

So in the synagogue of Nazareth Jesus claimed to be the fulfilment of the prediction of Isaiah of one anointed to preach good tidings to the poor. And when the Baptist sent from prison to enquire whether He was in truth the Coming One, His reply was that the prediction was being fulfilled – “the poor have the gospel preached to them.”

Canon Scott Holland points out how, in this Beatitude, Jesus is

pronouncing the verdict of experience. “There is something that He has found in the poor which He could not find elsewhere. There is a certain receptivity, a sensitiveness, a response, which is the peculiarity, the note, which poverty brings with it. The spirit is more on the alert in the poor; it stirs more readily to the touch of God; it is less cumbered, less reluctant, less stupid and stolid and obstructive, than with those who have more of this world’s goods.” [Scott Holland, *Our Neighbours.*]

From the first He found the chief response to His teaching among the poor, on whom the regulations of the law laid an almost intolerable burden. “The man of slender means, the mechanic, the day labourer, especially the peasant, who should venture to make the attempt, must very soon find that such requirements as those concerning the Sabbath and purification bade defiance to the best will.” To such men the yoke of Jesus was easy and His burden light.

Jesus deliberately chose for Himself a life of poverty, and though He imposed no vow of poverty on the inner circle of His disciples, it is noteworthy that when a rich young man was inclined to attach himself to the service, he was bidden, not to bring his wealth with him as a contribution to the cause, but to go and dispossess himself of it before he joined the ranks.

Yet, in itself, poverty does not bring blessedness. It involves restricted opportunities, constant pressure of material needs, anxiety, not for ourselves, but for those who depend on us. The poverty of monastic life was poverty sheltered from most of the disadvantages that make it hard to bear. The men to whom Jesus was speaking earned a precarious livelihood as artisans and fishermen. How could He tell them that poverty was a blessing?

The words “in spirit” give us the answer. Poverty may breed resentment and anxiety, and unfit the soul for blessedness; but it may foster trust and detachment from the overvaluation of material interests. Poverty in spirit does not mean poverty of spirit; it means freedom from the cares and riches and pleasures of this life that choke the word. The man who is poor in spirit is the man who has no desire for the accumulation of material things; who is neither embittered by straitened resources nor elated by great possessions.

Jesus habitually regarded riches not as an object of legitimate ambition, but as a danger to the spiritual life. He saw in the desire for material wealth the evidence of a false estimate of values, and warned His disciples against covetousness on the ground that a man’s life consisteth not in the abundance of the things that he possesseth. An economic system based on the idea that greed is a legitimate incentive to production, and a social system that regards wealth as

a passport to respect and consideration, are in direct antagonism to His teaching.

He taught the supreme value of spiritual things, and told men to lay up for themselves treasures in heaven, since the treasures of earth had no permanent value. The desire for wealth is largely a desire for security. But is security really good for us? The wish to be protected against the changes and chances of mortal life easily passes into the attitude of the rich fool of the parable.

One of the first results of fellowship with Jesus was to create a new indifference to material things. Matthew left all, rose up and followed him; Zacchaeus gave half his goods to the poor; the sons of Zebedee left their boat and their hired servants; St. Paul triumphed in the thought that in the service of Jesus he had suffered the loss of all things.

This indifference to material wealth was no mere affectation. The Hebrew Christians took joyfully the spoiling of their goods, knowing that they had in heaven a better and more enduring substance. And Clement of Alexandria, in his well-known sermon on the rich young ruler, declared that the man who goes on trying to increase without limit, ever on the look out for more, with his head bent downwards, is false to the Christian ideal.

Again, our Lord's standard of valuation of men was based wholly on character. It was a characteristic of the new Kingdom that it would reverse human orders of precedence. There are last that shall be first. The evil of a social system based on wealth is that it estimates men by a wrong standard, and regards that as desirable which Jesus regarded as dangerous. Under such a system the temptation to acquire wealth without too scrupulous a regard for moral considerations is perilously strong.

Then, lastly, our Lord called men into a life of fellowship, and nothing hinders fellowship more than great divergencies of material possessions. We can learn from the Epistle of St. James how early in the history of the Church this obstacle to fellowship began to show itself in the Christian Society; and even the agape associated with Holy Communion became an occasion for vulgar display (see 1 Corinthians 11:21). The class consciousness that we deplore in the labour movement is the outcome of a class-consciousness on the other side. It is very difficult for a rich man to give without a sense of patronage entering into his giving; and patronage is incompatible with the spirit of fellowship.

Are we, then, to regard our Lord's command to the young ruler as a general law of the Kingdom? The teaching of Jesus certainly points to the deliberate acceptance of a simple standard of life as a Christian duty, but great possessions may be a trust from which a man ought not to free himself. The

clearest summary of Christian teaching on the subject is given by St. Paul. "Charge them that are rich in this present world that they be not high-minded, nor have their hope set on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy; that they do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate, laying up in store for themselves a good foundation against the time to come, that they may lay hold on life which is life indeed." [1 Timothy 6:17-19.] For the special danger of wealth is that a man may gain what seems to be the whole world, while he loses his own soul. It is because the man who is poor in spirit is saved from this danger that his is the Kingdom of the heavens. Deliberately refusing to spend his strength in heaping up riches, or in envying those who have gained the wealth that he does not desire, he is set free to seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness. It is one of the paradoxes of the gospel that the Kingdom belongs to the poor. So St. Paul describes the apostles as "having nothing and yet possessing all things." When the sun has set, a vaster universe is revealed to us, invisible by daylight. Is it not often when the sun of earthly prosperity has set that men recognize the Kingdom that had been hidden before?

How can we translate this Beatitude of Jesus into the language of modern thought? The acquisitive instinct is probably the strongest instinct, for good and evil, in the natural man. It has been the motive power of the development of civilization, and of the wars and cruelties that have degraded it. So the first instinct that the children of the Kingdom are to conquer is the instinct that makes getting the main motive of life. God is rich beyond all conceivable estimates of wealth, yet His gladness is in giving. If He receives our gifts, it is not because He needs them, but because love is meaningless if there is nothing that it can give. And in the incarnation He "emptied Himself," giving His whole self that we through His poverty might be made rich. It is when we have emptied ourselves that we are most like God. The artist who has put his whole self into his picture or his poem, that so he may serve mankind; the teacher who has poured all his resources of mind and character into his work; the leader of industry who has contributed his powers of organization and enterprise without hope of reward – all men who have served and suffered, impoverishing themselves for the enrichment of the world – all these are imitators of God, and theirs is the Kingdom of the heavens because the qualification for admission to the Kingdom is likeness to the King.

The objection urged against Socialism is that it would reduce all men to one dead level of poverty, and that inequality of wealth would soon reappear unless the coercive power of the State was exercised to prevent it. No change in

the economic structure of society will by itself deliver a community from evils that are really due to a wrong estimate of values. The first step in any effective attempt at social reconstruction must be to estimate things as God estimates them. The foundations of human society are not economic, but moral. Yet it is true that moral developments will produce economic consequences. If a whole community could be purged of the sin of covetousness, its economic structure would forthwith be changed. The motive for the accumulation of wealth would be gone; the rich man would no longer be counted as an object of envy; men would choose to be poor in order to be free; and only those material things that ministered to the enjoyment of all would seem worth accumulating. The only kind of communism that has any moral value is the communism that is the voluntary expression of a sense of brotherhood. The local attempt at this kind of communism in the Church of Jerusalem was a temporary expedient to meet a special need, but there is no doubt that the early Christian communities accepted a responsibility for the welfare of their members much greater than has ever been the case in later times. The attitude that made this possible is exactly the poverty in spirit that Jesus commended. In the well-known words of Lucian, "Their leader, whom they still adore, had persuaded them that they were all brethren; in compliance with his laws they looked with contempt on all worldly treasures and held everything in common."

It is often said that the Christian duty of almsgiving could not be fulfilled unless there were men of wealth in the Christian society who could give of their abundance to those who have need. But no one who knows anything of the kindness that the poor show to one another can attach much importance to this argument. Almsgiving may mean large subscriptions given by wealthy people, but it also means the widow's mite given to the service of God or the needs of men. We have all learnt to recognize that a Church is stronger when it depends on the small offerings of the many rather than on the larger contributions of the few. Jesus Himself, though He was dependent for support on the contributions of His friends, was accustomed to "give something to the poor" (St. John 13:29). And perhaps it is part of the blessedness of poverty that its alms-giving represents real sacrifice often made in secret with no desire for public recognition or reward. For the Kingdom is given to those who, perhaps unconsciously, serve Christ in serving the least of these, His brethren. "Come, ye blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world."

But if this Beatitude is true, ought we not to aim at creating poverty rather

than relieving it? In answering this question we must distinguish between the poverty that imposes on men a simple standard of life and the actual indigence that makes the pressure of physical need so strong that mind and soul are starved. Extreme poverty and extreme wealth are alike in this, that they lead to an overestimate of the value of material things. The main ground of impeachment of our economic order is not that it does not enable everyone to become rich; but that it is unjust in its apportionment of the rewards of industry. Whether Socialism would afford a better guarantee for justice is a question into which we cannot enter; what is certain is that a redistribution of wealth that would prevent actual destitution and also render impossible the accumulation of great wealth in the hands of individuals would, *if it could be effected*, provide a better soil for the cultivation of moral virtue than the existing economic system. Christian ethics can never accept the doctrine that a man has the right to as much material wealth as he can get without actual dishonesty. Circumstances may involve a man in the responsibility of administering wealth that he has not earned or desired, but the man who deliberately sets himself to accumulate material resources in excess of his legitimate needs is placing his spiritual life in grave danger. For the Christian character is like the plants in our rock gardens that flower best in soil that is not so rich as to discourage them from striking their roots deep into the crevices among the rocks where they find moisture when the surface is dry.

The Kingdom of God is not offered to the poor as compensation for the discomforts of earthly life; it is theirs not because they are poor, but because they are poor in spirit, finding a refuge from anxiety in their childlike trust in the unfailing love of their Father in heaven.

#### IV – The Blessedness of the Sorrowful

The pleasures of each generation evaporate in air; it is their pains that increase the spiritual momentum of the world. – Illingworth.

Christianity, from its foundation in Judaism, has throughout been a religion of sacrifice and sorrow. It has been a religion of blood and tears, and yet of profound happiness to its votaries. The apparent paradox is due to its depth, and to the union of these seemingly diverse roots in love. – Romanes.

“The spirit of the Lord God is upon me; because the Lord hath anointed me to ... comfort all that mourn; to appoint unto them that mourn in Zion, to give them a garland for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness; that they might be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that He might be glorified.” [Isaiah 61:1–3.]

It was probably this passage that our Lord had in mind when He spoke of the blessedness of those who mourned. When the Jewish people had been carried into exile in Babylon, many of them settled down in the land of their captivity and were well content to forget their native country. But there was a faithful remnant who could not sing the Lord's song in a strange land. They clung to the dream of the day when the ransomed of the Lord should return and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads. They mourned, not with the hopeless sorrow of men who despair, but with the sorrow that waits to be turned into joy. And they mourned, not only because they were in exile, but even more because they recognized in their exile the just punishment of a nation's sin. The picture of the faithful servant of Jehovah, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief, bearing the sin of many that he might make intercession for the transgressors, was probably an idealized picture of the God-fearing remnant whose offering of vicarious penitence saved the religious life of the nation from perishing. For that very reason, the words found their complete fulfilment in Jesus. For He was not only the "new man" whose advent opened a fresh chapter of human history; He was also "the Christ," in whom the age-long inheritance of sorrow and hope, the entail of which had passed down through generations of Hebrew history, attained its full significance and value. That one life gathered to itself the whole burden of a world's sin, and in the sanctuary of sorrow offered the vicarious sacrifice of perfect penitence that was the consummation of all the imperfect penitence of the faithful remnant of every age.

The Christian life is meant to be a life of gladness. We entirely misrepresent the character of Jesus when we picture Him as a man habitually depressed and unhappy. He whose greeting to His disciples was so often "Be of good cheer" could not have lacked the note of cheerfulness in His own life. Yet the alienation of the world from His Father cast the shadow of sorrow over His earthly life. He loved men too much to be content that they should go on still in darkness, and as the early enthusiasm of the crowd passed into indifference and then into open hostility, He spoke more often to His disciples of the tragedy that lay before Him.

There is often a note of unreality in the hymns that we sing about being "mourning exiles here," yet the children of the Kingdom have no right to feel at home in a world where the laws of the Kingdom are set at naught. We cannot cherish high ideals without paying the penalty; we cannot believe in a kingdom of love and righteousness without being saddened by the hatred and injustice that hinders the coming of that kingdom. There is a kind of happiness that can be

won by taking the world as we find it. "I have not made the world, and He that made it will guide." But we cannot take refuge in this easy optimism if we believe that the true purpose of our lives is to forward the coming of the Kingdom. In a daring phrase, St. Paul claims to be filling up that which is lacking of the afflictions of Christ for His body's sake, which is the Church. No doubt he was thinking mainly of the sufferings that he endured in his missionary career, but these sufferings were the outcome of a collision of ideals between the Christian preacher and the world order that found the Gospel of the Cross a stumbling block and foolishness.

The sorrow of Jesus was the outcome of His passionate love for men. It flamed into anger against the hypocrisy and injustice – the "wrath and wrong that hinders loving" – that were only the more detestable when they masqueraded under the guise of religion. And behind His love for men lay His deeper love for His Father in heaven, whose purpose of good was hindered by the misrepresentation of His character. His ideal of human life was that men should so act that the Father in heaven might be glorified. When He taught His disciples to pray, "Hallowed be Thy name," He gave them a standard of action as well as a standard of prayer.

We are conscious of "the heavy and the weary weight of all this unintelligible world" in proportion as we share His love for men and His zeal for the glory of God. But in one respect our sorrow is deeper than His. For however heavily the burden of the world's sin lay on His mind and heart, no consciousness of personal failure overshadowed Him. While His outer life was lived in a world of men His secret life was lived wholly in the Kingdom of His Father.

We have no such haven of refuge to which to turn from the disillusionments of life. For when we take refuge in the inner shrine of our own personal being, we find the failure of the world reproduced in ourselves. "When I would do good, evil is present with me." The Christian man knows himself as an exile even in the inner Kingdom of his own personal life. To lose this consciousness of alienation is to lose the hope of achievement. To mourn for the sins of others while we do not mourn for our own is to be caught in the dangerous snare of spiritual pride.

But such mourning is not only the expression of the humility that recognizes its own failure; it is also the expression of the idealism that recognizes its high destiny. "Mourning and sorrow are in reality the acknowledged and felt contradiction of the nature that is in us, to the Divine life



which shall be revealed in us.” Low ideals ask for no tears as the price of their achievement.

Sorrow, then, is inevitable in the Christian life, but is it blessed? Not in itself, but in the result that it produces. It is possible to find a kind of morbid satisfaction in mournfulness, as people sometimes seem to “enjoy ill health”. They that mourn are blessed because their sorrow shall be turned into joy. It is a stage in the journey by which the soul enters into deeper fellowship with God.

In the *Purgatorio*, Dante treats this Beatitude as a warning against the sin of sloth (accidia). “Accidia” is “that low-spirited state of soul which shrinks away sorrowful from the pain and exertion which the struggle to attain spiritual good involves. And the Beatitude is – Blessed are they that mourn over this sadness which makes divine good seem not worthy of the effort to gain it.” [Carroll, *Prisoners of Hope*.] Bishop Paget describes this particular sin as “the dull refusal of the highest aspiration of the moral life; the acceptance of a view of one’s self and of one’s powers which once would have appeared intolerably poor, unworthy, and faint-hearted; an acquiescence in discouragement which reaches the utmost depth of sadness when it ceases to be regretful; a despondency concerning that goodness to which the love of God has called men, and for which His grace can make them strong.” [*The Spirit of Discipline*.]

“They shall be comforted.” The word, like the Greek equivalent (παράκλησις), has a much stronger and more virile meaning than we have come to associate with it. It conveys the idea, not of the soothing of a sick child to sleep, but of the encouraging of the tired soldier to the final effort that will win the battle. God often comforts us, not by changing the circumstances of our lives, but by changing our attitude towards them. He brings in the promise of the future to redress the balance of the present. Sorrow exercises an enfeebling influence on character unless it is made strong by the tonic of hope. As the blessedness of poverty lies in the fact that a life unencumbered with great possessions is better able to recognize its inheritance in the heavens, so the blessedness of sorrow lies in the fact that the light of hope shines clearer when the present is in shadow. Pessimism is the sickness that “destroyeth in the noonday” a generation that seeks its satisfaction in the present. They that mourn are those who recognize that the present has failed to fulfil its promise of good and are all the more certain that God’s last word has not yet been spoken. Though the sorrow of the present lay heavy on the mind of Jesus, it never for a moment (except perhaps at the darkest moment of the crucifixion) clouded the assurance that the future was bright with the certainty of victory.

The poor man is blessed because he is “rich in faith” (St. James 2:5); the

mourner because he is rich in hope (Rom. 8:24).

But on what foundation does this hope rest? No doubt sorrow for the sins of others is one of the strongest motives for social service. Jesus had compassion on the multitude because they were as sheep having no shepherd; he wept over Jerusalem because it did not know the time of its visitation. And this sorrow found expression in the supreme sacrifice when He gave His life a ransom for many. They that mourn are they that serve; there is no blessedness in the sorrow that dare not endure the cross. Yet social service often ends in failure and disappointment. We discover how strongly entrenched the forces of evil are; how inadequate are our resources for achieving any permanent result. We must look for comfort elsewhere; we find it in the sympathy of God. When we mourn for the sins of the world we are sharing the sorrow of our Father in heaven. And the sorrow of God becomes a great passion for redemption; they that mourn are, by that very fact, ranging themselves on God's side; His unconquerable patience is their assurance that

good shall fall

At last – far off – at last, to all,

And every winter change to spring.

In the strength of this consciousness Jesus Christ endured the cross, despising the shame. He endured the cross –He did not evade it. For the heaviness that endures for a night is not less real, even when we know that joy cometh in the morning. Even if we believe that human folly and sin will, in the end, minister to the greater glory of God, we should be less than human, and much less than Christian, if we felt no fellowship with Jesus in His sorrow over a world where truth seems forever on the scaffold, and wrong forever on the throne.

But is not this a morbid view of life? Can we not find refuge in the assurance that “God's in His heaven; all's right with the world”? Yes, if all that we mean by the solidarity of the race is a delusion. But if we are one family, we cannot dwell contentedly in the Father's house while our brother is still feeding swine in the far country. Indeed, is not the sorrow that a good man feels as he looks out on a world where cruelty and injustice and selfish indifference to the common good are only slowly giving place to better things the expression of the grief of the Spirit of God that dwells in him?

The mourning that brings blessedness is the mourning that is the expression of the desire for the establishment on earth of the fellowship for which men were made. There is often an element of selfishness in personal grief,

yet it draws together in the bond of sympathy those who have drifted apart in days of prosperity. How much more closely men ought to be drawn together by the vicarious penitence that does not shrink from the task of bearing the burden of the sins of the world. The fellowship of the Christian society is the fellowship of a common sorrow and a common hope.

The biographer of St. Martin of Tours tells how on one occasion the Evil One appeared to him in royal robes and crowned with a diadem, claiming to be Christ. But the Saint replied that Christ had not promised to return in such guise; “I will not believe that I see the return of Christ until He comes in the same form in which He suffered, and, above all, bears visibly the wounds which He suffered on the cross.” Commenting on this story, Newman says, “Many spirits are abroad, more are issuing from the pit; the credentials which they display are the precious gifts of mind, beauty, richness, depth, originality. Christian, look hard at them with Martin in silence, and ask them for the print of the nails.”

## V – The Blessedness of the Meek

Thy people also shall be all righteous; they shall inherit the land for ever. – Isaiah 60:21.

And for the elect there shall be light and grace and peace; and they shall inherit the land. – Enoch 5:7.

The meek will He guide in judgment, and the meek will He teach His way ... His soul shall dwell at ease, and his seed shall inherit the land. – Psalm 25:9.

The holiness of the meekest of men has its searching fire; for God would not be all-holy if He were not terrible in His devouring fury against sin; and in being holy, He is, of necessity, meek, and long-suffering, and merciful. – Scott Holland.

This Beatitude is practically a quotation from Psalm 37:11. The idea of “inheriting the land” is associated in the history of Israel with the promise of the land of Canaan, given to the seed of Abraham. The failure of the first emigrants to enter in is constantly present in the minds of the prophets and psalmists when they warn the people against the danger of losing their inheritance. “Today, if ye will hear His voice, harden not your hearts, as in the provocation.” What was the cause of that first failure? “They could not enter in,” says the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews, “because of unbelief.”

The root of all their failure was distrust of God. From this sprang discontent and disloyalty. “They thought scorn of that pleasant land.” So, on the borders of the promised land, their courage failed; with the goal in sight they turned back into the wilderness, and left to their little ones the task that God had called them to achieve.

All this helps us to understand the significance of the promise that the

meek shall possess (or rather inherit) the land. [The attempt of some expositors to prove that, in fact, the existing world order is ruled by the meek involves a misinterpretation of the thought of the Beatitude. γη has always a strictly territorial sense; it is the land, not the world order (κόσμος) established upon it. And the idea of inheritance (κληρονομείν) carries the promise into the future. It is the renovated earth (νη καινη of Revelation 21 of which our Lord was speaking.] For meekness is, first of all, a characteristic of the right attitude of men towards God. It was in this sense that Jesus claimed to be “meek and lowly in heart”. The meek man is not the man whose invertebrate feebleness of character rightly makes him an object of contemptuous pity to other men. Meekness is confident dependence on God. It grows out of the recognition of the love and power of God. As we think of the majesty of God, the fact of our own insignificance comes home to us, and we “pour contempt on all our pride”. But as we think of the love of God, our sense of insignificance passes into confidence. Meekness and humility are closely akin; in humility the recognition of our unworthiness is more prominent, in meekness there is a stronger sense of confidence. Meekness is the natural attitude of children to a Father whom they reverence, and on whose love they depend.

The lack of reverence that is a characteristic feature of our time is, in part, a reaction from the conventional ideas of an earlier generation. In as far as it represents a desire to avoid unreality, it may be a necessary stage towards a more real reverence. But it is often the result of lack of imagination, and of an exaggerated self-consciousness. In their desire to shock conventional morality, some modern writers do not hesitate deliberately to debase the coinage of religion. Yet irreverence is always the sign of a shallow mind, and its result is always the overvaluation of self which is the exact opposite of meekness. “Make a man perceive worth, and in its reflection he sees his own relative unworth, and worships thereupon inevitably, not with stiff courtesy, but rejoicingly, passionately, and, best of all, restfully; for the inner capacity of awe and love is infinite in man; and only in finding these, can he find peace.” [Ruskin, *Munera Pulveris*.]

“We live by admiration, hope and love.” As our love to God grows stronger, our sense of awe and wonder must become deeper as we contemplate the all-embracing life of the Father who dwelleth in the light that no man can approach unto. It is only the meek who are capable of worship; and a man incapable of worship is generally incapable of nobility in thought or magnanimity in action. It is the adoring realization of the majesty of God that lifts us out of the egotism that makes life “hideous and arid and vile,” till

Our noisy years seem moments in the being  
Of the Eternal Silence.

The thought of an inheritance reserved for the people of God is familiar in the Epistles. So St. Peter writes of an inheritance that can neither be devastated by war, nor defiled by sin, nor parched by drought, “reserved in heaven for you who are kept by the power of God through faith unto a salvation ready to be revealed at the last time” [1 St. Peter 1:4.] – or, according to Dr. Hort, “when things are at their worst.” In the prospect of this inheritance we rejoice, even though now, for a season, we are in heaviness through manifold testings. The reward of meekness is that, since its trust is in God and not in self or in circumstances, it can enjoy the blessedness of the assurance that its inheritance is secure.

This attitude of trustful dependence on God must be reflected in our relations with other men. The child of God cannot be self-assertive, inconsiderate, discourteous to others. The supreme example of meekness is the character of Jesus, “who, when He was reviled, reviled not again; when He suffered, threatened not, but committed Himself to Him that judgeth righteously.” No desire for vengeance marred the perfect serenity with which He bore wrong done to Himself. But the meekness of Jesus flamed into passionate indignation when the honour of His Father was at stake. The anger of Jesus was only the more terrible because it was “the wrath of the Lamb”. Meekness has nothing to do with the easygoing amiability that often masquerades under its name.

Nor has it anything in common with the contemptuous toleration that springs from indifference. “I strove with none, for none was worth my strife.” Its foundation is confidence in God – such confidence as lifts the soul above fussy self-assertiveness and petty irritations. “Wherefore let them also that suffer according to the will of God commit their souls in well-doing unto a faithful creator.” [1 St. Peter 4:10.] Real meekness is one of the hardest of all the Christian virtues to attain, for the hardest enemy to overcome is self, with its claims to consideration and deference. But God’s aristocracy does not hunger for the praises of men: –

There are, in this loud stunning tide  
Of human care and crime,  
With whom the melodies abide  
Of the everlasting chime,  
Who carry music in their heart  
Through dusky lane and wrangling mart,  
Plying their daily task with busier feet,  
Because their secret souls a holy strain repeat.

[Keble, *Christian Year*.]

Two unfailing characteristics of real meekness are courage and courtesy – courage that dares, if need be, to suffer patiently, and courtesy that will not cause needless suffering to others.

But is meekness possible in a world such as that in which we live? Will not the meek find themselves

Delicate spirits pushed aside

In the hot press of the noontide?

If we never “hit back,” shall we not earn the contempt of men? Yes, if we regard meekness only as a negation of courageous effort. But the doctrine of nonresistance that Tolstoy found in the gospel is not the whole truth of the ethical ideal of Jesus. We are pledged “manfully to fight under His banner against sin, the world and the devil.” And the essence of soldiership is

Self-abnegation, freedom from all fear,

Loyalty to the life’s end.

[Browning, *The Ring and the Book*.]

War lets loose the worst passions of human nature; yet no one who has served in the trenches can have failed to notice the exhibition, sometimes in the most unexpected places, of the qualities of the Christian gentleman – self-forgetfulness, modesty, patience under irritation. Mediaeval Romance loved to contrast the blustering braggart, whose only virtue is his courage, with the gentle knight, whose consciousness of the high service to which he has been consecrated makes him patient under provocation and courteous to all who are in need. So the English word “gentle,” meaning originally, “of noble birth,” comes to mean “possessed of the qualities that noble birth ought to imply.”

Yet meekness is not an easy virtue to practice in a competitive age, in which the survival of the fittest seems sometimes to mean the survival of the least scrupulous. A gentleman may be defined as a man who does not always claim what is due to him; and his conduct will often seem quixotic to those who do not understand that self-respect and meekness are near akin. In this, as in so many other things, our difficulty lies in the fact that we are called to exhibit, in a world still imperfectly Christian, the virtues that belong to the Kingdom of God. In that promised land there will be no place for self-assertiveness and resentment; for the children of the Kingdom have learnt not to be served but to serve, and understand the love that seeketh not her own.

The inheritance is not yet ours, but the Christian Church is the sphere within which, under the imperfect conditions of human life, the children of the

Kingdom may be trained for their citizenship. Does meekness always reign within the Christian society? Are there no contentions still as to who shall be accounted the greatest? Are there no claims to deference that breed resentment when they are disregarded? “Ye know that they which are accounted to rule over the Gentiles lord it over them; and their great ones exercise authority over them. But it is not so among you: but whosoever would become great among you, shall be your servant, and whosoever would be first among you, shall be the bondservant of all.” [St. Mark 10:42–44.] The light that is to shine before men must first be kindled in the fellowship of the Christian society.

No one can study the history of the early controversies within the Christian Church without recognizing how they were complicated by self-assertiveness and personal ambitions; and some of the later schisms in the Church might perhaps have been avoided if St. Paul’s entreaty “by the meekness and gentleness of Christ” had been remembered. Only men who live very near to God can carry on controversy in the spirit of meekness. Yet he who loses the virtue of meekness loses the title-deeds of his inheritance. Even if he gain the whole world, bad is his bargain; for though he may flare through history like a destroying meteor, the quiet stars watch his end; and “the saints of the Most High possess the Kingdom.”

As we think of this Beatitude, we are reminded of the story of the meeting of Augustine with the British bishops, as Bede tells it in his *Ecclesiastical History*. Seven bishops, and many other learned men, had arranged to meet Augustine to consider the question of the cooperation of the British Church with the Roman Mission. They went first to a certain holy and discreet man who was living as a hermit among them, to consult him as to whether they ought, at the preaching of Augustine, to forsake their traditions. He replied, “If he is a man of God, follow him.” “How shall we know?” they asked. He replied, “Our Lord saith, Take My yoke upon you and learn of Me, for I am meek and lowly in heart; if therefore Augustine is meek and lowly in heart, it is to be believed that he has taken upon him the yoke of Christ, and offers the same to you. But if he is stern and haughty, it appears that he is not of God, and you are not to regard his words.” They asked again, “How shall we discern this?” “Arrange,” said the anchorite, “that he may arrive first with his company at the place where the synod is to be held; and if at your approach he rises up to greet you, hear him submissively, being assured that he is the servant of Christ; but if he despises you, and does not rise to greet you, whereas you are more in number, let him also be despised of you.”

They did as he directed, and when Augustine received them sitting in his

chair, they refused to recognize his authority, and the last opportunity for linking the two Churches was lost.

## VI –The Blessedness of the Hungry

Not to man on earth is given  
The ripe fulfilment of desire;—  
Desire of Heaven itself is Heaven,  
Unless the passion faint and tire.  
So upward still, from hope to hope,  
From faith to faith, the soul ascends;  
And who has scaled the ethereal cope  
Where that sublime succession ends?  
Lord Houghton

Thou movest us to delight in Thy praise; for Thou hast made us for Thyself, and our hearts are restless until they rest in Thee. St. Augustine.

Hunger and thirst are often spoken of as almost the worst misfortunes that can befall a man. Yet in themselves they are two natural human instincts, without which it would not be easy to live. Hunger and thirst are a blessing to the man who has food and drink within reach; they are a torment to the traveler lost in the desert with his supplies exhausted. So the blessedness of those who hunger and thirst depends on the assurance that they shall be filled. Physical hunger and thirst are the craving of the human body for the nourishment that it needs. As our nature expands and our needs grow more varied, hunger and thirst cover a wider range of desires. In varying degrees men feel the intellectual craving for knowledge – the food of the mind – like Browning’s Grammarian, who

Soul-hydroptic with a sacred thirst  
Sucked at the flagon,

and, like J. R. Green, “died learning”. Art, too, has its own special “hunger and thirst,” its craving for a beauty that shall satisfy the whole nature of the artist. It is probably true that all the best work of the world has been done by men whose reach has exceeded their grasp, and who aspired to greater things than they achieved.

For our aspirations, rather than our achievements, are the real measure of our character.

All I aspired to be,  
All men ignored in me,



That I was worth to God.

It is what a man hungers and thirsts for that shows what manner of man he is. His acts may be dictated largely by external influences, but his aspirations are his own. That is why prayer is an infallible test of character. For if a man is honest in his prayers, he is telling God what it is for which he hungers and thirsts, and in doing so he is holding up a mirror to his own soul.

What is the highest good for which a man can hunger and thirst? The answer of the psalmist is, God. "My soul is athirst for God, even for the living God." "My soul thirsteth for Thee, my flesh longeth for Thee, in a dry and weary land, where no water is." And the answer of Jesus is the same, for he who hungers after righteousness hungers for God.

To describe adequately the development of the Old Testament idea of righteousness would mean writing the history of Hebrew theology. The word was originally forensic, and since Jehovah was the Judge of Israel the righteous man was the man who by obedience to the law won His approval. When the Holy Spirit, who spake by the prophets, revealed to men more fully the essentially moral character of God, the righteousness of God began to tower, like a snow-clad mountain peak, behind all their ethical teaching. So the righteousness of God became the ground alike of human hope and despair.

The hope of the psalmist is always in the righteousness of God – the eternal justice that cannot allow moral effort to go unrewarded. His prayer is: lead me, judge me, deliver me, quicken me, in Thy righteousness. From the low lands where men struggle and sin he lifts up his eyes unto the hills. Yet this idea of the awful purity and inflexible justice of God had another side. No mere external obedience to rules and regulations could meet the requirements of such a God. "There is none righteous, no not one." This deeper sense of sin found hope only in the thought of the mercy that made the righteousness of God something greater than justice.

So the golden age to which the prophets looked forward was to be an age when righteousness should run down like a mighty stream, and "the work of righteousness shall be peace; and the effect of righteousness, quietness and confidence forever." [Isaiah 32:17.] But the older idea of righteousness as careful observance of external regulations still persisted, and was represented in later Jewish life by the Pharisees. We misjudge the Pharisees when we think of them only as thanking God that they were not as other men were. Many of them, like Saul of Tarsus, or the young man whom Jesus looked upon and loved, were hungering and thirsting after righteousness, though they tried to quench their

thirst at the broken cisterns of the “works of the law”.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus reasserted the higher idea of righteousness that belonged to the teaching of the prophets. He swept away the whole machinery of external regulation, and told men that righteousness meant Godlikeness of character. He told them that the Kingdom of God was an order in which men thought as God thought and behaved as God behaved. The children of God must be like their Father in heaven. “The Kingdom of God and His righteousness” was the supreme good that they must seek before all else; the pearl of great price for which they must be prepared to sell all that they had. He deliberately set before men a standard of life that seemed, and indeed was, impossibly high. Yet in His own life He showed them how the life of God could be lived under human conditions. It is only when we set that life before us in all its beauty and strength that the hunger and thirst after righteousness reawakens in us, and we see the moral ideal as a path of light with God as its end.

This is the only Beatitude in which men are commended, not for what they are but for what they want to be. If Jesus had said, “Blessed are the righteous,” His commendation would not have touched the life of the men to whom He was speaking. For to see far off the shining battlements of a heaven to which we cannot attain is not blessed. But if hunger and thirst are a way of blessedness, it is a way from which no man is excluded. Only the life that has ceased to desire goodness has no place in the Kingdom of God. But we need more than merely a desire for goodness. We hunger and thirst after so many things, and our lives only become effective when we concentrate our efforts on the attainment of what we want most. To hunger and thirst after righteousness means to seek above all other things so to live that God may approve our lives.

“They shall be filled.” It is the same word that is used to translate Psalm 17:15. (“I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with Thy likeness.”) However far above our reach righteousness may seem, the desire for it is a guarantee that it will be ours. For righteousness is both a Divine gift and a human achievement. In Jesus’ use of the word, the forensic sense is hardly present. His purpose was to arouse men from self-satisfaction and moral indolence; to stir the dormant hunger in human hearts for what seemed an unattainable good. It was only when men began to hunger and thirst after righteousness that they became conscious of their own impotence. The Roman philosopher voiced the universal experience of mankind in the sad confession, “I see and approve the better, I do the worse.” It is St. Paul’s confession, “When I would do good, evil is present with me.” Deliverance cannot come from ourselves; only God can transform the inner self

and make us capable of being what we desire to be. This is the real significance of St. Paul's much misunderstood doctrine of justification by faith. It is the assertion, in forensic terms, of the truth that righteousness is a gift bestowed on the undeserving by the free grace of God. God wants men to be good, and He will make them good if they commit their lives to Him. The guarantee that "they shall be filled" is the love of the Father, who gave His Only-begotten Son for the salvation of the world.

We feel we are nothing – for all is Thou and in Thee;  
We feel we are something – that also has come from Thee;  
We know we are nothing – but Thou wilt help us to be.

[Tennyson, *The Human Cry*.]

Yet love itself is baffled by hostility or indifference. Even God cannot make righteous those who do not hunger for the Bread of Life or thirst for the Living Water – who have no consciousness of need. For hunger and thirst are a stimulus to effort, and faith is not a merely passive attitude that waits to be fed; it is the active response of the soul that leaps with glad energy to meet the call of God. In His acts of healing, Jesus generally asked of the sufferer what seemed an impossible effort. To the man with a withered hand, He said, "Stretch forth thy hand"; to the impotent man, "Rise up and walk"; to the leper, "Go and show thyself to the priest" – act as though you were clean. That is always God's way. Faith is no anemic virtue placidly waiting for the good that it seeks. It is the strained effort that wrestles, the strong grasp that holds. "I will not let thee go unless Thou bless me." We must care enough for righteousness to lose our lives if need be rather than fail to gain it. If we are content to remain

Light half-believers of our casual creeds,  
Who never deeply felt or clearly will'd,  
Whose insight never has borne fruit in deeds,  
Whose vague resolves never have been fulfilled,

[Matthew Arnold, *The Scholar Gipsy*.]

then "it shall be as when a hungry man dreameth, and behold he eateth; but he awaketh, and his soul is empty; or as when a thirsty man dreameth, and, behold, he drinketh; but he awaketh, and, behold, he is faint, and his soul hath appetite." [Isaiah 29:8.]

"He hath filled the hungry with good things," because the hungry press in to the feast with the energy that will not be denied. The victor garland is not for the timid and the slothful. "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the

course, I have kept the faith; henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me on that day.”

The fourth Beatitude is a connecting link between the two groups of three that precede and follow. The first three constitute a challenge to the world’s estimate of values. The things that men desire are wealth, enjoyment and independence. But these are not the things that the children of the Kingdom must seek after. They are to seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness. But what is His righteousness? The last three Beatitudes give us the answer. Mercy, purity and peace are aspects of the character of God that must show themselves in the character of those who desire to be called His children.

### VII – The Blessedness of the Merciful

The Lord, a God full of compassion and gracious, slow to anger and plenteous in mercy and truth; keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin; and that will by no means clear the guilty. – Exodus 34:6–7.

O ye kind heavens, azure, beautiful, eternal behind your tempests and time-clouds, is there not pity in store for all? – Carlyle.

Consider this –

That in the course of justice, none of us  
Should see salvation; we do pray for mercy;  
And that same prayer doth teach us all to render  
The deeds of mercy.                      Shakespeare.

No attribute of God is more often referred to in the Old Testament than His mercy. Prophet and psalmist loved to recall the compassion of God, reaching out to all His creatures, caring for their weakness and need. Mercy is too forensic a word to express the idea conveyed by the Hebrew word, which suggests the flowing out of a Divine compassion rather than the remission of a penalty. “Like as a father pitieth his own children, even so is the Lord merciful unto them that fear Him.” No doubt the idea of forgiveness is included in the word, but it includes much more. It expresses the great truth that lies at the foundation of Christianity, that God’s attitude towards every human life is one of sympathy and loving kindness. In the Old Testament, mercy and truth are constantly associated as attributes of God. The words represent the Divine love in two aspects: God “cannot deny Himself”; His will is the expression of a moral law that is absolute and eternal; yet that moral law is also the expression of perfect love and infinite tenderness. In several places the revised version has translated the two words with closer accuracy, by “loving kindness” and “faithfulness”.

Mercy is love in action. Its essential characteristic is that it measures its giving not by the standard of human desert, but by that of human need. In the New Testament, mercy and grace are almost undistinguishable, the main difference being that grace is associated more directly with the fact of the Incarnation. It is, so to speak, mercy raised to a higher power. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ is the mercy of God in terms of its supreme expression.

Human compassion is the evidence that humanity has not wholly lost the image of God in which it was made. Sympathy with weakness and need has sweetened human life at every age, but it was the teaching and example of Jesus that raised it from a flickering impulse to a clear-shining principle of conduct and character. “Become compassionate, even as your Father is compassionate” [The word used here (οικτιρμῶς) is practically a synonym of the word used in the Beatitude.] is St. Luke’s version of the Beatitude. In the verses that follow, four illustrations are given of the way in which mercy shows itself. The first three are successive stages in the exercise of Christian charity. Mercy is unwilling to judge, reluctant to condemn, eager to acquit. And, lastly, mercy loves to give, not in hope of return or gratitude, but as God gives, who “maketh His sun to rise on the evil and on the good.” No one can pass through this world without receiving abundant evidence of the existence of friendliness and sympathy, often dissociated from any avowed religious motive. But Jesus set before men a new standard of loving kindness when He told His disciples to do good to those who hated them and pray for those who despitefully used them and persecuted them. It is a hard saying. We may talk glibly about loving our enemies, but when wrong has been done to us the temptation to “get our own back” is almost irresistibly strong. How can we overcome an instinct that lies so deep in human nature?

Readers of *John Inglesant* will remember the great chapter in which the hero of the story allows the murderer, whom he has tracked down at last, to escape unpunished, and at the Eucharist in the mountain chapel solemnly commits the task of judgment to Christ. The spirit of hatred and the lust for vengeance poison the spiritual life of the man who gives way to them. To hate our enemies is to come down to their level, and obey the law of the Kingdom of Satan in place of the law of the Kingdom of God. We may, and indeed we must, hate the malice and envy that breed enmity between man and man; but to hate our fellowmen is always wrong. So “let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamour and railing be put away from you, with all malice; and be ye kind one to another, tender hearted, forgiving each other, even as God also in Christ forgave you. Be ye therefore imitators of God, as beloved children; and walk in love, even as Christ also loved you.” [Ephesians 4:31; 5:1.] The secret of mercifulness is

the refusal to identify men with the evil that they do. Somewhere under the most repulsive life a soul is struggling like a drowning man in a stagnant pool. Love will reach down, undeterred by the foulness of the water, to rescue the drowning soul. How much of the wrong done by man to man comes within the scope of the prayer of Jesus, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." It is only rarely that a man identifies himself so completely with evil that the wrong he does becomes the expression of his real self. Men are never entirely the victims of circumstances, yet circumstances play a larger part than we are always willing to admit in the evil that men do. "There, but for the grace of God, goes John Bradford." "The vices we condemn in others," says Sir Thomas Browne, "laugh at us within ourselves."

The thought that we shall be judged by the standard of judgment that we have adopted towards others is common in Jewish Rabbinic teaching. "Whosoever is merciful to men to him also is mercy extended from heaven." "Be ye full of mercy one towards the other, and God will be full of mercy towards you." But the mercy that Jesus set before His disciples was wider and deeper than the Rabbinic idea of mercy. To the question, "Who is my neighbour," He answered, "Every man in need whom you meet on the highway of life." Friend or enemy, fellow countryman or alien, Christian or heathen, his claim lies in the fact that God is no respecter of persons, but loves all His children with impartial love. The best comment on this Beatitude is the parable of the unmerciful servant. "He shall have judgment without mercy who showed no mercy." No more solemn warning was ever uttered by Jesus than the declaration, "If ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your heavenly Father forgive you your trespasses."

It is true that forgiveness cannot become fully operative till the offender has ceased to identify himself with the wrong that he has done. Repentance is the dissociation of ourselves from the self that has sinned. The prodigal son "came to himself" when he said "I have no right to be here among the swine troughs; I will arise and go to my Father." The mercy of God does not mean that God forgives men irrespective of their moral condition, but it does mean that He watches for the awakening of the consciousness of sin, that "while he is yet a great way off" He may enfold the returning prodigal in the arms of His forgiving love.

It is this eagerness to forgive that He expects from all His children. The disciple who has learned the blessedness of mercy in the school of Jesus cannot adopt a self-righteous attitude towards other men, or quench the smoking flax of

repentance by suspicion. How much of the influence of Jesus over men was due to His resolute determination to think the best of them. It was the mercy of Jesus that restored the self-respect of St. Peter and turned the unbelief of St. Thomas into triumphant faith. It was the mercy of Jesus that broke the heart of Judas, when he realized what he had done; and it was the mercy of Jesus that turned the hatred of Saul of Tarsus into wondering gratitude and passionate devotion. "For this cause I obtained mercy, because I did it ignorantly in unbelief."

Nothing aroused the indignation of Jesus more than the attempt of the Pharisees to set the precepts of the law above the larger law of mercy, as when they objected to His healing of the sick on the Sabbath Day, or eating with publicans and sinners. "Go ye, and learn what that meaneth, I will have mercy and not sacrifice."

So, on another occasion, He told them, "Ye pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and neglect the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy and faith." Then, lest they should suppose that He was advocating the disregard of the ceremonial of the national religion, He added, "These ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone." Mercy is not the whole of religion. "What doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?" [Micah 6: 8.] If tithe-paying is the expression of this humble walking with God, it is a vital element in the Christian life; but he who walks humbly with His God must remember that to do justly and to love mercy are the necessary conditions of any real fellowship with One whose tender mercy is over all His works.

A little later in the Sermon Jesus gives a series of illustrations of mercy in active operation; and they seem strangely impracticable. "If a man smite thee on one cheek, offer him the other; if he sue thee to take away thy inner garment, let him have thy outer garment too; if he impress thee to go with him a mile, go two." How are we to interpret these commands? The general principle that underlies them is that a merciful man will always want to do more for others than he is compelled to do. He may not always be able to give effect to this desire, but when he is obliged to resist evil or injustice, he will always do so with reluctance. He does not enjoy hitting back, or wrangling in the law courts, or regarding the claims of public service with resentment. [The word used here (*αγγαρεύειν*) refers to impressment for public service. (See Savage, *The Gospel of the Kingdom*, p. 136.)] It may be a public duty to resist outrage, or appeal to the law of the State against injustice. But what the words of Jesus seem to mean is that the element of personal resentment and vindictiveness must not be allowed to influence us. Tolstoy's doctrine of nonresistance is a misinterpretation of the

teaching of Jesus because it fails to recognize that personal inclination must at times give place to public duty. Yet the principle remains true. “Avenge not yourselves, beloved, but give place unto wrath; for it is written, ‘Vengeance belongeth unto Me, I will recompense, saith the Lord.’ But if thy enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink; for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head. Be not overcome of evil but overcome evil with good.” [Romans 12:19–21.] The supreme question for a Christian man must always be, not – How can I “get my own back” from the man who has wronged me? but, How can I win my brother to repent of the wrong that he has done? For mercy knows that successful wrong-doing injures the man who does the wrong far more than it can injure the man who suffers it. Jesus knew who should betray Him, but what He grieved over was not the wrong done to Him, but the shipwreck of a soul that had chosen evil rather than good. “Woe unto that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed.” He accepted the betrayal as included in the purpose of God, yet He yearned to save His friend from the awful doom towards which he was drifting.

### VIII – The Blessedness of the Pure In Heart

Blessed are those who have preserved internal sanctity of soul; who are conscious of no secret deceit; who are the same in act as they are in desire; who conceal no thought, no tendencies of thought from their own conscience; who are faithful and sincere witnesses, before the tribunal of their own judgments, of all that passes within their mind. Such as these shall see God in Nature and in Man himself. – Shelley.

God’s gift of a purity of soul  
That will not take pollution, ermine-like  
Armed from dishonour by its own soft snow.  
Browning

Les purs de coeur sont les simples, les droits, les chastes, qui ne s’arrêtent pas même à la pensée du mal. – Loisy.

If Jesus had said, “Blessed are the pure,” the thoughts of His auditors would have turned to the ceremonial purification that occupied so large a place in the religious life of the time. The idea of “taboo” finds a place in most of the primitive religions of the world. Contact with certain things and people involved exclusion from the tribal worship till some ceremonial of purification had taken place. The Book of Leviticus is largely occupied with the Jewish law of “taboo” and the ceremonial purification of the offender. In the period just before the coming of Christ the scribes had developed an elaborate code of ceremonial acts for the protection of the pious from defilement. On several occasions Jesus came into collision with these traditions of the elders, and on one of these occasions,



when complaints were made that His disciples did not observe the ceremonial washings before meals, He took advantage of the opportunity to lay down a moral proposition that struck at the root of the whole system. Defilement, he told them, was from within; nothing entering in from without could defile a man – so, adds the evangelist, He “made all meats clean”.

In insisting on the entirely ethical character of purity, Jesus was appealing back to the teaching of the great moral leaders of the nation. As soon as the prophets began to recognize the essentially moral character of God’s requirements, it became clear that no merely ceremonial act could cleanse the conscience and heart. The prayer of the psalmist is, “Create in me a clean heart, O God,” and his assurance is that “God is loving unto Israel, even unto such as are of a clean heart.” Jesus swept aside all external “taboos,” and carried His demand for purity behind mere acts to the inner recesses of the character. “As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he.” As He added “in spirit” to the first Beatitude, to show that it was not merely external poverty that was blessed, so here He added “in heart” to show that it was not external purity for which He was asking.

What, then, is purity of heart? The word “pure” means unadulterated. Pure gold is gold without alloy; pure water is water free of “specks of earth”. Yet purity is not a merely negative quality. Pure gold is gold *as it ought to be*; and a pure heart is a heart in which no unnatural impulse of evil is allowed to dwell. The pure in heart are those whose characters are in tune with God. The special characteristic of purity is whole-heartedness. [“The single heart is the same as is here called the pure heart.” St. Augustine. Cp. St. James 4:8.] Yet purity is no cold detachment from evil. “No heart is pure that is not passionate; no virtue is safe that is not enthusiastic.” [Seeley, *Ecce Homo*.] The analogy of physical health will help us. Health is the normal condition of the body, by which it is enabled to resist the attacks of disease. When a man ceases to be “every whit whole,” the germs of disease enter in and dwell there. So purity of heart is the condition that enables a man to withstand the assaults of evil, since there is no traitor within the gates to open them to the enemy.

But in asking for purity of heart, was not Jesus setting an unattainable good before His disciples? Poverty of spirit, meekness, mercifulness – these are in some measure attainable – but who can dare to claim to be pure in heart? Yet it would be strange if this one Beatitude differed from all the rest in asking for the impossible. Purity of heart must in some measure be within our reach even now. We must not too easily despair of ourselves. As the single-eyed man is the man who turns his whole face towards the light, so the single-minded man is the man who turns his whole self towards God. He recognizes every evil impulse as

something alien to his true self; he holds the citadel of his life in trust for the King, and if the enemy breaks in at some unguarded gate, he will never mistake him for an ally or tolerate his presence. It is a little unfortunate that the word “purity” should have come to be associated mainly with victory over the sins of the flesh, for in the teaching of Jesus it had a larger meaning. Pride and censoriousness and covetousness are as unclean as sensuality; every impulse is unclean that brings discord into the inner life.

There is a difference between purity and holiness. Holiness is an attribute of God, since He “cannot be tempted of evil.” In so far as any man is holy, he cannot sin. “He that abideth in him, sinneth not;” “He cannot sin, because he is born of God.” It is possible for a man so to walk with God that certain kinds of evil are, in fact, impossible for him. He has become “partaker of the Divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world by lust.” [2 St. Peter 1:4.] So, even here, we may become in some measure “partakers of His holiness.” [Hebrews 12:10.] But purity is a human attribute; it belongs to the character of the Christian warrior while still beset with enemies; it is like the peace of God that garrisons our hearts and minds. Like Sir Galahad—

My good blade carves the casques of men,  
My tough lance thrusteth sure,  
My strength is as the strength of ten,  
Because my heart is pure—

we overcome evil things only when we are wholehearted in our battle against them. So purity of heart is a condition to be maintained only by ceaseless watchfulness and constant prayer. “Cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of Thy Holy Spirit, that we may perfectly love Thee, and worthily magnify Thy holy name.” Holiness is the goal that still lies before us, the “rest that remaineth” to the people of God when their warfare is accomplished; but purity of heart is the gift that God gives to His soldiers when they go out to the fight, born from above in the laver of regeneration. If they lose it, they must “be converted and become as little children” again, that they may not forfeit their right to the Kingdom of heaven.

In the blessing attached to purity of heart, Jesus carried the idea of the Kingdom to its highest conceivable point. The expression may have been derived from the idea of “seeing the face of the king,” a privilege granted, in an oriental court, only to the most honoured servants (2 Kings 15:19, Jeremiah 52:25, Esther 1:24). To see the king’s face is to be honoured with his confidence. But the thought is wider than this. To see God, in the Old Testament, is regarded

as the supreme good to which a man can attain; yet “there shall no man see Me, and live.” Was Jesus thinking of the confession of Isaiah, “Woe is me for I am undone, for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of Hosts”? How can a man dare to stand before the awful purity of God?

Eternal light! eternal light!  
How pure that soul must be,  
When, placed within Thy searching sight,  
It shrinks not, but with calm delight  
Can live, and look on Thee!

So the vision of God that Jesus promised to the pure in heart belongs to the Kingdom yet to be revealed in its fullness. But, as in the case of all the Beatitudes, the blessedness that is still future throws its light along the path by which the pilgrims are traveling towards the Kingdom. Even now it is true that the pure in heart see God up to the extent to which they are able to bear the sight. Darkly, as in a mirror now, but then face to face.

Nature is a mirror that reveals God, but purity of heart is the necessary qualification for seeing Him there. Science only reveals God to the man who brings to his task the moral character that loves goodness and sincerity. Wordsworth’s message to us all is that the presence of God in the world of Nature is revealed to the simple-hearted, who have not sold their birthright for the mess of pottage that is all that the world will pay for it. But the revelation of God in Nature is incomplete. “The invisible things of Him since the creation of the world are clearly seen, being perceived through the things that are made, even His everlasting power and divinity.” [Romans 1:20.] But the moral character of God is only faintly reflected in the mirror of Nature.

Then there is the mirror of history. It is not only in the history of the Jewish people that the moral law of God finds expression. “England too has a history that is Divine; an Eternal Providence presiding over every step of it, now in sunshine and soft tones, now in thunder and storm, audible to millions of awe-struck valiant hearts in the ages that are gone; guiding England forward to its goal and work.” [Carlyle, *Miscellanies VII.*]

But history reveals God only to those who live in the spirit of the 119th Psalm, making His moral law their delight. The complacency of a Macaulay, the materialism of a Karl Marx, the cynicism of a Gibbon, miss the clue to the interpretation of history. The teaching of Jesus was Apocalyptic in this, that He taught men to see in history the record of the judgments of God.

There is only one mirror in which men may see the whole mind and character of God reflected. “We see the light of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.” “He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father” not only the “Wisdom and Spirit of the Universe,” or the all-ruling Providence that shapes the ends of history, but the Father whose love reaches out to all His children, unsatisfied till they are holy as He is holy. The revelation of God in Christ is a moral, not a metaphysical, revelation. It is hidden from the wise and prudent, and revealed unto babes – simple-hearted men who respond to the moral appeal of the gospel story. The moral compromises in which we involve ourselves dim our power of insight, and the image in the mirror becomes blurred and faint, not because our intellectual powers have failed but because our heart has lost its purity. Doubts that are merely intellectual do not touch the deeper springs of conduct and character; it is the will not to believe that blinds the eyes of the heart so that it cannot see God.

It is possible to attain to a knowledge of God adequate for the purposes of human life here on earth, but the words of Jesus point on to a more direct and immediate knowledge granted to the pure in heart in the Kingdom of their Father, where His servants shall serve Him, and they shall see His face. Mysticism offers the vision of God to the elect few who are able to tread the mystic path to the end; but Jesus promised this final good to all who in the dusty highways of life keep themselves unspotted from the world. It is written of the way of holiness, “There shall not pass on it any that is unclean,” but, “the wayfaring man, yea fools, shall not err therein.” Yet Jesus knew that the type of character that He was setting before His hearers in the Beatitudes was not one that would attract the multitudes. It was a strait gate and a narrow way that He called them to choose.

There are who ask not if thine eye  
Be on them; who in love and truth,  
Where no misgiving is, rely  
Upon the genial sense of youth;  
Glad hearts, without reproach or blot,  
Who do thy work, and know it not.

[Wordsworth, *Ode to Duty*.]

But for most men the wide gate and the broad way prove irresistibly attractive. Only when we recognize that it is leading us away from the City of God do we turn and retrace our steps, asking for the purity of heart that is not afraid to face

difficulty and danger, if only at last we may enter in through the gates unto the City and be satisfied with the vision of God.

### IX – The Blessedness of the Peacemakers

How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of Him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace, that bringeth good tidings of good, that publisheth salvation. – Isaiah 52:7.

If the peacemakers are they who do not contend one with another, but reconcile those that are at strife, they are rightly called sons of God, seeing that this was the chief employment of the Only-begotten Son, to reconcile things separated, to give peace to things at war. – St. John Chrysostom.

The peacemakers are pronounced blessed, they namely who make peace first within their own hearts, then between brethren at variance. For what avails it to make peace between others, while in your own heart are wars of rebellious vices? –St. Jerome.

The Hebrew word for peace is derived from a root meaning “wholeness”. So peace, in the Old Testament, generally means more than the absence of war or civil strife. It is the condition of wellbeing in which men and nations live when they are fulfilling the law of their being. So the usual greeting “Peace be with you” means “may you prosper and be in health” (3 St. John 2). Peace is therefore regarded as a gift of God to the righteous. “The work of righteousness shall be peace; and the effect of righteousness, quietness and confidence for ever.” [Isaiah 32:17.] Among the blessings of the Kingdom of God none is more to be desired than peace. The covenant of God with His people is a covenant of peace, and the title of the ideal King is “the Prince of Peace”. “Of the increase of His government and peace there shall be no end.” So the song of Zacharias proclaims the coming of One who shall “guide our feet into the way of peace”.

Peace is, first of all, a right relation with God. The peace of God, which passeth all understanding, garrisons the hearts and thoughts of those who trust in Him. The great enemy of peace is sin, because sin means alienation from the God of peace. The harmony of the spiritual life is broken, and the civil war that St. Paul describes in Romans 7 begins. Jesus came to reconcile all things to God, “having made peace by the blood of His cross”. He abolished the enmity between Jew and Gentile, creating of the twain one new man, so making peace. He was the great peacemaker, and in this Beatitude He invites all the children of the Kingdom to follow His example. He may have been thinking of the herald on the mountains, bringing the message of peace to Zion. For the highest kind of peacemaking is the preaching of the gospel of reconciliation. God wants to be at peace with you, is the message that every Christian man is charged to deliver. There will never be peace on earth till men recognize and respond to the goodwill of God. The peace of God is the source of all wellbeing; without it, all

the deepest needs of our nature remain unsatisfied. How much of the restlessness of modern life is due to the fact that men have missed the way of peace, and are trying to find in external things the satisfaction that they cannot give.

But peace with God is only possible on terms of unconditional surrender. We entrust our whole selves to God, making His will our will and His service our supreme desire; and so, “being justified by faith, we have peace with God, through our Lord Jesus Christ.” It is the task of the peacemaker to show, by example as well as by word, that all the gladness and glory of life comes through surrender to the purpose of God. Unless we can carry into the common ways of life the atmosphere of peace, we shall preach peace in vain. This Beatitude therefore follows naturally on the last, for purity of heart is the singleness of mind and purpose that gives peace in the inner life; and the man who has entered into that peace is now called to go out and carry the gospel of peace to others.

The peacemaker has another task; for the peace of God must be reflected in the conduct of men to one another. So St. James says, in a remarkable phrase, “The fruit of righteousness is sown in peace for them that make peace.” [St. James 3:17–18.] What He means is that the man who sows peace among men, setting himself against the “bitter jealousy and faction” that lead to “confusion and every evil deed,” shall reap the fruit of his labour in righteousness. Even if his efforts at reconciliation fail, his peace shall return to him again. It is a great mistake to regard peacemaking as an easy thing. Look at the qualifications enumerated by St. James. The wisdom from above – the wisdom that the peacemaker needs – is, first, pure (that is, single-minded, as in the sixth Beatitude); then peaceable; gentle (that is, generous in its judgment, as in the fifth Beatitude); easy to be entreated (that is, meek, as in the third Beatitude); full of mercy and good fruits (that is, its conduct must correspond with its professions); without partiality; without pretense. Who is sufficient for these things?

There are several spheres of activity in which the peacemaker can find work to do. Family life has its discords, and even children need to learn that it is nobler to make peace than to encourage strife. And when we pass to the life of the Church how significant is St. Paul’s constantly reiterated exhortation to the Churches to endeavour to keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace. “Be at peace among yourselves.” “Let the peace of God rule in your hearts.” “God hath called us in peace.” How comes it that a community founded by Him who said “My peace I give unto you,” has throughout its history been distracted and weakened by “wars and fighting”? St. James answers that the spirit of the world has invaded the Church; and, in words that seem an echo of the Beatitudes, he

pleads for the meekness that subjects itself to God; for the purifying of men's hearts; and for the sorrow that mourns over the strife that has banished peace. [St. James 4:8–10.] The humble, the single-minded, the sorrowful, are those who attain to the blessing of the peacemaker. If we could cure ourselves of conceit, of the double-mindedness that seeks our own ends as well as the glory of God, and of the carelessness that finds nothing particular to mourn about in the quarrels that sometimes make our Church life “a byword to the heathen,” we should enter into the blessing of the peacemakers.

The life of the State is another sphere of activity in which the peacemaker finds an opportunity for his work. At any given moment, war may seem to be the only possible solution of a collision of interests or ideals between nations. But the real causes of war are never the immediate circumstances that lead to the actual outbreak of hostilities. They lie much further back, and belong to those false ideals of life that Christianity has not yet been able to destroy. To call the condition in which armed nations watch their frontiers, distrusting the strong and despising the weak, by the name of peace is a misuse of language. Why has the Christian Church failed so completely to make war impossible among nations that profess to accept the Christian ideal? Partly because the Church is at variance within itself and partly because it has been content to wear soft clothing in king's palaces and has sometimes forgotten that “the friendship of the world is enmity against God.”

So the Church has condoned national aggression, the tortuous dishonesties of diplomacy, the oppression of the weak by the strong. It has too often been afraid to suffer the loss of all things and bear the reproach of Christ. But let us beware of the self-complacency that says, “If we had been in the days of our fathers, we should not have been partakers with them.” If many churchmen are trying, by their support of the League of Nations, to build up fresh safeguards against war in the future, the reason is not that we are better than our fathers, but that we have just had a tremendous object lesson as to what war is under modern conditions. For the present, the best security for peace is the recognition that the next war will mean the destruction of civilization; but when we have rebuilt the ruined cities, and when the

Graves, that true love had bathed with tears,  
Are left to heaven's bright rain,

the old illusions will reassert themselves, and Thor will rise again to challenge the empire of Christ. There is no real security for the peace of the world except in the influence of the Christian ideal of the brotherhood of all men in Christ.

Democracy will not help us; for a democratic constitution is no adequate safeguard against the waves of passion and greed that sweep over nations, or against the sterilizing blight of materialism under which all high ideals perish. The only kind of democracy that is safe for the world is Christian democracy, founded not on hatred but on love; not on selfishness but on service; not on rivalry but on fellowship.

The question whether it is possible for a nation to act on Christian principles in dealing with other nations that do not recognize them is too large to enter on here. What is certain is that every Christian man is bound to throw the whole weight of his influence into the scale on the side of the Christianizing of international relations. When war has actually broken out, the soldier may be a truer peacemaker than the “conscientious objector” who refuses to share the sacrifices that other men are making. The peacemaker is not the man who is too proud or too virtuous to fight, but the man who, like Wordsworth’s Happy Warrior,

Is placable – because occasions rise  
So often that demand such sacrifice;  
More skillful in self-knowledge, even more pure,  
As tempted more; more able to endure,  
As more exposed to suffering and distress;  
Thence, also, more alive to tenderness.

“They shall be called the sons of God.” Sonship, in Hebrew thought, generally implies more than mere lineal descent; it includes the idea of resemblance of character. The peaceable man is a “son of peace”; the sympathetic man a “son of consolation”. So Jesus taught that the name “son of God” only belonged in its full meaning to those who are like their Father in heaven. The peacemakers shall be recognized by God as His children because they share His purpose. The promise points on to that future manifestation of the sons of God for which the earnest expectation of creation is waiting; and to the invitation, “Come, ye blessed of My Father, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.” “Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father.”

The Jews thought of the Messianic age as the time when Israel’s privileged position as standing in a filial relationship to God would be vindicated before the world. “In the place where it was said unto them, Ye are not my people, it shall be said unto them, Ye are the sons of the living God.” [Hosea 1:10] But Jesus broke down all national limitations when He promised that the peacemakers



should be called the sons of God. Indeed, He may have had in view the restless nationalism that was perpetually stirring up strife against the Roman authorities; and part of the meaning of the Beatitude may have been an invitation to lay aside merely national ambitions and recognize the larger fellowship of all who were seeking to substitute goodwill for hatred as the basis of international relationships.

But why is the blessing of being acknowledged as sons of God attached to the special characteristic of peacemaking? Was it not because peace was to be the special characteristic of the Kingdom of God? The kingdoms of this world are often the outcome of the acts of the war-makers. But Isaiah foretold a time when “all the armour of the armed man in the tumult, and the garments rolled in blood, shall be for burning, for fuel of fire.” It is not the makers of war, but the makers of peace, who are preparing the way for the Kingdom that shall endure. Of them God will say, “Behold my sons; the men who in lowly places and with humble hearts have sought the way of peace and kept alive the ideal of fellowship.”

The word peacemaker is liable to call up to our minds the picture of a well-meaning but interfering busybody, constantly intrigued about the quarrels of his neighbours. But that is not the kind of peacemaker that Jesus meant. We think of the thorn-crowned figure, fainting under the weight of His cross along the Via Dolorosa that leads to Calvary. The way of peace may be the way of the cross; the cost of peace may be the oblation of life itself. What if peacemaking be the aspect of the Christian character in which we follow most closely in His steps, and share most deeply in His suffering? So we shall be called the sons of God in sharing the glory of His manifestation, when “we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.”

### **X – The Blessedness of the Persecuted**

Humanity, so far as it stands for the just, the noble, the brave, and the true, for those who in any way have crucified, sacrificed, limited themselves for the love of God and for the sake of His Kingdom and of their fellowmen, is a mystical Christ, a collective Logos, a Word or Manifestation of the Father; and every member of that society is in his measure a Christ, or revealer in whom God is made flesh and dwells in our midst. – Tyrrell.

The sevenfold picture of the character of the children of the Kingdom is complete, and as we look back we see how it was His own character that Jesus was setting before His disciples as the ideal after which they were to strive. He might have summed up all the Beatitudes in the one word, “Blessed are all who follow me.” And many, in those early days, rose up gladly to follow. A life that

welcomed poverty and trusted God, and loved mercy and sought for righteousness – surely such a life offered a present good as well as a future blessedness. But before long the early enthusiasm began to wane; the way proved more arduous than men had supposed; contemporary religious opinion frowned on the dangerous laxity of an ethical system that seemed to hold outward forms in small respect. So while the gracious words of the seven Beatitudes were still ringing in men's ears, Jesus added, probably for the first time, the warning that He repeated so often. He who would follow the way must count the cost. It was no bloodless victory that He called men to achieve. Looking back on the history of the chosen people, He told them that the men who kept loyal to God were always a remnant, sometimes an insignificant minority. Their blessedness was not in the applause of men, or in outward prosperity and success. The moral progress of the world had always been won by suffering. Through much tribulation men must enter into the kingdom of God.

It was a current belief among the Jews that the final establishment of the Messianic Kingdom would be preceded by an outbreak of persecution – the “Great Tribulation” – from which the faithful remnant would be delivered by the advent of the Christ. We see traces of this belief in the Book of Revelation, and some commentators have thought that the clauses of the Lord's Prayer, “Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the Evil One,” contain a reference to this idea of a final time of testing. Certainly Jesus never spoke as though there would come a time when it would be an easy thing to be a Christian. His words are a warning against the facile optimism that regards the martyr-robe and the crown of thorns as sacred relics of an age that has passed away.

Dr. Savage describes this Beatitude as gathering up into one terse summary, as the very climax of the whole series of Beatitudes, the prophet's picture of the suffering servant of the Lord. “The consecration of willing sacrificial suffering there depicted; the certain spiritual victory of the victim of secular hatred and wrong; and the glorious retribution of redemption, which outweighs all the shame of rejection by the world; these constitute the deepest insight into the mystery of suffering and injustice which was ever attained under the Old Covenant, and give the most graphic description of persecution for righteousness' sake.” [Dr. Savage, *The Gospel of the Kingdom*.]

In countries like our own, where Christianity has been for long the religion of a considerable proportion of the people, there seems, at first sight, little need for the reassertion of this eighth Beatitude. But every parish priest who is in touch with his people knows how far this is from being the case. When every

allowance has been made for men who bring persecution on themselves by eccentricity or ostentatious self-righteousness, it remains true that a working man who tries to live a Christian life is liable to petty annoyances that often amount to real persecution. And it is a question whether the immunity from persecution that many of us enjoy is not purchased at the cost of a certain lowering of the standard of the Christian ideal. For the moral standard of the Christian man must always be in advance of that of the world in which he lives. While it would be absurd to deny that the ethical standard of the modern world is higher than that of the Roman world in the time of Christ, it is easy to exaggerate the amount of progress that has been made. Crude selfishness and frank brutality lurk like wild beasts in the dark places of modern life. The Russian revolution is a warning to us of the way in which large sections of an apparently Christian nation may suddenly repudiate Christ, and re-enthroned the old gods of lust and violence. Any such repudiation may seem impossible in this country, but where the Christian ideal demands the sacrifice of material advantages, it is always liable to be treated as an impracticable dream, unsuited to the work-a-day world in which we live. There are not wanting signs that the issue between the Christian ideal and the ideals of the world will become more clearly marked in the new age on which we have entered; that men will be obliged to recognize that there is no immunity from the way of the cross for those who would follow Jesus. Our age is infinitely tolerant of differences of opinion, and a man may believe any creed, or none, without any loss of popularity. But toleration tends to break down when ethical principles are at stake, as the uncompromising demand that Jesus made for right conduct ranged against Him, in the end, many who would have tolerated His theological teaching. For the moral teaching of Jesus was a challenge that could not be evaded. The Beatitudes were the gentle overture of a tragedy and a triumph; through the soft chords sounds the note of an age-long struggle against dark forces of evil that, like the fabled dragon, renew their strength when they seem defeated.

We do not gain the Kingdom of Heaven by a morbid craving for unpopularity and public disapproval.

He who crowns himself is not the more  
Royal, or he who mars himself with stripes  
The more partaker of the cross of Christ.

[Mrs. King, *The Disciples*.]

But in social, political and business life, the man who quietly and

resolutely maintains the Christian ideal will often find himself in collision with conventions and compromises that he cannot accept without disloyalty. It may seem an exaggeration to describe the opposition that he will experience by the name of persecution, but the pinpricks of public resentment and private hostility are sometimes harder to bear than “the thrill of the bare limbs bound fast for martyrdom.” A man will sometimes be ready to give his life for a cause and yet hesitate to make much smaller sacrifices.

A religion that cost nothing would have no value as a training of the moral character:—

So, duly, daily, needs provision be  
For keeping the soul’s prowess possible,  
Building new barriers as the old decay,  
Saving us from evasion of life’s proof,  
Putting the question ever, “Does God love,  
And will ye hold that truth against the world?”

[Browning, *A Death in the Desert.*]

“Against the world” – for God is not on the side of the big battalions, and great moral victories are generally won by men who are prepared to “walk uncowed, by fear or favour of the crowd.” The man who is afraid to face unpopularity in the cause of what he believes to be right has not counted the cost of discipleship. Wilberforce, Clarkson, Joseph Sturge, Richard Oastler, Lord Shaftesbury, F. D. Maurice, Mrs., Josephine Butler, and many other men and women in modern England have had to face obloquy and misrepresentation for righteousness’ sake, and have won the causes for which they fought by what they suffered as well as by what they said.

It is the way the Master went.

Should not the servant tread it still?

What matters is that the apathy or open hostility of men should not make us embittered or fanatical. Our safeguard is in remembering that “even hereunto were ye called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example that we should follow His steps.” [St. Peter 2:21.] Like the early disciples, we must learn to rejoice if we are counted worthy to suffer dishonour for the Name, following in the footsteps of Him “Who, for the joy that was set before Him, endured the cross, despising the shame.”

Yet we need St. Peter’s warning. [1 St. Peter 4:15.] Persecution that we bring upon ourselves by lack of courtesy and consideration, or by unwillingness to recognize our own fallibility, is not persecution for righteousness’ sake.

Meekness, mercifulness, purity of heart, and a great desire for peace, are the necessary qualifications for the moral reformer who enlists under the banner of Christ. They will not secure for him immunity from suffering, but they will give him courage to endure without resentment, and grace to sow, in tears if need be, the moral good that other men will reap. The lesson of Jonah and his gourd is one that we all need to learn, lest in our zeal for righteousness our own moral character suffer shipwreck because we have not entered into fellowship with the pity and the patience of God.