



GOD CALLING TO MAN

By Charles John Vaughan

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

Charles John Vaughan, Church of England divine and educator, was born at Leicester in 1816, and educated at Rugby under Dr. Arnold. He was ordained in 1841 and in 1844 elected headmaster of Harrow. But the post which gave him the best opportunity as a preacher, was that of Master of the Temple which he occupied from 1869 to 1894. He was a leader in the Broad Church party and his sermons are marked by simplicity of diction, deep sincerity, and rare spiritual insight. He died at Llandaff, of which he had been dean since 1879, in 1897.

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And the Lord God called unto Adam, and said unto him, Where art thou?—Genesis iii., 9.

"I wish," said a great man of our day, "that some one would preach under the dome of St. Paul's, on the text, 'Where art thou, Adam?'" A noble subject, my brethren, when we think of it! But who is equal to the task of handling it? The work of God is quick and powerful—may it be so now, He Himself using it, and prospering it in the thing whereto He sent it.

I shall ask you to look very closely into the text itself. I need not tell anyone whence it comes; from the midst of that awful story which tells us of the first sin, and of its immediate consequences. That same story is in substance acted over and over again in every marked sin that is ever done by any man: the same mode of temptation; first inward question, "Yea, hath God said? is this thing which I wish to do really forbidden?" and then the thought of the hardship; "God doth know that this which He has forbidden is something desirable, something delightful; it is hard that it should be denied me;" and then the growing confidence, "I shall not surely die for it;" and then the last review of all the advantages, "good for food—pleasant to the eyes—to be desired to make me wise, or to make me happy, or to make me independent;" and then the act itself—the taking and eating; and then the sense of leanness entering into the very soul. But that is not all which sin brings after it. The next tells us of a summons, and after the context of an arraignment, and an examination, and at first a self-excusing, and then of a conviction, and a silencing, and a judgment: only one little word of comfort, one little streak of light, amidst all the sorrow, and all the curse, and all the gloom.

But I intend to sever the text now somewhat from its context, and to look into it, with you, by itself alone. "The Lord God called unto Adam, and said unto him, Where art thou?" There is the speaker—God, the Lord God. There is the person spoken to—Adam, the first man; Adam, from whom we all sprang; the father, and the likeness, and the representative of us all. There is the nature of the address—a call, a summons, decisive, authoritative, majestic. There are, at last, the words uttered—few and plain, yet, when looked into, big with meaning—"Where art thou?" And we shall not end without appealing to all of you, to each of you separately, to answer that question; to answer it truly, as we shall all have to answer it one day.

Now I shall not occupy your time, or use many words, about the speaker. There are those who profess to doubt the being of God; and there are those, on the other hand, who profess to prove it. I shall not suspect you of the one, and I shall not endeavor to do the other. I am quite sure that in your inmost hearts you do not doubt His being; and I am quite certain that, if you do, I cannot prove it to you. The being of God is not a matter of argument, it is a matter of instinct. The doubt or denial of it may pass muster with scoffing men in robust health and prosperous circumstances; but nine out of ten of those same men, finding themselves in sudden danger, by land or sea, from accident or disease, will be heard praying: they may conceal it, they may disown it, they may be ashamed of it afterwards—but they did it: and that prayer was a witness, an unimpeachable witness, that down in the depths of their heart there was a belief in God all the time; in their works alike and in their words they deny Him, but in their inmost souls, like the very spirits of evil, they believe and tremble. God, then, speaks here. I tell you not who He is: you know it; you know that there is such a person, your creator, your ruler, your judge: happy if you know also that

He is the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ!

Now, to whom does He here speak? I will say two things of His call as here described: First, that it is an individual call; and, secondly, that it is a universal call. We try to make God's call a vague one. It is for some one, no doubt; but every natural man tries to put it away from himself. In hearing a sermon, everyone thinks how suitable this reproof or that warning is to his neighbor; he goes away to wish that such a person had heard it, to hope that such a person listened to it; but the person who thus hopes, and probably, too, the person thus hoped about, never thought of taking it home—never said to himself, tho he was but too ready to say to another, "Thou art the man." Nevertheless, God's call is an individual one. The only use of it is to be so. O that we could hear it in that spirit! O that we could practise ourselves in so hearing it! Where art thou? not, where is he? still less, generally, where are they? Read the Bible thus, my brethren, as written for you, for your learning, for your reproof, for your comfort—yours individually and personally—and you will never need it in vain.

But this individual call is also universal. Let us not flatter ourselves that we are more to God than others are: it is a very common, tho a well-disguised notion. We think that our souls are more important than any others; and that is the least form of the error: but we go on to think our faults are more excusable, our sins more venial, than those of others; we go on to think that God will spare us when He does not spare others; we go on to think that our virtues are greater, our self-denials more meritorious, than those of others; and by this time we have got farther away from the truth and the gospel, than the poor self-condemning sinner who feels, and denies it not, that he is yet in the gall of bitterness, in the very bond of iniquity.

The call of God, like the care of God, is universal. It is to the race. It is to His creatures. Hear the word—"The Lord God called unto Adam, and said unto him." If it had been, God called to Abraham, or to Moses, or to David, there would have been some particularity, perhaps some limitation, in the summons; but none of us can say he is not included when Adam is spoken to; he is, indeed, the father of us all: of him we all come. What God says to him, He certainly says to us—to us all, as to each of us.

But we ask, perhaps, thirdly: How does God call to us? I will say, in three ways. He calls within—in conscience. Can you tell me what that thing is in each of us which seems at once so intimate with us, yet so independent of us, that it knows everything we do, or say, or even think, and yet sits in judgment upon us for everything? Is it not a strange thing? We should expect that the whole man would move together; that, if we did a thing, if we said a thing, if we thought a thing, we should go along with it, we should approve that thing: but is it so? No; we carry about within us a whole machinery of judicature; a witness, a jury, a judge, yes, an executioner, too; and, strange to say, it is in early life that the process is most perceptible, just while we are most ignorant, least reflecting, least logical in our judgments. It is the work of many men through life to stifle the voice within, and at last they almost succeed: but do not tell me that you have no such voice within—certainly you will not say that you never had it; and I will tell you what that voice is, or was. It was the voice of the Lord God within, calling to Adam, and saying, "Where art thou?"

He calls also without—in providence. I really know not whether this be not the most persuasive of all His modes of calling to us; certainly it is the most authoritative of all. Conscience may be stifled, but providence grasps us very tightly—we cannot escape from it. Tell me, who caused you to be born where and what you were? Who settled that you should be born in this country and not in that? Who decided that you were to have poor parents or rich, Christian parents or un-Christian? Who has managed your circumstances for you since you had a being? Who gave you, who has continued to give you, your vigor of mind and body, your power of enjoyment, or your experience of kindness, or your principles of judgment, or your instincts of affection? Who took away from you that friend for whom you are now mourning—that parent, that brother, that sister, that wife, that child? Yes, we may forget it, or we may fret under it, but in the hands of a providence we all are; we are utterly powerless in that grasp: and whether we will believe it or no, that power is a voice too—a call from God without, even as conscience is His voice and His call within.

Once more, God calls from above also—in revelation. My friend, believest thou the Scriptures? I know that thou

believest. Your presence here seems to say that you do. And yet in this multitude how many must there be who do not in their hearts believe! Let me rather say, who do not in their lives believe; for in your hearts I think you do: sure I am that there are some parts of the Bible which you cannot read and disbelieve; of course you may leave them unread, that is always possible—easier than to read them—but I do not think you can read the fifty-third chapter of Isaiah, for example, in the Old Testament, and I do not think you can read one chapter of St. John's Gospel in the New Testament, and shut the book, saying, "There is nothing in it." I suspect that is why we so often leave the Bible unread—just because we believe it; we feel, when we do read it, that it is God's voice, and we do not want to hear that voice. The Bible is more its own witness than we like oftentimes to admit.

"Who that has felt its glance of dread Thrill through his heart's remotest cells, About his path, about his bed, Can doubt what spirit in it dwells?"

God speaks; and speaks to us—to each of us and to all of us; and speaks, chiefly in three ways—in conscience, in providence, in revelation: and now, fourthly, what is His call? How is it here briefly exprest? It might have been put, it is put in the Bible, in different forms—but how is it here exprest? "The Lord called unto Adam, and said unto him, Where art thou?" This is a call, first, to attention. As tho God had said, Listen to Me. That is the first step in all religion. What we want first is a spirit of attention. It is the great art of our enemy to keep our thoughts off religion. That is the meaning of the overwhelming cares of life. The devil would occupy our whole time and thoughts with something which is not, and has nothing (as he persuades us) to do with God. That is the meaning of the excessive amusements of life. The cares of life are not enough to engross the attention of all men always; and therefore the enemy provides something which shall alternate with them for some men, and take the place of them for others. It is this art which God, in His mercy, in His long-suffering, in His desire that we should not perish, has to counteract by His divine skill. He takes a man aside now and then, from time to time—blest be His name for it!—and makes him listen. He interposes by some chastisement, some sickness, some bereavement, and constrains him to hearken to what He, the Lord God, has to say concerning him and to him. This is the first point gained. Behold, he listens! better still, Behold, he prayeth! It is a call, next, to the recognition of God's being, and of our responsibility to Him. "Where art thou?" It is as if He had said, I am, and thou art Mine. As if He has said, I have a right to know about thee, and thou canst not evade Me. As if He had said, I am about, now, to enter into judgment with thee: give an account of thy stewardship. Yes, my brethren, it is an awful moment, when a man first becomes distinctly conscious that God is, and is something to him. He may have talked of God before: he may have fancied that he knew all about Him: he may even have prayed before, and confest himself before, and asked grace and help before: but now, for the first time, he sees how much more there is in all this than he has yet dreamed of; and the only words which he can find at all to express his new feeling, are those of the patriarch of old—"I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear, but now mine eye seeth thee: wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes."

It is a call, once more, and yet more particularly, to reflect upon our place or our position. I know not how else to express the force of the inquiry, "Where art thou?" It may be read literally—of place. May not some one of those here assembled have been, ere now, perhaps often, perhaps quite recently, in some place in which the question, "Where art thou?" would have had a startling and condemning sound?—some place where he was sinning? some place where he had gone to sin? some place where he would not for the world have been seen by any human eye, and where he gladly forgot that there was yet one eye which did see him? Oh, if God stood this night upon earth, and called aloud to the "Adam" of this generation—to the men and women who form now the sum of the living human creation; if He should call them suddenly from the east and from the west to avow exactly where they were, and to come forth from that place as they were, without an instant allowed them to cover up and disguise themselves; oh, what a revelation would it be of action and of character! Oh, who might abide the scrutiny of that question? Oh, who could stand when that inquirer appeared? But, even if the literal local question could be well answered, there would remain yet another behind applicable to all men. "Where art thou?" is an inquiry as to position no less than place. It says, "What is thy present place as a man with a soul, as an immortal being? What is thy present standing, thy present state? Art thou safe? Art thou happy? Art thou useful? Art thou doing the work I gave thee to do? Is it well with thee in the present? Is it well with thee in the future? Say not, I can not answer, I

know not. I have taught thee how to judge of thyself; now therefore advise, and see what answer thou wilt return to Him that made thee."

My brethren, I propose, in the last place, that we all answer this question. It is a very serious thing to do; and it is what no man can do for his brother. Each one of us has one secret place, one sanctuary within the veil, into which, not even once a year, not even in the character of a high priest, can earthly foot ever enter. Yet in that secret place shines forth the light of God's presence; a light never put out altogether in any man, so far at least as its disclosing and revealing character is concerned, until sin and perverseness have done their perfect work, and the awful words are at length fulfilled, "If the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness!" At present, we will humbly hope, that this last ruin has not been wrought in any one who hears me. And if not, I repeat it, we can all, if we will, answer God's question, when He calls to each of us, as He does this night, and says, "Where art thou?"

One of us, perhaps, answers, if he speaks truly, I am wandering. I have left my Father's home; I took my portion of His goods, and carried them away into a far country. Yes, He was very generous to me; He grudged me nothing; life and health, food and clothing, even success in the world, even human friendship and human love, He gave me all these, and upbraided not: He warned me that I should be sorry one day if I left Him; He cautioned me against the perils of my way; He told me that I should not find happiness; He bade me, if I wished for that, to stay; He bade me, if I should ever be sorry that I had gone, to arise instantly and return. My heart was young then, and I thought I knew best; I left Him, with little feeling, with much expectation; His last look was one of regretful love that I left Him and I am a wanderer still. Sometimes I have arisen to go to my Father, but I went not: I was ashamed, I was afraid, I thought I was too sinful, I felt myself unstable, I feared that I might relapse, I dreaded reproach, I dreaded ridicule, I dreaded, above all, the sight of that face:—and thus stayed where I was, in the far country—I am a wanderer, an outcast still. And another answers, like him to whom the question in the text was first put, I am hiding. I have sinned and I have not repented. I have eaten of the tree of which God said to me, "Thou shalt not eat of it, neither shalt thou touch it, lest thou die." I believed the creature more than the Creator—the tempter more than the Savior. I went to the edge of temptation; I desired forbidden knowledge first, and then I could not rest until I knew by experience also; and now my heart is defiled, my conscience is defiled, my life is defiled; I have lost all right to the beatific vision, for I am no longer pure in heart; now, when I hear the voice of the Lord God, I hide myself, because I know myself sinful, and because I know that He is of purer eyes than to look upon or tolerate iniquity. And another answers, I am resting. Earth is very pleasant to me; I have toiled and I have reaped; I have gathered myself a competence; I have found the happiness of lawful love; I have built myself a nest here, I have fenced it against the blasts of fortune, I am warm and tranquil within: let me alone a little while; it is not long that I can enjoy it; soon calamity may come, loss, sickness, death, into my peaceful home; then I will turn and seek Thee—not yet, O not just yet! And another says, I am working. Am I not doing Thy work? Am I not discharging the duties of my station? Am I not setting an example of diligence and sobriety? Am I not availing myself of the faculties which Thou has given to make myself respectable, and useful, and exemplary in my generation? How can I do all this, and yet be religious? How can I find time for both worlds at once? But yet, indeed, am I not providing for that other world in making a proper use of this? Let me alone a little while; when I have a convenient season, I will call for Thee. And another says, honestly, I am trifling. The world is so gay, so amusing, so exciting: hast Thou not made it so for our enjoyment? Oh, grudge me not my brief time of mirth and forgetfulness; I shall be serious enough one day. And another says, I am coming. Yes, I am on my way. This is no world, I see it, of rest for me. There is no peace but in God: I sought it once elsewhere, and found it not: now I know my error; yes, I am coming, I am coming, I am on my way: but give me time: so great a change cannot be wrought all at once: heaven cannot be won in a day: give me time, and I will reach Thee. I am now using the means: I pray, I read the Bible, I go to Thy House, I partake in Christ's supper: surely this is the way to Thee!

Yes, my brother, but why this delay? Why this postponement of the desired result? Wilt thou be any fitter to-morrow than to-day for that step across the barrier which now seems so premature, so presumptuous? The word is very nigh thee: it is in thy mouth, it is in thy heart—thou knowest it well, even the word of faith—"Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ," at once, "and thou shalt be saved. Come unto me"—not to-morrow, but to-day—"all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." Are there any here present—God grant that they be many!—who have yet one other answer to return to the question on which we have dwelt? Thou sayest to me, O

Lord, "Where art thou?" Lord, I am a sinner in a world of danger; and I have learned that danger in myself; for I have fallen, and I have sinned against Thee, times without number; yet by Thy grace I have risen, and I have returned to Thee, and Thou hast accepted me in Thy Son, and hast endued me, according to my need, with Thy Holy Spirit. And now, Lord, my life is hid with Christ in Thee: He is my trust, He is my life, He is my hope, and the life that I now live upon earth, I live by faith in Him. Under Thy care, doing Thy work, thankful for Thy mercies, trusting in Thy strength, even now I am Thine, and hereafter I shall see Thee. Guide Thou my steps, make Thy way plain before me, in the days that remain to me, and at last receive me to Thyself, disciplined, humbled, sanctified, that I may rest in Thee forever, and forever see Thy glory!

My brethren, the work of God in each of us would be almost accomplished if this one call were heard within. Once let us know that God is speaking to us, and that He waits an answer; once let us feel that He is, and that He will have us to be saved, and all the rest will follow. May it be so now! May some wanderer this night return to his Father; some hiding soul this night come forth from its lurking place; some builder upon the sand lay this night his foundations upon the rock; some trifler be made serious; some worldly man turned heavenward—so that all may have cause to bless God for His word here spoken, and ascribe to Him, through eternal ages, thanksgiving, and blessing, and praise!

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