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THE BREAKFAST ON THE SHORE.

WHEN Jesus said to Simon, "Thou art Simon, the son of John; thou shalt be called Cephas (which is by interpretation Peter)," the surname, or added name, was a prophecy of his after life; the new name that waited for him, and which his changed character should deserve, in the pentecostal days. In the Gospels he is still "Simon." Instead of being Peter, the rock-man, standing out unmoved amid all the storms of passion and of hate, he is uncertain, weak, "a reed shaken by the wind," all agitated and unnerved by the taunt of a servant-girl. Nay, he has thrice denied the Lord, tossing away his Master on his hot and false words. Yet there is the making of an apostle in him, those granitic materials of strength and sparkle which only need the touch of heavenly fire upon them, and the cooling of heavenly winds, to become set and enduring, a living stone of the new temple. And so, like the scholar with the "turned" lesson, Simon is sent back to Galilee, to receive a new commission in place of the one he has forfeited and lost. It is a repeat in the music of his life, a sort of *da capo* movement, with the same accessories; the same lake shore; the same weathered boat and nets; the same companions with three others added, and the same vain toiling all the night. So far the story is but a repetition of the older scene, now three years ago; but here the unison ends and the "parts" come in variations which are still harmonies with new and deeper meanings.

After the sad scene of the palace yard, Peter retires into comparative seclusion. We see him, it is true, now hastily going out to weep bitterly, and now running with John to the emptied sepulchre: and that Jesus has forgiven him we may gather from the facts that he alone was mentioned by

name in the angelic message (St. Mark xvi. 7), and that Jesus appeared personally to him, giving him a private interview, though what passed between them then we are not permitted to know. But if Jesus has forgiven him, he has not forgiven himself; as if those guilty lips of his were stricken with dumbness, he moves here and there—as far as any record is made—a silent apparition, but the shadow of his former, forward self. Before, he was quick-worded, always the first to speak, and as by common consent generally the spokesman for the rest. But not so now. We hear the words of Cleophas and his companion, of the Magdalene, and of Thomas, who was slow of speech as he was slow of faith, but Peter's voice is hushed. Even when the "eleven" are gathered together—and so Peter must have been one of them—when the two Emmaus travellers return all breathless to them, to tell of the Lord's appearance by the way, Peter has no word; it is the others who tell even his own secret, how "The Lord is risen indeed and hath appeared to Simon" (St. Luke xxiv. 34). And when the Lord Himself appears among them, the denier has no word to say. Like Zacharias, he is stricken with dumbness, stricken by his own bitter grief. The chosen vessel of the Lord, moulded though it has been by the Master's hand, is alas! marred; but a broken—

"Vase of chilling tears,
That grief hath shaken into frost."

But back in Galilee, away from the scene of painful memories, and again breathing his native air, Peter recovers his lost self, and regains his lost position. All the old confidence is given back to him, the confidence of his brethren, and the old leadership is resumed—for some men are born to lead as others are born to follow and be led,—and when he says to his six companions, "I go a-fishing," they say directly, "We also come with thee." Fishing was

not exactly after the bent of Thomas's mind ; and Nathaniel seems to us more at home sitting under his fig tree, than dipping his oar into the lake ; but as they had no plans of their own, nothing definite before them in this interval of waiting, they fall in easily with Peter's plans, allowing themselves to drift out on the current of his impulse. Besides, as the sons of Zebedee are with them, and two others who may have had a sea-training, they have nothing to fear ; and better they should go a-fishing than do nothing. Some expositors have thought that in Peter's blunt and positive words they could detect a halting mind ; and that, impatient at the Master's long delay, he was half inclined to give up the apostleship, and to take up again the old life where it was so abruptly broken, as he attached himself to the person of Jesus. But Peter's language does not of itself imply this. It is rather Peter's way of speaking, with a tinge of hastiness in his words. He has a home to keep up, a wife, if not children ; and why should he not improve these few days of leisure in providing for himself and for his own ? He cannot mean anything more than this, surely, after the bitter lesson of the past few weeks. He has broken for ever with his past ; he has no wish to go back to it. The bridge behind him was all burned up in that one " look " of Jesus, and the charred fragments of it were swept away in the hot flood of tears.

The angel has said, " He goeth *before* you into Galilee "—as if the good Shepherd, who had given His life for the sheep, and now had risen from the dead, was still the same good Shepherd, leading out His flock into new pastures, anticipating all their wants and preparing their way before them. It is a new lesson that they have to learn—that the unseen Christ was to them all that the seen Christ had been, and even more. Hitherto they had walked mainly by sight. The sacred person of the Lord was close by them, visible, tangible ; needing the same earthly supports as

did their own; and so they had only known Christ after the flesh, and by the natural eye alone had they discerned Him. But they must learn to walk by faith. The eyes of their understanding, or rather the eyes of their soul, must be opened by some new "Ephphatha," and they must see Christ with the deeper, higher vision. There would be a "little while" of eclipse and darkness, and then an open vision which need nevermore be overshadowed. The Pentecost, with its filling of the Spirit, would be to them a new Epiphany, when the unseen Christ would be manifest; not as now, localized, shut into one narrow manger, or one circumscribed spot, but as here and there and everywhere in His spiritual but real presence. And this was one meaning of the forty days—the *interregnum* which came between the crucifixion and the ascension. The many appearances of the Lord—all sudden and all brief—were a sort of divine drill; the frequent absence leading them on towards the abiding Presence, accustoming their eyes to the new light, and teaching them to see Him who was invisible. And Jesus *had* gone before them into Galilee. They had come northward, to breathe again their native air, borne on the breath of His word, as the winged seeds are carried on the current of the wind. And was not Peter's sudden impulse to go a-fishing itself a divine interjection cast within his soul from above, as when, once before, the higher will had bade him "Launch forth into the deep"? From the way in which his purpose works out, with its crowning apocalypse by the shore, we may see a mind beyond the mind; and Peter's words are in some sense but an echo of the higher Voice—the Word who is already near them, with them, though they know it not.

Slowly the night had passed, and the stars that were overhead had dropped silently below the horizon of their western hills. But probably the seven fishers would scarcely spare a thought for the stars, for their eyes were

bent steadily and intently on the deep below them. Their little world is swinging round in the zodiac of the *Pisces*. But though they tack about here and there, now throwing out their nets, and now casting their spears, it is a vain, disappointing toil; for when the fourth watch strikes, and the sky crimsons over the hills of Gadara, they have taken nothing. Tired and wet, they are turning homeward, skirting the shore, when a Stranger accosts them from the beach: "Children, have ye any meat?" It is a courteous and very homely way of speaking, and "children" is not perhaps the most happy rendering of the word; it is rather the "my lads" of our colloquial and familiar speech. But the disciples, disappointed and wet through as they are, are in no very courteous mood, and they answer with an abrupt and monosyllabic "No," whose sharp ring had within it a tinge of petulance, as if they were half vexed to be so reminded of their failure. But when the Stranger bids them to cast the net on the right side of the ship, with the promise that they shall find, they do not hesitate. The Stranger probably had seen the shoal; at any rate His words spur on their lagging energies to one venture more, and the nets are let down. Drawing them in, they find enclosed within their meshes a wonderful take. The water teems with life, as the hundred and fifty-three fishes dart and plunge within their narrowing prison. From the narrative it would seem that Peter and John and probably two others were in the ship, or large boat, as we should call it, and that the other three were in the "little ship," or punt, from which the net was paid out. But John and Peter had no eyes for their spoil; they could only see the Stranger who had so accosted and so commanded them; and when John,—the disciple of the swift foot and the quick vision—said, "It is the Lord," Peter lost himself in a delirious joy. Hastily putting on his coat—the garment worn between the inner tunic and the outer robe—he

plunged headlong over the ship's side into the water; and rising again to the surface, and shaking the wet out of his eyes and his tangled hair, he made straight for Jesus, stepping up on the sands all drenched and dripping. The others stayed to secure their large harvest, which they did—much to their wonder—without breaking the net.

Coming to land, they see a “fire of coals there, and fish laid thereon, and bread.” It was not what we should call an out-door fire of hastily gathered weeds and driftwood, but a charcoal fire, which was the usual fire of the hearth and home, and which there was generally burned in a brazier. Is it simply a coincidence, or is it something more, that the only other “fire of coals” mentioned in the New Testament is in St. John xviii. 18, where we read of one in the palace yard, at which Peter stood and warmed himself? *That* “fire of coals” lighted him on his downward path; all his professions and promises were thrown into it, to disappear like the crackling of thorns, or the vapour of smoke: out of that “fire of coals” the viper crept which fastened on his heart, and which, alas! he had not the courage to throw off, but which stung him into a moral paralysis and insensibility. And now Jesus calls him to sit down at *His* “fire of coals” on the sands, and to bring of the fish they have now caught; for what they saw broiling on the fire was but one small fish (St. John seems to emphasize this, drawing a marked distinction between the “great fishes” of *v.* 11 and the diminutive word of *v.* 9), and near the fire one loaf of bread. It is as if Jesus would reproduce the scene of that sad night—at least as far as the altered surroundings would allow; but as Peter responds to the invitation, “Come and breakfast,” and seats himself all wet and cold by the Master's fire, it is with changed companionship and a changed self, for the forward heart has learned humility, and ambition has given place to love. St. John passes over the breakfast in silence, only telling us that Jesus took

His old place as Master and Host, multiplying the bread for His disciples and Himself now, as He did once before for strangers; for when Jesus "taketh bread and giveth them, and fish likewise" (v. 13), it is *the* loaf, and *the* fish (the little one) of v. 9, and not the large fishes which they have just caught.

And now we come to the central scene of the narrative, around which these other incidents group themselves as accessories and approaches. When the breakfast is over Jesus turns to Peter, and startles him with the question, "Simon, son of John, lovest thou Me more than these?" and Peter replies, "Yea, Lord, Thou knowest that I love Thee." A second time Jesus puts the same question, "Simon, son of John, lovest thou Me?" and a second time Peter replies, "Yea, Lord, Thou knowest that I love Thee." Still a third time Jesus puts His question, "Simon, son of John, lovest thou Me?" and Peter, grieved that his word should be taken so doubtingly, that the question should be asked a third time, answers, "Lord, Thou knowest all things, Thou knowest that I love Thee." In these questions and answers our version uses but one verb, "love," and so a delicate bit of colouring is omitted. In the Greek we have two words, with related but slightly different meanings, one a broader and the other a deeper word—one generic, the other more specific, more distinctly personal; and through the conversation there is a subtle logomachy, or word-combat, as between two rival contestants. When Jesus first puts the question, He uses the broader word, which, as compared with the stronger word, we might render, "Simon, do you care for Me?" as in our colloquial mode of speech. But this word is too cold, too distant, for Peter's passionate soul, and when he replies he uses the deeper word of strong personal attachment, "Thou knowest that I *love* Thee," putting all stress of accent upon the changed verb. A

second time Jesus uses the farther-off word, "Simon, do you care for Me?" and a second time Peter alters his Lord's word, substituting his own, "Thou knowest that I *love* Thee." But when Jesus puts the question the third time, as if standing corrected by His disciple, He Himself uses Peter's deeper word, "Simon, lovest thou Me?" It is all through a delicate bit of word-fencing; and the stronger word, which sounds the depths of the human heart, and tells of its deepest, holiest affection, wins.

We have a similar interchange of words in the three commands which follow the three questions and answers. Here again we have two words, both pastoral and closely related in the meanings; but one is the generic, and the other the specific word. It is first, "Feed My lambs," where the meaning is narrowed to the one duty of providing food, for etymologically "feed" and "food" are the same word. It is secondly, "Tend My sheep," where it is the broader word, which includes all pastoral duties. It is strictly, "Shepherd My sheep," and shepherding means more than feeding. The flock needs a fold as well as a field, shelter as well as sustenance, and the shepherd must be defender, guide, as well as provider. He must choose the pasturage, and himself show the way to it. He must put all around his flock the unseen fences of his thought, his unremitting care; and if need be, he must place between his flock and the ravening wolves which threaten the barrier of his strong arms, or the barrier of his own life laid down for the sheep. But in the third command Jesus reverts to the former, narrower word, as He says to Peter, "Feed My sheep." He underlines the emphatic word by the repetition, and at the same time He emphasizes the shepherd's primary, cardinal duty, which is to provide food for his flock; for what is a fold after all without a field? Its walls may be secure and beautiful as heaven, so that no beast of prey can break them down, and no robber can

climb them ; but if there is nothing to eat, the poor sheep will bleat piteously while they starve ; and they might just as well be devoured by wolf or bear, as be slowly eaten up of their own hunger.

But returning from this etymological diversion, why should Jesus question Peter about his love, repeating the question three times? Did Peter's words weigh so light that they must needs be heaped up one above another in repeated avowals before they made up the standard weight? Or was Jesus Himself at a loss how accurately to appraise this man, the erratic, enigmatic disciple? No; but there was evidently some deep purpose hidden in the thrice repeated question; and if we throw the light of the "fire of coals" upon it, we may, perhaps, detect that hidden purpose. By the fire of the palace yard Peter had been questioned as to his relations to Jesus, and three times he had disavowed his Lord, the last time backing up his disavowal with oaths and curses—the oaths and anathemas that even Religion sanctioned. And now Jesus calls him to *His* fireside, and puts the three questions to him, that in the three avowals and protestations of his love the three denials may be in part atoned for, and then forgotten. But did not Peter love Jesus before? or is this love some new affection that has blossomed suddenly in his heart and life? We can scarcely call it a new affection, for evidently, even in the old days, there was a nascent love growing up within his soul. But while there was a strong, personal attachment to Christ, if we examine it closely, we shall find that it was not a pure affection. It was a blending of gold and clay, the higher love intermixed with a lower love of self. It was not the character of Jesus so much that had won him, though they could not have lived three years in such intimate association with Him without loving Him as a Man. But they were possessed by the dream of an earthly kingdom, and this coloured, or rather discoloured,

their attachment, and threw a warp into their lives. The glitter of right and left-hand thrones was in their eyes, and so they were constantly struggling for pre-eminence and prominence, giving themselves up to their little jealousies and bickerings, and asking, Who shall be greatest? even when Jesus has set His face to go up to Jerusalem, and the dark shadow of the Cross has filled His soul. And Peter had not loved the "Me" purely and utterly; he had loved himself in the "Me." Instead of putting Christ in the centre, letting all his thoughts and plans gravitate towards Him and his life revolve about Him, he set himself in the centre, and the Christ on some far circumference, as if He were but some satellite of a moon, shining for his little world alone. But a change has come over the spirit of his dream. Calvary has transfigured his love, taking all the earthiness, the selfishness, from it; for self now is as if it were not. Henceforth in his purified affections there is no room for vain and proud ambitions, no room for any selfish purposes; Christ was all and in all; and when Peter answered, "Yea, Lord, Thou knowest that I love Thee," it was but the language of an absolute, whole-souled devotion—a love that through the future years should be all-absorbing and all-commanding.

And how this love, so passionately avowed upon the lake shore, grew and ripened, we may see if we turn to the two Epistles of St. Peter. Written in his later years, when life is mainly a retrospect, when the charm of novelty has long since faded away, and the tides of impulse have settled down into a more quiet, and, perhaps, deeper flow, yet how they sparkle with the precious Name! "Christ, Jesus Christ"! He cannot write many words without inserting the Name that is above every name; and no matter what his subject—what circles of duty he describes, or what heights of privilege he climbs—he leaves his Christ in the centre of those circles and on those loftiest heights.

And if we compare the two Epistles, we find a deepening and heightening of Peter's affection, with "more of reverence," as "knowledge" has grown "from more to more." In his first Epistle it is "Christ, Jesus Christ," until we may count the simple Name thirty times; while once he speaks of "the Lord Jesus Christ." In the second Epistle, however, he speaks of "Jesus Christ" once only; now it is "Jesus, our Lord," "our Saviour Jesus Christ," or "the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ." It is as if he beheld Him with the nearer vision—now the Lamb in the midst of the throne—and he casts at His feet his crowning words, or he bids us listen to the music of the Second Advent, "the revelation of Jesus Christ" which draweth nigh!

And here we touch a foundation truth, and one that is applicable to all times and all places alike. It is this: that love to Christ is the qualification for all service. So far Peter has been a learner rather than a teacher. He has had special privileges accorded him, as, together with James and John, he has been admitted to that inner circle of Christ's friendships; but he has not yet been a "fisher of men," nor has he rendered any signal service. His duties so far have lain down in the lower planes of ministry, such as lending his boat to the Master, casting his hook into the sea to fish for the silver stater, untying and leading down the ass, or preparing the guest-chamber. This was his work, among the "common tasks," which demanded neither skill nor strength of soul; and only once did he strike out in ways of his own, and that was when he too hastily drew his sword and cut off the right ear of Malchus. Now, however, he is to be promoted to a higher service, and one distinctly spiritual. He is to be a leader, the Moses of the new Exodus, seer of heavenly visions, and interpreter of Divine laws; and this higher ministry he cannot undertake—he cannot even understand—without love. Whether he be the speaker of the Pentecost, the

apostle of the circumcision, or the shepherd to fold and feed the flock, love must be his inspiration, and words and deeds must be the overflowings and outflowings of a full heart.

So is it to-day and every day. In all the fields of service that lie open to us—and the Master's fields are many as they are wide—the work that tells the most and that lasts the longest is the work that has most of heart in it, most of soul. It is not labour which in Heaven's reckoning counts so much, but the love in the labour. We may do a great deal of work for Christ, if we set it down in hours and days; we may busy ourselves, and even weary ourselves, with multiplied activities, running here and there, and yet accomplish little, perhaps nothing. The lips may speak correctly and fluently enough; our words may be well chosen and well spoken, and yet they fall lightly on the air and ear; they do not reach the consciences of men; they do not rouse the soul to action, leaving behind them the echoes of sustained reverberations. Our message, carefully prepared though it is, leaves no impact upon the life, and makes no more impression than the flap of an insect-wing! Because the impelling force is wanting. The heart is cold and dead; there is no glow of hidden fire, no consuming, constraining love. And it is only the heart which speaks to the heart; as Goethe says,—

“ You never can make heart throb with heart
Unless your own heart first has struck the tone.”

True words! and true alike for the pulpit as for the stage. Isaiah in his vision saw the angel take the live coals from the altar and put them on his lips, that they might be fit channels for the Divine message. But Heaven's angel cannot touch our lips with fire unless he can find the live coals on the sacred altar of our heart. But if the heart be right—if it has caught in some measure a sympathetic beat

with the Divine heart of infinite pity and infinite love—it is wonderful how mighty even weak, frail man becomes, and how far-reaching is his influence. The beat of a consecrated heart can shake the world. An apostle of love will always command a hearing; for when he speaks, whose heart is “afire with God,” men unconsciously take off their shoes, stilling the noise and clatter of their own thoughts even, as they listen to the Voice within the voice, the still, small Voice of God!

But a weary task it is to put on the shepherd’s dress and to borrow the shepherd’s attitudes and voice without the shepherd’s heart! We may indeed call ourselves apostles; we may learn to speak in ecclesiastical tones and oracular ways; but if love be wanting, we only beat the air with our vain endeavours, and our wisest words are but sounding brass or tinkling cymbal. How can we feed the flock of Christ if we ourselves are strangers to the heavenly pastures, with no key to unlock them, and no eye even to discern them? Alas for us who profess to be seers of heavenly things and yet ourselves are blind! Like Samson Agonistes, we may punctually and punctiliously keep up our round of religious duties, grinding at our mill, and so preparing the bread of life for others, and yet all the time we ourselves sit in darkness, not knowing the light of day, and not so much as tasting the heavenly bread! Strange shepherds of the flock are we when Duty takes the place of Love! when the soul which should be an altar for the sacred fire is nothing but a funeral urn, enclosing a few dead ashes! The flock may thirst and pant for the living waters, their hearts crying out for “God, the living God”; but all we can do is to conjure up some illusive mirage over their desert, or to lead them up some old water-courses, now hot and dry! Hungering and pining for heavenly food, something that will make their soul patient and strong, quiet and glad, and all we can do is to toss them a

stone as they cry for bread, or to feed them with windy words! But the hireling shepherd, the self-installed pastor, is zealous only about his so-called "orders" or his "living." As to tending or feeding the flock, he knows little, and cares less; but he is diligent and skilful at shearing—keeping his feast of St. Nabal with much self-gratulation and with very prolonged rites!

But how Peter loved, and how well he shepherded the flock of Christ, the sequel of the Acts of the Apostles shows. Not only was he the preacher, he was the pastor too; and such was his remarkable power and fame, that he was called here and there—now by heavenly visions and now by earthly voices, now to the abode of death and now to the house of life, where Cornelius and his kinsmen stood waiting by the gate of a new dawn. Indeed, such was his influence, that even in Jerusalem, where he had denied his Lord, along the very streets where he had slunk away in shame and sorrow that dark, sad night, the people brought out their sick and laid them down in the way, that, perchance, "the shadow of Peter" might fall upon them and heal them! Strange transformation! Losing his life, he has found it; losing his self—or, which is the same thing, hiding self in Christ—he has found a higher, a multiplied self, speaking as with cloven tongues, and living a thousand lives in one. And as Peter—himself "an elder" now—writes to the strangers of the Dispersion, this is the exhortation he sends to the elders, "Tend the flock of God which is among you, exercising the oversight, not of constraint, but willingly, according unto God; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind" (1 Peter v. 2). The flock is thus his last thought, as it has long been his only thought; and as he passes on to them his own commission it is as if the fire of coals still lighted up his soul; for he uses the very word Jesus then addressed to himself, and he speaks of another morning that is soon to break over him and

them, and of another appearing of the exalted Christ: "And when the Chief Shepherd shall be manifested, ye shall receive the crown of glory that fadeth not away." As the tones of the bell linger in the air long after the hammer-stroke, so the word of Jesus, striking upon Peter's inmost soul, had set all his being vibrating, while the music lingered in his ear and heart on and on through all the after years.

The strange interview was now drawing to a close. The three interrogatives have been followed by the three imperatives, and now these are followed by a double Amen: "Verily, verily I say unto thee, When thou wast young, thou girdedst thyself, and walkedst whither thou wouldest; but when thou shalt be old thou shalt stretch forth thy hands, and another shall gird thee, and carry thee whither thou wouldest not"; St. John adding, "Now this He spake, signifying by what manner of death he should glorify God." And so the life of love and service is to have its crown and consummation in sacrifice; finding its Calvary somewhere—though Jesus gives no hint as to where the cross will meet him, or when, except in the far distance, "when thou shalt be old." But why should Jesus mention it at all? for He does not so forecast the future of James and John. And why should it be mentioned now of all times, when Peter, forgiven and restored, is stepping up to the old place of pre-eminence and authority, and stepping forwards to a future all bright with promise? Does not the prophecy at first sight seem superfluous; and is it not something of an anachronism that the shadow of Peter's cross should fall on this Galilean shore, dropping darkly within the dawn of a new life? Perhaps we shall best discover its meaning and its timeliness if we read it—as indeed the whole narrative should be read—in the light of the denial. Peter had spoken boldly, "Lord, with Thee I am ready to go both to prison and to death" (St. Luke

xxii. 34). But the sad fall has had its rising again; though it was a dark eclipse, it was but brief—but for one night, or rather for one hour—and now that the deep shadow has disappeared, and all the old brightness has returned, it is as if Jesus wished to forget it. Henceforth it must be unmentioned, one of the “things behind” which must be forgotten; and now Jesus, as it were, cuts out the fracture of the cable where the divine sparks were arrested, and muffling into silence the shrill cock-crow, He joins the new life to the old just where the sad fault came, answering Peter’s words of ready devotion with His own prophetic affirmation. “You say that with Me you are ready to go both to prison and to death. You speak truly, for you are ready now, if not before; and you *shall* go with Me even unto death, for you shall indeed drink of My cup, and with My baptism of blood shall you too be baptised. So come, follow Me; the way is open, even forwards to the cross.”

And so Simon Peter, like Simon the Cyrenian, becomes a cross-bearer; but unlike the Cyrenian, Peter must bear his own cross, and not his Lord’s, and his “compelling” will be, not the constraint of force, but the deeper constraint of love. And Peter accepted the prophetic guerdon. Is his reward for tending and feeding the flock, for years of unremitting toil, to be a martyrdom, a crucifixion? So let it be. Dying for Christ is better and sweeter than living for the world, or even for himself; and as just now his forward-stepping arms struck through the water to go to Jesus, so henceforth, impelled by a love he cannot put into the poor, broken words of earth, the arms of his soul reach out to the things that are before, embracing the cross that awaits him, for the sake of the Christ who is above and beyond it. And Peter steps forward lightly, rejoicing even in tribulation, and singing along his *via dolorosa*; counting it double honour that he may share his Master’s sufferings and shame.

“Follow Me,” said Jesus as He rose from the ground and moved away, strangely withdrawing from the seven disciples, now that the lesson was over. And Peter, stumbling at the word, and reading it in the lower instead of the higher sense, stepped after Him, as did John also—for Peter was quickest to start, though John was swiftest in the running. Peter, seeing John too following, must speak one word for him, the disciple who has loved and not denied; “Lord, what of this man?” he says in his quick, nervous speech. But there must be no further uplifting of the veil; and Peter’s pointed question, like his keen sword, must be put up into its sheath of silence; for this is the only answer, “If I will that he tarry till I come what is that to thee? Follow thou Me.”

“If I will.” So does the risen Christ step within our human lives, guiding their currents, measuring their times. We throw ourselves here or there; we think, we plan, we act, we suffer; but there is an unseen Mind in which our little thoughts and purposes play—just as the all-embracing sky holds within itself alike the flight of all the birds and the sweep of all the worlds. “If I will,” one must tarry, and one must go; one must live, and one must die; for to Him who is the Life, life and death are one. And so a true love follows Christ, and does not question Him. She does not seek to know all, but is content to know that *He* knows, and that, somehow, His will is written on everything; and, rejoicing or sorrowing, doing or suffering, love endures as “seeing Him who is invisible.” He who loves and follows ardently and utterly, having nothing, yet possesses all things: things present, and things to come; heights, depths; life, death—all are his, since he is Christ’s.

HENRY BURTON.