Mercy for the Fallen

TWO SERMONS

HOUSE OF MERCY, CLEWERS,

By the

REV. T. T. CARTER, M.A.

In Aid of the

An Appeal for the Completion of the House.

JOSEPH MASTERS, ALDERSGATE STREET

LONDON

AND NEW BOND STREET
be, "compel to come in," those whom His voice is calling, even now, "in the streets and lanes of the city," and in the "highways and hedges" of our land?

Let it then be our earnest prayer that our hearts may be enlarged, and the gift of the love of Christ be stirred within us, that in the spirit and power of His love we may accomplish what He hath given us to do, and seek by His grace to gather in these lost ones, whose misery, degradation, and shame perpetually cry out to us for mercy, that we may work together with Him, their Redeemer, for their deliverance, that so with Him we may rejoice in the final gathering of all whom He will save in His day; to Whom with the Father and the Holy Ghost, &c.

SERMON II.

S. John xix. 25.

"Now there stood by the cross of Jesus His mother, and His mother's sister, Mary the wife of Cleophas, and Mary Magdalene."

The text mentions three persons who, at the latter period of the Crucifixion, stood near the Cross. The following verse speaks of a fourth,—"When Jesus therefore saw His mother, and the disciple standing by, whom He loved." Four there were in all, who saw His last pang, and watched His dying look; the blessed Virgin Mother, Mary her sister, Mary Magdalene, and S. John the beloved Apostle. Though brought thus closely together, they were persons very different one from another, in character, in preparations of heart, and in manner of life.

In the Mother of our Lord we see the image of Virgin purity. She was one who from infancy had grown in a retired home, in a sweet humility, in gentleness, in submission, in innocence; so far as was ever given to a child of Eve, (One only excepted) blessed among women, honoured of Angels, and highly favoured of God. She was the pattern of all those who, in their several degrees, nurtured in Christian homes, and shielded from the impurities of the world,
have never fallen away from their first grace, ever
drawing nearer to the perfect vision of God.

S. John is the image of faithful love. He was one
who had grown up in the world, in common labour,
amongst the ordinary trials of life, in a fisher's calling,
and from that world, and all its gains, and all its
pleasures, had turned at the first call to follow the
Lord, and in following Him, had learnt to rule his
life and quiet his too passionate soul, as he gazed with
a still, deep love on the Countenance of his Master,
and, from His bosom whereon he lay, drank in the
streams of light and love, through which he became
ever purer, more gentle, more divine. He is the fore-
runner of all those who in the midst of the world are
yet weaned from it more and more, as the call of God
comes upon them, and follow His will, as their eyes
are opened to see, and by degrees are absorbed in the
pervading consciousness of His most blissful love.

We pass over the third; Mary, the Virgin Mother's
sister, scarcely known to us except by name. There
is yet a fourth, standing by the Cross, near as the
others, Mary Magdalene. She had been known in
eyearly life by a far different course from that of her com-
panions, by a notoriety which has clung to her name
through all ages. She is known as "the sinner from
the city;" so unclean that seven devils had entered
into her. But she had learnt to loathe her sin, and
had knelt at the feet of Jesus, washing them with her
tears, and wiping them with the hairs of her head,
one the snares of accursed love, but now offered to
Him who in mercy had drawn her to Himself, to
love Him only. She had heard Him pronounce her
forgiveness, and from that hour had cleaved to Him
as the life and joy of her soul, and followed, minister-
ing to Him of her substance. She is the pattern of
all those who, having fallen and become dead in tres-
passes and sins, have heard in the depth of their souls
the voice of God calling them, and have torn them-
selves from all the entanglements in which they were
bound, and sought a perfect cleansing through His re-
deeing love in following His holy ways, giving them-
selves, and all they have, to Him.

These three stood near the Cross, types of that in-
umerable company to be gathered in from all corners
of the earth to meet before the Throne. One all
purity, who had borne Him in her womb. One all
love, who had lain on His breast at supper. One all
sorrow, who had pierced Him with her sins. And all
together now in Him gathered into one fellowship.
The Cross has alike drawn hearts so different, and
alike cleansed all. Even the sins which had been as
scarlet have been made white as snow. The sinner
in her penitence is cleansed, and in her cleansing stands
beside the purest of her sisters. "The pure in heart
shall see God," as is given to none other; but none
of the virtues of the Cross and Passion of the Son of
God are withheld from the penitent.

Often indeed there is given to these last an earnest-
ness of grace which seems beyond that of all others. All
the three Marys carried the sacred Body to the tomb,
but when the Virgin returned to the city, and all was
silent, and hope was gone, the Penitent remained
watching. "There was Mary Magdalene and the
other Mary sitting over against the sepulchre." All
the three again went to the tomb early in the morning
when the Sabbath was past, carrying sweet spices to
anoint Him; but when the others had retired in de-

1 S. Matt. xxvii. 61.
spair of finding Him, the Magdalene alone remained, in tears, still seeking Him.

And as there are depths of earnestness and love developed in the souls of those who in the bitterness of their remorse have known the mercies of Christ, so are there gifts of consolation, unrevealed to others, reserved for them alone. Our Lord showed Himself alive first to the Magdalene, next to St. Peter, both fallen, both penitents. The first entrance into Paradise, the passage thither even by His side, was the blessing of a Penitent. The first sound of His voice, when He had risen from the dead, and the promise that, when He had ascended, He should be touched with a closer touch than was ever known before, was the unspeakable joy of the Magdalene.

And if to all who have fallen, and after their long wanderings would return, there is mercy, and through that mercy a perfect cleansing, and the vision of God, can we suppose that the one class of penitents who are more especially represented by the Magdalene, shall fail to find their place beneath the Cross. If the Eternal did not scorn, though the Ioper scorned, the sinner from the city, but gave His feet to be kissed, and blessed her love, for “she loved much,” we can think that now in the fulness of His perfected atonement, He will reject any one who comes forth from her hiding place of shame in the city or the village, to find rest in Him? If, when many, even leaders and teachers of the people, had condemned the sinner taken in the very act, He nevertheless shielded her from scorn and death, and would give her season of grace in peace, can we doubt that His will now must be, that every one, however defiled, should have a refuge and a home, and hope of restora-tion to the favour of God and man? We believe then that the will of God is clear, that such penitents should not be driven back into the depths of the dark waters, but rather should be sought out, if haply the strivings of the Spirit may draw one or another unto Him Who still waiteth to be gracious.

There are moreover special reasons why such sinners have a very touching claim on our pity and our aid. Does it not move you to think that the sinful woman has to bear a burden from which man the partner of her guilt is free? He returns from his sin and no outward change has passed over him. In the eye of the world he is as though he had sinned not. How different are the consequences to her. She must forfeit home and becomes the outcast. She loses the hope of ever again eating the bread of honesty. A gulph opens before her, which no remorse, no toil, no restitution can ever enable her to cross. From very necessity she sins on; from the very cravings of hunger, though she loathe it, must still return to it, must die in it, if death overtake her. No door opens to receive her as a servant; no trade admits her as a sharer of its toil. There is no despair on earth like that which comes over the soul of the fallen woman, when sin has become an abomination to her, and yet her perpetual uncleanness is the only source of her daily bread. Her hell is begun; within her shame, tribulation; and terror, without her scorn, and darkness and a laughter in which devils may well be thought to join.

Or if the darkness be unfelt, and the inward horror be as yet unrevealed to the soul, yet even still more is to be mourned that spiritual death which tends ever onward, though unconsciously, yet rapidly and surely, to its own place and final doom.
It should moreover move us to think, that all this misery may have arisen from causes to which the poor alone are subject. For their children suffer, in a manner unknown to others, from exposure, from too close contact in cottages with insufficient space to separate the sexes, and preserve the veil even of common decency; from too great familiarity in the times of labour, in the field where all ages and both sexes mingle without restraint, or the workroom with its close and long continued evil communications, during the many hours when no mother’s eye is near to check the first breach of female honour, or mark the first unholy look; or in the walk homewards, unguarded, amidst the contaminations of the idlers of the hamlet, or along the crowded street.

Or it may be from unkindness at home, where passions are so uncontrolled, or from want of discipline and restraint, so difficult to preserve among the poor in their unceasing round of daily toil, or from a fond parent’s weakness, or a sinful parent’s neglect, or mere blameless lack of prudence, the consequences of all which tell with such intensely aggravated force in the unguarded state of a labourer’s home.

Or again from destitution, the burden of distress depressing all the moral energies of the soul, and breaking down the barriers of the grace of chastity, or the helplessness of the orphan and motherless, in the special difficulties which poverty must bring.

How quickly in such scenes, and amid such snares as these, will the early faults of wilfulness, or vanity, or secret passion hurry the young beyond the line of female safety, and then in an unwary hour, the weak compliance with some dazzling promise or heartless lie, in ignorance or heedlessness of what must follow, seals her destiny, and suddenly she awakes to feel that she is the scorn of all, and must shun the light of day, and go and dwell where the darkest horrors ply their trade. All unconsciously perhaps there begins a course in which are gradually revealed the realities of a lot as horrible as imagination could picture among the damned.

It has been the continual sight of such misery close by our own homes, and in the sphere of my pastoral care, that has led us to form a retreat where penitents coming forth from those depths of debasement may share, if it be possible, the merits and virtues of the all-sufficient Sacrifice of the Cross, which is our only hope, and is surely their’s also. There is a haunt within my parish, such as alas! is not uncommonly found in the suburbs of our towns, whither, as to a sink of shame flow in from all the villages around, and from the great city, the outcasts of many a saddened home. They stray away from the scenes of their childhood, and are lost amidst the crowd which wanders through our lanes and courts. My frequent walk is among sights of degraded womanhood, which, God grant, may never darken the hearth of any one of you. A few years ago God stirred in the hearts of some who dwelt in the spot referred to, a desire to flee from their sins, and at the same time He awakened in one of His servants who lived hard by a longing to save the sinner. There was a lady who received into her own home those penitents; within three days, six; within a month fifteen. Thus arose the House of Mercy, within sight of the abode of vice; that “where sin abounded, there grace should much more abound.” From that hour to this present, it has grown upon this foundation. There was no design, no theory, nothing of our own mind. Enlarging, the work has taken a settled form in the same spirit.
It has been unbought love winning to Him Who is Love, the fruits of His redemption, disentangling the thorns which had fastened around and torn the lost sheep, smoothing the roughness of the way of the cross, and rejoicing in their return within the fold.

In the recovery of the lost it has been marvellous to see what affections have been drawn forth, what efforts after self-control have been made, what restraints patiently borne, what a change has come over the countenance, stamping on the outward features the influences which had been breathed over the inward life. A marvel and a blessing it has been to watch how hearts so withered, which had never believed that pure, disinterested love could exist in human breasts, have melted at the touch of those who sought them in Christ's compassion.

For as we have learnt from Christ the hope that such sinners may be saved, so have we learnt the true means by which the work is to be done. He taught us by His own example the effectual way to reach such sinners' hearts: it was by His self-sacrifice and love. He stooped from heaven to reach them. He sat down with them to share the sinners' meal. "As Jesus sat at meat in the house, behold, many publicans and sinners came, and sat down with Him and His disciples." He stooped down to still lower depths of shame and suffering. He "being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God; but made Himself of no reputation, and took upon Him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of man, and being found in fashion as a man, He humbled Himself, and became obedient to death, even the death of the cross." He gave up all for love of those whom He sought to save, and mingled amongst them, and became as one of them, and thus constrained them to love Him. He the All-pure, yielded Himself to mingle with the impure; He Whose Name is Love, gave Himself for those whose hearts had become most basely selfish, and thus both won them to Himself, and raised them to the consciousness of a higher and purer life.

And this manifestly is an eternal law affecting the salvation of souls. It is undeniably an example which must reverently be borne in mind by all who would win souls, and according to our measure, at however vast a distance, be copied. And herein a great defect in our old Penitentiaries is made evident; for there has been in them a lack of this self-sacrifice and personal love. The work has been too often done merely as a hired service. They who serve in them are scarcely in a position to represent to the penitent Christ's love, nor to say, without risk of being gainsaid, "We come to you in the love of God, and for your soul's sake only." The penitent cannot so surely feel "for love of me and for Christ, not for themselves, they labour." There is not the direct appeal of love to love. There is danger lest the great principle of the first drawing of the soul be not put forth, and lest the sinner rise not to the contemplation of the love of Christ in Christ Himself: for they whom she sees, as between God and her, bear in their office and ministering but a dimmed reflection of His Image in this which is His special mode of winning hearts.

It is this which distinguishes the House of Mercy from our older Penitentiaries. If to live amongst such fallen ones, labouring for them day and night, with unbought love to save them from their sins, and from themselves, in order to present them before the Throne in the presence of all the holy angels, rejoicing over

\[1\] S. Matt. ix. 10.  
\[2\] Philip. ii. 6—8.
each one that repenteth, constitutes a claim on your sympathy and aid; such a ground of appeal may be urged most undoubtedly in this case.

And must not such an appeal come with a very personal feeling to every one of us on one ground or another. Such as have been brought up in pure and joyous homes, where a holy modesty has ever found the seclusion which it loved, where the young heart has known no blighting, and its first fond affections have been sanctified and sealed by a blessing from above, and who owe they know not how much, to safeguards cast around them, not of their own choosing, but of His love Who orders all our lots in life—such may feel a pity for those who perhaps have fallen, because, as they grew up, they had no such watchful shelter.

So likewise the parent who by God's infinite mercy has been spared the bitterness of a daughter's fall, on whose lineage no spot of infamy has ever come, may compassionate those whose trials and difficulties they never experienced, and who, had their lot been cast in a more favoured sphere, would perhaps equally have been spared such misery.

And again, some there may be whose consciences are stirred with the remembrance of the sins of their youth, who have upon their souls the same guilt as those for whom I plead, but have escaped their utter degradation; some one perhaps there may be, who even has lured into the fatal snare one who but for him had never known such infamy—of such, surely we may ask an act of restitution, for without restitution, where it may be had, repentance is vain, and such an offering may return in blessing, if not on the very partners of their crime, yet on other members of that doomed class, for whom, so often much more sinned against than sinning, this one, and only means of restoration now remains.

For surely "God is righteous in all His ways," and "the judgments of the Lord are true." There can be no inequalities in His dispensations, Who "is no respecter of persons." And though, for the most part, on woman only fall with such instant speed the terrible consequences of her guilt, there must be judgments in store for those also who have shared the same guilt—a fellowship of retribution, as there has been a fellowship of impurity—judgments suspended awhile, that other laws of His Providence may have their course, but to be manifested in that day when God will "bring to light the hidden things of darkness," and every unrepented sin shall have its full recompense. "Some men's sins are open beforehand, going before to judgment, and some men they follow after." The sins of youth may seem to have passed away—no trace left, save upon the memory,—and since their days of evil, the guilty may have drawn around them the circle of a happy home, and in its happiness forget the misery which has fallen upon those no more guilty than themselves. But the impurities of social life can give no security against Heaven's unerring retributions. Subsequent abstinence from evil is no atonement for former guilt. The flight of years cannot put away sins; if unabsolved, uncleaned in the virtues of the atoning Blood of the Lamb, they live on where sleep in awful silence the final judgments of an offended God. Blessed be His Name, those final judgments may be averted; but infinite mercy cannot lessen the demands of perfect justice. God surely looks for restitution. Sins against

1 Tim. vi. 24.
Himself He freely remits, and herein we can offer no amends to satisfy His justice. Sins towards our fellow-creatures, He remits as freely; but herein we may often give, and where we can, He requires us to give "restitution and satisfaction to the uttermost of our power," and to check the vice; and heal the misery in which oneself may have borne a part, in a meet offering, which will be accepted of God, not as though it could win pardon, but as the late amends of penitence, from one who did what he could.

Oh! that we may all feel more deeply the dreadfulness of sin, and the nearness of our danger, and the mercy of our escape; and the blessing of rekindled hope, and the value of souls in His eye, Who will have the house swept even for the one piece of silver, from which the Image of its Lord is not yet wholly erased, and Who even where it is altogether obliterated, yearns to recreate afresh "after the same Image in righteousness and true holiness," that Image in which it is our hope to stand before Him at the Last Day; and that, in the grateful consciousness of His forgiveness and renewed love, we may run the way of His commandments, and accomplish the good works which He hath prepared for us to walk in, in love to others, as we have been freely loved of Him; that so, in that day when He maketh up His jewels, He may own us as among those in whom the purposes of His love have been fulfilled, and the travails of His own Soul satisfied; to Whom, with the Father and the Holy Ghost, be now and ever all glory and thanksgiving, &c., &c.

AN APPEAL
FOR THE

HOUSE OF MERCY, CLEWER.

Lent, 1856.

To those who are interested in Church Penitentiaries and Sisterhoods, this appeal is addressed. The House of Mercy for the recovery of fallen women has been established amidst many difficulties, although largely prospered, and the greater portion of the intended designs is finished; but we urgently require help at this present time, for we are pressed by the liabilities still remaining on the new buildings, and by the need of completing what we have begun. We ask of those who are enabled and kindly disposed to aid us, that they would aid us now by giving, or collecting each the sum of £10. If three hundred and fifty persons undertake to give this aid, our work may before long be completed. We are encouraged to make this appeal from the blessing which has hitherto rested on the House of Mercy, and which is marked by the following facts in our past progress.

First, as to our financial state. We commenced this work suddenly, without any preparation, in a house lent only for six months, trusting to aid, from day to day. In laying the foundations of every work of any magnitude, there is much of the outlay which never appears above ground; but the main of the expenditure has been as follows: Two houses were successively occupied, after the first which was lent, and both these had to be fitted for the purpose, at a considerable cost. A permanent site was then purchased, being a freehold estate of fifteen acres, at a cost of £2300. The grounds around the house have been fenced, drained, and laid out for recreation; dairy-farm stocked, &c.

Lastly, the New Buildings just completed have been raised at a
cost of about £6500. This may seem a large outlay for the purpose, but those who have examined the buildings and know our requirements, have not thought that there has been any unnecessary expenditure. There has been running on, at the same time, a current expenditure of maintaining a household of about thirty persons, year after year, for upwards of six years.

Secondly, as to the vital point of the living agency for carrying on the work. It was commenced by a single individual, who, for six months and upwards, had no fellow-workers. For the next year and a half, there was only the precarious help of occasional visitors. Gradually a settled community has been formed, which now consists of nine Sisters. They are constituted, according to legally constructed statutes, and by Episcopal sanction, into a corporate body, as a recognised instrument of the work of the Church of God. They support themselves on their own independent means, and carry on the entire management and care of the House with only a few subordinate helpers serving without wages.

Thirdly, as to the truth and permanence of the principles on which the House has been founded. Its principles were, at the commencement, known only in the appeals of the chief leader of the movement. They have since made such way, that they are now recognised and upheld by a Society which numbered, in the spring of 1854, 400 members, including fifteen Bishops, and which extends its operations throughout the entire sphere of the Church of England. Five other Houses have since been formed on the same principles, and are now cherished by this Society.

Lastly, as to the great and momentous object for which these efforts have been made—the success of our endeavours to recover the lost sheep of Christ's fold. The Clergymen and Sisters alike who have entered upon this work were obliged to do so without any previous experience whatever. The old precedents scarcely apply to what was intended to be carried out in dutiful observance of the Church's system and by a higher kind of service. We have had to form our own views, learn minute details, and test every rule by our own actual experience. The work has also suffered greatly, up to this time, from the very inconvenient internal arrangement of houses, which only with difficulty were at all made available for the purpose, and where there could be no classification, or even temporary separation for testing the cases admitted.

If the question should ever cross the mind,—is so large an outlay, and so elaborately constructed a system, necessary for such an object?—an answer is suggested in the words used by the Lord Bishop of Oxford at the last meeting of the Church Penitentiary Association in London:

"It has been objected that more has been done for reclaiming a few of the lost ones of Christ than has been done for a great number of the unfallen. This is the one recurring thought which tends to weaken our efforts. It is, in one shape or another, the taunt which has been thrown out against the Penitentiary move-
ment, and it takes the form of an accusation that the promoters
of it are influenced by a spurious, sickly, and morbid benevolence.
No one who is engaged in this work has failed to suffer from the
paralysing influence of this suspicion; and, therefore, it is well
that there should be settled in the minds of all what is the true
and thoroughly sufficient answer to the question. The simple
answer is that it is the will of God, marked upon the entire dis-
ensation, of which we are partners, that there should be the ne-
necessity of greater labour to bring back to the fold those who could
be saved, rather than to preserve those who, through the grace of
God, had not fallen. It is that which stands written, as with the
finger of God, in the history of man's redemption. Let those
who misgiv their motives reflect upon what God, in His mar-
bulous tenderness, has done for man; because what limit was there
to the power of God when man fell into sin? and why might He
not then have called into existence countless worlds peopled with
unfallen creatures? But, instead of this, the Eternal Son died
for us upon a cross, and went through the whole of that costly
apparatus by which man became rescued from his fall. Therefore,
those who hope to share hereafter in the beatitude of Christ
should not suffer such a thought to subdue them; because,
stepped upon every thought of our own is the thought that to
raise the fallen and to save the sinner was sufficient to bring down
from heaven the co-eternal Son of God to hang upon the cross at
Calvary. Nothing so much tends to put matters in their true
light as to go straight to the great truth, that when they labour
to restore a few unfortunate beings from the unspeakable misery
in which sin has reduced them, they are but following the distinct
type of God's love for mankind in the redemption of man through
our Lord Jesus Christ."

N.B. Any who are kindly drawn to unite in making the effort
here urged will be thankfully supplied with any number of papers
they may require, to assist in forwarding this object, by applying
to the undersigned.

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