

THE OLD TESTAMENT



LIGHT AND TRUTH:
BIBLE THOUGHTS AND THEMES 1

BY HORATIUS BONAR



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Light and Truth Thoughts and Themes Vol 1:
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Preface

ALL the rivers run into the sea, yet the sea is not full," said the wisest of the wise. We might add to this, and say, "All the rivers come out of the sea, yet the sea is not empty." All the books in the world have, more or less directly, come out of the Bible, yet the Bible is not empty. It is as full as at the first. Let us not be afraid of exhausting it.

There is but ONE book that would bear such study. Let us be thankful that our world does contain such a book. It must be superhuman, supernatural. Blessed be God that there is at least one thing thoroughly superhuman, supernatural in this world; something which stands out from and above "the laws of nature"; something visible and audible to link us with Him whose face we see not and whose voice we hear not. What a blank would there be here, if this one fragment of the divine, now venerable, both with wisdom and *age*, were to disappear from the midst of us; or, what is the same thing, the discovery were to be made that this ancient volume is not the unearthly thing which men have deemed it, but, at the highest estimate, a mere fragment from the great block of human thought,—perhaps, according to another estimate, a mere relic of superstition.

"Bring the Book," said Sir Walter Scott, upon his deathbed, to Lockhart. "What book?" asked Lockhart. "What Book?" replied the dying novelist, "there is but ONE Book." Yes; there is but one Book, and we shall one day know this, when that which is human shall pass away (like the mists from some Lebanon peak), and leave that which is divine to stand out and to shine out alone in its unhidden grandeur.

God is now recalling humanity to the book which was written for it. By the very attacks made on it by enemies, as well as by the studies of its friends, he is bringing us back to this one volume, as the light shining in a dark place. That we may know the past, the present, and the future, he is bidding us betake ourselves to it.

Let us read it, let us study it, let us love it, let us reverence it.

It will guide, it will cheer, it will enlighten, it will make wise, it will purify.

It will lead us into all truth. It will deliver us from the fermenting errors of the day. It will save us from the intellectual dreams of a vain philosophy, from the vitiated taste of a sensational literature, from the specious novelties of spiritual mysticism, from the pretentious sentimentalisms of men who soar above all creeds and abhor the name of "law," from Broad Churchism, and High Church-ism, and no Churchism. It will lead us into light and love, into liberty and unity, imparting strength and gladness.

This Book is "the *word* of God." It contains "the words of God," but it is "the word of God," the thing that God hath spoken to man. Being *the word* of God, that which it contains must be *the words* of God.

Each word of God is true, and as divine as it is true. But are there not various readings, so that at times we are uncertain which is the authentic word? Yes; but these cases are few, and doubtful cases do not invalidate those that are not doubtful, of which latter more than nine-tenths of the Bible is composed. The doubtful readings make us far more secure as to all the rest. There are various readings in Homer and Cicero, but the occurrence of these does not prove that the rest are not really the very words of Homer and Cicero.

But are not there words of wicked men, nay, of Satan himself, in the Bible; how can I say that it contains nothing but the words of God? I did not say this. But I say that even the words of the wicked are inserted in it by God, for a wise purpose; and in interpreting such words we are to consider what that purpose is, so that taking the passage as a whole we shall extract the truth of God from it, nay, discover also how the words of the ungodly are made to illustrate the truth of God. No word is set down in the Bible save by the authority of God. This is our security and joy.

But are there not variations in the narratives, as in Kings and Chronicles, as in the Gospels; nay, as in the very words said to be spoken at our Lord's baptism. Yes; variations, but not inconsistencies; and these variations are introduced by the Holy Spirit on purpose to bring out all the aspects of the scene. These variations from the exact original words are not by chance or without a purpose. The Spirit was the author of the original words, he is the author of the variations also. Has he not a right to vary his own words when he sees fit; and when he varies them shall he be accused of inaccuracy? Shall the fact of the variation be used as an argument against the verbal inspiration of Scripture, as a proof that the original words were not worth the exact reporting? If the variation were a contradiction, the reasoning would hold good; but as this is not alleged, the accusation falls to pieces, for it is a pure sophism to deduce from a variation the same conclusions as from a contradiction; and it is as arbitrary as it is absurd to deny a writer the liberty of setting his own words in different lights, nay, and to found upon the fact of his doing so a charge or a suspicion that he never spoke or wrote any such words at all. So long as we can shew that we have divine authority for the variations, we need not shrink from acknowledging these, or suppose that the consequences of such an acknowledgment must be a relinquishment of the full inspiration of Scripture. Suppose I am arguing with a friend concerning something which I did and spoke, am I not at liberty at one time to cite my original words, at another time to vary them so as to give point to them or force to my argument. And because I thus explain myself in varying language, shall it be said that I never really used the very words, or that it is of no consequence to know whether the words were really mine, when the very object of the discussion is to get at the original words and their true meaning? Yes; we have divine authority for the variations in the different narratives; and, having that, we have divine security for words of Scripture, quite as much so as if there had been no variation at all. This becomes all the stronger when it happens, as is admitted in the present case, that the aim of the writer is really to present the varying truth to us, that he can have no object in misrepresenting it or misreporting himself, nay, that his character is such

as to place him above all suspicion, both in regard to truthfulness and wisdom.

I take this Book, then, as "the one Book," the Book of God, as truly such as Calvin's "Institutes" or Hooker's "Policy" are the books of men. And why men should write books for their fellow-men, and God not write one Book for his creatures to tell them of himself, I do not understand. It seems to me the most natural of all things. The utter silence of God to the creatures which he has made would surely be so unnatural as to be incredible. That God should speak is what we might expect; that he should be dumb is beyond all belief. That he should speak in words of his own choosing is what we should above all things desire, for then we should know that his thoughts were really presented to us; that he should speak in words of man's choosing (if such a thing could be), is altogether undesirable and unlikely, for then we should not know whether the language and the thought were in the least coincident; nay, we should feel that we had gotten an incorrect and untrustworthy volume, that we had been cheated and betrayed, that instead of bread we had got a stone, and instead of an egg we had got a scorpion.

The pages that follow are an attempt to bring out, as briefly as possible, the thoughts of God, as contained in the words of his Book. It is with light and truth that we have to do, in handling that Book. The old Latin poet says,

Verborum vetus interit aetas,
but the divine volume, with its true words, like the light which is its emblem, remains, forever perfect, and forever young.

Edinburgh, November 1867.

I.

The Old And New Creation.

Genesis 1

FAITH only can read this chapter aright; for the record goes back beyond human history; and for its statements we have the authority neither of testimony nor experience, but the bare word of God (Hebrews 11:3). These pre-historic annals of earth are the region of faith, quite as much as those posthistoric annals given in the Apocalypse. It is by faith that we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God; for faith has to do with the unseen both behind and before us. This chapter contains the substance of our creed concerning God, as THE CREATOR.

I. The Creation. It comprises the whole of what we call the universe, and all that it contains, visible or invisible,—"the heavens and the earth." This universe was created; it did not create itself, nor did chance create it, nor did it exist eternally. Its Creator was God, not a God; but the one living and true God, who calls himself El and Elohim, and Jehovah. Its Creator was the Word of God, the Son of God, the second person of the Elohim or Godhead (John 1:2; Colossians 1:16). This was "in the beginning;" that is, the indefinite past, the far past. Then the things which are now seen were made, not out of pre-existing materials, or "things which do appear," but out of nothing.

II. The Chaos. It was shapeless and unfilled up, without form and void. It was not properly "the earth" or "the world;" and "the fullness thereof" had not yet come. Whether this chaos was the first state or an after condition, that of fall and punishment, in connection with the apostasy of angels, we do not say. Here, however, earth lies before us in chaos; how long we know not. This chaos was one of "darkness," which covered the whole face of the abyss or deep. How this could be, save in connection with a sinning race, is not easily seen; for "God is light, and in him is no darkness at all."

III. The Life. The Spirit of God moved upon (or brooded like a dove over) the face of the waters. These waters were everywhere; the globe was fluid, but the waters were dead: the fluid mass had no vitality in it, it was like the lifeless bodies of the valley. The Holy Ghost came upon them, and the power of the highest overshadowed them; life was imparted; the deep was quickened, or as Milton writes, "made pregnant." This Spirit, then as now, came from Him "who has the seven spirits of God,"—the Son of God, the Creator, for "in him was life." The quickening Spirit is with him. "The Life was manifested" (Psalm 104:30; 1 John 1:2).

The Light. God spoke; the light came, following the life. For it is not first light then life, but first life then light. "The life was the light of men." Christ *the life* was *the light* of the world. It was God, the Son, who commanded the light to shine out of the darkness. It needed a word only; no more.

The Order. There has been confusion hitherto; mixture. Sky and earth, light and darkness, air and water, are all commingled. Every needful element is there, but they are mixed up with each other, and so are useless. As to the air and earth and water, there must be division; the landmarks of each must be set; as to light and darkness, there must be alternation; day and night, sunrise and sunset. All must be perfect order; no one interfering with its fellow, but each left free to work its own work in the development of a glorious universe.

VI. The Beauty. It is no longer "without form." It is now coming into shape in all its different features, and all is comely." By His spirit He hath garnished the heavens." It is by degrees or stages that this beauty is drawn out; yet it does come. The blue heavens, the translucent atmosphere, the sparkling stars, the bright sun, the waxing and waning moon, the green earth, the blossoming trees, the many-coloured flowers,—all beautiful; for He who formed them is Himself the fountainhead of all beauty, the perfection of perfection, the infinitely loveable One. We were made to love "the beautiful" in the creature, how much more in the Creator! He

has made everything beautiful in its season, and He has given us minds capable of appreciating and admiring it all; but it is He himself who is altogether excellent, the sum as well as source of all beauty. He claims admiration and love for himself, as the infinitely glorious One.

VII. The Fruitfulness. Valley, plain, hill, and field are all fruitful; and they bring forth their shrubs and fruit trees, their corn, their abundance of everything that is good for food, as well as pleasant to the eye. It is a fruit-bearing earth. Barrenness is unknown. Man and beast are there, fish and fowl are there; all kinds of life, intelligent or unintelligent. It is not mere beauty or order that satisfies God, but fruitfulness. It is fruitfulness He asks from us. We are ourselves part of His fruitful earth, as well as its lords, and in both aspects He asks for fruitfulness. He comes to us daily "seeking fruit."

VIII. The Goodness. He gazed on it, and pronounced it all very good. Each part of it was good; the whole "very good." It is good in every sense; good in the sense of beauty; good in the sense of subserving beneficent and loving ends; earth and sea, hill and valley, river and forest, all mutually helping each other. All is goodness! Yes, a marvellous whole of unutterable goodness. Death is not here, nor ferocity, nor warfare. All is good, very good. The earth is full of the goodness of the Lord. God delighteth in His handiwork. And though much marred and defaced, it still exhibits its original excellence. But it will do so more gloriously in the times of the restitution of all things, when there shall be the new heavens and new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness.

"Behold, I make all things new."

II.

The Link Between Being And Non-Being

"God said." —

Genesis 1:3

THIS chapter, in many places, prefixes the name of God to what is said or done, that there may be no mistake as to the speaker or doer, and that God himself may be prominently presented to us in his divine personality. We read, "God created"; "God made"; "God saw"; "God divided"; "God called"; "God set"; "God blessed"; "God formed"; "God planted"; "God took"; "God commanded." But the most frequent word here is, "God SAID." As it is elsewhere written, "He spake and it was done"; "he commanded the light to shine out of darkness"; "the worlds were framed by the word of God"; "upholding all things by the word of his power."

God's "word" is then the one medium or link between Him and creation. Creation is in one sense immediate,—the result of direct power; in another, it is mediate, as accomplished by the intervention of speech. How far this mode of statement is a condescension to man's weakness, we will not say; but the frequency with which it is repeated, shews what stress God lays on it. There was evidently an intervention of something corresponding to human speech, if, indeed, the actual words were not spoken just as they are set down. Between the "nothing" and the "something,"—non-existence and creation,—there intervenes only the word; but after that many other agencies come in, animate or inanimate,—second causes, natural laws and processes,—devolving the great original fiat; for it is only as in connection with it that these laws and processes have any power at all. The power or energy of the original "word" still lasts, still vibrates through the universe, still keeps creation in motion, still preserves the sequences and orderliness of all created things above and beneath.

He is the sovereign Speaker and the sovereign Worker. All are under his authority. He saith to this creature, Go, and it goeth; and to another, Come, and it cometh. He sits on his throne commanding the universe.

It is that same word that is still acting; as efficacious, as potent as at the first. Why does yon sun still move and shine? Not merely because of a word spoken some thousands of years since; but because that word is operative and energetic still. We read the original "God said" in every revolution; in every sunrise and sunset. "By the same word are these things kept in store." Vitality, growth, beauty, fruitfulness, are indications, not of a past power, but of a present energy; a continuation of the original impulse, or rather of the very same original impulse still prolonged and working. "My Father worketh hitherto."

When the Son of God was here, it was thus he acted in doing His miracles. He spake and it was done: "Lazarus, come forth"; "Young man, arise"; "Damsel, arise"; "Be opened." It was a word that was still the medium. And in His case we see the fitness; for He was "the Word." But there is the same fitness in the first creation, for He was Himself the Creator. It was He who spoke the creating word at first. His words are the words of authority and power.

This God (and this Son of God) speaks to us still. He does not keep silence though our outer ears hear no sound.

1. He speaks to us in Creation. This earth and these heavens are the echo of his voice. God speaks to us in each part of his handiwork. It is not "nature's voice" as men speak. It is the true, authentic voice of God. He speaks each day to us, and is never silent. As He spake at first, and the universe heard his voice, so he speaks to us now. Shall we hear or not?

2. He speaks to us in the Word itself. This Book embodies His words. Creation is the visible embodiment of His power and wisdom; it is the result of His words. His power came forth in speech as a channel or medium. This book of His is, in a different way, the effect of His

speaking. It is his written wisdom and power. There is His voice to us. The thunder and tempest are his loud voice of grandeur; the sunshine and the gentle breeze His still small voice; but deeper, clearer, keener, softer, yet more penetrating than all these, is His word. Men speak of the Bible being the thoughts of God, but not His words. As if you could speak of a certain piece of music apart from the notes which compose it, or of the sea apart from the drops which make it up; as if you might say that creation embodied the general purpose of God, but not any minute or special designs. That Book is what it is because it contains the words of God. To our outer ear God speaks to us; and through our outer ear to our inner man. For it is through the word, and in connection with it, that God communicates with us. That word quickens: "Thy word hath quickened me." That word produces faith: "Faith cometh by hearing." That word strengthens, comforts, heals, nourishes, revives. It gets into contact with each part of our souls, and works its own work here. And it does this because it is divine. No human words could be trusted to work the work in a human soul so unrestrictedly. It is not eloquence, nor poetry, nor argument; but something more than all these together; something peculiar and indescribable, which man could not have formed, and which he cannot understand, that makes it so suitable for the soul of a foolish and sinful man.

3. He speaks to us in Providences. Let us listen reverently to everything that happens, and we shall recognise a divine voice, and divine words in all. No providence is dumb. No sorrow, no joy, no sickness, no recovery, no calamity, public or private, is dumb. "God said" sounds out from them all. By them God is pursuing us at every step, and all the day stretching out his hands to a disobedient and gainsaying race. How articulate, how eloquent are the daily events of the commonest life on earth. Yet we close our ears! Day unto day utters speech, yet we will neither interpret nor hearken!

4. He speaks to us by His Sabbaths. I mention this especially because of its connection with the creation-scene. Each Sabbath is to us a silver trumpet speaking direct from God. It gives no uncertain sound. It

speaks of grace, and love, and rest. It is God's weekly invitation to the weary. He who would take from us our Sabbaths would silence the voice of God.

Thus it is that God speaks to us. Yet deeper than all these there is a divine and irresistible voice speaking to our inner man. Not separate from the word, yet still distinct,—the direct, sovereign, almighty voice of God by which the new creation is formed. Hence it is that out of many hearing the same sermon, or reading the same Bible, some believe, and some believe not. As in the old creation, so in the new, it is God that is the speaker and the worker. "Behold, I make all things new." The new creating words come from His lips to souls dead in sin.

What noble and mighty things are words! Through them we wield the mind of our fellow men. We cannot operate on dead matter through them, as God can, but on living souls we can. What a responsibility on us for our words! What a danger and sin in idle or evil words. Let our words be ever true and holy.

III.

A Happy World

Genesis 2

WHAT a poem, what a picture was the first chapter! Unrivalled in magnificence. The work done, and the words which describe it, are both of God. Now we get some details of the work.

I. Its completion. Thus the heavens and earth were finished, and the whole host or array of all that they contained. God finishes what he begins. He leaves nothing imperfect. And he delights to speak of it as finished. So with creation; so with the tabernacle; so with the temple; so with the great work on the cross. "It is finished." So at the close of time. "It is done."

II. The rest. The seventh day saw the work done. Hitherto it had been continuous work. Now it is rest. God rests. Creation rests. The morning stars begin their song, and the sons of God their shout. What rest means in Him who "fainteth not, neither is weary," we cannot say. It means more than mere cessation from work. God's rest must be as real a thing as His joy and His love; though what it is we cannot say. He calls it rest. It must be something in him exactly corresponding to what rest is in us. The day on which He rests He "blesses;" and blessing with Him is no mere word. It must be a day more fraught with blessing to us and to creation than the rest. More blessing flows out on that day. There are deeper things in this than we think. We shall one day learn that neither earth nor man could have done without this day of blessing. Invisible blessing flows out from it even to those who are profaning it. God sanctifies it; sets a fence round it; makes it a holy thing, like the altar when sprinkled with blood. He has done this, because He rested, and because He shall rest. It is the SABBATH, the rest-day. Shall we not love the name?

III. The details (4-6). God graciously recapitulates; and gives us a glimpse of the process of creation. All plants and herbs were his handiwork; not chance; nor nature; nor man. As yet the ground was unfilled; and rain had not fallen. But now God interposes. He covers earth with a refreshing mist, and he creates man. Probably the state of the atmosphere then was such as to produce mist instead of rain; and it may be that this was the state of things up till the deluge. How wonderful are his works; in wisdom hath he made them all, the finished or the unfinished!

IV. Man's formation. Man is said to be "formed," to be "made," and to be "created." All by God; and out of the dust. His origin is partly of earth and partly of heaven; his body from beneath, his soul from above. God breathes the "breath of lives" into him, and he becomes a living soul. Thus his body is "made" or "formed;" but his soul is "created." The first Adam was made a living soul, the last Adam a quickening spirit. The first man is of the earth earthy, the second man is the Lord from heaven. In Him we live and move and have our being. We are his offspring.

V. Man's dwelling (8-15). God plants a garden for him, in a region which he names Eden (delight). This garden is the eastern part of Eden; afterwards called Paradise. He stores it with all that is beautiful and fruitful: a tree of life he puts there; a tree of knowledge also. Down from the heights of Eden there comes a river, which waters the garden, and then parts into four streams, in four directions, each flowing through some goodly land. Thus the garden is doubly watered by the mist and the river. It is a dwelling fit for man; and worthy of God. God is not ashamed to be called their God; seeing He has provided for them such a habitation. This habitation man is to keep and dress. It needs his care; yet the care is slight. No sweat of the face; no anxious toil. Easy and pleasant labour! Such is the love of God.

VI. The test (16,17). A right to every tree but one! Large scope and free welcome to every tree but that of knowledge. Herein is love. Yet here is a link fastening man to God. Man is not to be allowed to go at large,

without anything to remind him of God or divine law, or divine sovereignty. Even in this pleasant garden God's authority must be acknowledged. Thou shalt, and thou shalt not; thou mayest, and thou mayest not, is the formula in which God presents his authority, and lays down a test of obedient love. Here is love on the largest scale of beneficence; here is obedience reduced to the smallest possible point; liberty as wide as possible; restraint almost nothing; one little piece of forbearance.

VII. The help-meet. Man cannot do alone. It is not his nature; it cannot consist with his happiness. He will not need much to remove the gloom of solitude; one companion will do. God forms this one for him,—a help-meet; taken, not out of the dust, but out of himself; not out of his head, as if superior; not out of his feet, as if inferior; but out of his side;—where lies his heart;—his equal in one aspect; and yet he is the head,—the first Adam the representation of the second, out of whose wounded side, when He slept the sleep of death, his Eve, the church, was brought;—the offspring of his heart, the object of His love,—altogether one.

VIII. The purity. Naked, yet not ashamed. This is holiness; the perfection of innocence. No fear; no blush; nothing to hide. They can look to one another without shame. They can look up to God without fear. For sin is not there. It is sin that gives an evil conscience. It is sin that spreads blushes on the face. Conscious guilt; how this makes one hang his head!

Let us learn,—

(1.) That evil is not of God. God creates nothing sinful. Sin comes from the creature, not from the Creator; from beneath, not from above.

(2.) That God's works in connection with earth and man are those of love. He made the world and its fullness so excellent, because he loved man. God is love.

(3.) That God loves holiness. He made man holy, because He is holy, and He loves what is holy. He loves to see holiness in the world which He has made; and He is to see it yet when all things are made new.

IV.

The Sin, The Sinner, And The Sentence

Genesis 3

THE first two chapters gave us creation's perfection. Like a newly finished statue, there it stands. The chisel has given its last touch. The sculptor is satisfied; pronounces it very good, and rests. All is fair. Earth is like heaven.

But now the descent begins. The steps are no longer upward, but downward. Creaturehood cannot stand alone. The moment that it is left to itself it totters, it falls. It must be joined to the Creator before it can stand. The fall is the first step towards this everlasting union, in virtue of which creation is to become infallible.

I. The Tempter. Outwardly the serpent, inwardly the devil; hence called "the old serpent;" hence the Apostle says, "as the serpent beguiled Eve," and "lest Satan should get advantage over us." This is the first demoniacal possession. Afterwards we read that the devils entered the herd; that Satan entered Judas; that he filled the heart of Ananias. In speaking to man he must use some fleshly form. Thus by means of the serpent he communicates with man.

II. The Temptation. The tempter makes use of the testingtree, and points to it as a mark of restraint and tyranny. His object is to separate Adam and Eve from God; to produce the evil heart of unbelief, which would make them depart from the living God. For this end he suggests doubts on three points, (1.) As to God's goodness,—in prohibiting the tree. (2.) His faithfulness,—in fulfilling His threats. (3.) His truthfulness,—in deceiving them as to the real nature of the tree. Having got Eve to listen, he leads her on, and then flatly contradicts God. Ye shall not surely die.

III. The Bait. (1.) Negative, ye shall not die. (2.) Positive, ye shall be as God, knowing good and evil. The first was to remove the dread of danger, the second to lead on. Knowledge! Knowledge like that of God! Intellectual ambition,—this is man's first snare, and it shall be his last. Worship of intellect and genius. Human supremacy in mind. Progress! Not in the knowledge of God Himself (Satan does not dare promise that); but of good and evil. Does not this imply that evil is in itself a strange attraction? To know evil man will do and dare as much as to know good. Evil is in his eyes an empire of boundless range, to whose utmost limits he fain would penetrate. Hence his love of the "sensational." The opening of the eye to see afar off, whether into space or time, or the substance of things, is an irresistible bait. For the obtaining of a wider range of vision, what will man not do?

The Success. The tempter triumphs. Woman, "the weaker vessel," yields. She falls, and in falling, drags her husband down. Three things win her over. (1.) The tree is good for food. Why then not eat of it as of all the rest? Yet for this she had only Satan's word. But "the lust of the flesh" prevailed. (2.) It is pleasant to the eyes; it looked goodly, and the lust of the eye prevailed. (3.) It makes wise; it is the tree of knowledge. She wants to be wise, and she will not wait God's time, nor take it in God's way; but in her own, or rather the devil's. *Wisdom* is the devil's bait; wisdom apart from the God only wise,—apart from Him who is the wisdom of God. What harm is there in wisdom, says he still; and so with this sophistry he leads men into knowledge where God is not; into literature where God is not, and where Christ is unknown.

The Shame. We are unfit to be seen, is the first feeling that arises after the sin; unfit to be seen by any one, even by one another; unfit for the sun to shine upon. A covering or darkness is their only refuge. Now they know what nakedness is. The virus of the forbidden tree has shot through them, and the sense of disobedience clouds their conscience; they now for the first time know the distinction between their comely and uncomely parts,—the clean and the unclean. They take the nearest and the broadest leaf,

and twist it over them. Here it is simply covering, in after days it became ornament as well.

VI. The Dread. How shall we look on God, or God look on us? God comes down,—they flee, as far off as possible, into the covert of the trees. Their fig-leaves were more for themselves, this is for God. They dare not face Him. They dread His anger. O folly! To hide from God! Yet man has always done so; his doing deeds in darkness or when alone, which he would not do in the light or before the others, is the same feeling as here.

VII. The Trial. God summons them. They come forth and stand at His bar. He questions them, and brings out their whole guilt step by step. They blame each other, they blame God, they blame the serpent. But they sullenly admit the deed. Poor excuses! What can palliate sin? What will God accept as palliation? Guilty on their own admission; this is the verdict.

VIII. The Sentence. Each of the guilty parties receives judgment. (1.) The Serpent. As the instrument he is cursed, and as the representative of the old serpent. A greater than the serpent is here. In this curse on the serpent, God reveals His love to the sinning race, and tells that instead of cursing the victim, as no doubt Satan expected, he means to take his part against Satan,—to raise up a deliverer, the Son of the woman, who, though not without wounds, will destroy man's enemy. The man with the bruised heel is to be the bruiser of the serpent's head.

(2.) The Woman. No curse, but still a chastisement, a memorial of her sin; as the first in sin she is to be in subjection, and though through child-bearing she is to be the source of blessing, yet this very thing shall be in sorrow, to remind her of her sin. (3.) The Man. No curse on himself, but on the ground for his sake. Fruitfulness in evil is the doom of the soil; sorrow and death, toil and sweat is the doom of man. Yet these after all are earthly. They do not separate from the love of God.

The Man's Faith. He names his wife according to the promise; mother of the living, not of the dead mother of him who is the living one, the resurrection and the life. Adam believed God, and was justified; he accepted God's testimony to the coming Messiah as the living One, though born of her who had brought in death, and he became partaker of life eternal.

God's Clothing for Man. Coats of skins; those of the slain sacrifices, provided by God himself, better and more durable than the fig-leaves; types of heavenly raiment, and preintimations of the source from which that raiment was to come,—of the materials of which that raiment was to be composed, viz., the life and death of the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world. This was what the Lord meant when he said, "Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him," and what Paul meant when he said, "Put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ."

Yes; the Son of God has come to clothe us! He has provided the garments, and He puts them on. They are fair and goodly; washed white in His own blood; glorious as the sun. He asks us to take them; nay, He entreats us to allow Him to put them upon us." Buy of me white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear" (Revelation 3:18).

V.

Man's Fig-Leaves

"They sewed fig-leaves together, and made themselves aprons." —

Genesis 3:7

THEY are alone, yet they are ashamed. They are in Paradise, yet they are ashamed. It is conscience that is making them blush. It not only makes cowards of them, but it works shame and confusion of face. They are ashamed of themselves; of their nakedness; of their recent doings. They cannot look one another in the face after their disobedience and recriminations against one another. They cannot look up to God now. Possibly too they shrink from being in view of the serpent who beguiled them. The feeling of happy innocence is gone.

They must be *covered*. This is their feeling, the dictate of conscience. The eye must not see them, either of God or man. The light must not shine on them; the eye of the sun must not look on them; and the fair flowers and trees of Paradise must not see their shame. They love darkness rather than light. Covering is what they seek,—covering from every eye. Thus, shame and guilt are inseparable. "I must be covered," is the sinner's first feeling,—from the eye of God and man, even from my own. They cannot look on me, nor I on them!

Thus far they are right. But now they go wrong. Their mistake was twofold: (1.) That they could cover themselves; (2.) that they can be covered with materials from vegetable nature. Let us look at these.

I. Man thinks he can cover himself. He knows not the greatness of the evil; he does not calculate on the penetration of the all-seeing eye. He sets to work and makes himself a covering, and he says this will do. What sin is, or what the sinner needs, or what God requires, he has no idea of. Each sinner has his own way of covering himself; he weaves his own web,

whatever may be the substance of which it is composed. He wishes to be his own coverer, the maker of his own raiment. He thinks he can do it himself. He has no idea that it is utterly beyond his power. He trusts to the skill of his own hands to provide the dress that shall hide his shame from the eye of God and man. He thinks it an easy thing to deal with shame, and fear, and conviction, and conscience. He will not believe that these can only be dealt with by God. This is the last thing that he will admit. He will try a thousand plans before accepting this. He will make and try on many kinds or sets of raiment before betaking himself to that which God has made. The unbelieving man's whole religious life is a series of plans and efforts for stitching a raiment for himself, with which to appear before God and before men; nay, with which he hopes to appear before the judgment-seat. It is with this man-made, this self-made clothing, this earth-made, or priest-made, or church-made religion, that he robes himself; with this he soothes conscience; with this he quiets fear; with this he removes the feeling of guilty shame. He can do all that is needful himself, or at the most with a little help from God.

II. Man thinks he can cover himself with leaves. He supposes that what will hide his shame from his own eye will hide it from God; that even such a frail covering as the foliage of the fig-tree will do. He has no thought of anything beyond this. The fig-leaf will do, he thinks. What more do I need? But he is mistaken; the fig-leaf will not do, broad and green as it may be. But why will it not do?

(1.) It is man's device, not God's. That which covers sin, and renders the sinner fit to draw near, must be of God, not of man. God only has the right, God only can, prescribe to man how he is to draw near. What then is ritualism but a religion of fig-leaves?

(2.) It is simply for the body, not the soul. It does not relieve the conscience, or satisfy the guilty spirit, or cover the whole man. It is utterly insufficient. It could not remove one fear, or quiet one pang of remorse, or make the man feel tranquil in the presence of God.

(3.) It is composed of life, not of death. That which is to cover man's sin, and deliver him from the sense of shame, must be something which has had the life taken out of it. The green fig-leaf will not do. It is no better than Cain's sacrifice,—the fruit of the ground. The only thing that can relieve the sinner from guilt and shame is atonement; the only atonement is by blood; for without shedding of blood is no remission; and therefore the only sufficient covering must be one connected with atonement,^{3/4}one which represents death,^{3/4}one which tells of the payment of the righteous penalty and the removal of the righteous condemnation. The fig-leaf spoke of life, not of death; of the blessing, not of the curse. It had nothing in it which told of propitiation or substitution; nothing which spoke of God's anger turned away by means of the endurance of that anger by another.

The truths here taught us for ourselves are not a few. They are of profound importance.

(1.) Man's devices for covering sin are useless. They may be easy or difficult,—cheap or costly,—still they are vain. They profit nothing. The covering is narrower than a man can wrap himself in. These devices are innumerable. Good, deeds, long prayers, fervent feelings, self-mortifications and penances; church-connection, rites, ceremonies, religious performances,—such are man's ways for approaching God, his coverings for a sinful soul. They are all fig-leaves!

(2.) Man's devices all turn upon something which he himself has to do, not on what God has done. Man misses the main point of importance. This was not wonderful in Adam, to whom nothing had been revealed;

but it is amazing in us now, when God has announced that he has done all,—that "it is finished!"

(3.) Man's devices assume that God is such an one as himself. He can conceal himself from his fellow man; therefore he thinks he can cover

himself, so that God shall not see him. That which conceals him from a human eye, he supposes will conceal him from a divine.

(4.) Man's devices all trifle with sin. They do not fathom its depths of malignity in God's sight. They assume that it will be easily forgiven and forgotten. They overlook its evil, its hatefulness, its eternal desert of woe. What are fig-leaves as a protection against the wrath of God or the flames of hell!

VI.

Expulsion And Re-Entrance

"So he drove out the man: and he placed at the east of the garden of Eden cherubims and a flaming sword which turned every way, to keep the way of the tree of life." —

Genesis 3:24

WE may safely conclude that this solemn act on the part of God is not separate from, or in contradiction of the previous promises of grace, but in fulfilment of it,—embodying an illustration or exposition of it. As generally interpreted, it stands alone, and speaks wholly of judgment, not of grace. But rightly read, it anticipates the apostle's statement, "The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life;" or if there be aught about it apparently stern or terrible, it amounts to nothing more than that in the Epistle to the Hebrews, "The Holy Ghost thus signifying, that the way into the holiest of all was not yet made manifest."

I. The expulsion. The holy dwelling so specially made for man can no longer be his abode. He has sinned it away. He is not to be cast out of earth, or even out of Eden; but out of Paradise he must go, that God may testify to the evil of sin. But the simple fact of his being left on earth,—nay, in Eden,—is a proclamation of God's forgiving love.

(1.) The Expeller. It is God himself. He who made Paradise for man, and set man in it! He expelled him. The expulsion and the introduction are the acts of the same Being.

(2.) The expelled. It is man,—nay, "the man," the same as mentioned before; the man so newly made, so greatly loved,—made in God's image, to represent him and to serve him!

(3.) The expelling. The word is a strong one,—driving out by force, as the nations of Canaan. In verse 23 we read, he "sent out"; but man would not go, so he is compelled to force him out! It is forcible ejection from a forfeited abode.

Paradise was the place of God's dwelling with man; and now either God or man must leave. If God leaves, man is hopeless; if man leaves, his place is still kept open for him by God. Even in the expulsion God shews his grace, His longsuffering, His unwillingness to leave man or man's earth. He desires still to have a habitation here. "This is my rest," He says.

II. The guard. This was a sword,—or rather, "the sword," the sword of fire, or "the flame of the sword,"—the sword which turned round every way, perhaps girdling Paradise with a flaming belt; the sword spoken of, Joshua 5:13; 1 Chronicles 21:16,27; Psalm 45:3; Isaiah 34:5,6; Ezekiel 21:5, Zechariah 13:7. It was placed, not simply to bar entrance, but to inflict death on all who should attempt to enter. It was "the veil"; but it was more. It told that the holiest was not opened; and that until God withdrew the barrier it was death for the sinner to enter. What more efficient, more terrible fence could there be? Sword and fire in one! God's sword and fire,—revolving, in life and power; making access an impossibility. Living fire, or fiery life! It is the shekinah in the form of a sword, as elsewhere in the form of a pillar, according to the purpose to be served. O man, canst thou re-enter Paradise without God's permission? Canst thou open the barred gate? Canst thou remove or quench the sword of fire? Thou canst not. There is one that shutteth and no man openeth; that kindleth and no man quencheth. Only He can open who closed the gate; only He can quench the fire who kindled it; He who said, "Awake, O sword, against the man that is my fellow!" That sword is quenched,—in the blood of Jehovah's fellow, the gate is open, the access unchallenged and free!

But the special object of this fence was to keep the way to the tree of life, which was in the midst of the garden. The eating of this tree was to preserve man's immortality. As the common fruit of the garden was to

uphold him against the tear and wear of each day; so the tree of life had in it special virtue; and it is no more inconsistent with man's immortality to say this than to say that he needed other food to maintain his life. It was "in the midst," as the most conspicuous and most accessible place: marking its importance and preeminence among the trees of the garden. The preservation of man's immortality was now no longer a desirable thing. Besides, it was forfeited. He was taught that there was immortality in store for him; but not through that tree. It must be reached through death. It must be the immortality of resurrection. His being debarred from the tree of life was the preliminary or preparatory step to his being taught this wondrous lesson which after ages were to evolve. Man shall one day approach the tree of life (Revelation 2:7); but not now! Death lies between him and life. Death is the gate of life; resurrection is our hope.

III. The new occupants. The cherubim now are set where man was. These are doubtless symbolic things, such as those of gold in the tabernacle; or, if having the semblance of life, like those spoken of in Ezekiel and the Revelation, which are still symbolic, not real beasts or living creatures. Their appearance (earthly animals); their position on the mercyseat; their being one with the mercy-seat, their being sprinkled with blood; the song they sing in Revelation, all tell us that they are redemption-symbols, proclaiming man, and man's earth with all its creatures, redeemed and glorified; man reintroduced into Paradise, higher than that from which he was driven out, the Paradise of God. These cherubim in the earthly Paradise are said to dwell there; not "set", but "made to tabernacle" there. They are placed there as in a dwelling, to indicate man's future restoration to the abode he had lost. The sight of them is good news to Adam. He and his seed are to be restored after all. They are not always to be banished; not always to worship at the gate, or stand upon the threshold. They are to re-enter and partake of the better tree in the better Paradise.

The way is now opened; the sword withdrawn; the invitation unrestricted and unconditional. A new and living way! Let us draw near! Without is condemnation, within is pardon; without is death, within is life and

immortality. There is no barrier now; no veil; no hindrance; no distance; no uncertainty. The blood is shed and sprinkled. Through death, life has come. The tomb becomes the gate of life. Why stand we without, as if the sword of fire were still there, or as if the veil were not rent in twain? Why hesitate, or tremble, or doubt, when all is plain, and when God himself is beckoning us in? Let us come boldly to the throne of grace. Let us draw near with a true heart, and in full assurance of faith. Let us not linger on the threshold, but at once go in. The blood which has been shed on earth and accepted in heaven, is that which emboldens us to approach with confidence, not reckoning it possible that we can be sent empty away.

VII.

The Blood Of Sprinkling And The Blood Of Abel

"And he said, What hast thou done? the voice of thy brother's blood crieth unto me front the ground." —

Genesis 4:10

"And to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel." —

Hebrews 12:24

THIS cry of Abel's blood reminds us of the "How long?" of the martyrs (Revelation 6:10), and of the injured widow's "Avenge me." It was a cry from the ground where it had been hidden from every eye but God's; a cry to God; a cry which brought down a curse.

The "blood of sprinkling" is, first of all, the blood which was sprinkled in the tabernacle; which, with all its imperfections, spoke better things than Abel's. But it is especially the blood of the Lamb of God as sprinkled on the conscience, in believing.

In one aspect the cry of Christ's blood is the same. For it is that blood that now rests on Israel. Through it the long curse has come upon the nation. But still this is not the direct and proper meaning or application of the blood. It speaks better things than that of Abel.

I. It speaks of love, not hatred. It was to Cain's hatred, a brother's hatred, that Abel's blood bore witness. The blood of sprinkling speaks of a brother's love,—the love of Christ, the love of Him who loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood. It is truly of love that the

blood so loudly and explicitly speaks. Thus it speaks better things than that of Abel: for it speaks both of a father's and a brother's love. "God is love" is its message. Of the love which passeth knowledge it bears witness to us;—love unto death; love stronger than death.

II. It speaks of grace, not of wrath. Because of Abel's blood God was angry. It was divine wrath that spoke out in his words to Cain. But it is divine grace and mercy that speak in the blood of Christ. The blood of sprinkling propitiates God, and draws out grace. It says, Where sin abounded grace did much more abound. Grace "abounding" over divine wrath and human sin; "riches of grace;" "exceeding riches of grace;" the "grace of God that bringeth salvation,"—these are the voices which come from it to us."

III. It speaks of forgiveness, not condemnation. The blood said, Father, forgive them. It was not condemning blood. He who heard of it, and believed God's testimony to its meaning and efficacy, was thereby assured of forgiveness. The blood shewed the true basis and the true way of pardon; pardon through the condemnation of another; Pardon through the blood-shedding, for the blood-shedders themselves; righteous, true, holy, unchangeable, eternal Pardon. "No condemnation;" nay, justification through the great transaction on the cross.

It speaks of comfort, not of terror. Abel's blood was dreadful to all who saw it; full of terror to the murderer; alarm to his conscience; remorse to his spirit. Not so with this better blood. Its voice is comfort. It soothes the sinner's terrors. It does not palliate his sin; yet it so speaks to him concerning it as to let him know that the blood-shedding which brings him in guilty, and deserving of a murderer's death, assures him at the same time of the removal of all his fears. It is indeed nobler, richer blood, the blood of God, and so bringing on the shedder more awful guilt; yet by its propitiatory nature, its expiatory power, it announces, with divine certainty, the deliverance from the infinite danger under which they who had shed it had brought themselves.

It speaks of peace come, not of peace gone. The blood of Abel said, Peace is gone; peace has forsaken the earth; it has left man and the families of man. All is now hatred, variance, murder, separation between man and God; between man and man; between brother and brother. The blood of Jesus tells that peace has returned. He is our peace. His blood has brought it back to earth. He has made peace by the blood of his cross. It has come! It has come down from heaven. Heaven and earth are meeting. God and the sinner are being reconciled. There is yet hope for man and man's earth. We need not despair, as if peace had fled away forever.

VI. It speaks of the blessing, not of the curse. Abel's blood spoke wholly of the curse; it brought the curse on Cain; and on the earth. It doubled the curse which Adam's sin had brought to the world. Christ's blood blesses and curses not. Its voice is the voice of blessing. It means blessing in every drop. It meant blessing when first shed; it means blessing still. There is no curse in it, saving to those who reject it. In it is the fullness of eternal blessing, blessing such as the sinner needs; the removal of all curse for soul and body.

VII. It speaks of nearness, not of distance, between man and God. Reconciliation, friendship, communion, nearness^{3/4}all these are contained in it. "We who sometime were far off, are made nigh by the blood of Christ." No separation, no darkness, no uncertainty of relationship, but cemented union, on the basis of a purged conscience and an everlasting righteousness. Every hairbreadth of the distance which sin had produced is forever swept away. Perpetual nearness! Eternal fellowship! This is our portion; secured to us by the righteous removal of all that intervened between us and God;
either on God's side or ours.

VIII. It speaks of the purged, not of the pricked and despairing conscience. Abel's blood spoke to Cain's conscience; it must have been a perpetual pricking and wounding. Christ's blood speaks of purging, healing, soothing. No more conscience of sins! A conscience purged from dead works to serve the living God! Every wound in it healed; every

trouble laid to rest; every shadow resting over it dispelled. Not despair, but hope.

It speaks of life, not of death. Abel's blood seemed the seal set to the death of the race. Brother murders brother,—what is to be the end of this? But Christ's Word speaks of life; the reversal of the sentence by the payment of the penalty. There was no life through the Word and death of Abel. There is life through the blood and death of the Son of God. Life from the dead is the voice of the blood; life to the slayers of the Prince of life. The voice from the cross was one of life;—"I give unto them eternal life." The voice from the tomb was the same;—"quicken together with Christ."

It speaks of restoration, not of expulsion. It was Abel's blood that made Cain a fugitive and vagabond, Christ's blood brings us back from our wanderings; restores us to Paradise; delivers us from exile; gives us possession of the Paradise of God, the heavenly city, the new heavens and earth wherein dwelleth righteousness. It is the blood of the Son of God that makes us friends, children, heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ. Let us receive God's testimony to this blood, this better blood, this blood of the everlasting covenant. The reception of this divine testimony is life, and peace, and holiness.

Be warned against the rejection of this testimony and trampling on this blood. It is blood which, when sprinkled on the soul, saves; but which, when not sprinkled, condemns. It will sink the rejector to the lowest hell.

VIII.

The Way Of Cain

"And Cain went out from the presence of the Lord." —

Genesis 4:16

"Not as Cain, who was of that wicked one, and slew his brother. And wherefore slew he him? Because his own works were evil, and his brother's righteous." —I John 3:12

"Woe unto them! for they have gone in the way of Cain, and ran greedily after the error of Balaam for reward, and perished in the gainsaying of Core."—Jude 11

AS "the way of Cain" is spoken of by the apostle Jude, as specially the way of the last days, let us inquire what it was. It was evil, not good. He is an open and defiant sinner; and in him sin takes its full swing. He is the first child of the fall, and the offspring of the fallen; he is no common transgressor; he runs no ordinary career of wickedness; he rushes to the extremity of evil. He is given as a beacon, yet as a true specimen of man, of the human heart even in the most favourable circumstances. He came into the world, not like Adam, full-grown, but a child, and therefore with the least possible amount of evil. He is the child of believing parents; for Adam shewed his faith by calling his wife, and Eve shewed hers by the way in which she received her first-born. He had a most godly brother, and was one of a pious household; brought up within sight of Paradise, and from childhood taught the knowledge of the true God, and the woman's seed. He was exposed to no outward temptation; he had no companion in sin; he walked the broad way alone. He was warned, no doubt, against the serpent and his seed. He was more than once spoken to directly by God. He had every possible advantage, in the absence of evil and the presence of good. Much might have been expected from him; yet

he turns his back on God, on Paradise, on the altar, on the sacrifice, on all that is good and blessed.

But let us see more specially what the apostle calls "the way of Cain." It is the way,

I. Of unbelief. Cain is the first specimen of an unbelieving man. His parents were sinners, but they believed. His brother was a sinner, but he believed. Cain is not an atheist, nor an altogether irreligious man. He owns a God, and brings his fruits to the altar. But he brings no lamb, no blood, nothing that speaks of death. He comes with no confession, no cry for mercy. He sees no need of the woman's seed, no danger from the serpent; no preciousness, and perhaps no truth, in the promise of the serpent's crushed head or Messiah's bruised heel. He takes Satan's side against God, not God's against Satan; for all unbelief is a siding with Satan against God. God is not to him the God of grace, nor the woman's seed the Saviour of the lost. He has a religion, but it is self-made, a human religion, something of his own; without Christ, or blood, or pardon. The love of God is to him mere indifference to sin. Rejection of God's religion, and of His Messiah,—this is "the way of Cain."

II. It is the way of apostasy. He turns his back on God, and will have none of Him. He is not like one of our dark heathen, ignorant of the true God. He knows Jehovah, and has heard His voice; but he turns away. He is an apostate (the first apostate) from the religion of his father; a scorner of the Messiah; he wants a Messiah of his own,—"a Christ that is to be"; not God's Christ, but man's. From what small beginnings apostasy springs.

III. It is the way of worldliness. Having forsaken his father's God, he makes a god to himself; that god is the world. He goes far from Paradise, builds a city, becomes a thorough man of the world; becomes the father of the inventors of all curious instruments, leads the ever-swelling crowd in its race of worldliness and vanity,—with the cry, Onward, onward; progress, progress. They eat and drink, marry, and are given in marriage.

All about Cain is of this present evil world. In our age what a spirit of worldliness is abroad; often not open wickedness, but simply worldliness, so absorbing the soul as to draw it quite down from the region of "the world to come."

It is the way of hatred. He begins with envy of his brother; goes on to hatred; ends in murder. He is specially jealous of his brother's having found favour with God. Yes, strange, though he would have none of God for himself, he cannot bear that his brother should have it. Not the love of man or woman, but of God is the cause of the first jealousy and the first murder. He hates God, and all the more for loving his brother. He hates Abel, and all the more for being loved of God. He cannot lay hands on God, as he fain would do, but he lays hands on His favourite, and so takes his revenge. Yes, the way of Cain is the way of envy, jealousy, hatred, murder!

The way of God-defiance. He dissembles; he wipes his bloody weapon and his bloody hands, saying, What have I done? He lies; he pretends; he would hide his doings from God. He has beguiled his brother into a lonely field and slain him, thinking that none would rescue, and none see. He acts as the liar and the hypocrite in the very presence of God. The way of Cain is the way of hypocrisy, falsehood, and defiance of God. God asks him of his brother; his answer is not only a lie, but a brazenfaced piece of impiety: "Am I my brother's keeper?" Thus he mocks God; utters the language of irreverence and defiance:—"He is your favourite, why do you not keep him? I never pretended to keep him." Here mingled fear, shame, audacity, defiance are manifested. He would fain deny the deed, but dares not. He trembles, and would fain conceal it. He puts on a defiant air and attitude, as if to brave it out before the all-seeing One!

Such is the way of Cain! Mark his doom.

1. Despair. No cry for mercy, but merely, My punishment is greater than I can bear. So is it in other ages. The sinner's despair of mercy, or complaint against God for making his punishment so heavy, is the

repetition of Cain's offence and his doom. Why should a sinner despair on this side of hell? There is forgiveness to the uttermost; grace reaching far beyond the extremity of human guilt.

2. Banishment from God. He goes out from the presence of God, as if he could no longer bear that. He must away from Paradise, the birthplace of the race, the old seat of worship. But what is this to the eternal banishment? Cain has no rest, moving to and fro without hope or aim, a fugitive and vagabond, seeking rest, finding none. Sad curse! yet nothing to the eternal wandering!

3. Disappointment. He himself was his mother's disappointment, for she thought she had gotten the manchild. So is he a disappointment to himself. From first to last we see in him a disappointed man, trying everything, succeeding in nothing; building cities, roaming from place to place, to soothe his conscience, and fill up his heart's void. But in vain!

4. Fruitless worldliness. He is the heir of a barren world; for the whole world is his. He is possessor of a soil made unfruitful by a brother's blood; tilling and sowing, yet not reaping. A weary man, toiling for that which is not bread; trying to wring water out of the world's dry sands and broken cisterns. Such is the career of thousands. Fruitless worldliness. A life of vanity; a soul utterly void; a being wholly wasted.

IX.

The Man Of Rest

"And Lamech lived an hundred eighty and two years, and begat a son; and he called his name Noah, saying, This same shall comfort us concerning our work and toil of our hands, because of the ground which the Lord hath cursed."—

Genesis 5:28,29

THIS is the utterance of faith; it is the voice of a believing man that we hear in Lamech's words. Lamech speaks because God had spoken to him. It is not mere parental yearning; it is not mere selfish weariness crying out under toil; it is not the expression of a dark and vague hope; it is faith speaking out the revelation which God had made to it regarding creation's deliverance; and it is the first intimation we have as to the removal of the "curse,"—as to the "rest" and "consolation."

It is a double prophecy. By this I do not mean a doubtful or a conditional prophecy. There is no such thing as a conditional prophecy. If it be prophecy, it is not conditional; and if it be conditional, it is not prophecy. A double prophecy is one that takes in two events, or persons, or places in one description; the near and the far; predicting both, while seeming to predict only one; as David, in the seventy-second Psalm, points both to Solomon and to a greater than Solomon; as Isaiah points to the Babylon of his day and Babylon the great. The prophet sketches a scene or person immediately before his eye, but in language which intimates that a far greater is coming. The near or miniature sketch is so drawn as to bring out the full features of the larger and more distant.

So is it here with Lamech. God reveals to him the future of two persons and two things: (1.) his own son, and a far greater, of whom his son was but the shadow; (2.) the alleviation or removal of earth's curse, partially under Noah, fully under the greater than Noah. There are two remarkable

prophecies before the flood, first, that of Enoch, concerning Messiah's coming with his saints, to destroy the wicked; which was a double prophecy, relating both to the deluge and to the judgment at the Lord's coming; the second is that of Lamech concerning "the rest" of the saints (2 Thessalonians 1:7) and the removal of the curse. Let us look into this second prophecy.

I. The curse on the ground. When man sinned, the first stroke of the curse fell. It had now lasted about fifteen centuries, unabated. It was something real: its results were both barrenness in what was good, and fruitfulness in evil. The whole creation groaned; the blight and sadness were felt everywhere. It was a record of human sin; God's visible testimony to the greatness of the first sin—the one sin of primal disobedience—"Cursed is the ground for thy sake." It is not yet removed. Creation is still subject to vanity. Corruption, mortality, decay, death are here. It has been a long curse, yet it is the memorial of a single sin.

II. Man's toil and weariness. The whole verse reads weariness and heaviness of spirit—almost despair. The world was growing more wicked and more luxurious. It was increasing in population. Men were not allowed to eat flesh; nor to kill animals save for sacrifice. These animals, increasing rapidly, would require an immense pasturage. Man's toil would thus be greatly on the increase; it would become quite oppressive and overwhelming. He knew not what to do, nor which way to turn. Toil, toil, toil! This was his daily lot. In the sweat of his face he was made to eat his bread. The curse on the ground grew no lighter, and his labour grew heavier. What with barrenness in good and fruitfulness in evil, it demanded of him endless labour and weariness. He groaned under it along with a groaning creation. He was compelled to sympathise with the groaning and travailing creature. Such ought to be our feeling. Our toil may not be quite so oppressive; we do not so wholly depend on our toil; the appliances of art and the permission to eat animal food have alleviated our labours. But still creation groans, and man eats his bread in the sweat of his face.

III. Man's longing for comfort. The words of the verse are those of the hireling looking for the shadow, and longing for repose. These patriarchs were aged men; some nearly a thousand years. One thousand years of toil! What a life! If three-score and ten be so wearisome to some, what would one thousand be? Lamech, when he uttered these words, was one hundred and eighty-two. Surely he had known toil and weariness beyond what we can do! Do we wonder that he longed for comfort, that he sighed for rest, and that he breathed out these deep longings for deliverance?

Are we not longing too? Is toil so sweet that we wish its continuance? Or is rest so terrible that we do not desire it:
and say "how long"!

Mans expectation of deliverance. He knew that the case of earth was not hopeless. He would gather from the first promise that God meant, some time or other, to undo the curse. And while he sympathised with the "groaning and travailing" of creation, he joined in its "earnest expectation." He sustained himself under his toil by the expectation of rest.

He was not satisfied to remain forever toiling and sweating. It was part of his creed to look for rest; to grasp the coming consolation. Man laboured and was heavy laden; but he heard the voice of the true Noah saying, Come unto me, all ye that labour, and I will give you rest.

Man's expectation was connected with some one individual to be born in due time. Lamech had been taught of God to expect something in connection with *his* son, whom he named Noah, in consequence of this expectation. And in his time relief was granted, the alleviation, though not the removal, of the curse and the toil, (1.) Noah received a confirmation of the first blessing given to Adam before he fell; (2.) In his time man's life began to be shortened; (3.) Permission was granted to till animals and eat their flesh; (4.) Special attention was directed to husbandry, "Noah began to be a husbandman." These partial alleviations given in connection with Noah were figures of the complete deliverance of creation in connection with a greater than Noah; in the day of the Son of man, the day

of the manifestation of the sons of God, of those of whom Enoch prophesied "the Lord cometh with ten thousand of His saints."

Thus we anticipate the deliverance of creation, the removal of the curse, in the day of the Son of man, when He shall say, Behold, I make all things new. The greater than Noah is at hand; and with Him the manifestation of the sons of God; and, with that, the rest which remaineth for the people of God; the times of the restitution of all things; when barrenness shall be exchanged for fruitfulness; and the wilderness rejoice and blossom as the rose: for we according to His promise look for new heavens and a new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness. Seeing, then, we look for such things, what manner of persons ought we to be in all holy conversation and godliness!

X.

Going Out And Keeping Out

"Now the Lord had said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will shew thee: and I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing: and I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed. So Abram departed, as the Lord had spoken unto him; and Lot went with him: and Abram was seventy and five years old when he departed out of Haran." —

Genesis 12:1-4

THUS begins the story of Israel's calling, as a nation. Like the great rivers of earth, it has a small beginning,—one individual; a Chaldee of Ur; an idolater of Mesopotamia; with no recommendation or worthiness; a genuine specimen of God's electing grace, and of divine sovereignty, as well as of the power of the Holy Ghost.

So far as appears, God had not personally interposed, from Noah's time to this. The only kind of interposition was that at Babel. Now he comes forth out of His silence and darkness. He speaks; nay, He appears; He, as the God of glory, or "God of the glory" (Acts 7:2). The shekinah re-appears; and out of it God speaks to Abram. The frequent use of the words "the Lord APPEARED to Abram," in connection with Stephen's reference to the glory, intimates this mode of revelation.

I. The command. It is sovereign and authoritative; it is explicit and uncompromising; it does not wait on our will or choice; it leaves no room for hesitation on our part. "Get thee out" are Jehovah's words to Abram. They refer to one single transaction, about which there can be no mistake; and lest there should be any mistake, the three things to be left are

specified, country, kindred, father's house. The getting out is to be complete and decided. It is also to be immediate; no waiting, nor lingering, nor preparing; get out at once. This command is all the more peremptory from its not specifying the place to be gone to. With that he was not to concern himself. The terminus a quo was quite explicit; not so the terminus ad quem. The latter was of little moment in the mean time. It would come to light by and by. It was on the bare command of Jehovah that he was to act; putting himself blindfold into the hands of God. All that Abram was to know of his route or destination was this, "It is the land which I will shew thee." Thus completely was he shut in and shut up to obedience.

II. The promise. It is as directly from God as the command is; so that he can no more doubt the one than the other. It relates wholly to the future,—much of it to the future of far ages. Yet it is a very explicit and blessed promise, for the fulfilment of which he had the divine truthfulness and unchangeableness. "God who cannot lie;" who "does not repent,"—this is the God both of the command and the promise. He gives both; let us accept both; not separating the one from the other. In this promise God comes forth strikingly as the doer of the whole; "I will shew;" "I will make;" "I will bless."

All is of the Lord and of none else, (1.) A land,—though unknown; (2.) numbers; (3.) blessing; (4.) honour; (5.) fountain of blessing; (6.) the occasion of blessing or cursing; (7.) the blessedness of the whole earth in him. Large promises these! Glorious blessings! Including all that Abram needed for eternity as well as time. This gives a vision of Messiah and his glory, as well as of all earth under Him; for Abram is to be "heir of the world" (Romans 4:11).

III. *The obedience.* "He departed as the Lord had spoken to him." "He obeyed," says the apostle (Hebrews 11:8). God called, he complied. He did not argue, nor linger, nor hesitate, nor look back. He set out at once. He knew not where he was going; not a step of the way or anything of the land. He had no earthly counsellor or guide. Only the God of the

glory,— Jehovah in His shekinah, He went before him, as in the pillarcloud. Everything connected with this obedience was supernatural and divine. Jehovah broke his earthly ties; enabled him to triumph over earthly affections; made his face like a flint against all opposition; took him by the hand and led him out. Here we have obedience in its simplest, purest form,—believing, trusting obedience. "God has spoken," that is his answer to all suggestions from without or within. "God has spoken," that cheers and gladdens him. He could not mistake the voice,—either its meaning or the quarter from which it came. That was enough for him. We need not ask particularly, was this the time of his conversion? Probably it was. It was the day of God's power to him. It was what Christ's words were to the sons of Zebedee, or to Zaccheus. God spoke, and the Holy Spirit carried the message to the inner man. He was turned from dumb idols to serve the living God; he became heir of the righteousness which is of faith; he became Messiah's ancestor, yet a trophy of Messiah's power.

There are some striking texts in subsequent scriptures which derive much light and point from this scene. They are the following :

(1.) Psalm 45:10, "Hearken, O daughter, and consider; and incline thine ear; forget also thine own people, and thy father's house." God thus speaks to His chosen ones; the bride of Christ. Thus he speaks aloud to an unheeding world." Hear, and your soul shall live." Oh, listen now,— turn your back on the world; your face to Jesus!

(2.) Matthew 16:25, "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me." Christ's command is as explicit as that to Abram. "Come after me,"— come at once. Come now! Deny self and come! Deny self and take up your cross! Whatever hinders, come!

(3.) 2 Corinthians 6:17, "Come out from among them, and be ye separate." Here the words are remarkably like those addressed to Abram. The command is, therefore, come out; be separate; touch not; the promise is

like unto it," I will receive you;" "I will be a father;" "Ye shall be my children."

God speaks to us, and says, "Come out."

(4.) Revelation 18:4, "Come out of her, my people." In one aspect this is the likeliest to Abram's call, for it is a call out of Babylon. It suits these last days well. Come out of Babylon! Come out of every false church; every city of idols; every refuge of lies! Come out! Say not, I will stay, but worship the true God inside! No. Come out! This is God's command!

XI.

The Shield And The Recompense

"After these things the word of the Lord came unto Abram in a vision, saying, Fear not, Abram: I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward."

Genesis 15:1

THE full meaning of this "word of the Lord," which "came unto Abram in a vision," can only be understood by reference to the events narrated in the preceding chapter. Never had such an unequal battle been waged as between Abraham and these mighty kings. With his 318 servants he had pursued, conquered, spoiled thousands, perhaps tens of thousands. Truly he put his life into his hand, and with marvellous courage encountered the peril. On the back of this, God comes to him with "I am thy SHIELD." He had moreover, given up the spoil to others, reserving nothing to himself; and God comes in with His "I am thy exceeding great REWARD." He had done both of these in simple faith; having no previous command, or promise, or assurance of success; and God having thus tested his faith, comes to him with a blessed word of assurance: speaking to him in a vision, and calling him by name. Let us mark,

I. The word of cheer. "Fear not, Abram." It is God who speaks. He calls Abram by name, as one on familiar terms with Him; and no doubt Abram recognised the comforting voice and cheering words. How frequent throughout Scripture are the divine "fear nots"; how ready God is to utter them, even as a father to his trembling child. To Isaac He said, "Fear not, for I am with thee" (Genesis 26:24). To Jacob He said, "I am God, the God of thy fathers: fear not to go down into Egypt" (Genesis 46:3). Frequently to Israel He said the same words, "Fear not, for I am with thee" (Deuteronomy 31:6, Isaiah 41:10). And in many cases, as here, He names the name of him whom He is cheering; fear not Zacharias, fear not Mary, fear not Paul! God takes for granted that His servants may have

cause for fear, that at times their hearts may fail them: fightings without and fears within; sorrows, storms, dangers, burdens, troubles, enemies. To meet and counteract the influence of these upon the soul He says, "Fear not." Yes, it is God, our God, who thus speaks. He knoweth our frame, and remembereth that we are dust. He knows the world in which we live, and remembers that it is all adverse and hostile. He knows that Satan rages, and that his legions are all abroad. He knows that the spirit may be willing, yet the flesh is weak. And so He says to us, Fear not, be of good cheer. Thus Jesus spoke on earth, and thus He speaketh still from heaven.

II. The word of security. "I am thy shield." This is truly a divine form of expression, full of force and point. God does not say "I shield thee," but "I am thy shield." This latter is far stronger than the former; just as the expression, "He is our peace," is far stronger than "He gives us peace," or "He is our righteousness," is stronger than He justifies us, or "He is our treasure" is stronger than He makes us rich. Here God proclaims HIMSELF to be Abraham's shield. So is He the shield of all who are Abraham's seed.

The past, the present, and the future are all included in this.

(1.) I WAS, or have been, thy shield. He had been so in Abraham's case; memorably and marvellously so, in the recent conflict with these invaders from the east. Had God not been both sword and shield to him, how could he have ventured into, or come safely out of, such a conflict with such superior forces? So has He been to us, as every day of our past lives has testified, a perpetual and impenetrable shield.

(2.) I AM. thy shield. It is not the past alone that is witness to this protection. It is still continued. Each day we need the shield, each day we have it. Each day brings up a new battlefield and a new enemy; a new danger and a new assault. But God is our perpetual shield. Round and round us, above and beneath us, our complete panoply, our high tower. This is our daily security.

(3.) I WILL be thy shield. Abraham dwelt among enemies, dangers on every side; he was a stranger in a strange land; without a friend but God. He gets the assurance of perpetual protection. No evil shall assail, no weapon shall prosper, no enemy shall overcome or wound. God says to His church, "I will be thy shield." Her dwelling is among enemies, she is a lily among thorns, a sheep among wolves. The world is against her, hell is against her. If God were to permit it, she would be swept from earth in an hour. She has no might, no skill against such an array of deadly foes. Her sufficiency, her security is only of God. He is her shield. Not only does He defend her, but He is her shield. Yes; each of us may say, God is my shield, I am safe, I can defy the world, I can shake my hand at hell. I shall be more than conqueror through Him that loved me. Safe now, safe in days to come, safe in conflict, safe in evil days, safe in sorrow or in joy, safe on a sick-bed or a death-bed, safe forevermore. God the Lord is my sun and shield. Who shall make me afraid? This is more than even the "shield of faith" and the "breastplate of righteousness"; it is a divine shield and breastplate, behind which I am absolutely and entirely secure. Jehovah Himself stands between me and danger. His omnipotence compasses me about. Am I not safe forever?

III. The word of recompense. Abraham had given up all and left Chaldea, he had refused to lay his hand on the spoil of the invaders whom he had defeated, he had parted with everything of earth, and now God comes in and promises to make up for all by giving HIMSELF. He does not say, I will recompense thee, but I am thy recompense. How forcible are the words? (1.) I am thy reward; (2.) I am thy great reward; (3.) I am thy exceeding great reward. How full and rich are these words of promise! Here is present, and there is ETERNAL reward. God does for us exceeding abundantly above all we ask or think. Not pardon, we have that already, it is far beyond that; not salvation, it is far beyond that; not heaven, nor glory, it is far beyond these. It is God Himself, He whom the heaven of heavens cannot contain! He is our reward—He—HIMSELF!

In all this we find,

(1.) Strength for work and duty. What encouragement, comfort, invigoration is here! How can we weary in well doing, or shrink from peril? Jehovah is our shield and recompense.

(2.) Motive for self-denial and self-sacrifice. We are called to these. But God gives more than a command or call, He presents us with a motive,— protection and everlasting recompense. Shall we grudge the surrender, seeing the recompense is so great?

(3.) A reason for calmness and stedfastness. God is with us. We are on His side, He is on ours. It is His work that we are doing, His battle that we are fighting, not our own. Let us not be ruffled nor moved. Let no opposition, provocation, vexation, defeat, triumph of evil annoy us. Our shield is Omnipotence. Our reward is the fullness of God Himself.

XII.

Liberty And Service

"Let my people go, that they may serve me." —

Exodus 8:1

THUS God spoke of Israel in Egypt, commanding deliverance for them. It was a word of power, like, "Let there be light." Reluctant Pharaoh was compelled to let go his grasp. The command was irresistible.

God adds His reason for the command and its peremptoriness, "that they may serve me." He did not need to give a reason, yet He does so; He justifies His claim upon them and against Pharaoh. God's authority over men is an infinitely reasonable one. He makes no claim in regard to which even our own consciences do not justify Him. He has a claim on us; and no other can compete with this. You must serve me, He says to us; they must serve me, He says to them who held them in bondage. The length, and strength, and apparent justice of other service cannot be taken into account when God puts in His claims.

'Tis thus Christ speaks respecting His church, His elect; the Holy One of Israel respecting His Israel. He speaks to His enemies and theirs; to those who hold them in bondage, the Pharaohs of the world, to Satan, "Let my people go, that they may serve me." It is out of earthly bondage into heavenly liberty that He calls us; from the bondage of Satan to the liberty of Christ. It is both to a divine service and a divine liberty that we are called. These are the two things; and they are inseparable. Not liberty for its own sake, but liberty for the sake of service; not service without liberty, but service as the result of liberty. Liberty and service conjoined; not the one without the other, but hand in hand. "Freedom is a noble thing," yet its value consists in the position in which it places us for service.

But what I specially notice here is the order of the two things,—first liberty, and then service, implying that service is impossible without freedom. There may be Egyptian service,—such service as will satisfy the gods of Egypt, without liberty, but not such as will please the God of Israel. There may be self-righteous service, mechanical service, Pharisaical service, the service of the outer man, without liberty, but not the glad service of the soul.

I. We are in bondage. Our natural condition is one of bondage. We are born in Egypt, not in Canaan; born in a prison; born with the fetters on our limbs; born slaves. Our wills are in bondage; our faculties are in bondage; our affections are in bondage; our whole souls are in bondage.

There is no free motion or free action of any part of us. All is constraint. We act under the sense of terror, or for a reward, or in order to obtain pardon. We do nothing freely or purely. Work done in chains is no work at all. Work done in order to purchase liberty is not acceptable work.

II. We were made for liberty. Israel was not made for Egypt, nor Egypt for him. So we were not created for bondage and the prison-house. God made man both upright and free. His whole being,—faculties, and affections, and will,—were made free, truly free, with nothing of constraint upon them save the glad constraint of love. God did not create us bondslaves. Liberty is the proper, the normal condition of the creature.

III. We cannot serve God without liberty. We may do some things without. The body can labour in a prison, and with fetters; but the soul must be free in order to serve; free in all its parts, so that nothing may be of constraint but willingly. Other services may be performed in any way,—for wages, or under threat; but God's service must be performed freely in all its parts. We must be free in order that we may serve. It is not service in order to liberty, but liberty in order to service. This is God's order; and he who disregards it, or inverts it, is a servant of whom the Master cannot approve,—whose service He rejects. Nay, his is no service

at all. Till we are free, we cannot serve. He that is not free can perform no duty aright, no true work for God.

IV. Christ calls us to liberty. He came to open our prison doors; to bring us out of the house of Egypt. He came to break our chains, and to make us wholly free. He has stated the matter thus: (1.) the Son shall make us free, implying that the liberty comes directly from Himself; (2.) the truth shall make you free, teaching us that it is through the truth that He gives us the liberty. He liberates. His truth liberates. His Spirit liberates. With our fetters broken by His touch; our souls receiving His truth; ourselves filled with the spirit of liberty, we go forth as freed men to serve God. In the bondage of unpardoned sin, in the disquietude of uncertainty as to our relationship, we cannot serve God. It is not true service, or happy service, or loving service, or acceptable service. We must be let go that we may serve.

Have you been set free? Are you walking at liberty? Has the gospel brought its peace in to you? Is the Spirit of adoption teaching you to say, Abba, Father? You say you are endeavouring to serve God. But in what spirit? In love or dread? In gladness or in terror? In light or in gloom?

XIII.

The Day Of Despair

"Intreat for me." —

Exodus 8:28

PHARAOH is brought down from his haughtiness. He had but a little before scoffed both at Moses and his God; now he is humbled,—only for a season indeed,—yet he is humbled. He confesses Jehovah; he becomes a suppliant to Moses and to his God. Is this the Pharaoh that said, "Who is the Lord?" How is he come down from his pride!

What brings him down? It might be (1.) true repentance; (2.) cunning; (3.) terror. It is only the last of these that is here at work, and his impressions pass away with the terror. He cares no more about God than he did before; but he would fain be delivered from these judgments. Now let us look beyond Pharaoh.

I. The sinner's day of prosperity. There is such a thing as prosperity even in this fallen world; prosperity for the wicked,—*"Lo, these are the ungodly that prosper in this world."* They are not in trouble as other men. They revel in pleasure, they roll in wealth, they are decked with honour; all things go well with them. They say, *"Tomorrow shall be as this day, and more abundant."* The sinner sits at ease, and puts away the thought of trouble. He basks in sunshine, and laughs at storms. He sails onward with favouring breezes, and believes in no shipwreck. No adversity for him!

II. The sinner's day of trouble. No prosperity lasts forever; nor is it even life-long, or half a life-time. Then the clouds gather; the tempest breaks; the waves wash over the vessel, and it becomes a wreck. Sometimes it is one long day of trouble, after as long a day of peace. Sometimes it is the alternation, at brief intervals, of joy and sorrow, light

and darkness, health and sickness, prosperity and adversity. Each man has his day

or days of trouble. Let this be thoroughly pondered and laid to heart. Care will come; distress will come; sickness will come; death will come; weariness will come. The sky will darken; the smile will vanish; the night will fall. These are certainties, O sinner,—and perhaps very near. Thou canst not ward them off. Wise precautions cannot ward them off; nor potent friends; nor prudent councillors; nor sanitary regulations; no; these will not avail. God's word, God's purpose, will break through all these, and lay thee low. Thou wilt find what it is to be in the hands of the living God. He will deal with thee. He is dealing with thee now by His goodness; to-morrow He may be dealing with thee in severity and sore displeasure.

III. The sinner's helplessness. He knows not what to do. He once thought himself strong; now he feels himself weak; unable to contend against his ills. The current is too strong; he cannot swim against it. His foes are numerous; his difficulties great; his friends fail; his conscience awakes; his heart trembles; what can he do? He is utterly helpless; and in his helplessness he turns coward.

His remembrance of God. Hitherto God had not been in all his thoughts; now he says, God only can help me. Man cannot; devils cannot; angels will not. Perhaps God will. His long despised God comes now to remembrance. So in danger the sinner cries. In shipwreck; in the plague; he cries.

His dread of God. He does not go straight to God; or if he does, it is in despair. He trembles before Him; afraid to look up. He is overawed, overpowered by a sense of God's greatness. It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. God is to him the most terrible object of all, yet he cannot but betake himself to Him in some way. He is undone any way. Perhaps this dreadful God, who is more powerful than these evils, may succour him.

VI. His appeal to God's people. He once despised them, hated, and shunned them; now he goes to them with, "Entreat for me." What a different man a saint seems now! He has something to say with God, and that is a great thing for a despairing sinner. He has influence at court. So he goes to him. How often has the stricken, afflicted sinner, had these words wrung from him, "Pray for me."

O sinner, look forward to your day of darkness. Prepare for it now. It is coming. How dreadful to be overtaken by it unprepared.

O sinner, go now to God; straight to God; not to Moses, nor to any saint; but at once to God. Go, with all thy sins, and burdens, and trials; go now! He will receive you, and bless you.

The day is coming when another cry shall be heard; when you shall cry on rocks and hills; and all in vain. O seek the Lord while he may be found! When Jesus Christ the great Judge may come, we know not. He may come soon. Earth is growing old. Its sin is heavy upon it. *Your* sin adds to the load. It will soon be too heavy to bear. Then the vengeance comes. God's long-suffering is great, but not forever. The great day approaches. He that shall come, will come, and will not tarry. Up and make ready! Up and watch!

XIV.

The Blood Of Deliverance

"It is Jehovah's passover." —

Exodus 12:11

WE first notice,

I. The name here given to the ordinance. The Lord's, or Jehovah's, passover. This reminds us of our New Testament feast, so like in name, "the Lord's Supper." Both belong to the Lord. Both were instituted by him. Both referred to Him. The Passover and the Supper have no meaning without Him. He is the Alpha and the Omega of both. "The Lord" is Christ's New Testament name; but it is also His Old Testament. It is He the Son, the Messiah, that is so often spoken of there under the name, "the Lord." Hence we rest our belief that Christ is God, not so much on the fact that the names of God are applied to Christ, as on this greater fact, that the names of Christ are applied to God. It was of him that Eve said, "I have gotten a man from the Lord"; of Him Enoch spoke, "Behold, the Lord cometh"; of Him we read, "The Lord said, My Spirit shall not always strive"; "it repented the Lord that he had made man on the earth"; "The Lord said to Noah"; "the Lord said to Abram; for He who appeared to Saul appeared to Abraham; and so in regard to the Passover, "the Lord spoke unto Moses and Aaron."

II. The persons to whom this ordinance was given. "To Moses and Aaron." In almost all other places we read, "the Lord spake to Moses" alone. Here it is specially to both,—to Him who was King in Jeshurun, and to Him who was Israel's High Priest. They were the representatives of the nation of kings and priests, even Israel; and representatives also of the church, the higher and truer "royal priesthood," to whom the Lord's Supper was to be given. To us then, as the true Moses and Aaron, kings and priests, the Lord's Supper is given. It is the banquet of Jehovah's

royal priesthood. To us as such He says, Eat, drink. Do this in remembrance of me.

III. The place where it was given. In the land of Egypt. It was a feast in Egypt, and yet not of Egypt. It did not consist of Egyptian viands. It spoke of deliverance from Egypt, and yet it was first to be observed in Egypt. It told of Egypt, and it told of Canaan. So with the Lord's Supper. It is in the world, yet not of the world. It is given here, observed here, yet it points away from this; it reminds us of our heavenly inheritance.

IV. The institution itself. It consists of two parts, according to the division of the apostle (Hebrews 11:28): (1.) The feast; (2.) the sprinkling of blood. Let us examine these.

(1.) The feast. What is it?

In itself. It is a lamb, without spot; a lamb roasted; with bones unbroken; bitter herbs; eaten in haste, staff in hand.

Symbolically. It is commemoration; it is testimony; it is nourishment; it is contrition; it is strength.

Such is the Supper of the Lord. It is a feast; the food is the Lamb of God. The bread and wine speak to us. The Supper is full of meaning. It is commemoration, testimony, nourishment. My flesh is meat indeed. Man eats better than angels' food. Take, eat, are the gracious words of the divine provider.

(2.) *The sprinkling of blood.* The feast and the blood must go together. The one hangs upon the other. It is not simply "blood," but "sprinkled" blood which we find in the Passover, the blood of the Lamb on which we feast. What then does this blood proclaim? What is it? What does it mean? There is *life* in question; for wherever the blood comes in there the question of life and death come in. Here there is then the giving of life for life. It is not *cleansing* that is the special signification of the passover

blood, though indirectly that may come in. It is something else. Let us see what it is.

It is the blood of separation. That blood was sprinkled on door-post and lintel; and by this Israel was separated from Egypt. The difference between them was marked by the blood. They in our day who deny the blood would obliterate the distinction between the church and the world. Hatred of the blood has been the mark of the world since the days of Cain. Love for it, and trust in it, the characteristic of the church of God from Abel downward. Israel dwells alone; isolated by the blood.

It is the blood of protection. "When I see it, I will pass over." That blood was Israel's shield. There seems a twofold kind of protection,—the blood warding off the destroying angel, and making him *pass over*; and God himself (attracted by the blood) passing over as a defender, between Israel and the angel (Isaiah 31:5). God says, "When I see." The blood is ever before *Him*. *We* do not see it. It is outside,—beyond our vision,—shed eighteen centuries ago. But God sees it, and that is our security. We think upon the blood which *God* sees, and feel ourselves secure.

It is the blood of deliverance. It not merely protected *in* Egypt, but it delivered *out of* Egypt. It was this blood that saved: "I gave Egypt for thy ransom." There is death for Egypt, but life for Israel. Pardoned and set free, Israel turns his back on the land of bondage. That blood was the opening of his prison doors. It is still the blood that sets us free! Freedom through the blood is what we preach.

It is the blood of doom. It was doom to Egypt. It not merely said, God is for Israel, but he is against Egypt; nay, there is *death* for Egypt, for Jehovah's enemies. It is still the blood that condemns. For all who are not under its shield there is only death! It seals the sinner's death! The wrath of God abideth on him. The blood that would have saved now dooms.

XV.

How God Deals With Sin And The Sinner

Leviticus 4:27-35

WE have here, (1.) the sinner. He is one of the common people; "any man;" "whosoever." (2.) The sin. It is one of ignorance; he is not aware of it; conscience did not take cognisance of it; he has forgotten it. (3.) The remedy. It is a sin-offering; this only can make it pass as completely from God's memory, as it has passed from his own. (4.) The atonement. It is by blood; through the intervention of priesthood; no atonement without the blood of a substitute. (5.) The connection between the sinner and the atonement. He lays his hands on the sacrifice, for a two-fold reason; to identify himself with it; to transfer his sin to it; he says, Let this stand instead of me, its life and death for my life and death. (6.) The forgiveness. The sin passes away; there is no condemnation; it is instantaneous, complete, perpetual pardon.

Such was the symbol. Full and expressive,—revealing to us atonement and pardon through the one great sacrifice. Let us see what this old sin-offering teaches us.

I. What God thinks of sin. It is something which must not be slighted. It is infinitely hateful, calling for condemnation and wrath. Nothing light or trivial about it. Not to be jested with, or transiently frowned upon, or forgotten in a day. It calls for special marks of wrath. It is the abominable thing which He hates; its beginning is wrath and death, its end is hell. And as He thinks so does He wish us to think. What think ye of sin? What is your opinion of its nature, its evil, its deservings?

II. How He deals with it. He does not despise nor forget it. He deals with it as a Judge. He estimates it as a Judge. He condemns it as a Judge. He inflicts punishment as a Judge. This must be either executed on

ourselves personally, or on our substitute. Condemnation must be proclaimed; the penalty must be executed,

(1.) He condemns sin. He gave the law to condemn sin. He set up the cross to condemn it more. The soul that sinneth, it shall die. The wages of sin is death.

(2.) He provides a sin-bearer. He does not leave us to do this; but does it Himself. He not only appoints the sin-offering, but He provides the victim. His Son, the Word made flesh,—He is the appointed Sin-bearer,

divine and human in his constitution, perfect in all respects, sufficient for the great undertaking, able to bear wrath without being consumed.

(3.) He transfers the guilt. The Lord hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all. The chastisement of our peace was on Him. He whose is the right to retain or transfer the guilt transfers it to a substitute.

Thus, then, He has provided the atonement. His appointed High Priest has made the atonement. This atonement is now a past fact. It is done. The sin-offering has been brought. The blood has been shed. The propitiation has been accomplished. God has done it all, without man's help, or desire, or concurrence. Nothing more is needed now in the shape of atonement for the guiltiest. No more blood, no more fire, no more endurance of wrath. It is all done! Nothing can be added to it or taken from it. Love is now free to flow out.

III. *How He deals with the sinner.* He bids him come for pardon, and assures him of getting it at once, freely, on the ground of the provided atonement, and simply as a sinner. His object is to connect the sinner with the propitiation; for so long as they remain separate there is no benefit resulting to man from the shed blood. He provides thus for the connection of the sinner.

(1.) He issues a declaration concerning His own free love, His goodwill to men, His willingness to pardon any sinner. "God so loved the world." "God, who is rich in mercy, for the great love wherewith He loved us." Thus we have God's own assurance of a personal welcome to each of us,—as we are. We do not make the welcome personal by our prayers or feelings; we avail ourselves of an already existing personal welcome to each sinner,—as a sinner.

(2.) He issues a testimony to the completeness of the atonement. He raised up His Son from the dead as the *visible* testimony. But besides this He has in various ways given full testimony as to the sufficiency and suitableness of the atonement.

(3.) He issues a promise of forgiveness to every one who will receive this testimony. "It shall be forgiven him," is His promise to every one who thus believes. Thus forgiveness becomes a matter of certainty to every one who thus connects himself with the divine sin-offering.

Perhaps you say, I see that God has provided a propitiation, that this is complete, and available for me, but how am I to be so connected with it as to obtain the pardon? Everything depends on this connection being established, for without it there is no pardon. Now, how did the Israelite connect himself with the sin-offering? He simply took the lamb and brought it to the priest and said, Let this stand for me, laying his hand on it and thereby transferring all his guilt to it. So we, by receiving the testimony and the promise, connect ourselves with the divine atonement. We go to God saying, Let this life and death be for my life and death. We consent to be dealt with on the footing of another, not our own, and immediately the personal exchange takes place. He gets all our evil, we get all His good. Our demerit goes to Him, His merit comes to us. We take the royal grant of life and righteousness through the life and death of another. Pardon is secured, and ought to be a thing as sure and as conscious to us, as to the Israelite after he had brought the sacrifice and seen it laid on the altar.

XVI.

The Fire Quenched

"The fire shall ever be burning upon the altar; it shall never go out." —

Leviticus 6:13

THIS was one of God's special commandments to Israel, and no doubt has a special meaning both to them and to us. For he speaks no random words; his trumpet utters no uncertain sound. He says only what he means, and he means all he says. His words are profoundly real; more so than those of the deepest thinker of any age; and far more enduring; for they are eternal words, embodying eternal truths. The fire, the altar, the sacrifice, the tabernacle, have all passed away; but the truth embodied in these remains forever. It is for our instruction as truly as for Israel's.

I. The fire. Fire in general is the symbol of wrath. It is sometimes the figure of purifying; but more commonly of anger, divine anger,—anger on account of sin; for in no other connection do we ever read of divine anger. Not personal affront, or caprice, or pique, or partiality, or ill-humour; none of these are ever connected with God's wrath. Only SIN! The history of fire in Scripture is very instructive. It begins in Paradise, and ends in the last chapter of Revelation. There is the flaming sword; the fire of the sacrifice; the fire of Sodom; the fire of Egypt's plagues; the fire of the pillar; the fire of Sinai; the fire of Korah; the fire enfolding itself of Ezekiel; the "unquenchable fire"; the fire that accompanies Christ's second coming; the fire of Apocalyptic judgment; the lake of fire; the fire that comes down from heaven, that is to consume the ungodly; these are some of the memorable allusions to fire in Scripture. Most of these are connected with the Shekinah or visible symbol of the divine presence, intimating that it is from that presence that the fire proceeds; even from God Himself. Thus God intimates most solemnly that there is such a thing as wrath. Yes, there is wrath; now hidden, one day to be revealed; wrath which the wicked treasure up against the day of wrath. God is not too

benevolent, too merciful, to be angry. If there be no anger in God, the Bible utterly deceives us. A large, very large portion of it, is quite unmeaning, or rather false. The expulsion from paradise, the deluge, Sodom, sacrifice, pain, death, sorrow, the law, the cross, the unquenchable fire, these are very plain intimations of wrath,— wrath against sin; wrath for the punishment, not merely for the deliverance or warning of the sinner. All the ills that flesh is heir to, are originally and in their proper interpretation (however over-ruled) expressions of divine anger. How terrible for a sinner to be confronted with an angry God!

How hateful a thing must sin be to excite that anger; to be the one thing that provokes His wrath.

II. The altar. The word means the place of sacrifice. It was elevated; implying that what was placed on it was lifted up to be presented to God. There was but one altar of sacrifice,— one spot for the sinner to meet God. It was the most essential part of tabernacle and temple; without it there could be no place of worship for a sinner. A sinner can only worship at an altar; can only meet; God there. Why? Let us see. There are two things: very prominent and visible about the altar, the fire and the blood: the fire the symbol of wrath; the blood the symbol of the effects of that wrath, in the infliction of punishment. Thus while the altar proclaimed wrath, it also proclaimed wrath appeased in consequence of the deserved punishment having been inflicted. Condemnation and pardon were thus fully expressed; hatred of sin, yet love to the sinner: inexorable justice, inexhaustible grace. No sin pardoned without first being punished (either in person or by substitute); no debt cancelled without being fully paid. A just God, and a Saviour; not only a Saviour though a just God, but a Saviour because a just God. Thus the altar was,

(1.) The place of condemnation. There God condemned the sinner and his sin. Condemnation was the first thing the altar exhibited and proclaimed.

(2.) The place of confession. The sinner comes, not to hide, nor to extenuate, nor to excuse, nor to deny, but to confess his sin.

(3.) The place of pardon. The pardon is the result of the condemnation,—the condemnation of the substitute or surety. First condemnation, then confession, then pardon ; free, and large, and irrevocable.

(4.) The place of meeting with God. The one spot on which God and the sinner can meet. Only over blood, over death, can the great business of salvation be transacted, and the great question of pardon settled between the sinner and God. There only is it lawful or honourable for God to meet with the sinner; there only is it safe or comfortable for the sinner to meet with God. There the great reconciliation takes place.

The cross is the altar. At the cross we meet with God, and God with us. There we learn our condemnation and our deliverance, our death and our life. There we confess, and there we are freely forgiven. There we know what sin is, and what grace is! Our God is a consuming fire; yet God is love.

The fire upon this altar was peculiar in many respects.

(1.) It was kindled by God. At first it was lighted directly from heaven,—from the shekinah-glory. It was God's own fire.

(2.) It was fed with the fat of the sacrifices. The peace offering is specially mentioned in connection with this. As if that which ratified the peace was that which satiated the fire.

(3.) It was never to go out. Once kindled, it was to burn always. It needed no rekindling. It was kindled by God, but fed and kept up by man. In the case of the lost the fire of God is eternal and unquenchable; and in the case of the saved it is only quenched, because exhausted in and by Him who, as the eternal one, endured the wrath of eternity during his brief life on earth. Good news to sinners! THE FIRE is QUENCHED. There is one who has borne wrath for sin. He who accepts that one wrath-bearing is personally delivered from it all. But he who rejects it and tries to bear the wrath himself must reap what he sows, and bear it forever.

There is but one tabernacle; one altar; one fire; one sacrifice; one Priest! Not two ways of approaching God, or two ways of pardon; only one! He who accepts and uses that one is safe; he who tries another must perish forever. Yes, there is but one cross, one Christ; one Saviour. But He is sufficient. "Christ is all and in all."

XVII.

The Vision From The Rocks

"From the top of the rocks I see him." —

Numbers 23:9

IT was of Israel and Israel's glory that the false seer of Pethor spake. He stood upon the top of Moab's barren rocks, and gazed down on the happy nation, whom God had delivered from Egypt, had brought through the desert, and was about to lead into the land flowing with milk and honey. It was with wonder, perhaps with envy too, that Balaam looked on the goodly tents beneath him. So, from this desert land and these desert hills, we gaze upon the church on her way to Canaan, about to be settled in the blessed land and holy city. And when we gaze, what do we see?

I. The ruggedness of the land of our present sojourn. It is the region of hostility as well as barrenness. This is not our rest. These dark mountains are not our home. We may pitch our tents among them for a season, or climb to the top to gaze around us. But they are no dwelling-place for us. We may look on Canaan from Pisgah, but Pisgah will not do for a home. Nebo lies hard by Pisgah, and Nebo tells of death, not of life,—mortality is here. This is the land, not of Israel, but of Moab; and its gods are Baal, not Jehovah. We could not abide here.

II. The glorious land. Afar off just now, but still visible, still beautiful. It is the Paradise of God; it is the new Jerusalem; the city which hath foundations; the new' heavens and new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness. The vision gives us a wondrous contrast between what we are and what we shall be, making us long for the day of entrance.

III. A people delivered from a present evil world. Once in bondage, now free; once groaning under oppression, now in the service of a heavenly Master, and heirs of the world to come; the red sea crossed, and

now between them and their persecutors as an iron wall. Forgiven and redeemed; with their backs on Egypt, and their faces to Jerusalem. "A people saved by the Lord."

A people sustained by Jehovah Himself. Theirs is the hidden manna, the water from the smitten rock. Jehovah feeds them; Jehovah gives them the living water. It is not man but God who cares for them. All that they have they owe to Him who has delivered them. They feed on angel's food; nay, better, the very bread of God; on Him whose flesh is meat indeed, whose blood is drink indeed.

A pilgrim band. They are strangers on the earth; this is not their home; here is not their city. Their loins are girt, and their staff is in their hand, and they are hastening onward. No sitting down; no taking ease; no folding of their hands. Forward, still forward, is their watchword! Theirs is a pilgrimage, not a pleasure-tour. They must not tarry.

VI. A people bought with a price. Their ransom has been blood; and they are not their own. Another life has gone for theirs. They have been plucked from death and the grave; because another has died and risen for them. To that other they belong, not to themselves, nor the flesh, nor the world.

VII. A people loved with an infinite love. The banner that is over them is love. The song they sing is love, "Unto Him that loved us." It is a love which passeth knowledge; a love without bound or end; a love eternal and divine. All around and above them is love,—the love of Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. They are the monuments of love; the witnesses of love,—free love, forgiving love, redeeming love; love beyond that which angels know,—a love which constrains them, purifies them, urges them forward, gladdens all their way.

VIII. A people preparing to pass over to the goodly land. It is within sight; a few days, perhaps less, will bring them over. Their journey is nearly done. Their toil and weariness will soon be exchanged for rest and

glory. And "now is our salvation nearer than when we believed." From the top of the rocks they can see Jerusalem, and Olivet, and Bethlehem; and get glimpses of the whole outstretched land. It is a land of plenty, where they shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; it is a land of light, where there is no night; a land of blessing, where there is no curse; a land of gladness, where sorrow comes not; a summer land, where the frosts of winter chill not; a calm sunny land, where storms vex not and shadows fall not; a land of health, where the inhabitant shall not say, I am sick; a land of peace, where the war-trumpet never sounds; a land of life, where corruption and mortality enter not, where death and the grave are unknown; a land of union, where broken ties are all reknit, and broken hearts all healed. For the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters, and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes! (Revelation 7:17.) There Jesus reigns; there we reign with him.

XVIII.

The Doom Of The Double-Hearted

"Balaam also, the son of Bear, they slew with the sword." —

Numbers 31:8

BALAAM had taken the field against Israel,—against a people whom he had pronounced blessed,—whom he had pronounced invincible both by earth and hell. Yes; Balaam "the son of Beor,"—he, and not another of the name,—he rushes on the bosses of the Almighty's buckler; he defies Israel and Israel's God!

But he fails. He would fain have cursed Israel; but he could not. He counselled Moab to seduce Israel by temptation, and his device succeeded too well. He now fetches his last stroke. In vain He perishes ignobly. He is slain with the sword which he had defied.

Such is the end of the backslider; of one who knew the truth but did it not; who once said, "Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his." It was certainly not the end he prayed for; yet it was the end to which his whole life had been tending. He reaped what he sowed, and in him "God was not mocked." He died as he lived, in fellowship with Moab, yet in heart persuaded that Israel was the beloved of the Lord, and that Jehovah was God. His life had been with Midian, and so was his death. His grave is with the unclean. He passes from earth with none to soothe his death-bed and close his eyes; none to lament for him or to build his monument. Sad end of a life of halting and indecision, and resistance of the Spirit, and braving of conscience, and rejection of light, and wretched covetousness. He loved the wages of unrighteousness, and verily he had his reward.

Let us see what he wanted and how he failed; how ambitious he was, yet what a life of utter failure and disappointment was his. He would fain

have risen, but he sunk. He would fain have been rich, but he lost everything. What a wasted life! Yet the life of one who knew better things but did them not; who knew that the world was vanity, yet followed it; who knew that Israel's portion was the best, yet chose that of Moab; who knew the true God and the true Messiah, but preferred the idolatries of Israel's enemies. He saw Him from the top of the rocks, but that was all. He got a passing glimpse of the cross, but no more. It was all he saw of the way of life, ere he plunged into death and woe.

I. He wanted to serve two masters. These were the same as the Lord in after days designated God and mammon. He wanted not to offend either; to please both. He was like Issachar crouching between two burdens. But it would not do. He failed. Such is the certain failure of all who make the like attempt. "Ye cannot serve God and mammon." He loved the one master, mammon; and he dreaded the other; but would fain do the will of both. He could not afford to lose the favour of either. Miserable life! More miserable death! The life and death of one whose whole career was one long attempt to do the bidding both of God and the devil.

II. He wanted to earn two kinds of wages. The wages of righteousness and the wages of unrighteousness (2 Peter 2:15) were both in his eyes; he would fain have the pay both of God and of the devil. He was unwilling to do or say any which would deprive him of either. He was as cautious and cunning as he was covetous. He would not work without wages; and he would work for a hundred masters if they would only pay him well. How like many so-called "religious" men amongst ourselves.

III. He wanted to do two opposite things at the same time. He wished both to bless and to curse. He was willing to do either according as it might serve his interests. The only question with him was, "Would it pay?" If the blessing would pay, he would take it; if the curse would pay, he would take it. If both would pay, he would take them both. Blessing and cursing were both alike to him, confessing and denying the true God, worshipping Baal or Jehovah, it mattered not, if by "this craft he could

have his wealth." So with many among us. If Sabbath-keeping will pay, they will keep the Sabbath; if Sabbath-breaking will pay, they will break the Sabbath. True Balaams,—without principle, without faith, and without fear!

He wanted two kinds of friendship. He would fain be friends with everybody. Perhaps he was timid; of those whom Scripture calls "fearful" (Revelation 21:8); perhaps, also, he was ambitious, and sought great things for himself wherever these could be obtained (Jeremiah 45:5); certainly he had before him "the fear of man which bringeth a snare," and the love of man's approbation which brings no less a snare; he *dreaded* Israel's God, of whom he knew much, but he dreaded also Moab's gods, though whether he really believed in them we know not. Made up of these contradictions, and acting not by faith but unbelief, he tried to secure the friendship of all whom he counted great, whether in heaven or in earth. He shut his eyes not only to the sin but to the *impossibility* of such a course; he saw not that the friendship of the world is the enemy of God, and that whosoever will be the friend of the world must be the enemy of God.

He wanted to have two religions. He saw religion to be a paying concern, a profitable trade, and he was willing to accept it from anybody or everybody, to adopt it from any quarter if it would but raise him in the world, and make his fortune. Perhaps he thought all religions equally right or equally wrong, equally true or equally false. He would rather not offend any god if lie could help it. He would make concessions to "religious prejudices" of any kind if the prejudiced people will only help him on. He was like Erasmus of old, whom a German writer thus describes,—"Erasmus belongs to that species of writers who have all the desire to build God a magnificent church; at the same time, however, not giving the devil any offence, to whom, accordingly, they set up a neat little chapel close by, where you can offer him some touch of sacrifice at a time, and practise a quiet household devotion for him without disturbance." Such was Balaam; two gods and two religions he wanted to have.

But this double service, and double friendship, and double religion would not do. He could make nothing by them. They profited him nothing either in this life or that to come. His end was with the ungodly, his portion with the enemies of Israel. And his soul, where could it be? Not with Israel's God, or Israel's Christ, or in Israel's heaven. He reaped what he sowed.

He was a good specimen of multitudes in these last days. An educated and intelligent man, shrewd and quick-seeing, of respectable character, high in favour with the rich and great, a religious man, too, after a fashion, not unsound in creed so far, for he acknowledges Jehovah as the true God. But he is fond of the world, fond of money, fond of preferment; one that would not let his religion stand in the way of his advancement; who could pocket all scruples if he could pocket a little gold along with them; hollow of heart, but with a fair outside; just an Erasmus; no Luther, no Calvin, no Knox, no confessor, no martyr. His worldly interests are the main thing to him. He would rather not risk offending God, but yet he would not like to lose Balak's rewards and honours. He would rather not take up his cross, nor deny himself, nor forsake all for his God. Religion with him is not just a thing to be suffered for,—at least if he can help it.

So is it with multitudes amongst us. They want as much religion as will save them from hell; not an atom more. The world is their real God; gold is their idol; it is in mammon's temple that they worship. Love God with all their heart! They don't so much as understand the meaning of such a thing. Sacrifice riches, place, honour, friends to Christ! They scoff at the thing as madness.

Oh, be on the side of God, out and out. Don't trifle with religion. Don't mock God and Christ. Love not the world. Be religious in your inmost soul. Don't mistake sentimentalism for religion, or a good character for the new birth. You may go very far and yet not be a Christian. You may follow Christ in some things; but if not in all, what is your following worth? This world or the world to come, that is the alternative; not this world and the world to come. Christ all or nothing. The soul more precious than worlds, or utterly worthless.

No middle ground; no half-discipleship; no compromise. No. The friendship of the world is enmity with God. Come out and be separate. The new birth, or no religion at all.

Look to thy latter end! What is it to be? Where is it to be? With whom is it to be? Anticipate thy eternity. Is it to be darkness or light, shame or glory? Oh make sure, make sure!

Do not sear your conscience by praying Balaam's prayer, "Let me die the death of the righteous." What will that avail you? It is the life of the righteous that God is calling you to lead and he will take care of your death. Decide, halt not; else surely yours will be a wretched life and a still more wretched death. What will gold, or purple, or honour do for you when you lie down to die, or rise up to be judged?

XIX.

Be Not Borderers

"Go in and possess the land." —

Deuteronomy 10:2

ISRAEL passed through many changes in their history; but here we have its termination,—the possession of the land. They were bondsmen, wanderers, outsiders, borderers; but they were not to remain such; they were to possess the land. Here their earthly history, which began with Abraham, ends. Let us learn from this something as to ourselves and our history.

I. We are not to be without a land. We are to have a country and a city. When in the world, we have these in a certain way, but they are all carnal, they pass from us and we from them. The world's cities and possessions will not do for us. They cannot fill us, nor satisfy us, nor abide with us. Hence, even when in the world, we are truly strangers; landless, cityless, homeless. And after we have come out from the world we are strangers, though not as before; for a land, a city, a home have been secured to us. Sinners, God offers you the better Canaan!

II. We are not to be dwellers in Egypt. The house of bondage is not for us. Pharaoh cannot be our king. We must, like Moses, refuse to be called the sons of Pharaoh's daughter. We must go out, not fearing the wrath of the king; counting the reproach of Christ greater riches than Egypt's treasures.

III. We are not to be dwellers in a barren land. The wilderness may do for a day, but not for a permanent abode. Ishmael may have the desert, Israel must have the good land,—the land flowing with milk and honey.

We are not to be borderers. To be out of Egypt is one step, to come up to the borders of Canaan is another; but that is not to be all. We are not outsiders, never crossing the boundary; nor borderers, belonging to neither region, ever crossing and recrossing the line, as if we had no wish to stay or no portion in the land. The border lands are not for the church, nor for any one calling himself a Christian, an Israelite indeed.

We are to go in and possess. Out of Egypt, out of the wilderness, across the borders, into the very heart of the land,—Judah's hills, Ephraim's vales, Issachar's plains, Manasseh's pastures, Naphtali's lakes, and Zebulun's fertile reaches. We go in and take possession, leaving all other lands and regions behind. It is the God-chosen, God-given land. Let us enter on it. It is rich, goodly, well watered, let us possess it. Not merely let us survey it, or pitch our tents in it, but build our habitations there, to dwell in it forever.

What I gather specially from our text is, that we are not to be borderers; not merely not Egyptians, nor Ishmaelites, but not borderers. The place to which God invites us is the land, the kingdom, the city. Just now, of course, it is but the promise, for the kingdom has not yet come. But I speak of the promise as if it were the thing itself, for the promise is God's, not man's.

There are many borderers in our day; half and half Christians; afraid of being too decidedly or intensely religious. They are not Egyptians, they are not perhaps quite outsiders, for they occasionally seem to cross the line and take a look of the land from some of its southern hills. But they are borderers. They have not boldly taken up their abode in the land; they have not entered in nor possessed it. They are vacillators, worshippers of two Gods, trying to secure two kingdoms and to lay up two kinds of treasures. Let me speak of and to these. Why should you be borderers?

I. It is sin. It is not your misfortune merely, it is your guilt. That halfheartedness and indecision is about the most sinful condition you can be in. Borderer, you are a sinner; a sinner because a borderer!

II. It is misery. You cannot be happy in that half-and-half state. You don't know what you are, nor whose you are, nor whither you are going. You are sure of nothing good; only of evil. Were you dying in that state,—were you cut off on the borders, you are lost; and does not that thought make you truly wretched?

III. It is danger. You think perhaps that because you have gone a little way that all is well; or at least that you are out of danger. No. The danger is as great as ever. Were you to die on the borders,—only almost a Christian, —you are as sure of hell as if you had died in Egypt.

It is abomination to God. It is an insult to him. It says that you do not care for him or his goodly land. That halfheartedness is abominable to God. It is like Laodicea, or perhaps worse. Borderer, beware of thus provoking and insulting God.

It is loss to yourself. Even just now, how much you lose. You might be so happy! If decided and sure, you might have such peace! And then the prospect of such a land! What a loss! Yes, your own interests as well as God's honour demand decision. It is such a goodly, glorious land! It is so foolish, and so cowardly to hold back. Oh *decide*. Be a borderer no more. Enter in and possess the land at once!

XX.

The Outlines Of A Saved Sinner's History

"He found him in a desert land, and in the waste howling wilderness; he led him about, he instructed him, he kept him as the apple of his eye." —

Deuteronomy 32:10

WE might take this figuratively, of Abraham, in Chaldea; or of Israel in Egypt; but Moses is speaking literally of the Sinaitic wilderness, and of Israel there. No sooner had they crossed the Red Sea than they became wanderers in the desert. There God found them; he came to them. It was truly a desert land; without bread, or water, or dwellings, or cities. All heat, barrenness, danger, terror. He met them, came to them, took their hand, and became their guide (Deuteronomy 1:31,33; Nehemiah 9:19); by day and night he kept and led them for forty years; taught, protected, watched, as if they had been the tenderest part of the tenderest member of His body. Such was Israel's story, till brought to Canaan; and such that of every Israelite indeed, every saved sinner from his first arousing till he enters into the joy of his Lord. Consider,—

I. The sinner in his native country. That land of his nativity is a desert waste; it is the far country into which the prodigal went; the world where all is evil. It is a barren land, without comfort, or safety, or friends, or kindred. No living bread to feed his famished soul. No fountain of living water to quench his thirst. No peace, nor rest, nor gladness; no shelter from the wrath to come. He is wretched and empty; a poor wanderer of the desert, a man without a home.

II. The sinner found by God. (Jeremiah 2:2) The three parables of our Lord bring out this: the lost sheep found by the Shepherd; the lost silver found by the woman; the lost son found by his father. It is not the sinner that seeks God, but God the sinner; and when God comes He finds him in the land of barrenness, and famine, and danger; He finds him in his sin

and wretchedness; a child of wrath, an heir of hell. He goes in quest of him; seeks him; saves him. By convictions, by terrors, by disappointments, by a sense of want, by weariness; by these he pursues him from valley to valley, from refuge to refuge; and not by these only, but by a thousand such things great and small. Each believer, as he looks back reminds himself of this,—“He found me in a desert land, a waste howling wilderness.” Ask them all, and they will tell you this. Ask Abraham, Moses, Manasseh, Zaccheus, Paul; ask the Corinthians, the Thessalonians,—they will tell you the same story,—“He found me in a desert land; “He chose me, sought me out, found me, called me, sent from above, took me, and drew me out of many waters. I was a lost sheep, but He found me! A prodigal, but He found me! Some in childhood, some in youth, some in manhood. Yet all the same at last.

III. The sinner under God's care. The finding is not the ending, but the beginning of God's dealing with him; which from first to last is all marvellous; the display of wisdom and love.

(1.) Guidance. No place needs a guide like the desert. One gets utterly bewildered in its intricacies and labyrinths of rocks and plains. He who finds him knows this, and takes him under his guidance, so that at every turn, every step, he shall be sure of being in the right way. Nay, and often does God bring him into circumstances, in which there can be no help save in Himself. The desert is pathless, the sinner is ignorant; there are false guides, uncertain ways, as well as darkness and enemies. Therefore does God lead us! By His word, His providence, His rod, His hand, His eye; by sorrows and joys, prosperities and adversities; by the footsteps of the flock; hedging up our way; denying us our own will. He “leads us about;” not directly, but with many a winding, and apparent backturning; many stages and unlikely bypaths. He does not take us at once to Canaan, but leads us about; for wise ends; of grace and discipline, and purifying; for the manifestation of Himself and the overthrow of Satan. What a leader! Whatever be the entanglements, briars, thorns, darkness, He will guide us; onward, still onward, to the city of habitation; we come up out

of the wilderness leaning on the Beloved. We pray, "thy Spirit is good, lead us to the land of uprightness."

(2.) Instruction. One of his first words is, "Learn of me." The sinner needs his teaching,—divine, not human teaching; as to what sin is, himself, God, Christ, the cross, the love of God, the grace of Christ, the glory to be revealed. These God teaches us. Every day and hour is a teaching time; and He who has found us is one who has compassion on the ignorant.

(3.) Protection. He comes at once under the shadow of the divine shield; so that he is kept by the power of God; "preserved in Christ." No enemy prevails; no weapon injures, no evil comes nigh; he is made more than conqueror. How careful God is of the new found one! How sensitive about injury done to him, as if done to Himself, to the apple of His eye! What a guardian, what a protector do we find in God! The sun shall not smite by day nor the moon by night; nor shall the sand of the desert blow into our eye.

O men of earth, are you still wanderers? Lost, unguided, uninstructed, unprotected? What will the desert do for you? Will it be an equivalent to Canaan and Jerusalem? God pursues you, appeals to you, seeks to win you, asks you, Have I been a wilderness to you? He calls! In every way, and by every agency; by the gospel, by the law, by a sense of want, by sorrow, by pain. He calls,—he pursues! Oh, flee no longer from him. Let him this day overtake you!

XXI.

Divine Longings Over The Foolish

"Oh that they were wise." —

Deuteronomy 32:29

THESE are the words, not of anger, but of love, of disappointed affection, of a sorrowful friend, of a tenderhearted father, of an earnest, gracious, long-suffering God. In them God yearned over Israel. In them He still yearns over us. In them we learn the attitude in which God is standing over us, all the day stretching out His hands to a disobedient and gainsaying people.

I. God's desire to make us wise. Himself the infinitely wise God, He longs to make us partakers of His wisdom. He has no pleasure in our ignorance; nay, it excites His compassion as much as His displeasure. He knows the preciousness of wisdom, and He loves not to see us without it. He wishes us to be wise. Why then does He not make us so, seeing He is as powerful as He is wise? I cannot explain this whole puzzle, it is inscrutable. Only let us remember, (1.) That He is sovereign as well as loving; (2.) That wisdom, from its very nature, cannot be forced; (3.) That the power of a human will for evil, for resistance both to wisdom and to love, is very great, far greater than can be supposed from the feebleness of the creature in whom it is. We cannot disentangle the whole knot, but we know from His own words that He desires sincerely and honestly, to see us wise. What else can our text mean—"Oh that they were wise." Is not this good news? God desires to make you wise! If any man lack wisdom, let him ask of God.

II. Man's unteachableness. The wish to be wise and the unwillingness to be taught is one of the many strange contradictions of humanity. The search for wisdom and the rejection of it when God presents it, is a spectacle, strange, but not quite unaccountable. For the wisdom man

searches for is wisdom of his own selecting; it is wisdom without God, it is wisdom which will not contradict his propensities and lusts, it is wisdom reasoned out by himself and according to himself the credit of discovery. Submission to divine tuition is what he specially dislikes; liberty to take or reject God's instruction is what he claims for himself, and the present age is developing man's unteachableness to the full. He claims to be his own teacher, and to be the judge of the wisdom which he is to receive. He insists that his own reason, his own conscience, his moral sense, shall sit in judgment on all that is presented to him. The authoritative presentation to him of any doctrine he holds to be inconsistent with his liberty, and therefore even when he receives the doctrine thus presented he rejects the authority on which it comes; he may receive the truth, but it is because his own reason has proved it or accepted it, not because God has offered it. He would have his faith to stand in the wisdom of man, and not in the power of God.

III. God's provision for our becoming wise. He has not left us to gather wisdom at random, nor contented Himself with the mere expression of a wish that we should be wise. He has given substantial proof of His sincerity in this thing. He has provided,

(1.) The lesson. This book of his contains that lesson. It is full, varied, complete, simple. It is a lesson for learned and unlearned, for Jew and Greek, for rich and poor,—the same lesson for all. In this one book is written the lesson of lessons; the lesson which, when learnt, removes darkness, ignorance, disquietude, and gives light, peace, health, and an eternal salvation.

(2.) The school. It is the school of Christ. For our first step is to become His disciples, to accept Him and His rules for the guidance of our studies. "Make disciples of all nations" was His commission. So we enter His academy, we enroll among His scholars. This discipleship is the first step to wisdom, it is the renunciation of the false schools, of the world, of man, of philosophy, and the submission of our whole man to the regulations of this school.

(3.) The discipline. It is not simply pouring in information that is required. The mind, the soul, the conscience must be so disciplined and prepared as to receive it aright. Various is this discipline, this training. Hardship, sorrow, trial,—all kinds of chastisement are required in order to fit us for the reception of the wisdom. In this divine school all these are brought into use, daily use, to make us receptive, pliable, teachable, submissive.

(4.) The Teacher. He is the Holy Ghost. Sometimes we are said to "learn of Christ" and to "learn of the Father," but the Spirit is the special teacher; "he shall teach you all things;" "who teacheth like him." His teaching is perfect, irresistible, yet not miraculous; gradual, natural, yet supernatural. He teaches us out of that book which he has inspired.

Thus God yearns over us, grieving at our ignorance, mourning over our unteachableness, offering to teach us, to make us wise. Thus pitying us, He provides for us; leaving us inexcusable if we remain untaught. Oh that thou wert wise, He says to each one of us,—sincerely does He say it. Let us place ourselves entirely in His hands for instruction, for light, for blessing. All He asks is that we enroll ourselves as His scholars and submit to His teaching. In His infinite compassion and love He beseeches us to be wise.

XXII.

What A Believing Man Can Do

Joshua 10:12-14

THERE are several miracles referred to in Scripture in connection with the sun. When the sun was darkened in Egypt (Exodus 10:21); when the "light of it shall become sevenfold"; when the shadow went back on the dial of Ahaz (Isaiah 38:8); when the sun was darkened at the crucifixion (Matthew 27:45); when the sun shall become black as sackcloth (Revelation 6:12); when it shall scorch men with fire. But this is the most extraordinary of them all, nay, of all the miracles of the Bible. It is quiet and beneficent; it is conservative, not destructive; it arrests but does not injure. It is not like the deluge, or the plagues of Egypt, desolating and death-dealing; nor like the Red Sea, or Sinai, or Jordan, or the descending fire on Carmel. It is simply a stoppage of creation's movements, the arresting the descent of the two great lights, making day a little longer. It does not look like a miracle, for there is no change in sun, or moon, or sky, or earth; yet it is this "no change" that is the greatest of all miracles,—"There was no day like that, before it or after it, that the Lord hearkened to the voice of a man." The time had not come when they should have no more need of the sun.

The thing was done in a moment, without premeditation or preparation; not by fasting and prayer, or an appeal to God, as in the miracles of Moses and Elijah; but by a command, a word, addressed directly to sun and moon; as if Joshua were assuming the Creator's authority; the command of faith, uttered in simple confidence in God; the word of one man; the word of a man in sympathy and fellowship with God. O confidence in God, what can'st thou not accomplish! Joshua is a man of like passions as we are, yet he speaks to the sun and it stands still!

It is not only a very extraordinary miracle in itself, but it is a very manifest one; not done in a corner, but open to the eyes of all. That long

long day in Palestine would doubtless be remembered forever. It could not be hid. It was in one respect a beneficent miracle; in another, indirectly, destructive; for it enabled Israel to overthrow their enemies; and in such a ruin God is glorified. It was, we might say, a very superfluous miracle. Why not enable Joshua to cut short the work, or send the lightning or the earthquake? God does not always economise His forces, His gifts, His treasures. He loves sometimes to shew how He can lavish His fullness,—how He can be, as men say, extravagant. How completely a much lesser miracle would have served the purpose! Yet he does not grudge this, in answer to the word of one of his saints. Stupendous and superfluous it does seem to us,—for the one stoppage of the sun (or earth) includes so many other stoppages and the forthputting of an amount of Power, absolutely inconceivable. We can measure the amount of power put forth in severing the Red Sea or the Jordan; but the arrestment of sun and moon involves an amount of power beyond all calculation or conception.

I. Familiarize your minds with a great miracle like this. Do not try to lower it or diminish it, or empty it of the supernatural. Take it for what it is here stated to be. God means what he says. He does not exaggerate. Take it for what it is.

(1.) It will enlarge your thoughts of God. He is seen in this miracle as infinitely great and powerful; able to arrest sun and moon in a moment. We need to have our thoughts elevated, expanded, greatened. It is with a great God that we have to do. Alpine or Grampian magnificence declares His greatness; but this far more. In days when man tries to make himself look great, and to think himself powerful; it is well to remember the greatness of Jehovah.

(2.) It will increase your reverence. Reverence of God comes, in part at least, from what we see of his power and majesty. We must be steeped in such views of God as this miracle gives us, that we may be delivered from flippancy and frivolity in dealing with God,—in prayer and praise. Are we sufficiently reverential? Are we bowed down in spirit before this mighty God?

(3.) It will give you a true insight into the true supernatural. The tendency of the age is to disbelieve the supernatural; to assume that man occupies the whole space of being; and that beyond what he sees, and hears, and feels, there is nothing,—no room for angels or spirits, no room for God, no room for agencies apart from known forces and ascertained laws. The Bible is full of the superhuman and supernatural. In studying it we are delivered from superstition, which is the supernatural of the fake, and taught the world of faith, which is the supernatural of the true. For faith deals with the true supernatural, the divine supernatural. It is the evidence of things not seen.

II. Have faith in God. Here is a miracle so great that we can hardly ask for a greater; hence we ought to say, "Is there anything too hard for God." It cherishes faith and expectation. It shews what God is willing to do for men like ourselves. Let us not be staggered by the greatness or difficulty of any work, or the power of any enemy. What though we needed a miracle? If not a visible miracle, yet something as great? Is not God willing to do it for us? There is still power, still love. He still takes part with His Israel against their enemies. Let us be trustful, believing, brave. If God be for us, who can be against us? What cannot faith do? What cannot unbelief mar?

Have faith in God. Not in self, man,

schemes, societies, organisations, churches, money, intellect, science, progress; but in God. Let us be Joshuas. Let us shew what one living man, armed with the living word, can do with the living God!

XXIII.

Song Of The Putting Off Of The Armour

"O my soul, thou hast trodden down strength." —

Judges 5:21

THIS is one note of the warrior's song; a note loud and glad. It is the exulting cry of victory; the song of triumph; victory and triumph; when the battle was not merely for Israel but for God. It is the song of Deborah and Barak; a song inspired by the Holy Ghost; a song of earth, yet doubtless responded to in heaven; the song of the putting off of the armour; the song of one who was strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might.

We might suppose it uttered by Abraham on returning from the slaughter of the kings; by Moses when he saw Pharaoh overthrown; by Joshua when he discomfited Amalek; by David when he slew Goliath; by Israel in the latter day (Isaiah 14:3,4). It is the song of one who out of weakness had been made strong in the Lord and in the power of his might.

We might suppose it to be Christ's song of triumph when he died, with "It is finished" on His lips; or still more when He rose again from the dead; or still more when He ascended on high, leading captivity captive.

We might take it as the song of apostles on the day of Pentecost, when, "not by might or power," they saw three thousand saved; and as the song of apostles wherever they went preaching the gospel,—Ephesus, Corinth, Colosse, or Rome,—that wondrous gospel, proving itself mighty in their hands to the pulling down of strongholds, and the overthrow of enemies. Surely it was Paul's when he said, "I have fought a good fight."

We might take it as the church's song in the day of her coming triumph over all her enemies; over Antichrist, over Babylon, over Satan; when

caught up into the clouds, or standing on the sea of glass: "O my soul, thou hast trodden down strength."

It must be ours (1) daily; (2) specially at certain seasons and emergencies; (3) at the last, like Paul; (4) hereafter throughout eternity, as we look back upon the past, and understand more fully our own impotence, as well as the greatness of the powers arrayed against us. How often shall we find ourselves repeating, even in the new Jerusalem, the song of the ancient prophetess, "O my soul, thou hast trodden down strength."

I. Our warfare. It is "a good warfare," or more exactly, "a glorious warfare." It is against enemies within, around, beneath; self, the flesh,

the world, but specially, the principalities and powers of evil. "Fight the good fight of faith." It is our battle. It is God's battle. It is the church's battle; for we are but one of a mighty army of warriors. It is a warfare from which we cannot escape, save by deserting Christ's ranks; for there is no discharge in this war. It is a constant warfare. It is a lifelong warfare. It is earnest and terrible; no child's play; no mere sound or name; but an intense reality. Nowhere out of Scripture do we find it better described than by Bunyan in his *Pilgrim's Progress*. He knew the reality, and has painted it well. Our life is then a warfare; a warfare which enters into everything; because at every step our great adversary stands to bar our progress, and to prevent us glorifying God in each portion and transaction of life. You complain of the power of sin. Well, fight! Of the difficulty of believing. Well, fight!

II. Our weapons. We need to be armed, both for defence and offence; fully equipped in every instrument of battle. No half-furnished soldier can fight a battle like this. There must be no broken swords, no rusted spears, no shattered helmets.

(1.) What our weapons are not. They are not carnal; not earthly; not self-made, nor man-made. They are not the weapons of science, or philosophy, or human intellect. These avail nothing against sin, or the flesh, or Satan.

(2.) What they are. They are divine and heavenly, forged and hammered on no earthly anvil. They are God-made and God-given. They are complete, both for attack and defence. Sword, shield, sandal, helmet,—all that is needed in this warfare, and described by the apostle (Eph. 6), are provided for us. No man loses this battle for want of offered armour.

III. Our strength. We need power to use the provided weapons. Not the weapons without the power, nor the power without the weapons, but both together. "Be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might." Our sufficiency is of God; all strength is in the Lord. What are sword and buckler to palsied limbs? We need strength,—divine strength for divine armour. The fullness of Him to whom all power is given, is at our disposal. There need be no lack of strength to us in this warfare.

Our victory. It is no vain warfare this of ours; no idle battlefield. **We** go forth to *win!* Yes. Our eye is fixed on victory from the outset. We are assured of triumph from the moment we draw the sword. We are made more than conquerors. How often are these words sounded in our ears: "To him that *overcometh.*" We aim at daily victory,—we aim at final victory,—such as that of Paul. Fight and conquer. Let us anticipate the warrior's song: "O my soul, thou hast trodden down strength."

Our recompense. All that *win* have their rewards; but some victories are harder to win; some more or less complete. And there is a difference in the degree of reward. The seven rewards promised to the seven churches are *representative* rewards. They represent seven different kinds or degrees of glory, set before the conqueror. Yet the least reward is unutterably excellent; worth all the struggle, and the sacrifice, and the sorrow.

Brethren, let us fight! Let us aim at victory; at complete and perfect victory. Let us covet a high reward; let us be ambitious of no common crown. Our great Captain speaks to us, "Behold, I come quickly, and my reward is with me." How soon He may appear we know not. And He

comes with the crown of righteousness, the crown of glory in His hand for His own. If we suffer, we shall also reign with Him.

XXIV.

The Kiss Of The Backslider.

"Orpah kissed her mother-in-law; but Ruth clave unto her." —

Ruth 1:14

IN this book we have the Gentile sheltering the Jew, and the Jew in return inviting the Gentile to partake of Israel's land and blessing. Moab receives Judah, and feeds him in the day of famine (as the prophet in after years speaks, "Let mine outcasts dwell with thee, Moab," Isaiah 16:4), and Judah bids Moab welcome to his better portion. Israel's famine first sent Israel to Egypt for food; Israel's persecution drove Israel's true Son—Messiah, Son of David—to seek protection in Egypt; so now we see Naomi leaving Bethlehem, passing over the rugged hills of Judah, crossing the Dead Sea, and settling in the land of Moab, till the calamity was overpast. Whether it was faith or unbelief that led her to flee from Bethlehem, we say not. It was faith that led her to return. It is as a believing woman that we now find her leaving her exile to seek her own land again, though as yet she knew not that Messiah was to spring of her line.

She sets out with her two daughters-in-law, after a ten years' sojourn in Moab. They travel onward for a little, till they come to some particular spot,—perhaps the shore of the Dead Sea, which they must cross. There Naomi tests them; and there the difference comes out between the two. It is to this difference we have now to attend.

The difference is brought out in Orpah's kissing and Ruth's cleaving. There was great resemblance up to a certain point. Both were Moabites; related by marriage, if not by birth; both attached to Naomi up to a certain point; both linked to Bethlehem by their marriage; both going out with

Naomi to dwell in Judea. There were many points of likeness between the two. It will be profitable to notice these. There are many Orpahs among us,—few Ruths; many Balaams, many Demases, many who follow a while, and then go back and walk no more with the Lord.

I. Orpah and her kissing. There are many kinds of kissing spoken of in Scripture; some evil, some good. There is the murderer's kiss—that of Joab (2 Samuel 20:9); the harlot's kiss (Proverbs 7:13); the kiss of the enemy (Proverbs 27:6); the kiss of idol worship (Hosea 13:2); the flatterer's kiss (2 Samuel 15:5, Absalom); the traitor's kiss (Luke 22:48). These, however, have nothing in common with Orpah and her kiss. Then there is the kiss of affection (Genesis 50:1, Joseph); the kiss of homage (1 Samuel 10:1, Samuel); the kiss of reconciliation (2 Samuel 14:33); the kiss of meeting (Luke 15:20, The prodigal); the kiss of parting (Acts 20:37). In some of these we find Orpah's kiss. It was the kiss of affection, and the kiss of parting. Thus far it was good and not evil. But we must consider its meaning in the circumstances. Everything depends on that. It meant that,

(1.) She was not prepared to leave Moab. The ties between her and it were still unbroken, though for a time a little loosened. Moab was still Moab to her, the home of her kindred, the centre of her affections, the dwelling place of her gods. Thus millions are not ready to leave the world, though often in some measure broken from it. They cling to their old haunts of vanity, foolishness, pleasure, lust, or literature.

They cannot think of forsaking these. Nay, they soothe their consciences with the argument, that it would not be right to break off from all these. To them the world is still the world; attractive and excellent. They cannot think of crucifying it, or themselves to it. They have been born in it, lived in it, their friends are in it,—why should they leave it? Their hearts are still here, their treasure is here; and they linger in it, though at times they feel the necessity of leaving it. What would life be to them without the novel or the ballroom, the theatre, the gay assembly, the banquet, the revel, the folly, the wine-cup, and the song?

(2.) For the sake of Moab she was willing to part with Naomi. She was not without longings after Naomi and her city, and her kindred, and her God. But her old longings and ties kept her back, and in the end prevailed. Yet she wished to part in peace, to bid a decent farewell to her mother-in-law. She kissed that she might not cleave. Her kiss was a farewell; a farewell to Naomi, her land, and her God. Have we not many Orpahs? They would fain have both Israel and Moab. They would rather not part with either. Their heart is divided. They would fain cast in their lot with God's people, and obtain their inheritance. They are not scoffers; not openly godless; not reckless pleasure-seekers. But half-and-half, or rather not so much. They would be religious up to a certain point,—to the point when a choice must be made,—and then their heart speaks out. They give up Christ, and turn back to the world. Yet they do so quietly, as it were, and kindly. They kiss at parting; but will that kiss avail them? Will God accept the kiss as an excuse for turning back, or as a substitute for the whole-hearted service which He desires? What does that kiss mean now? What will it stand for in the great day of the Lord? It is not the kiss of Judas certainly, but it is the kiss of the "fearful and unbelieving" (Revelation 21:8).

II. Ruth and her cleaving. Orpah kissed, but Ruth clave. Orpah kissed that she might not cleave. Ruth cleaves silently, and without show or demonstration. She lingers not nor halts.

Moab is behind her, Israel is before her, Naomi is at her side. Her choice is made. She falters not either in heart or in step. Yonder are Judah's hills; behind them lies Bethlehem; she presses forward. Jehovah must be her God, and Jehovah's land her heritage. Nothing shall come between. She forgets her kindred and her father's house. What are Moab's hills, or cities, or temples, or gods? Jehovah, God of Israel, is now her God forever. Here is cleaving; here is decision; here are faith and love; here is the undivided heart.

It is this that God looks for still. Nothing else will He accept. Not half a heart or half a life. Not Orpah's kiss, but Ruth's cleaving. He wants decision. He abhors vacillation and compromise. If you prefer Moab, go dwell there; enjoy its pleasures, and worship its gods. If you choose

Israel, pitch your tent there, and take Jehovah for your all. It is a mean and poor thing to divide yourself between the two. Be decided, brave, manly, and determined. Know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? Love not the world. Love the world to come. Love Him who is Lord and King of that coming world. Come out and be separate, and touch not the unclean thing.

Indecision will profit nothing. Even in its gentlest and kindest form, it is hateful to God. It will not satisfy you; it will not satisfy God. A whole world and a whole Christ you cannot have. Half of the world and half of Christ is equally an impossibility. Alliance with the world and alliance with Christ is out of the question. Ye cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of devils. Beware of carnal fascinations and snares. Beware of pleasures and vanities. Meddle not with worldly amusements. Suspect that of which the world is enamoured. Blind not yourselves by creature-love and creature-beauty. Lull not your conscience asleep by an outward religion, a fantastic, and pictorial, and sensual worship. It is not religion but Christ that God points you to. Forsake all for Him. Let Him be all to you.

Look to Bethlehem, whither Naomi and Ruth were on their way. He was born there. Let your heart rest there. Look a little farther, to Jerusalem and Golgotha. There He died, the Just for the unjust. There He finished the work. There He shed the reconciling blood. There He gave full testimony to the free love of God. Let your conscience get its purging and pacification there. Let your whole soul go forth and abide there, with Him who died and rose again, and who has promised, saying, "I will come again, and receive you to myself!"

XXV.

The Priestly Word Of Peace

1 Samuel 1:12-18

HERE we have an earthly high priest dealing with a child of sorrow; and in his treatment of her we find both a contrast and a comparison with the heavenly High Priest. The contrast comes out strikingly. Eli shews, first, want of knowledge; for he speaks under a mistake,—in ignorance of the person and the condition of her whom he addressed. Secondly, want of charity; for he charges her at once with drunkenness. Third, want of patience and caution; for he does not wait to inquire. Fourthly, want of tenderness; for he speaks harshly as well as rashly. How great the contrast in all these respects between the earthly and the heavenly High Priest. Contrast this scene with that of the woman of Sychar, or the woman taken in adultery. What a contrast between Eli and the Lord! How differently does Jesus deal with a sinner from the way in which Eli does! The way in which Eli acts makes it necessary for the woman to defend herself; the way in which Jesus acts creates no such necessity; for they to whom He speaks feel that their unworthiness is no bar to His grace, and that the admission of their unworthiness does not alter that grace in the least. The words and acts of Jesus do not set them upon self-defence, as did Eli's. How great the difference between this holy man of Israel and Him who is "The Holy One of Israel!"

But there is comparison or likeness as well as contrast. Eli, though imperfectly, does represent the better High Priest; even him who can be touched with the feeling of our infirmities, who can have compassion on the ignorant, who is a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, and who ever liveth to make intercession for us. This will come out as we consider (1.) the application to the high priest; (2.) the answer; (3.) the confidence; (4.) the consolation.

I. The application. Hannah deals directly with Eli. She is in Jehovah's tabernacle; she has access to its altar; she speaks to the high priest face to face. Two special requests she makes, (1.) count me not a daughter of Belial,—treat me not as a sinner; (2.) let me find grace in thy sight. These are our two special petitions in our dealings with the better High Priest: deal not with me as a sinner, let me find favour with thee. Forgiveness and favour, these are what we need, and they are what we come to the Priest for; for he is the High Priest of the good things to come. Let us deal with him directly. Let us put our whole case into His hands. We apply to Him as the Son of God, as the Priest, the God-man who sits on the throne of grace. He waits for us; let us wait on Him. He is our Eli, our Aaron, our Melchisedec; all fullness is with Him. He sets open that fullness to us. Though sinners, let us remember we have to do with one who can Manage the worst case and can undertake for the chief of sinners.

II. The answer. His answer is, Go in peace,—may the God of Israel grant thy petition. He speaks peace to her. She was sorely troubled and tempest-tossed; she needed peace, and it is with peace that he begins. So is it with peace that our Eli begins; he has made peace, and he speaks to us the peace which he has made,—"Go in peace," He says to every one who comes to Him, for "him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out." This answer is sure to every one who comes to Him. He does not stand on ceremony with His petitioners. He gives what is asked; He sends none empty away. Let us believe that we have what we ask of Him. And then, as if speaking to us of the Father, he says, "Jehovah hear thee, and grant thy petitions." We do not hear His voice; but just as surely as Eli speaks to Hannah and grants her prayer, so does He speak to us and does for us exceeding abundantly above all we ask. Every one who goes to our High Priest is quite sure of an answer, and that a gracious one. He sends none away unsatisfied. Peace and favour from the God of Israel, these are the things He gives. Hannah went to Eli uninvited, but we go invited; it is our heavenly Priest who says, Come unto me!

III. The confidence. Hannah went her way. She did not trouble, nor vex, nor affront Eli with a second or a third application. She took him at his word, like the nobleman who came to Jesus about his son. It is thus that we are to deal with our Eli. Take Him at His word. Trust Him. Do justice to His faithfulness and honesty. Let us not stand on ceremony, or approach in terror and doubt; but believe that He is the rewarder of all that seek Him. Nor let us deceive ourselves and mock Him by saying, I don't distrust Him, I only distrust myself. This is absurd. You are really distrusting Him, and doing so on the ground that you are not fully complying with His conditions (as if He made any conditions!); whereas He bids you trust Him just as you are. If your faith is not good enough, come with it as it is. If your way of coming be imperfect, add that to the number of your sins, and still trust. Let nothing in yourself produce distrust, so long as it is true that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners. "They trusted and were not put to shame" is a truth for us now.

IV. The Consolation. She not only went her way; but she did eat, and her countenance was no more sad (literally, no more what it was). Deep had been her sorrow; now it passed away, at the gracious voice of the High Priest. Thus we learn what it is that relieves a disquieted soul. It is the voice of the High Priest, "Go in peace." We have an High Priest with whom to communicate in our troubles, a greater than Aaron or Eli; and we know, even more surely than Hannah when she heard Eli's voice, that His words to every soul that comes to Him are, "Go in peace." He is not "punctilious," nor does he wait to scrutinize the quality or excellence of our manner of approach. The moment that our words, "God be merciful to me," come up to Him, His answer comes down. "Go in peace." Let us be sure of this; let us give credit to His promises, even though we do not actually see His wee, or hear His voice. Our application must be successful. He cannot deny Himself. He cannot dishonour His priesthood nor break His promises. Not more certain ought we to be that we have asked than that He answers. How long are we to wait before believing Him? How many signs are we to ask before we are sure that He will do as He has said? Why will we persist in doubts, which all take for granted that He is not true to His word, and which disguise their wickedness under the

name of humility, and under the pretence that as we do not know whether we have asked aright, we cannot know whether he will answer till he has answered. Let us beware of the Pharisaism that is always asking for a sign before it will trust the Son of God.

XXVI.

Human Anodynes

1 Samuel 16:14-23

OF Saul we may say, "Thou didst run well, who hath hindered you?" He began well, but ended ill. His first days and works were better than his last. So with Demas; so with the church of Ephesus; so with the Jews, whose following Jehovah at first was belied by their last apostasy. So is it still with souls, churches, nations, ages.

I. Saul's sin. For the root of all was sin. This sin was simply disobedience to a command of God. He was bidden slay Agag and his people. A cruel command, some would say, to which disobedience was better than obedience. But it was a divine command, whether the wisdom, or the justice, or the mercy were visible. God had His reasons for it, and that was enough. Saul's sin was not misrule, nor oppression, nor wickedness, but simply disobedience to a command which some might call arbitrary, if not harsh and stern. Such stress does God lay on obedience, simple obedience, unreasoning obedience. His will must be done; for He is Sovereign, and He is the God only wise. Saul's sin was the preference of his own will and wisdom to God's. Let our consciences be tender as to this; and let us beware of acting on our own reasons or ideas of fitness, or doing our own will. "To obey is better than sacrifice."

II. The consequences. (1.) His crown is taken from him; he is rejected from being king. (2.) Samuel leaves him (1 Samuel 15:35). But the two special things mentioned here are these:—

(1.) The Spirit of the Lord departed from Saul. I do not take up the question as to whether Saul were a true child of God; this passage does not determine the point. He might be so; and these words might be like Paul's: "Whom I have delivered unto Satan, that they may learn not to blaspheme" (1 Timothy 1:20); "deliver unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh" (1 Corinthians 5:5). But certainly "the Spirit which departed

from Saul" was good, not evil. It was the reversal of what is said: "God gave him another heart,"—a heart for governing, which He now takes away. The good Spirit is grieved, and departs. Saul's last act of disobedience has quenched Him; he is left without heavenly guidance.

(2.) An evil spirit from the Lord troubles him. He is not left alone; for as one Spirit departs, another enters. (a.) He is troubled. His soul is now the abode of darkness and fear. He becomes moody and sad; he is vexed, perplexed, desponding. This is the fruit of sin! (b.) He is troubled by an evil spirit. The clean spirit goes out, and the unclean spirit comes in,— comes in to torment, and sadden, and vex. (c.) He is troubled by an evil spirit from the Lord. God lets loose Satan upon him. The unclean spirit returns with others more wicked than himself, and his last state is worse than his first. These words are very awful: "I will choose their delusions;" and "God shall send them strong delusion! "

Thus is his chastisement double—negative and positive; a departure of the good, and the arrival of the evil. And this affliction is Jehovah's doing. Not chance, nor disease, nor natural depression of spirits, but a visitation from God; judgment for disobedience, judicial punishment.

III. Human appliances. Here is music, religious music,—the music of the harp, the harp of David. This is soothing but it does not reach the seat of the disease. It is something human, something external, something materialistic and earthly, something that man can originate and apply. It is effectual to a certain extent; it drives away the evil spirit, and restores temporary tranquillity; thus possibly deceiving its victim. In like manner we find the human spirit afflicted in every age, sometimes more and sometimes less. And in all such cases man steps in with his human and external appliances. I do not refer to the grosser form of dispelling gloom,—drunkenness and profligacy, in which men seek to drown their sense of want, and make up for the absence of God. I refer to the refined appliances; those of art, science, music, gaiety, by which men try to minister to a mind diseased. What is Romanism and ritualism, but a

repetition of Saul's minstrelsy? The soul needs soothing. It is vexed and fretted with the world, its conscience is not at ease, it is troubled and weary. It betakes itself to forms, something for the eye and ear, to chants, and vestments, and postures, and performances, sweet sounds and fair sights, sentimental and pictorial religion, which is but a refined form of worldliness. By these the natural man is soothed, the spirit tranquilised; the man is brought to believe that a cure has been wrought, because his gloom has been alleviated by these religious spectacles, these exhibitions which suit the unregenerate soul so well. They but drug the soul, filling it with a sort of religious delirium. They are human sedatives, not divine medicines.

IV. The results. A partial and temporary cure. It is said that the evil spirit departed, but not that the good Spirit returned. Saul's trouble was alleviated, but not removed. The disease was still there. The results of David's harp were only superficial and negative. So is it with the sinner still. There are many outward applications, which act like spiritual chloroform upon the soul. They soothe, and calm, and please, but that is all. They do not reach below the surface, nor touch the deepseated malady within. Men try rites, sacraments, pictures, music, dresses, and the varied attractions of ecclesiastical ornament; but these leave the spirit unfilled, and its wounds unhealed. They cannot regenerate, or quicken, or heal, or fill with the Holy Spirit. They may keep up the self-satisfaction and self-delusion of the soul, but that is all. They bring no true peace, nor give rest to the weary. They do not fill, they merely hide our emptiness.

Our age is full of such appliances, literary and religious, all got up for the purpose of soothing the troubled spirits of man. Excitement, gaiety, balls, theatres, operas, concerts, ecclesiastical music, dresses, performances,—what are all these but man's appliances for casting out the evil spirit and healing the soul's hurt without having recourse to God's one remedy? These pleasant sights and sounds may "take the prisoned soul and lap it in Elysium," but what of that? They do not bring it nearer to God, they do not work repentance, or produce faith, or fix the eye on the true cross. They leave the soul still without God, and without reconciliation. The

religion thus produced is hollow, and fitful, and superficial, and sentimental. It will not save nor sanctify. It may produce a sort of religious inebriation, but not that which God calls godliness, not that which apostles pointed out as a holy life, a walk with God.

XXVII.

Spiritual And Carnal Weapons

"And the men of Israel said, Have ye seen this man that is come up? surely to defy Israel is he come up: and it shall be, that the man who killeth him, the king will enrich him with great riches, and will give him his daughter, and make his father 's house free in Israel."

1 Samuel 17:25

HERE are two men, and in these men two nations, two religions; two bodies or companies,—the seed of the woman, and the seed of the serpent. Israel and Philistia are now brought face to face. There must be war, not peace; not even an alliance, not even a truce. The world's table is not spread for the church, nor the church's table for the world. The "earth" may sometimes help the woman, and swallow up the floods which would overwhelm her; but friendship with the earth is not to be cultivated or sought after. The friendship of the world is enmity with God.

Here are two men,—the one the personification of power, the other of weakness; the one of self-reliance, the other of confidence in God. We see man, nothing but man, in the one; God, nothing but God in the other. In the Philistine we see man fighting against God, in David man fighting for God. What the world admires and prizes is to be found in the one, what it despises in the other.

One thing marks them both: they are full of courage and of confidence; both equally sure of success, though the one boasts, and the other boasts not. The sources and grounds of their confidence are very different; but their confidence itself seems very much alike.

The *object* of each is, in one respect, different; in another, the same. They meet for battle,—each bent on the overthrow of the other. But Israel has

not provoked nor challenged the conflict; nor is Israel desirous of seizing Philistia. She has Jerusalem: why should she seek Gaza? But Philistia would fain have Israel and her land in her power, and she makes continual inroads for this end. She is not content with Gaza and Ashkelon; she must have Jerusalem and Bethlehem.

But it is not the Gentile giant that I ask you specially to, notice, but the Jewish boy, the stripling of Bethlehem. In him we have—

I. The rejection of human weapons. He was fully aware (1.) of the greatness of the issue depending on this combat; (2.) of the strength of the adversary; (3.) of his own weakness; (4.) of the great things to which he had pledged himself. Yet he declines to avail himself of any of those things which would have helped to make up his deficiency, and made him, as man would say, adequate for the struggle. He takes only that which is expressive of feebleness,—which would make him incur the imputation of being a fool, like the apostle in after years. He had to become "weak" as well as a "fool," that he might be both wise and strong. His taking unlikely and unsuitable human weapons was more expressive of his faith than if he had taken none; for, through such, God got the opportunity of shewing His power,—His power, not as directly coming down from heaven, but as coming through the feeble instrumentality of a shepherd, and a shepherd's sling. It was God identifying Himself with David, and using the sling as His own two-edged sword. Thus the true beginning of all strength is weakness; the starting-point for success is the abnegation of self-power and human appliances. How often is it true, of individuals, and of churches, and of societies, that they are too strong for God to work by or with; too well equipped, or too well organised; too rich, or too numerous, or too great, for God to get glory from! He must have His work done by hands, regarding which there will be no mistake as to who is the doer of the whole work, and the author of all the success. David did not reject these weapons because they were sinful. He often used the sword, and the spear, and the shield, in fighting the battles of the Lord. He had builded a tower for an armoury, wherein there hung a thousand bucklers, all shields of mighty men. But, in certain cases, that which is lawful is not

expedient. Lawful instruments sometimes become, if not unlawful, at least inexpedient and useless, when they give God no room to make bare His arm. We are, generally speaking, far too solicitous about our strength, and forget that it is always by weakness that God works. We are too solicitous about intellect, learning, numbers, money, as if we could have no hope of success without these. No one is too weak to work the work of God; many are too strong. We are slow to believe this, slow to act on it. Yet it is one of the great truths on which God has set His seal during the ages past.

II. The adoption of divine weapons. David leaves the human weapons to the Philistine; he prefers the divine. The sight of human weapons in his adversary had not made him afraid to do battle with him, nor made him say, Oh that I had a sword like his! And as he drew nearer, and saw his whole strength and array, his confidence does not sink; it rises. He sees in the giant an enemy of the living God, and his weapons as, therefore, directed against Him. That sword, that spear, that shield, are used against Jehovah, God of Israel. David is not dismayed, but goes forward triumphantly, assured of being more than conqueror. He has a weapon,—only one,—framed by no human hand, brought out of no earthly armoury. It is called "the name of the Lord." With this he can face, not only Goliath and the Philistian armies, but Satan and the hosts of hell. This "name" is our weapon still. It is sword, and shield, and spear. Armed with it we can do any work, fight any battle, engage any foe. Only let us be sure that we are on God's side, and our enemy against Him, we can go forward with confidence. "If God be for us, who can be against us?" is one side of the maxim. "If we be for God, who can be against us?" is the other. In using this name as a weapon, or as a plea, I come as if God and I were one; as if God, and not I, were on the battle-field. We stand in God's stead, and He in ours. We fight in God's stead, and He in ours. It is not so much we that work as He. Using His name, is simply confiding in His revealed character and sure word, and in nothing of ourselves,—making use of no arm of flesh, no power of man's arm or man's intellect, but Jehovah's alone, the Lord God of Israel. Have faith in God! Not in man, nor in the flesh, nor in genius, nor in science, nor in numbers, nor in rank, nor in

influential names, nor in great schemes, but in the living God—David's God and ours.

XXVIII.

Divine Silence And Human Despair

"And when Saul inquired of the Lord, the Lord answered him not, neither by dreams, nor by Urim, nor by prophets. Then said Saul unto his servants, Seek me a woman that hath a familiar spirit, that I may go to her, and inquire of her. And his servants said to him, Behold, there is a woman that hath a familiar spirit at En-dor." —

1 Samuel 28:6,7

THE scene of this sad strange narrative, is the plain of Esdraelon, a place of battle-fields. The Philistines are in the north, at Shunem. Israel at the south, in Gilboa. It is a critical hour for Saul, and for his people. The enemy is in strength; Samuel is dead; Saul's conscience is not at ease; he has provoked the Lord; how shall he face the enemy? "He is afraid, and his heart greatly trembles." He knows not what to do. He does, however, the right thing so far: he consults God. But this inquiry is in vain. "The Lord answered him not, neither by dreams, nor by Urim, nor by prophets." Then in his despair he betakes himself to the woman with the familiar spirit.

Thus heaven, earth, and hell are brought before us. A little of the veil is drawn aside, and we learn something of the workings of the invisible as well as of the visible. We notice, (1.) God's silence; (2.) Saul's despair.

I. **God's silence.** Saul in his terror cries, but there is no answer of any kind. No dream of the night reveals the secrets of the future; no prophet comes instead of Samuel; no voice comes from the high priest. All is silent. Silent just when utterance was most desired and needed. Saul knocks at the gate of heaven, but it is barred against him; there is no response. That silence, how dreadful! The roar of thunder, the crash of the earthquake, the rush of the hurricane would have been a relief,— though terrible in themselves. But that *silence*, it is absolutely intolerable. It is the silence of heaven; the silence of Him whose voice was so anxiously

expected. We read of the silence of the desert, the silence of midnight, the silence of the church-yard and the grave; but this is something more profound and appalling: the silence of God when appealed to by a sinner in his extremity. There must be a meaning in that silence. It is not the silence (1.) of indifference; (2.) nor of inability to hear; (3.) nor of weakness; (4.) nor of perplexity. He is alive to the case; he can hear; he is able to deliver; he knows what would meet the case. Yet he is silent. It must then be the silence of refusal, of rejection, of displeasure, of abandonment. Terrible silence! Anything would be better than this.

Such is the position in which God represents the sinner at certain times: "When they call I will not answer" (Proverbs 1:28); "I will not be inquired of by you" (Ezekiel 20:31). The foolish virgins going for oil too late; the knocking for admittance too late; the crying Lord, Lord, too late; the calling to the rocks and hills in the great day. The only answer is silence! Oh, terrible silence for the sinner! He would not call when he would have been heard, and now it is too late! God called on him during his lifetime, but he would not hear. Now he calls, but God keeps silence. Yet even this awful silence will be broken. God will speak; He will speak from the throne. Depart, ye cursed, will be the breaking of the silence, and the answer to the rebel's cries!

II. Saul's despair. Danger presses; the Philistines are mustering; the crisis has come. Yet there is no answer. What will he do? There were three courses open to him: (1.) he might sit down in quiet hopelessness, and let the evil come; or (2.) he might, in faith and penitent submission, commit the whole matter to God, even amid this awful silence: or (3.) he might betake himself to hell for counsel since heaven was deaf. He chooses the last! In his despair he goes to the enemy of that God who was refusing to answer; he turns to the wizards whom he had himself put away; he turns from the living to the dead; he consults with hell. It must have been a dreadful day of suspense for Saul; a dreadful night, when having formed the fatal purpose, he sets out across the hill to Endor. What his thoughts and feelings were in that awful hour we know not. They must have been of the wildest and gloomiest kind. "God has cast me off, I will betake myself

to Satan; heaven's door is shut, I will see if hell's be open." And when crossing the hill, and approaching the village of the enchantress, he must have felt, Now I am going on an errand to Satan; I am going to try if he can do for me what God will not." Oh terrible journey! Fit winding up to that silence and suspense! He is determined to get a glimpse of the future, though his prophet be the evil one himself. The past is dark; the present is gloomy; what is the future to be? God will not tell him. Will Satan? Thus he rushes on in despair;—he the king of Israel, the friend of Samuel, the conqueror of Israel's enemies,—the forty years' monarch and warrior, who has never trembled before an enemy,—he, the tall, stately Benjamite. Thus, in melancholy madness, he moves in that dark midnight, over the heights that overlooked his own camp and that of his foes. What a picture! Nothing in Milton half so grand or sad,—hardly anything out of hell half so terrible,—as this man of war, and might, and commanding stature, striding on over these hills to the gate of the pit. His despair had blinded him; he had not learned to say with one who was a greater sufferer than himself, "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him." He despaired because God was silent. Yet the silence was meant to lead him to repentance and acknowledgment of sin. It was God's last appeal to his conscience. Let us learn,

1. The perils of backsliding. Here is one who once bid fair, whom God favoured and honoured; the friend of Samuel, turning his back on God.
2. The terribleness of the silence of God. It means something dreadful: it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God; to cry and get no answer; to find no light!
3. The evils of despair. No sinner here ought to despair. His case may be sad; God's silence long and deep; his sins many; yet on no account let him turn his back on God; rather let him fling himself into His arms. This would be blessed despair.

XXIX.

Jewish Unbelief And Gentile Blessing

"And the ark of the Lord continued in the house of Obed-edom the Gittite three months: and the Lord blessed Obed-edom, and all his household." —

2 Samuel 6:11

IT was into the house of a Gentile that the ark was brought; a Philistine; a dweller in Gath; a " Gittite;" but one who knew the Lord God of Israel.

It was the sin of an Israelite that led to its being brought here. Uzzah offended and was slain. He was afraid to trust the ark to take care of itself. He laid distrustful hands upon it when the oxen stumbled. Perhaps this was not his first offence of this kind. He seems to have been *forward*; perhaps proud,—proud of his office.

It was David's unbelief that brought it. He did not rightly interpret God's dealing; and was afraid; afraid of God, because He was holy, and ready to vindicate His holiness. He began the work, but broke it off in the midst, through fear,—unbelieving fear.

He dreads danger to himself; but, strange, he does not so for Obededom. He was willing that Obed-edom should run the risk which he would not. In what a strange conflict of feelings this was done! There is more of unbelief and less of faith in David than we should have expected. He thrusts the ark into Obed-edom's house, that whatever ill might happen might fall on him. It was not in love to Obed-edom, nor with a design of honouring him, nor with the wish to confer blessing on him. None of these motives seem to have influenced David; but blind fear,—a wish to keep himself out of danger. He does not seem to have cared about this Gentile; it would seem as if he were saying, If there is danger, let it fall on a

Gentile. He does not seem to have meant it for good to him, yet good came.

The ark of the God of Israel came to Obed-edom. It knocked at his door seeking shelter, seeking a home. He received it gladly. He was not forgetful to receive this stranger; and truly he received an angel unawares. He seems to have been a man of faith, one who knew the God of Israel,—who knew Him even better than did Israel's king! When David, in terror, would have nothing more to do with the ark, Obed-edom opened his door and bid the God of Israel welcome. Truly it might be said, "I have not seen such great faith, no, not in Israel."

In this unexpected way, blessing entered this Gentile house; nay, God Himself entered, and with Him all blessing. It was but a transient stay of the ark, a three months' sojourn; but God Himself had taken up His abode, and He would not depart. No doubt all kinds of blessing came in, temporal and spiritual; and these did not leave. What a gainer Obededom became by this failure of David! Through David's fall, salvation came to this Gentile! God was not unrighteous to forget his work of faith. Verily he had his reward. It was a high one. David was a loser, but Obed-edom was a gainer.

Jerusalem was a loser, but Gibeah was a gainer! Thus wonderful are the ways and works of God! Now turn to the lessons.

I. How God punishes irreverence. It was irreverence in Uzzah to put forth his hand. God had provided for the carrying of the ark by Levites, &c. He will not allow this to be encroached upon. He will not permit men to do evil that good may come; or to be judges of what is right, when He Himself has spoken. Beware of irreverence in the things of God; irreverence in church; in touching holy vessels; irreverence as to the name, or book, or day of God. Woe to the irreverent! They are Uzzahs, and shall know it at length, though they be long spared.

II. How God's people misinterpret His dealings. David did so. He shrunk from the ark; he dreaded it; he shrunk from God; he dreaded Him;

he went back to Jerusalem without that for which he had specially gone forth; all through misconstruing this judgment upon Uzzah and his irreverence. God in smiting Uzzah did not mean to repel or terrify David; He merely wished to warn,—to check undue familiarity. David in haste and unbelief supposed it to mean that God was frowning upon him,— that God was a hard Master,—eager to take advantage of every slip or stumble. Thus David wronged Jehovah.

III. How much they lose by this misinterpretation. Professing to shun Uzzah's presumption, they fall into David's unbelief; and like David they lose the honour and the blessing which might have been theirs. Such is the way in which hundreds lose the blessings of the Gospel. They misinterpret God and His dealings; they flee from Him, they doubt Him, they suspect Him; and so peace is lost, fellowship is lost, God Himself is kept out of the soul.

IV. How much they gain who receive God simply. While David was the loser, Obed-edom was the gainer. He was not afraid of God. The ark came knocking at his door asking admittance, and he gladly received it. And with the ark God came in, and with God all blessing. Everything prospered in his house now that God had come in. See how God can overrule the unbelief and failures of his people.

1. Beware of flying from God, or shutting out God. He comes to you and knocks; be you Jew or Gentile. Be not alarmed. It is a friend, not an enemy.

2. *Let in God.* Both into heart and home. Let God dwell in you and in your house. Bid Him welcome. Be not forgetful to entertain Him. He comes in love. Fury is not in Him. He is seeking entrance for Himself, and shelter for His ark among the sons of men. Let Him not pass by your door. Go out to meet Him, and bid Him welcome. He will bless you.

XXX.

The Restoration Of The Banished

"For we must needs die, and are as water spilt on the ground, which cannot be gathered up again; neither doth God respect any person; yet doth he devise means, that his banished be not expelled from Him." —

2 Samuel 14:14

SUCH is "the wise woman's" argument, or rather Joab's, addressed to king David, in order to persuade him to be reconciled to Absalom. God does not deal with us as you are dealing with your son, though we have deserved his anger. He punishes, yet he, devises means for the cancelling of the punishment and the restoration of his exiles. He is just, yet the Saviour. Mark the woman's statement.

I. We must needs die. This is the law, the inevitable, inexorable law; not of nature or fate, but of God. "Unto dust shalt thou return;" "It is appointed unto men once to die." This is no probability, but a certainty, a necessity; greater than that the sun will rise and set to-morrow. "He died," is the conclusion of each man's history. Our world's story is one of death. It might be Methuselah's nine hundred or David's seventy, but it is death at last. Even when the Son of God took our nature, he must die. None have escaped this, save two; none shall, save those who shall be alive when Christ comes. You may have health, friends, riches, honours, but you must needs die. When, where, how, you know not.

II. We are as water spilt on the ground, which cannot be gathered up again. Man lieth down and riseth not. He is not like some building, which when ruined may be re-erected; nor like fallen fruit, that may be gathered up; but like water, which mingles with the soil and cannot be laid hold of. He mixes with the earth, and cannot raise himself, nor be raised by his fellows. He passes away and returns not. Look at the churchyard, there is

the water spilt on the ground. Look at earth's battlefield, there is the water spilt. Look at the depths of ocean, which have swallowed up tens of thousands, there is the water spilt. Not one drop has yet been gathered up of all that has been spilt since the world began, save one drop, one precious drop,—even Him who saw no corruption. No grave has given up its dust. Each slumbering atom lies till the great morning. We may walk among and weep over them, and raise monuments with names and epitaphs, but we cannot gather them up. There they remain till He comes, who is the resurrection and the life, to put forth His hand and take up each forgotten particle.

III. God doth not respect persons. In His sight all are alike, as sinners, as creatures, as sons of Adam, as dying men,— young or old, low or high. He cannot be bribed to spare. He accepteth no man's person. The sickbed and the death-bed are spread for all. The tomb opens for all; the simple turf it may be, or some rich marble monument, but still it is a tomb, a receptacle for human bones and dust. No ornaments can make it otherwise. Thou must die, is the recorded sentence, and God makes no exceptions.

IV. He deviseth means for the restoration of His banished. He is righteous, and will not palliate sin, nor repeal His sentence. Yet He does not leave us without hope. Mark here,

1. His banished. We are God's banished ones, no longer in our father's house or the king's palace, cast out like Adam from Paradise, or Cain from God's presence, or Absalom from Jerusalem, or Israel from Canaan. Sin has done it all. The brand of exile is upon us; it is God himself who has banished us. Elsewhere we are described as prodigals leaving our Father's house, here as criminals banished from His presence. O man, thou art an exile! Perhaps thou dost not feel thy loneliness, thou hast got familiarised with the place of exile, nevertheless thou art a banished man, banished from Him who made thee and in whose favour is life.

2. God's love to the banished. He has expressed His displeasure against their rebellion by banishing them, yet He has not forgotten them. He pities them, yearns over them, beckons them back. Distance has not erased their names from his paternal heart. No other may pity them, but he does. The Father sees his prodigals in the far off country; their misery, loneliness of heart, weariness, call forth his pity. He stretches out his hands, and the words of his lips are, "Come unto me," return, return.

3. God's design to restore them. He has a purpose of grace. The good pleasure of his goodness shews itself in a gracious design, a plan of mingled sovereignty and goodwill, righteousness and grace. He has resolved that they shall not remain afar off. His purpose shall stand.

4. His means for this. These are not stated here, but the Bible is the revelation of these. He spares not His Son, but sends Him in quest of the exiles. He comes into the land of banishment, lies in an exile's cradle, becomes a banished man for them, lives a banished life, endures an exile's shame, dies an exile's death, is buried in an exile's tomb. He takes our place of banishment that we may take His place of honour and glory in the home of His Father and our Father. Such is the exchange between the exile and the exile's divine substitute. Though rich, for our sakes He becomes poor. Though at home, He comes into banishment, that we may not be expelled forever. And here, in connection with our restoration through a substitute, there are three questions.

(1.) Will the Father accept a substitute? Yes, He will; nay, He has. His purpose of grace has been carried out by His providing the Substitute. He has sent His Son! He has sent Solomon to seek Absalom, to bear Absalom's penalty. He has not spared His Son that He may spare us.

(2.) Is the Son willing to become a substitute? Will Solomon quit Jerusalem and David's palace, and take the place of the banished Absalom? He will. Nay, He has done it. He has come down in quest of us. He has borne our sins.

(3.) Are you willing to take this substitute? He has come. He offers the exchange. Give me thy guilt and take my righteousness. Thou rebellious son, thou banished Absalom, thou hater of thy heavenly Father and conspirer against His government, wilt thou not return? Thy Father's heart yearns over thee, He longs to have thee back. Return, return! If not, He weeps over thee as over Jerusalem; and when thou diest He cries out, O Absalom, my son, my son.

XXXI.

The Farewell Gift

"And it came to pass, when they were gone over, that Elijah said unto Elisha, Ask what I shall do for thee, before I be taken away from thee. And Elisha said, I pray thee, let a double portion of thy spirit be upon me. And he said, Thou hast asked a hard thing: nevertheless, if thou see me when I am taken from thee, it shall be so unto thee; but if not, it shall not be so. And it came to pass, as they still went on, and talked, that, behold, there appeared a chariot of fire, and horses of fire, and parted them both asunder; and Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven."—

2 Kings 2:9-11

THIS is the parting of two friends; of the master and the servant, Elijah and Elisha. They journey together, they cross Jordan together, they come up to the gate of heaven together. They must separate; the one to go up to heaven, the other to remain a little longer here. They part, not in anger like Paul and Barnabas, but like David and Jonathan,— in love. Elijah speaks first, and his love to his faithful companion shews itself in the words, "Ask what I shall do for thee before I be taken away from thee." All that he possesses, all that is in his power, he will give.

But Elisha's request goes beyond what he had expected, or what he could grant. "Thou hast asked a hard thing," a thing beyond my power to give; a thing which only God can give. I must refer you to him; but I am permitted to give you this sign, "if you see me when taken;" that is to be the token that God grants your request; if not, then the request cannot be granted.

The sign was given. Elisha saw his master ascend; nay, was allowed to obtain the mantle of his master, in token of his receiving his spirit. And

acknowledging this sign, he rends his own clothes into two parts, as if putting his former self aside and putting on Elijah.

But the request of Elisha is a striking one. It was not what Elijah expected or could grant; but it was in sympathy with his own feelings, and he therefore referred it to God. It was for the Spirit,—that Spirit that rested on and dwelt in Elijah,—nay, a double portion of that Spirit. He admired and loved his master; and his desire was to be like him; nay, to get beyond him; to rise higher; to do and say greater things than Elijah said or did.

In this narrative we find, in Elisha, the indication of such things as the following:—

I. Spiritual sympathy. He is of one mind and spirit with his master. He has been witness of his life and doings; he sees the spirit which has pervaded all his words and deeds; not merely the spirit of power and miracles, but of holiness, and zeal, and prayerfulness, and boldness. Sympathising with all these, he longs to have the same mind; to be filled with the same spirit. How well for us if our sympathies were thus with the men in whom the Spirit of God dwells or has dwelt in ages past! Not with this world, nor with the spirit of the world, but with the world to come, and with the spirit of it, should our sympathies be. Not with the men of the world's genius, or science, or learning; not with earth's poets or philosophers; but with prophets and apostles. Whatever there is of truth and beauty in Homer, or Plato, or Demosthenes, or Shakespeare, or Bacon, or Milton, or Wordsworth, or Tennyson, let us accept; but let our spiritual sympathies ascend far higher; let us realise our true oneness with Enoch, and Elijah, and Elisha, and Isaiah, and Ezekiel; our fellowship with that Holy Spirit which dwelt in them. The sympathies of this age are confessedly not with prophets and apostles. These are looked on as fragments of obsolete antiquity and old-fashioned narrowmindedness. Let us, however, go back to these ancient times and men, not concerned to be "abreast of the age" if we be "abreast" of the Spirit.

II. Holy imitativeness. His desire is to be like Elijah. He wishes not merely to have "the Spirit," but "thy spirit," the spirit that dwelt in Elijah. To be like him in the divine features of his character; like him in the possession of the Spirit and in that special form in which he possessed it; this was what he sought. There is certainly but one great model; but there are subordinate ones also. Paul said, "Be followers of me," and the eleventh of Hebrews is a collection of models, a book of patterns, in each of which we may find something to copy. While copying Christ, then, let us not overlook the inferior models, either among the inspired men of Bible-days, or the uninspired worthies of later times. May the spirit of Elijah, and Paul, and John rest on us; the spirit also of Wycliffe and Huss, of Luther and Calvin, of Knox, and Welsh, and Rutherford, and Whitefield, and M'Cheyne, and Hewitson.

III. Divine ambition. Elijah was not only full of admiration for his master, not only wished to be like him, but desired to get far beyond him. He asked a "double portion" of his spirit. This is true ambition; this is coveting earnestly the best gifts of which Paul speaks, and in connection with which he points out the more excellent way of "charity," in which especially Elisha seems to have risen higher than his master, Elisha's ministry being more one of love than Elijah's. In such things as these let us be ambitious. There is no fear of aiming too high or seeking too much. Let us not give way to the false humility which says, "Oh that we had but the hundredth part of what Elijah had!" Let us rather at once, with Elisha, seek to have far more. Let us seek a double portion of his spirit. This is true humility. It is desiring to be what God wishes us to be. It is honouring his fullness and his generosity. It is acknowledging the extent of blessing in reserve; reckoning on it as quite illimitable, and therefore not confining ourselves to what others have had before us, but going up into the divine fullness, for far more than has ever yet been obtained even by the fullest.

Quiet expectation. He speaks and acts like one who fully expected to get what he asked. Elijah had referred him to God for "the hard thing" he had asked; it was in God's hand alone. "It is not mine to give" (as if anticipating the Lord's words). Elisha owns the divine sovereignty, and is

calm; but he realises the divine love, and expects. He believes, and therefore does not make haste, but goes quietly on beside his master to see the end. He believes, and therefore he assures himself that God is not likely to be less gracious than his master, nor to deny him what Elijah would gladly give if he could. Let us *believe!* Have faith in God. Trust Him for much, for he is able to do for us exceeding abundantly above all we ask or think.

Conscious possession. He accepts the sign: he sees the prophet caught up; he seizes his mantle, and returns by the way he came, conscious of having received the "double portion." He believes, and therefore he speaks and acts. The sign promised has been given; can he doubt that the thing promised is also given? He may have nothing new in *feeling* to corroborate it, but that matters not. He has it in simple faith in the bare word of the true God. The "double portion" is mine, he says to himself; and he goes back to exercise his prophetic calling, in the calm consciousness of possessing more than his master did. What is Jordan to him now? A stroke of the mantle divides it; and henceforth his life is to be one of mighty and gracious miracle. Let us speak and act as men who believe that God fulfils His word to us. Let us *trust* that word when we use it. There is more in it than in Elijah's mantle. It is living and divine. Let us not blunt or deaden it by our want of confidence in its power.

XXXII.

God's Dealing With Sin And The Sinner

"Er, the first-born of Judah, was evil in the sight of the Lord, and he slew him." —

1 Chronicles 2:3

HERE we have, in one brief sentence, a statement of the way in which God deals with sin and the sinner. It is the repetition of a verse in Genesis, in a very unlikely place,—in the midst of names and genealogies; God thus giving us to know the stress He lays on it. It is not for nothing that He thus repeats it. Such clauses as this, flung in apparently by chance, or what is called the transcriber's taste, are full of meaning. This certainly contains a very distinct and awful utterance.

Looking at it generally, we may say that it brings out, in a very outstanding and unambiguous form, such things as these:—

I. God's estimate of sin. It differs widely from man's. It is the Judge's estimate; not the physician's merely, or the father's. It is one of condemnation. It is not simply disease, or misfortune, or an accidental deviation from the straight line; but guilt, which must be reckoned for according to inexorable law. Sin, in the divine judgment, is not something vague, and loose, and shadowy, but well-defined and substantial. It is not a thing of sentiment or feeling, but a thing to be determined by the sharp test of unchanging law,—law interpreted by an inflexible tribunal, and applied by an infinitely righteous Judge, without respect of persons; without fear, or favour, or partiality; without the remotest risk of mistake, or possibility of miscarriage of justice.

II. God's treatment of sin. He does not merely pronounce a sentence or verdict, without meaning to carry it out. His deeds correspond with his

words. He hates sin; He tells us this; He treats it accordingly. His treatment of it is—

(1.) Prompt. Though he does bear with the sinner, yet this patience is not at variance with the promptitude. He is both patient and prompt; yet is he not hasty. It does not take him unawares, nor shew him as if at a loss how to deal with it. He is always ready to meet it and deal with it, whether open or secret, greater or less.

(2.) Decided. He does not trifle with it, as if undecided how to proceed, or hesitating as to what sentence to pronounce. There may be, for wise and gracious reasons, some delay; but the delay does not arise from any want of decision, any changeableness or instability. He is altogether decided in words and ways. "He is in one mind, and who can turn him?"

(3.) Severe. "The Lord slew him"; that is, struck him down, cut him off by a violent death. He did not die the death of men, but perished like Korah. God made a fearful example of him before the eyes of his brethren; though what it was we know not. When God arises to smite, he is infinitely terrible in his vengeance. He is in earnest; and he punishes in earnest, when his wrath is kindled but a little.

(4.) Watchful. His eye is on the wicked, his eyelids try the children of men. Nothing escapes him. No sin, however small, is overlooked. Though fury is not in him, yet he is watchful.

His eyes are as a flame of fire.

But it is not sin merely that God would have us consider here.

It is the sinner specially. For this non-information as to the sin (we are not told what the sin was) seems to be for the purpose of making prominent the sinner. And then the reticence as to the personal history of the sinner, fixes our eye on the other circumstances thus brought out in relief.

He is a first-born son. To him would pertain peculiar honour, and in him would centre peculiar expectation. Yet he is slain— slain by God. How

often do we thus find the natural order broken in upon, and human hope frustrated! It was so in Cain; it was so in Esau. *Sin* breaks up all order, and disappoints all hope. Were it not for sin, the river of human order (family and social) would flow on undisturbed.

He is the first-born of Judah. "Judah, thou art he whom thy brethren shall praise." Judah, in God's purpose, is already the royal tribe; and this sinner, slain by God for his wickedness, is the first of the royal line, the first link in Messiah's royal chain. As Esau and Reuben had been set aside because of their sin, so is Er. Sin breaks the line; and the blow that severs it is dealt by God himself. "Jehovah slew him," because "he was wicked in the sight of the Lord." And if any one say, "Why doth he yet find fault, for who hath resisted his will?" our answer is, "Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God?"

Yes, God is not afraid to break Messiah's line. He can rectify the breakage in His own way, but rather than that sin should go unpunished, He does not hesitate to break that line; to set aside Judah's first-born. So in finitely does God hate sin!

But there is something yet more remarkable. The broken link was to be refastened by the permission of sin as great as that which had broken it: the triple sin, first of Onan, then of Judah, then of Tamar! How mysterious! "How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!" What a strange fragment of human history is this breaking and this mending of Messiah's royal line! "Oh the depth of the riches, both of the wisdom and knowledge of God!" See how He hates sin; how He smites the sinner; how He does not spare even the first-born of Messiah's tribe! Yet see how His purpose stands! And see how He can make use of sin for remedying the breaches which sin makes! What a God is ours! So righteous, so wise, so powerful, so loving and gracious!

But how terrible the lesson regarding sin! God cannot pass it by. On whomsoever found, it must be punished. Even when God's purpose is to

remedy it, it must be punished; first punished before it can be remedied, lest men should make light of it, or think that God is trifling with it.

Yes; and when sin is at last found (though but by imputation) upon His well-beloved Son, it must be punished.

He must die. Yet He dies only to live; and he lives that we may live also. Judah's royal Son, David's Lord, is our Redeemer from sin.

Jesus, the true "first-born of Judah," he whom "his Brethren shall praise," was "made sin for us;" though not "evil in the sight of the Lord," but good,—his beloved Son, "in whom he is well pleased,"—he was treated as evil, and slain of the Lord; "made a curse for us," though he was the blessed One; for "it pleased the Lord to bruise him, and to put him to grief." Thus He takes our evil as if it were His own; and we get His good as if it were our own. God dealt with Him on our account as if He were evil, not good; God deals with us on account of Him as if we were good and not evil. God slew Him, that He might not slay us. God condemned Him, that He might pardon us. We listen to God's testimony concerning Him, and, in listening, we drink in the everlasting life.

Nor only *life*, but *glory*; royal glory. For in receiving that testimony we are grafted into Judah's royal line. We become part of "the church of the first-born. "We inherit a kingdom. Ours is David's palace, and David's city, and David's heritage. Ours is the better Canaan; the new Jerusalem; the throne and crown of the Son of God. We are joint-heirs with Him in His royal glory; sharers in His holy reign.

XXXIII.

God Finding A Resting-Place

1 Chronicles 21:1-30

THERE is something very peculiar about this fragment or episode of Israel's history. It is abrupt, and in a manner isolated, though not wholly so. It has also some very remarkable points about it. It is the introduction to the history of the temple. It shews the way in which David was led to Moriah as the temple site, and to Oman's thrashingfloor as the place for the altar of burnt-offering. It was through David's sin and punishment that God pointed out the "rest" which He had chosen, and the spot where He had purposed to place His name (2 Chronicles 3:1). Thus God overrules human sin; nay, takes occasion from it to display His grace. It was their king's sin that was the link between Israel and Moriah, between Israel and the temple, between Israel and the place of burnt-offering. Strange this, but suitable and striking. It is sin that is, in one sense, the link, or at least the point, of contact between us and Jesus.

There is this peculiarity also about the spot: it was the place of division between death and life, between condemnation and pardon, between pestilence and health. All up to this point was judgment; but here the sword stayed. This hill, this thrashing-floor, stood between the living and the dead. Such is really the character of the temple and the altar. Here life begins, and death is stayed. All up to this is death and vengeance; that temple was the shield of the world.

There is also this peculiarity. The spot where the plague stayed was Gentile, not Jewish ground. It was the property of a Jebusite—the last heir of the Jebusite kings (2 Samuel 24:23, "Araunah the king"); perhaps of Melchizedek; so that thus Moriah passes from Melchizedek to David. It was on Jebusite or Gentile ground that the angel of judgment sheathed his sword, and Israel's temple was erected. How much of that temple was Gentile, not Jewish! The ground, the cedars, the gold, and silver, and brass

(1 Chronicles 18:7,11), the workmen were Gentile; all but the stones, which were Jewish. Israel was thus to learn that the Gentile had an interest in these courts. The Gentile could say, That rock is mine, that gold is mine, that cedar-wood is mine, that workmanship is mine. Yes; in that temple all nations meet with one another, and meet with God. One in Christ, was the teaching of the temple, as well as of the cross.

Let us further notice, that it was in connection with the numbering of Israel that the temple-site came to be fixed. God's special promise to Abraham was, that his seed should be as the sand of the sea and the stars of heaven; and now, when this promise is abused, and made a minister of pride, the judgment comes because of it; and yet, out of the judgment comes the voice which says, "This is my rest." The point of the destroying sword (not a voice from the glory) marks the temple; its flash reveals the long-appointed spot. That temple was to be a seal and pledge of Israel's numbers without number—"the fountain of Israel."

Let us further notice, that it was in connection with the common occupations of life that this revelation of the temple-site was made. "Oman and his sons were thrashing wheat" at the time when the angel came, and his sword stayed at the thrashing-floor. They had no share in David's sin and Israel's punishment, and they were not alarmed at the pestilence. They were not clad in sackcloth, like David and the elders. They were not on their knees, but engaged in the common duties of the day. God finds them at the thrashing-floor, and blames them not. Nay, He honours them and their employment; He honours that piece of ground where they were working, by turning it from a thrashing-floor into an altar. Let no man be ashamed of his honest trade, or think that God will not meet with him in the midst of it. Oman's flail was not a mean thing in the eyes of God.

Let us notice again, that this ground was bought at its price by David for Israel. There are only two spots which thus passed by purchase into Jewish hands, Machpelah and Moriah,—the one for burial-place, the other for a temple; the one bought by Abraham, the other by David. Of all the rest of the land Israel took possession, as God's gift, without money and

without price. Strange that, for a spot on which to fix the symbols of resurrection and reconciliation, Israel (in the persons of Abraham and David) must pay the full price!—as if to remind them that, in both cases, it was by ransom that the blessing was reached—"a ransom for the sins of many," "I will ransom them from the grave."

One thing more we notice, this fixing of the temple-site had nothing to do with the tabernacle, or the ark, or the priesthood, or the Urim and Thummim. There was a break between them. The ark was on Zion, and the tabernacle (at this time) was at Gibeon, and it was not to the high priest that God made this new revelation, but to David, and Gad, and the elders of Israel. There was much in the temple that was a repetition or fuller development of the tabernacle, there was much in it that was new. The tabernacle was linked with Levi; the temple, in great measure, with Judah. It is the king, not the priest, that builds the house. God asks the help of David, and Solomon, and Nehemiah, and Zerubbabel, and such civil governors in the maintenance of His worship. Their giving it honours them, and defiles not the temple of God. God, in his sovereignty, led the ark about to Gilgal, Shiloh, Kirjath-jearim, Zion; and now that His purpose is served, He sets it aside, and chooses a new site for His place of worship; and that place no longer a tent, but a temple; no longer connected with priesthood only, but with royalty as well; no longer frail and moveable, like a pilgrim, but fixed and unchanging,—type of the house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.

Such is the end of the tabernacle-age. It began with Moses and ended with David. It began with Sinai and ended with Zion. It began with the thunder of the burning mountain and ended with the pestilence and the devouring sword. A wondrous mixture all throughout of mercy and of judgment!

The temple-age ended in more awful judgment—the desolation of temple, and city, and people. For man is always treasuring up wrath against himself and ripening for the final stroke, "Evil men and seducers wax worse and worse." "The end of all things is at hand; be ye therefore sober, and watch unto prayer."

XXXIV.

The Moriah Group

1 Chronicles 21:1-30

WE have taken up some general aspects of this narrative, chiefly in connection with the temple and Moriah; let us look at it from another point of view. Let us see the different characters or persons in it. Each comes out in a peculiar way.

I. Satan. He is very explicitly spoken of here, as in Job and elsewhere, as a person, a true being, not an influence. He is connected with earth; not with its heathen kingdoms only, but with Judea. He is not only in Babylon, but in Jerusalem; he has access not only to Nebuchadnezzar, or Herod, or Nero, but to David. He is watchful; he lies in wait for opportunities. He hated man at first in Paradise. He hates David; he hates Israel; he hates God. "Resist the devil, and he will flee from you." Be sober, be vigilant, for your adversary the devil walketh about. He is powerful, cunning, subtle. He is that old serpent, the dragon, the devil, Satan. He will go on with his wiles and malice till the Lord comes to bind him.

II. David. He is a man of God, yet of like passion; with others; exposed to Satan. Mark—(1.) his sin: pride, ambition, selfaggrandising,—like Nebuchadnezzar, "Is not this great Babylon?" (2.) His repentance (ver. 8): his conscience is touched; he cries out of his "iniquity" and "foolishness," even before the message of judgment came. (3.) His chastisement and humiliation: he is smitten in the very point of his pride—Israel's numbers; he clothes himself with sackcloth, and falls down before God. (4.) His alarm (ver. 30): he knows not what to do,—the tabernacle is in Gibeon, with the altar of burnt offering; what is he to do? The sword is between him and it; and besides, it is busy at work, he has no time to go to Gibeon. (5.) His forgiveness (ver. 26); he cannot go to God, but God comes to him—to the spot where he is. He answers his sacrifice

by fire; this is forgiveness and acceptance. All is well; the light of God's countenance has returned; the blood of the burnt-offering has done its reconciling work; and on that spot where the blood was shed and the fire came down, Israel's daily propitiation was to be offered up in all days to come.

III. Joab. He is a rough warrior, often rude in speech and stern in deed. But he is a man of faith. He knows the law of the Lord, and he trembles at his word. He knows that, for certain ends, it was a right thing to number Israel; but here he sees this turned into evil, and used to cherish pride. He remonstrates. His conscience is sensitive in this matter. He sees the sin and the danger. He is bold also, not fearing the wrath of the king; but he is obedient also. We have here the bright side of Joab's character, and learn to think well of him, not only as one of David's mighty men, but as a man of faith and conscience.

Gad. He and Nathan were David's seers,—his divine counsellors,—two of his statesmen. It does not appear that David consulted Gad about this numbering; or, if he did, he heeded not his advice any more than that of Joab. But now Gad is sent from God to the king. He was, no doubt, a man in communion with God, and was waiting to know the divine will in secret. God comes to him, and gives him his message. It is a twofold one. (1.) Judgment (ver. 10): offering the king his choice of woes. (2.) Of mercy (ver. 18): commanding the altar to be built, a symbol of divine pacification,—forgiveness for David and for Israel through the blood.

The Elders (ver. 16). They acknowledge the stroke and the sin: "It is the Lord." They clothe themselves in sackcloth, they fall upon their faces. So far as we know, they had not shared David's sin, yet they at once place themselves by his side in confession and humiliation. David had sinned (ver. 8), Israel had sinned (2 Samuel 24:1). They identify themselves with both. It is thus that we should take up a ruler's sin, or a brother's sin, or a nation's sin; not blazoning it abroad in private gossip, or in the newspapers, but taking it on ourselves, and carrying it to God.

VI. Oman. A Gentile, a Jebusite, a king (2 Samuel 24:23), owner of Moriah. He is quietly working with his sons, apparently ignorant of what was going on, till he is alarmed by the angel (ver. 20), and astonished by David's visit. He was a believing man, acknowledging not the gods of the Jebusites, but the Lord God of Israel; a generous man, handing over to David freely his own ancestral possessions. He is honoured by God; his land is honoured. He loses his property in the land, but for a marvellous honour. The history of his thrashing-floor is interesting; probably it is the great rock, to this day, under the great mosque. In the temple, in the altar, in the rock, Oman is held in everlasting remembrance.

VII. The Angel. There are specially three destroying angels mentioned in the Old Testament: he who was sent to Egypt to inflict the plagues; he who was sent to the Assyrian host to slay its myriads; he who was sent to Israel to slay the 70,000. He is the messenger of wrath and vengeance; he comes directly from God; he is like one of those seven spoken of in the Revelation, that sound the trumpets, or of those who pour out the vials; or like him who launched the symbolic millstone against Babylon the great. Yet, in the case before us, he utters mercy as well as inflicts judgment. He is terrible in his might; yet he bears the message of forgiveness,—the forgiveness of Him who is able to save and to destroy.

VIII. Jehovah himself. He shews himself as the hater of sin, and its avenger, even in his saints. He has a watchful eye over all his people, to bless and to chasten. He has Satan in control, and uses him at pleasure. He has angels in command, and sends them on errands of judgment and mercy. He is holy and righteous, yet pitiful and gracious, not only to Jerusalem, but even to Nineveh. He smites, yet he spares. He chastises, yet he blesses. His tender mercies are over all his works. He has no pleasure in the death of the sinner. He is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.

XXXV.

Diverse Kinds Of Conscience

"So did not I, because of the fear of God." —

Nehemiah 5:15

WHEN Joseph was dealing with his brethren he said, "This do, and live; for I fear God" (Genesis 42:18). Such was Joseph's motive. When Colonel Gardiner was challenged to fight a duel, he answered, "I fear sinning; you know I do not test

fighting." Such was his motive. So when Nehemiah kept aloof from the evil ways of others, he gave his reason, "So did not I, because of the fear of God." Here, then, is Nehemiah's principle of action, both in what he did and in what he did not do. The fear of God. This was the one thing that kept him right and prevented his turning aside to the right or left. Of the unrighteous it is said, The fear of God is not before his eyes; of the righteous, The fear of God is before his eyes. This is the great feature of difference between the two. It was this that operated, and influenced all his proceedings, that moulded his life. He was, as we say, a God-fearing man; and he shewed this in what he did and in what he did not do. He was conscientious, not only as to actual duties, but as to responsibilities.

Here then we have true conscientiousness; not merely natural uprightness of character, but the desire to have a conscience void of offence towards God and man. It is conscientiousness arising from the sense of God's presence, the wish to please Him, the fear of offending Him, the desire to do all that is well-pleasing in His sight. As the love of Christ constraineth, so the fear of God makes conscientious.

Are we thoroughly conscientious? Is our conscience constantly at work? Not in the spirit of bondage or terror, but in that child-like gentleness and tenderness of conscience that desires to have God's approbation in everything we do and every word we speak. What a regulator to our life

and conscience would be this fear of God! Let us consider the different spheres and operations of conscience. There is,

I. The religious conscience. By this I mean the conscience exercising itself in the things of religion, in religious belief and actings. In our dealings with God, in the service of God, in our testimony for God, let us be thoroughly conscientious, not formal, superficial, perfunctory, but conscientious. If I act religiously simply because others do so, or because it involves my good name, or because of habit, I am not acting conscientiously. Let our religion mould our conscience, and let our conscience penetrate and pervade our religion. I do not merely mean that a religious man should be a conscientious man, but that he should carry his conscientiousness into all that concerns religion. He should be alive, not only to duty but to responsibility.

II. The secular conscience. Though not of the world, we are still in the world. We are hourly coming into contact with the world in public and private. Every movement of our daily life comes, more or less, into contact with the world; it may be collision, or it may be intercourse and mutual help in common things; let us in all these be thoroughly conscientious, in what we do or in what we abstain from doing. Never let the world say of us, in reference to either word or deed, There goes a religious man without a conscience. In all secular and social things let us manifest a conscientious spirit, and shew to others that the fear of God is before our eyes. Let that fear regulate our daily intercourse and walk. Let a sense of responsibility toward God and our fellow men be ever on edge.

III. The commercial conscience. By this I mean conscience throwing itself into all our business transactions, our buying or our selling, our giving or receiving, our bargains, our speculations, whether merchant, lawyer, banker, farmer, tradesman, mechanic, or whatever our worldly calling may be. Let us take counsel with conscience continually. Let the fear of God be before our eyes in the counting-house, the shop, the warehouse, the market, or wherever our calling may place us. Hard-driven

bargains, advantage taken of men's necessities, grinding of the poor, overcharges, unjust measures, dishonest statements as to goods sold or purchased,—these are not things into which conscience can enter. Let every man of business, on whatever scale, be out and out conscientious, having the fear of God before his eyes.

The family conscience. Into each circle of life, outer and inner, conscience must enter. The fear of God must reign in the *family*. We must be conscientious in our family dealings, making each member of it feel that we are acting in the fear of God. Let us be conscientious in our family rules, at our family table, in our treatment of our children, and in their education. Be conscientious *with* them and before them. Never let them say that we do an unconscientious deed. Conscience says to each father and mother, Train up your child in the way he should go. Oh, be conscientious with your children! They know what conscience is, how conscience operates and shews itself. Let the fear of God be stamped on all family arrangements. Servants, be conscientious to your masters, and masters, to your servants.

The private conscience. I must make conscience of all my individually private actings. I must be conscientious in all personal things, when alone, unheard, unseen. I must be conscientious in my closet as well as in my family. I must be conscientious about my solitary, hidden actions. The fear of God must fill every chamber of my heart. I must be upright before myself and before God.

VI. The local conscience. I must be conscientious everywhere, at home or abroad. I must carry my conscience with me when I travel, just as when I was at home. I read sometimes of Christian travellers spending their Sabbath in sight-seeing? I find that some think it no evil to climb mount Sinai or mount Hermon on the Sabbath because these are sacred scenes. They would not climb Snowdon or Ben Lomond, but they would climb these foreign mountains! What sort of local conscience is this? Ought not a Christian to carry his conscience into every place, and when tempted to

do abroad on the Sabbath what he would not do at home, to be able to say, "This did not I, because of the fear of God."

Cultivate a tender conscience, an enlightened conscience, a conscience void of offence; not morbid, or diseased, or crooked, or one-sided, or censorious, or supercilious, or proud. But simple, and bold, and sensitive. Beware of a blunted or seared conscience. Shun compromises where principle is concerned; they always leave a stain upon the conscience. Let the fear of God reign in you always and everywhere. Beware of the fear of man. Cultivate the fear of God. The gospel, as well as the law, makes demands on your conscience. Conscience speaks to you in the name of Jesus Christ as well as in that of God.

XXXVI.

The Soul Turning From Man To God

"Behold now, I have ordered my cause; I know that I shall be justified. Who is he that will plead with me? for now, if I hold my tongue, I shall give up the ghost." —

Job 13:18,19

THIS is the utterance of a justified man, and of one who knew that he was justified, and was prepared to defend his position as such against all accusers.

Job's declaration here may primarily be the assertion of his innocence against the accusations of his friends. But we may use it for something beyond this.

We do great injustice to the Old Testament saints and to their privileges, and no less so to the God who made them what they were, when we conceive of them as possessing an imperfect justification, or an imperfect and uncertain knowledge of their justification. Paul's declaration was explicit on this point: "I know whom I have believed"; and yet it was not a jot more explicit than that of Job: "I know that my Redeemer liveth." When Paul said, "It is God that justifieth, who is he that condemneth?" he was only speaking what Job had spoken ages before: "I know that I shall be justified.

Who is he that will plead with me?"

In connection with the words of our text, let us note the following passages: Psalm 32:1,5, Isaiah 50:7-9, 51:12, Romans 8:31,34, 1 John 1:9. In all these we have the same truth, the same tone, the same confidence, the same assurance, and the same source or channel for the flowing of all these into the soul. The old and the new are alike. We cannot say either the old is better or the new is better; both are good, and both are the same.

In both we have the utterance of the one creed of the church, and the voice of the one Spirit, the Spirit of adoption, through the one Redeemer.

In our text (along with the context on both sides), we have the expression of an old saint's feelings in reference to man and to God. He has no hope from man, but he has all hope from God. One would have expected the opposite. Imperfect man might be expected to bear with an imperfect fellow man; but can a perfect God be expected to do this? Yet it is on God that he falls back; and the infinitely holy, all-searching God is felt to be a surer refuge for a sinner than unholy, sin-excusing man. Such must be the spirit of our dealings with God. His holiness and His omniscience are not only no discouragements, but the opposite. He knows the very worst of us, and He hates it; yet He pities us. We cannot tell Him worse of ourselves than He knows already. And is not this encouragement! Man's narrow heart makes us despair of him; God's infinite heart gives us hope. Have we not often been comforted with the thought that God knew us fully? Let us then mark the feelings or attitude of a saint towards God.

I. Misconfidence. "I know that I shall be justified." It is no mere hope, or peradventure; it is a certainty. It is of this that Paul speaks, "We are made partakers of Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast." This was the attitude of Old Testament saints, much more that of New. It is the feeling of the child; it is simple trustfulness, for everything, beginning with pardon.

II. It is confidence as a sinner. Job speaks as a sinner, simply as such, not as a better man than others. He goes to God simply as such; and he trusts as such. He realises this blessed truth that a man's evil is no reason for distrusting God. When Adam fled from God, he did not know this; he thought that his sin was a reason for distrusting and flying from God, till God taught him differently, and shewed him what grace was.

III. It is confidence arising from God's character alone. He has looked into the face of God, and learned there that a sinner may trust Him, just because of what He is; nay, that a sinner can only glorify Him by trusting

Him because of what He is. It is not only because of His grace that He trusts; but because of His holiness and power; for these are no longer against the sinner; but on his side. Everything in God's character, has by the cross of Christ been turned into a reason for trusting Him. The more man knows of Him the more he trusts. Trust is the natural and inseparable response of the soul to the divine revelation of the character of God. It is not what man sees in himself, of his good deeds or good feelings, of his graces, or his repentance, or his regeneration, or his faith; but what he sees in God, that calls out confidence.

It is confidence of personal justification. "I know that I shall be justified." It is no vague confidence in some unknown God; some sentimental trust in God's universal fatherhood, or mankind's universal sonship. It is of personal justification that he speaks; thus acknowledging personal condemnation in the first place; and then, as the result of a judicial act, personal justification. It is of this that the whole Bible speaks; it is this that the cross seals to us. This is not a state in which we are born; but into which we come by believing in Him who was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification. Do you *know* this? Is this the beginning of your religion, the starting-point of your heavenward course?

It is confidence in spite of all accusers. From verse 20 to verse 27 Job is pleading with God, confessing sin, and uttering confidence. In verse 28, and next chapter, he turns to man as his accuser. Who is he? A man that shall die. What matter his accusations? Let the whole world condemn, what matters it? Shall this shake a confidence resting on the word and name of God? Let Satan and conscience accuse; shall they shake a confidence which comes from above? Let their charges be all true, what of this? "Who is he that condemneth?" "Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect?" We plead guilty to the accusations, but not with the less confidence do we claim an acquittal from the Judge, simply on the ground of what our Surety has done.

XXXVII.

Man's Dislike Of A Present God

"They say unto God, Depart from us; for we desire not the knowledge of thy ways." —

Job 21:14

THE men who speak thus are not atheists. They do not say there is no God. They may be scoffers, blasphemers, ungodly, but they are not atheists. They whom Job describes are worldly men. The world, with its riches, its possessions, its pleasures, its friendships, is their all. They have nothing beyond it, and they do not wish anything beyond it. They are satisfied. They love the world, and are resolved to make the best of it that they can. When anything comes in between it and them, or threatens to prevent their enjoying it, such as pain, or sickness, or death, they thrust it away. They do not ask, whether the intervention may not, after all, be true and important; it mars their enjoyment of the world, and so must not be for a moment entertained.

In our text we have worldliness versus God. For it is worldliness that is here speaking out. It is not man contending against man because of injury or encroachment, it is not man protesting against pain, or mortality, or life's brevity, it is man protesting against God. God seems to him as a dark shadow overclouding all his joy. How is this?

I. Not because God has injured him. He does not pretend that any wrong has been done or threatened to be done. He does not speak as an injured man, nor plead against God because of injustice.

II. Not because God hates him. He has no reason to conclude such a thing, either from what God has said or done. He cannot point to any mark of hatred.

III. Not because God has interfered with his prosperity. He is evidently a prosperous man, mighty in power, neither is the rod of God upon him (verses 7 and 9). It is not because of these things that he says to God, Depart from us. Indeed, he does not hide his reason altogether, "we desire not the knowledge of thy ways." He has no liking for God or his ways, he looks on him as an obstruction, an unpleasant visitor, a dark cloud, a spoiler of his pleasure.

But these worldly men in Job's time were but a specimen of the men of many ages,—our own as well as others. In these different ages we find a variation in the feeling and in its expression. Sometimes there is more of infidelity in it, or even direct atheism, sometimes less. But in all there is a desire to get quit of God, God personally, though perhaps not God abstractly; to thrust him into a corner of his universe, where he will least disturb the children of men. In the present day we find this state of feeling widely spread and working, not only in the world but in the church. Men who call themselves Christians lend themselves to the outcry, "Depart from us." At the bottom of all this feeling is the love of the world. It is this that prompts men to seek to get quit of God.

I. They try to get quit of Himself. They tolerate Him afar off, but not near. They tolerate a religion of uncertainty, but not one of certainty, or fellowship, or conscious nearness. They would let Him alone, if He would let them alone; but if not, they raise the cry, "Depart." An abstraction, a creed, a system of theology, they bear with, because it does not interfere with their worldliness; but God Himself can only be tolerated as a shadowy, impalpable, far distant being. To anything else they say, "depart."

II. They try to get quit of His Christ. Some superhuman being, such as Paganism delighted in, they tolerate; but not the Christ of God, the Word made flesh. A Christ that will assist them in their great endeavour to keep God at a distance they will admire and sing of; but the Christ that brings God near, that makes His love a reality, and His favour and forgiveness a certainty, they cannot away with.

III. They try to get quit of His Spirit. They dislike the supernatural, and do not wish to hear of a world outside their own, from which influences and operations are continually coming to modify things here, or transform men, or protest against sin. The Holy Spirit, as the special expression and representative of the supernatural and divine, in connection with man's nature and soul, they either refuse to believe in, or treat him as a mere afflatus, a breath, an influence.

They try to get quit of His book. The Bible is God's visible representative and commissioner here. It is the silent protest in every house in favour of God. And hence it is set aside by many, or only read for its poetry, its morality, its antiquity. To believe as little of it as possible is the object of multitudes; to cast doubt upon its authenticity; to reject its inspiration,—to treat it as not a book for this advanced age,— these are the ways in which men are seeking to get rid of God's book.

They try to get quit of His law. They say it was not for us but for the Jews; they tell us that the morality of Socrates was higher than that of Moses; they (in a more refined fashion) speak of it as buried in the grave of Christ; so that we have got quit of its exactions and sanctions. No Sabbath for us; the law is dead! No restraint on us; the law is dead!

Thus the age tries to get quit of God. It does so, because it dreads Him; it has no relish for Him; His presence is a gloomy shadow; His nearness would interfere with all worldly schemes and pleasures. Therefore men say, "Depart." The old Pagans never said to Jupiter, Depart; for they looked on him as in sympathy with their sins, and lusts, and pleasure. But to the living and true God men say, Depart, because they feel that they cannot have both Him and their sins. They cannot clothe Him with the robes of their own worldliness.

Yet He has not departed. In love He lingers, seeking to bless. He knows the blank His departure makes, and that nothing can fill it. Therefore He

lingers; yearning over the sons of men; entreating them to take Him for their portion and all.

XXXVIII.

True And False Consolation

"How then comfort ye me in vain, seeing in your answers there remaineth falsehood?" —

Job 21:34

MAN needs consolation,—"man that is born to trouble;" specially a man in Job's condition; overwhelmed with calamity. Not one day's consolation, but many; nay, constant; for, what between the little cares and the large sorrows of life, its ripples, and its waves, and its breakers, there is no day exempt from trouble. Life has many burdens, heavy or light. But much depends,

(1.) On the state of mind in which the calamity finds us, or produces in us. Where irritation, murmuring, rebellion, and unbelief prevail, it is idle to speak of consolation. We are not in a fit state to receive it. We repel the hand and the medicine of the physician.

(2.) On the persons who administer it. If they are not thoroughly trusted or respected; if they are suspected of selfishness, or insincerity, or unkindness, their words are useless, perhaps worse.

(3.) On the kind of consolation administered. Sometimes it is hastily and thoughtlessly poured in, or rather flung at us, as water is hastily snatched up and flung over a flame to extinguish it. Sometimes the most indiscriminate statements are made, and commonplace maxims uttered, as if anything would suit anybody, or everything would suit everybody.

Much depends on these three things; as much on the last as any. In regard to this let us mark what is not consolation; for man is skilful in administering false consolation.

(1.) Sentimental saws are not consolation. These are often poured into the ears of sorrow; but they are not medicine; they are only the relief found in the intoxicating glass. Fine figures, poetical rhapsodies about the sorrows of life, these are dangerous things, they soothe for an hour, that is all.

(2.) Appeals to natural self-love will not do. How commonly do we hear a professed comforter reminding a sufferer of the multitude of his sorrows in order to make him feel as a martyr. All that thus appeals to pride, vanity, self, is worse than vain.

(3.) Taking refuge in fatalism will not do. "We must submit," is the frequent language of the sufferer. This is not faith, but unbelief. It is man feeling himself overpowered by a hand stronger than his own; not falling back on love and wisdom.

(4.) Ascribing all to our own desert. Though there is truth in this, yet the way in which it is generally done is wrong. "If I had not deserved it, it would not have come." If we begin in this way, where shall we end? Our deservings! What is their measure? Hell! Let us be thankful that it is not according to our deservings that sorrow comes, but on a far higher principle. A sorrow may point to the kind of sin, or the seat of sin, but no sorrow of ours can measure the desert of sin; that is measured by the cross and sorrow of Christ alone.

(5.) Betaking one's self to pleasure will not do. This is the most wretched and perilous of opiates,—it is "strong drink," "mixed wine," which ruins the soul while it makes us for a few hours forgetful of our sorrow. It is not in pleasure that we are to drown our grief; no, nor yet in business.

There is a vast difference between real consolation and unreal; between the true and the vain. It is of this that Job speaks. He needed consolation; never man needed it more. He was thirsting for it. His friends came to administer it; but they failed. How and why? Because "in their answers there was falsehood." It was not the truth which they administered. There can be no real consolation, then, which is not founded upon the truth. It is

the truth that comforts. There can be no consolation in a falsehood. A lie may heal our hurt slightly, but not effectually. The water of truth from the cup of truth can alone refresh, and heal, and console. That cup of truth is ever full.

(1.) There must be the true interpretation of God's ways. We must see their meaning, and bearing on us; what it is in us that they point to; and what God's purpose is in sending the calamity. We have to deal honestly both with ourselves and with God, asking what is God condemning in me? What sin is he seeking to extirpate? What truth to communicate? What scripture to illustrate?

(2.) There must be the true understanding and discrimination of our circumstances. We must know ourselves; and so apply well each dealing of the divine hand; tracing out the aim of each blow or each burden. The sinner must not take hold of words that suit only the saint. There are words for all. Let us apply wisely, else the consolation will be vain.

(3.) There must be the right knowledge of God's character. No "consolation" or "answer" can be of any use which is not made to spring out of this. God is wise, God is great, God is holy, God is love. We must keep these things in mind in every dispensation.

It is the amount of truth we speak that is the measure of the consolation imparted. It is not strong language nor soothing words that will do. Hence, in the day of trouble we should deal much with Scripture and its words. Then we are on sure ground. God's words are mighty for consolation; for he is the God of all consolation. The exhibition of Christ and his fullness is true consolation. The presentation of the Spirit as the Comforter,—the Spirit and the Spirit's love, holy love,— this is true consolation. At all times administer only truth, not error; but specially in the day of sorrow. Falsehood is not consolation; it is not peace; it is not medicine, but poison. Truth, the truth of God, that is consolation and strength.

XXXIX.

Gain And Loss For Eternity

"For that is the hope of the hypocrite, though he hath gained, when God taketh away his soul." —

Job 27:8

THE word "hypocrite" means properly the "ungodly," and corresponds to the "wicked" and "unrighteous" of whom Job was speaking. To this passage, probably, our Lord refers when he asks, "What shall it profit a man, if he gain the whole world, and lose his soul?" Job asks, What becomes of the vain hope of the ungodly when this life is done? Whatever they may have of gain here, all is loss hereafter. This may be their "time to get," but that shall be their "time to lose." And their loss is not for a day, but forever.

It is not all gain with the godly here. Paul says, "For whom I have suffered the loss of all things." He who casts in his lot with the people of God must prepare for loss as well as gain. He must count the cost beforehand, and be ready to pay it when the day comes for payment. There is the taking up of our cross and the denying self, and forsaking all. He loses, (1.) This world: whatever may be in it of pleasure, or satisfaction, or pomp, or gaiety, he loses; for he cannot have both worlds; (2.) his name: perhaps he stood high in reputation with the men of this world, and had a name for many things; this he loses, for his name is cast out as evil; (3.) his religion: for the likelihood is that he had a sort of religion or religiousness like Saul of Tarsus; all this past religion of his must be left behind,—it will serve him no more; (4.) his goods: this may not always be demanded to the full extent, as in days of persecution; but still he must be prepared to part with everything; counting it no more his own.

But his "hope" is never lost. He is "saved by hope"; his eye is on the "things hoped for"; "he abounds in hope." This well never runs dry. This

treasure-house is never exhausted. Whatever of darkness there may rest on his present, his future brightens with "hope"; and that hope "maketh not ashamed"; it contains the incorruptible and everlasting. And even now he has abundant compensation for loss and trial.

Not so the "ungodly." He has indeed a "hope," a hope of being saved, or, at least, of not being lost; a hope of going to heaven, or, at least, of not going to hell. But his hope is not "the good hope through grace." It is a self-originated hope; an unscriptural hope; a groundless and unreasonable hope; a fallacious hope; a hope that will not be sickness

proof, nor deathbed proof; or if it be so, it perishes at death; it is wrapt up in his shroud, and buried in his grave; for it there is no resurrection.

Thus the one thing which seemed gain to him, goes from him at death; and all is loss, utter, infinite, irreparable, eternal loss! For him there is no morning, but only night; night without a star, or even a meteor-gleam. His losses cannot be enumerated or estimated, they are so many and so terrible.

He loses such things as the following:—

I. His soul. I might say his body too; for if the man be lost, then soul and body are gone. But it is the soul that is the special and supreme loss. The loss of that which moulders in the grave is after all subordinate, but the loss of that which cannot die is great beyond measure. He who has lost his soul is poor indeed. Yet in the case of the ungodly man that fearful loss is incurred. He loses his soul. Not that the soul perishes or is annihilated. That would be some relief to the poor doomed victim of sin. The soul is lost, but cannot die. The loss of the soul consists in eternal condemnation and ruin. All is gone for which the soul existed. It exists now only for woe. Life is no longer life, for the soul cannot enjoy it. All that constituted life, true life, in time or eternity, is gone. Life is now become worse than death, for the soul is lost; lost in darkness, woe, anguish, and an endless hell; lost from God, and goodness, and blessedness, and from all holy beings forever and ever.

II. Heaven. The future state and place of blessedness has many names: a kingdom, an inheritance, a city, a new heaven. All of these are names of joy. "Heaven" is a noble and glorious name, embodying in it all that is excellent, and divine, and perfect. Its joy is perfect, its light is perfect, its holiness is perfect. Its songs are perfect, its service is perfect. It is day without night, it is the blessing without the curse. All this is lost to the ungodly. What a loss must a lost heaven be! To be shut out from such a kingdom, dispossessed of such an inheritance, nay, made the heir of such sorrow and darkness,—how infinitely woeful! Think, O man, amid all thy losses, past or prospective, what a lost heaven must be! A lost kingdom, a lost city, a lost inheritance! Who can measure such a loss.

III. Christ. Yes, Christ is lost, and this is the heaviest loss of all. None like it, so infinite and so irreparable. This is the loss of losses, the woe of woes. A lost Christ! What can equal that! This is the loss of the ungodly. This loss is great, (1.) Because of what Christ is in himself,— the glorious Immanuel; (2.) Because of what he has done on the cross; (3.) Because of his love; (4.) Because of his sympathy, and fellowship, and consolation; (5.) Because of his reward. This loss is indeed unutterable. Men do not see this, or think of it. Yet it shall one day be felt. In hell it shall be realised as the loss of losses, that which makes the place of woe so unutterably woeful. "I might have had Christ," will the lost sinner say, "but I would not have him, and now he is gone forever; I cannot have him now. Instead of Christ, I have Satan; instead of heaven, hell."

Consider your losses, O ye ungodly! They are unspeakable and eternal. Look at them now, and prevent them. There is some little compensation now for such losses, in the world's pleasure, or lust, or wealth. There shall be no compensation then. It will be unmingled woe, a cup of undiluted, unsweetened gall and wormwood.

What a disappointment to you who have been hoping and hoping! To lie down with a false hope, and go up to the Judge expecting to be received! How dreadful the agony of such a disappointment!

It is not too late. Your soul is not lost, heaven is not yet lost, Christ is not yet lost. All may yet be won! The gate stands wide open; go in, go in! God's record stands still true concerning his Son; believe it and be saved.

XL.

Man's Misconstruction Of The Works Of God

"By them judgeth he the people." —

Job 36:31

THIS verse suggests Acts 14:17, "He left not himself without witness, in that he did good, and gave us rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness." Both passages call on us to listen to the voice of God speaking to us through what are called "natural phenomena." By "judging" we understand more than inflicting judgment, more than sitting as judge, or sentencer, or executioner. It means "ruling" as well, wielding the sceptre and governing. By people we specially understand the gentile or idolatrous nations of the earth; or generally the inhabitants of earth. Two things are here declared, first, that God judgeth the nations; secondly, that he does so by the changes and occurrences of nature.

I. He judgeth the peoples (or nations). This judging is not a thing of the past, or of the future merely; but of the present. He has been, and he is now "judging." Creation is past, the new creation is future, but governing is now. All are equally sure and true; and they who deny the present governing or the future interposition in the great day, might as well deny creation. God's connection with earth is as close and as direct now as ever.

Not so obvious or so visible, but quite as real. A thing does not need to be visible, or audible, or palpable in order to be direct and real. Many things are the latter which are not the former. The power of the silent and distant moon over the sea; of the atmosphere over all life; of the soul over the body in every movement: these are instances in point. Only God's connection with earth is more real and direct than these; for in Him we

live and move and have our being. His purpose comes in contact with earth and its dwellers; not generally and by means of laws, but directly and minutely. His will, his voice, his hand, his arm, all come into contact with this world, as well as with all other worlds, the creation of his power. He has not left them alone. He sustains and rules as truly as he creates. Not for a moment does he let go his hold. He is the governor among the nations. He ruleth by his power forever; his eyes behold the nations. He doeth according to his will in the armies of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth. It is with no distant, unheeding God that we have to do; but with that God who fixes the bounds of our habitation, who counts our hairs, who feeds the ravens,

notes a sparrow's death, clothes the lilies of the field. He is nearer to us than the nearest earthly object or being; more closely in contact with us than we are with one another. All other links are as nothing compared with this; they are threads, this is an adamant chain.

II. He judges the people by means of the changes of nature. We use "nature" for want of a better word: we mean earth and sky with all their motions, and alternations, and transformations, great and small, all "natural phenomena" as they are called. These phenomena, or appearances, appear to us common things; by some ascribed to chance, by others to "laws of nature." Here they are ascribed directly to God. They are His voice by which He speaks to us, His finger by which He touches us, His rod by which He corrects us; His sword, by which He smites us. It seems to be the thought of many that in none of these can we or ought we to recognise, directly and specially, the interposition of God; that it is fanaticism to interpret them so as to make them special messengers of God to us. But the words before us are very explicit, "by them judgeth he the people." The things by which He is here said to judge the people, are the common things of the day and year,—the rain, the clouds, the lightning, and such like. He uses these as His voice in warning, or commanding, or chastising, or comforting. These common things do not come by chance, or at random, or by dead law, but go out from God as his messengers. Thus every thing has a divine meaning and a heavenly voice.

Let us listen and interpret and understand. Summer speaks to us with its green fields and fragrant gardens; winter speaks to us with its ice and snow and frost. By these God judges the people. The pestilence, the famine, the earthquake, the lightning, the storm, the shipwreck, the overthrow of kingdoms and kings. Each of these has a special message to the nations,—and to each of us. Let us see God drawing near to us in them;— shewing His care and love,—manifesting an unwearied concern for our welfare. Woe to us if we either misinterpret them, or refuse to interpret them at all. The common daily changes of personal or family life, all speak in the same way. Not only the sweeping calamity that carries off its hundreds, but the sickness, the pain, or the gentle indisposition, these have a voice to us. He that hath an ear, let him hear!

We disjoin God from creation, and so see nothing in it of divine life and power. We disjoin God from the changes of creation, and so find no meaning in these. We disjoin God from the beautiful or the terrible, and so realise nothing in them that overawes, or attracts, or purifies, or comforts. We have so learned to separate between God and the works of God, that we seem to imagine that they contradict each other. The fair sky, and the clear stream, and the green hills, all speak of divine goodness, and bring to us a gospel which can hardly be mistaken. But we have learned to deny the gracious meaning, and to say that all this beauty means nothing, and contains no message from God, and embodies no glad tidings of great joy.

This separation of God from His works is one of the awful features of human unbelief. How much more of Him should we know, were we to interpret His works aright, and hear His voice in each, whether in love or discipline. These skies of His are not bent over us in beauty without a meaning. These seas of His do not roll for nothing. These flowers of His are not fragrant and fair for nothing. They do not say to us, God is your enemy, He hates you; but God is your friend, He pities you, yearns over you, wishes to make you happy. How full a gospel does creation preach to us, according to its kind and measure!

The separation of the works of God from His word, is another sad feature of human unbelief. Creation and inspiration are in harmony. The Bible does not contradict the works of Jehovah. It means what they mean; and they mean what it means. Each little part of both speaks, out most intelligibly. God wishes to be understood in both. Men would misinterpret both; they try to discover as little of God as they can in both. Yet both preach the same gospel. In both we see the goodness of God leading to repentance; in both we discern the loving-kindness of the Lord. The fact that we sinners are out of hell is one gospel; that we who should have been in hell are dwellers on a fair and fruitful earth, is another; God in these ways shewing that He has no pleasure in our death or misery, but in our life and joy.

XLI.

The Two Cries And The Two Answers

"There be many that say, Who will shew us any good? Lord, lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon us." —

Psalm 4:6

THERE are two cries here—the cry of the sons of men, and the cry of the sons of God. They are very unlike. Yet they are both importunate. They go up unceasingly. Earth is full of them. Wherever you go, you hear either the one or the other. They are the cries of men like ourselves; of men who have souls to fill; who know what sorrow is, and what is joy. The men who utter them are made by the same God; placed in the same world; heirs of a common mortality; moving on to one eternity. We find them often side by side; in one city, one village, one family. Not the Hindoo using one cry, and the European the other; but intermingled; the two cries constantly going up from the same places.

I. The cry of the sons of men. "Who will shew us good." Let us mark what it is, and what it means.

(1.) It is the cry of emptiness. These sons of men feel that there is something lacking. They were not made for this perpetual hunger and thirst. They are empty, and therefore they cry. They are poor and needy; but find no supply.

(2.) It is the cry of weariness. They who utter it are seeking rest, but finding none; they labour and are heavy laden. They would fain rest, but know not how or where. UNREST! This is their portion. Unrest here; sad prelude of the eternal unrest, the never-ending weariness.

(3.) It is the cry of darkness. All is darkness and blindness. They grope about, not knowing which way to look, or to turn; and they cry, shew us,

Shew us something; for our eyes are blind; we have tried in vain to see.

(4.) It is the cry of helplessness. They have tried many expedients; tried to create good for themselves, or to get it from others; but in vain. They find themselves helpless.

(5.) It is the cry of earnestness. It comes forth often amid bitter tears and groans. Men are bent on being happy; they would do or give anything for happiness. They are mistaken, yet in earnest. They would take any good, if they could get it.

(6.) It is the cry of despair. Who, who, who? They have tried every one, everything. All in vain. They are emptier, hungrier, thirstier, sadder than at first.

(7.) It is a loud and universal cry. Many. Yes, the whole world. It is Esau's loud and bitter cry reverberating through the earth. It is the cry of the many, not of the few. The world is unhappy. It has no rest. It is thirsty, and knows not where to drink; it is hungry, and knows not where to find bread. It weeps, and knows not how to get its tears dried! Every man walks in a vain show; going about asking, Who will shew me any good?

II. The cry of the sons of God. Very different in all respects. They know what is written, "He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good."

(1.) It is the cry of the few, not of the many. For the sons of God are a little flock. One here, and another there; not like fields of grain, nor gardens full of flowers, but plants in a desert,—a few scattered ones here and there.

(2.) It is a certain and definite cry. They know what they want, and how to get their want supplied. They do not grope about on all sides; they go straight to the source.

(3.) It is a cry to God. It is God alone in whom their hope is.

They go straight to Him. Whom have I in heaven but thee? He is their portion and their all.

(4.) It is a cry for light. They have some light already, but they want more. We have a sun, but we need it daily; more and more sunshine!

(5.) It is a cry for light from the face of God. Light! Light from God! Light from the face of God. The light of God's countenance! This means that God was to gladden them with His favour and love, of which the benignant smile of the countenance was the expression. Lift up the light of thy countenance on me, is our lifelong prayer!

(6.) It is a cry which will be answered. The cry of the sons of men goes up in vain. They speak to the rocks, and get merely the echo of their own voice. But this cry is heard; daily, constantly. Light streams down and into them. God's countenance is their sun. There is health in it,— "healing in His beams." What a contrast between the two cries and the two answers!

O ye sons of men, how long will ye love vanity? How long will ye doat upon this vain world, and worship it as your idol? How long will ye treat its broken cisterns as if they were the fountains of living water? Oh, love not the world!

What will its good things profit in the day of the Lord? Will its pleasures cheer a death-bed, or brighten the gloom of the grave? What is the ball-room when "its flowers are fled, its garlands dead?" What can the music and measure of the dance do for you when sickness comes, or the last trumpet sounds? Will that gay dress of yours do for a shroud? Or will it suffice instead of "the fine linen which is the righteousness of the saints? How will these "revellings and banquetings" appear to you in the retrospect of time, still more in the retrospect of eternity? What will you think of your "idle words," your "foolish talking and jesting," your "filthy communication," your riotous mirth, your luxurious feasting, when you stand confronted with the last enemy, or before the Judge of all? You have gone from scene to scene, from gaiety to gaiety, from party to party, from

vanity to vanity, from novel to novel, from ball to ball, in the dreary emptiness of your poor aching hearts, crying, "Who will shew us any good?" and when the end comes, what is your gain? Is it heaven, or is it hell? Is it joy, or is it woe?

XLII.

The Knowledge Of God's Name

"They that know thy name will put their trust in Thee." —

Psalm 9:10

THERE are three things here which sum up this passage,—the name; the knowledge; the trust.

I. The name. A name is that which marks one man out from another, by which one man addresses another; and, in eastern lands and early days, which expresses the character or circumstances of the man to whom it belongs. Thus God's name marks him out; by it we address Him; it embodies His character. Thus He himself gives it, "Jehovah, Jehovah Elohim, merciful and gracious," &c. It is this name that is written all over the Bible, but specially exhibited in Christ Jesus, who came to declare to us the Father's name. It is a name—

(1.) Of Greatness. Jehovah, God, Creator, El-Shaddai; all expressive of majesty and power and glory. The Lord God omnipotent.

(2.) Of Grace. It is the declaration of free love. "Merciful and gracious." He to whom it belongs must be the fountain-head of love. "God is love." In him is infinity of compassion and longsuffering.

(3.) Of Forgiveness. He pardoneth iniquity, transgression, and sin; all sin, great and small; there is forgiveness with Him, that He may be feared; forgiveness to the uttermost.

(4.) Of righteousness and holiness. It is holy love that is to be found in Him; righteous grace to the unrighteous; righteous pardon to the guilty. God's pity to the sinner is holy pity. It is as the Holy One that he loves, and pities, and blesses. It is a name revealing all that a sinner needs;

unfolding the mind and heart of God; gathering into one glorious sun the light scattered over the universe, diffused throughout the Bible. It is the name of names; in it music, light, medicine, peace, assurance forever. The great and gracious character of God, thus embodied in a name, brought to a point, is made much more accessible, placed more within our reach and comprehension; pledged to us by the very fact that it has been deposited in a name. No man likes to sully his good name, to act inconsistently with his own name, or the family name. And shall God not act consistently with His name? Shall He treat us in a way that shall belie the name that He has taken to himself? When we plead that name and appeal to it, will He not immediately and cordially respond?

II. The Knowledge. For a thing like this to be of any use to us, we must know it. So long as it remains unknown, it is useless; as good as non-existent. The sun is of no use to me if I am shut out from its light.

Food is of no use to me if I do not know of its existence. So all the love of God is useless to the sinner, unless he knows it. The knowledge of it is that which introduces its blessings to the needy soul. Nothing more is needed, nothing less will do. This knowledge is not a price which we pay, nor a qualification by which we are fitted for blessing, nor a recommendation which invites God to bless us. It is simply the natural way of letting in the blessing, as opening our windows is the natural way of letting in the light. The child's knowledge that his father loves him makes him happy. The father's knowledge that his child has recovered from a deadly sickness, brings immediate relief. The criminal's knowledge that his sovereign has pardoned him, removes his burden. In all these cases, and such like, it is the simple knowledge of what is good and gladdening that does the work, and we never think of puzzling ourselves with asking, But is my knowledge of a right kind? Is it of the quality and quantity that will secure blessing for me? As if our getting the benefit of good news depended upon a certain peculiar way of knowing them, on which peculiarity turned the whole virtue of the thing known. Ah, it is not thus that we deal with earthly love! It is not thus that we conjure up difficulties and distinctions, and metaphysical questions,

which can never be properly adjusted, and which, if they were adjusted, would leave us just where we were. For say what we like, knowledge is just knowledge, and not something else; knowing the love of a person is just knowing it, and not some mysterious act or feeling or combination of emotions which the poor man cannot fathom, and about which philosophers have wrangled for ages.

III. *The Trust.* Such is God's name that it cannot be known without evoking trust; and the trust arising from this simple knowledge is the truest and most blessed of all. God's character is of such a kind as to call up confidence as soon as it is known by a sinner; and he who has no confidence in God, does not yet *know* him or his name. Did he know it, he could not help trusting him. When we come into contact with a loveable object, we cannot help loving; when we come into contact with a trustworthy object, we cannot help trusting, unless we are persuaded that it is a false report which we have heard concerning this loveableness or this trustworthiness. The knowledge of the name of God is that which leads to trust. Hence we preach that name,—that name of grace and love, of mercy and of truth! We bring true tidings concerning it; and we give evidence, in the death and resurrection of the Son of God, that these tidings are quite as true and as good as they profess to be. It is on the basis of "infallible proofs" that we rest our gospel. Our tidings are as sure as they are blessed.

XLIII.

Deliverance From Deep Waters

"He sent from above, he took me, he drew me out of many waters."

Psalm 18:16

WE take these words as the expression, (1.) of David's experience; (2.) of Christ's experience; (3.) of every Christian's experience.

In all these we learn much of God; David's God; the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ; our own God. For it is His character that is thus unfolded to us. He is the God of all grace; nay, God is love; in Him there is help, and with Him is plenteous redemption; He it is that redeems Israel out of all his troubles. It is He who is above; it is He who sends from above; it is He who takes (lays hold of); it is He who draws,— and that out of many waters. Such is the God with whom we have to do! He is infinite in power and grace. To know Him is life eternal; to rest upon His love and power is the true strength and solace of the soul! The knowledge of ourselves troubles and casts down; the knowledge of this God relieves and lifts up. The great use of knowing ourselves is, not that we may be qualified for receiving and being received by Him, but that we may become more and more dissatisfied with self, and more and more drawn to Him who is altogether unlike self, more and more emptied of everything; so that as empty vessels we may be in a state for containing Him and His fullness. For it is our emptiness that attracts and makes us suitable for His fullness; and it is in knowing self that we are: emptied of self. We decrease, He increases.

I. David's experience. This whole psalm refers to this subject; and his whole life is an exemplification of the text. He was constantly in the deep and many waters, from the day that Samuel anointed him king. First Saul, then the Philistines, then Absalom, threatened to overwhelm him.

They compassed him about; they raged against him; they poured their billows over him; till he seemed sinking in the waters; not once nor twice, but: many times. In each successive peril God drew near to save; He sent from above, He laid hold of him, He drew him out of many waters. Jehovah's love and power never failed. Low as David went down, they went down lower still. Whether as the young shepherd of Bethlehem he was exposed to any danger save that of the lion and the bear, we know not; but no sooner is he named king than enemies arise; the floods assail him. That which we should have expected to be the termination of trouble and danger, stirred up these, introduced him into conflict; raised the storm; drew the rage of enemies around. What could David have done, had it not been for Jehovah his God! His arm, His shield, His sword,—they were his protection and deliverance.

II. Messiah's experience. These psalms of David are the psalms of the Son of David; and this psalm is specially His resurrection psalm. All His life He was exposed to foes. He was made to feel the wrath of God, as the bearer of our sins, "Thy wrath lieth hard upon me, thou hast afflicted me with all thy waves, all thy waves and billows have gone over me." It was so during His life, as when He said, "Now is my soul troubled;" it was so in Gethsemane, when He said, "My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death;" it was so on the cross, when He cried, "My God;" it was so when He lay under the power of death. But "Jehovah sent from above, He took Him, He drew Him out of many waters." He "delivered Him because He delighted in Him." As our sin-bearer, our cursebearer, our death-bearer, He had Jehovah's wrath poured upon Him. This was the depth out of which he was plucked by the Father's hand; and His deliverance is ours. It was as our Surety, our Substitute, that He was drawn out of many waters.

III. The Christian's experience. By nature he is in these many waters, though at first he knows it not. "Under wrath" is the description of his condition; "the wrath of God abideth upon him." He is not alive to this. His eyes and ears are closed. He sees not, hears not the roaring waves of wrath. Like Jonah, he is asleep in the storm. When the Holy Spirit shews

him where he is, and what he is, terrors seize him. He is overwhelmed, and knows not how to help himself. All help is vain. He looks upward, and sees him who was drawn out of many waters, and Him who drew Him. He remembers the words, Whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved. He appeals to that name; and forthwith the help comes down, and he is delivered, and henceforth his song of grateful joy is, "He sent from above, he took me, he drew me out of many waters." So in after conflicts; so in daily troubles; so in times of sorrow; so on his bed of death; and so in the day when his body shall be delivered from death and the grave.

Thus he ascribes all to God, from first to last; the sending, the taking, the drawing; all are of God. Salvation is of the Lord. Of Him, and to Him, and through Him are all things. Yes, Jehovah saves! He does not help us to save ourselves; He SAVES! However far down we may be; however deep the waters; however near the perishing,—He can rescue! His arm is not shortened that it cannot save; nor waxed feeble that it should fail to grasp us or to draw us up. His is salvation to the uttermost; deliverance from the lowest hell.

All true religion must begin with salvation. God's hand must lay hold on us and lift us up. Untrue religion may begin in any way; and can go on without salvation, without pardon, without reconciliation, without any putting forth of the mighty power of God. But the true, the real, the divine, must begin with this conscious rescue, this plucking from the waves of wrath; and must, though perhaps with feeble voice, sing Messiah's song, "He sent from above, he took me, he drew me out of many waters."

XLIV.

The Excellency Of The Divine Loving-Kindness

"How excellent is thy loving-kindness, O God! therefore the children of men put their trust under the shadow of thy wings."—

Psalm 36:7

THERE are two special things, fitting in the one to the other, (1.) Divine loving-kindness; (2.) Human trust.

I. Divine loving-kindness. "How excellent is thy lovingkindness, O God!" David speaks as one who had known it, who had tasted that the Lord is gracious. He is here telling his experience to God himself, but in the hearing of man, that he may know it too. He speaks because he believed and felt. His history had been throughout an exhibition of the lovingkindness of the Lord, as indeed is the history of each of us. And this loving-kindness is genuine, and true, and deep. There is no pretence about it. It is as true as God himself. "God is love," "God is rich in mercy," "God so loved the world." There is nothing more real than the love of God. But it is not of its reality that David here speaks. He takes that for granted. No one who knows Jehovah could doubt it. But it is of its excellence that he speaks. God's love is such an "excellent and glorious thing"! It is "precious" beyond all gems or gold, for that is the meaning of the word. It is the most costly and rare of all things. It is beyond all price and all excellence of earth. What can equal in costliness the love of God! Its preciousness is measured by the gift it gave, and by the innumerable gifts contained in that one,—life, pardon, salvation, peace, the glory to be revealed. In this love there are unsearchable riches,—exceeding riches of grace. There are no riches to be compared to this great love of God. Having it we are rich indeed. Without it we are poor, life is blank, eternity is dark.

II. Human trust. It is of Adam's sons that David speaks. "Therefore shall the children of men put their trust in the shadow of thy wing;" that is, betake themselves to thee as their refuge. God's character is then the basis of human confidence. That character is the attraction to the sinner, for it is just such a character as suits him,—irrespective of his being anything but a man and a sinner.

This love which so suits the sinner and calls forth his confidence is that which is exhibited in the cross of Christ. That cross is the revelation of God's love as a righteous thing; and thus appeals both to man's heart and his conscience. The love furnishes the ground for trust, and the cross removes every reason for distrust.

Let us here note such points as the following:—

(1.) Man's ignorance of God. With the Bible in his hand he yet knows not God, he worships an unknown God. "They know not me," is God's testimony against man. Ignorance of God is a sin of no common heinousness.

(2.) Man's mistakes as to God. He imagines Him to be such an one as himself. He entertains a bad opinion of Him. He thinks of him as a God yet to be propitiated by work, or prayer, or sacrifice. He mistakes His character, His words, His gospel.

(3.) Man's distance from God. Departure from God is the sinner's own act. He has fled from God, and he prefers this state of distance. He dislikes the idea of nearness. To get as far from God as possible is his object. And not only does he depart from God, but he says to God, Depart from me.

(4.) Man's distrust of God. He not merely mistakes God, but he thoroughly distrusts Him. He cannot imagine God to be anything but his enemy. He has no confidence in Him. He cannot feel himself safe in the

hands of God. To be simply at the mercy of God, without claim, or merit, or recommendation, is a hateful as well as dreadful thought.

Let us mark God's remedy for all these. It is a double one,— subjective and objective.

(1.) Subjective. The subjective is the moral or spiritual rectification of nature and character by the power of the Holy Ghost. "Ye must be born again." It is the re-begetting, the transforming the whole man, enabling him to love what he hated, and to hate what he loved. It is the renewal of every part of the man's soul and being, creating him in Christ unto good works, for we are his workmanship, we are the clay and he the potter.

(2.) Objective. This is the representation given of Himself in His revelation. He shews himself to the sinner in an aspect at once gracious and glorious. He makes Himself be seen as the sinner's friend and not his enemy. He unveils and unfolds his whole character as the God of all grace, the Lord God merciful and gracious, pardoning iniquity, transgression, and sin.

It is to the overshadowing, protecting wings of God that David here points us, those wings of which the Lord spoke as stretched out to shelter Jerusalem, those wings under which Israel encamped or marched through the desert. He stretches out His wings and calls. He tells us of a sure and sufficient shelter, and bids us at once take refuge there. These wings are broad, and large, and strong, fitted to shelter all the sons of Adam. And thus stretched out they themselves invite us. They contain their own invitation. They say, Come and be safe, come and be blest, come and be sheltered from present wrath and from the wrath to come. Come, for all things are ready; the love is ready, the deliverance is ready, the protection is ready. Oh, well with them who have taken shelter beneath the shadow of the everlasting wing.

To those who see no danger and desire no security, these expanded wings may be nothing; for what is a Saviour to a sinner that knows not his peril.

But to those who know what wrath is and what sin is, what condemnation is and what the judgment to come, who know that God is a consuming fire, and that the day of vengeance is coming, and that an unpardoned, unreconciled sinner must then have to face an angry God,—that wing, that hiding-place, that covert, that Saviour, are of infinite preciousness. And seeing in that outstretched wing the loving-kindness of the Lord, they betake themselves eagerly to its shelter, and as "the children of men," the "sons of Adam," the sinners of humanity, they put their trust beneath its shadow.

XLV.

The Sickness, The Healer, And The Healing

"I said, Lord, be merciful unto me: heal my soul; for I have sinned against Thee." —

Psalm 41:4

THIS is the cry of the needy; of him who has no helper; of him who in the time of trouble finds that there is no refuge but in God. It is the cry from the soul's sickbed,—more terrible than the sickbed of the body,—to the divine Physician, for the application of his heavenly skill and medicine. It tells us—

I. Sin is the soul's sickness. It is an infinite evil; the evil of evils, in comparison with which mere pain is nothing. The end of all bodily sickness, if allowed to run its course, would be death temporal; so the end of all sin, if unarrested, would be death eternal. It is infinitely varied in its nature, though comprehended under some general descriptions, and capable of being classified under certain heads. All the diseases, or shades of disease, of the body, are but types of the awful varieties of sin. Palsy, leprosy, fever, blindness, and the like, are symbols of sin. The whole head is sick, and the whole heart is faint. There is the disease of unbelief, of impenitence, of lust, of enmity to God, of pride, of worldliness, &c.; all these have penetrated our spiritual system, and destroyed our spiritual health. Not that sin is mere disease or misfortune, to be got quit of gradually by a healthy regimen, or diet, or medicine; to be wrought out of the constitution by human skill and effort. It is guilt as well as sickness, to be dealt with by the Judge as much as the physician; nay, by the Judge first, before the physician can touch it,—for as the order of the evil was first, the guilt and then the disease following thereon, so the order of the remedy is first the pardon and then the health.

II. God is the soul's Healer. Whether we look at sin as disease or as guilt, or as both together, we find that in regard to it we must deal with God alone. The medicine, the skill, the pardon, the deliverance, are in His hands. With no other must we transact in the matter of sin's removal; not with self, or man, or the flesh, or the church, or a creed, or a priest, but with God himself; and that directly, face to face, alone, without any medium or intervention. All others are physicians of no value. They heal not at all, or they heal slightly, or they increase and irritate the disease. Health is with God alone. He heals effectually and eternally. He who is the soul's life is also the soul's health. Whatever be the sickness, deep or slight, of long or brief standing, connected with the eye, the ear, the hand, the feet, the head, or the whole spiritual being, the counsel which must be given to the sick soul is, Go straight to God; deal with Him, and let Him deal with you.

III. God is most willing that the soul should be healed. He has no pleasure in our sickness or death; His desire is that we should live and be in health. Our sickness is not of Him, but of ourselves, just as truly as our health is not of ourselves, but of Him. Yet He loves not the evil of His creatures; He desires their good, not their evil. Why, then, does He allow sickness and death? For infinitely wise reasons, of which you and I know nothing, but which will be known sooner or later. Yet our present ignorance should not lead us to deny the sincerity of God's desire for our welfare. The two things will be found perfectly reconcilable, and both equally true. Let us not take up with one-sided truth, but let us receive both sides, according to the divine revelation, whatever our perplexed minds may argue.

IV. God has made provision for the soul's healing. The disease was so thoroughly beyond human skill that none but God could undertake the cure. He has undertaken it; He has provided the means, He has sent the physician. The medicine is the cross. There is forgiveness which is indispensable as the commencement of the cure; righteous forgiveness through the death of the Surety. At and with the cross the cure begins, and begins by the pardon of the sinner. But pardon is not the whole. There is

fear, trouble, disquietude, weariness, darkness, and such like. For these also the cross provides. And with the medicine there is the Physician Himself, Christ Jesus; or rather there is Christ and the Holy Spirit, Christ dispensing the Spirit, and the Spirit revealing Christ. The power and the skill are in their hands. They apply the divine provision. So that everything pertaining to the healing of the soul is truly divine. Hear the Lord's own declaration regarding this, "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of man be lifted up," &c. We ask then,

(1.) Hast thou been healed? If so, give God the glory. Assuredly the health came not from man, but from the love and power of God, from the cross of Christ, from the hand of the Holy Ghost.

(2.) Wilt thou be made whole? Perhaps thou art still unhealed? Be it so. The cross is here for healing; look and be cured, look and be saved, look and be forgiven. It is not working, or buying, or deserving, but simply looking. The sight of the cross is pardon, and health, and life. The leaves of this tree are for the healing of the nations.

(3.) Canst thou do without healing? Is thy wound so slight, thy disease so trivial, that thou canst do without the cross, and that thou canst heal thyself? Or though unhealed dost thou think thou canst go on as thou art, well enough, without health? Suppose thou couldst in this world,

what of the world to come? Tossed upon an eternal sick-bed, think of that! Eternal disease pervading body and soul, think of that! Oh, look and be healed! Make at once the application of our text, "Heal my soul, for I have sinned against thee."

XLVI.

The Consecration Of Earth's Gold And Silver

"And the daughter of Tyre shall be there with a gift; even the rich among the people shall entreat thy favour." —

Psalm 45:12

THIS is a latter-day scene; for the whole psalm is resplendent with latter-day glory; the glory of Christ the King; the glory of the Church the bride; the glory of the palace, the throne, the retinue, the kingdom. All here is glory, gladness, righteousness. It is the time of the restitution of all things. We ask,

I. Who is this daughter of Tyre? She is the old Phoenician city, lying on the sea coast at the foot of Lebanon; the representative of the old world's commerce.

(1.) What she was. The great merchant-city of the old world, the representative of ancient commerce, and splendour, and wealth; the centre of magnificent villas, extending for miles north and south,—down to the water's edge and up the slopes of Lebanon.

(2.) What she is. Desolate; the old city swept away; the new one, a small sea-port; hardly more than a fishing village.

(3.) What she is to be. More than one prophecy foretells the resuscitation of Tyre in the latter day. (Isaiah 23:18.) Though the old city shall "not be found," yet there shall be a representative of it,—the same great merchant-city, only "holy."

II. To whom she comes. It is to Christ and his church that she comes. She seeks them out and bows before them. For the position of all things and parties is reversed in that day. The Church is on the throne; the world

seeks her out and does homage. What a contrast to the condition of things during these ages past! The church no longer dishonoured, trodden on, persecuted, despised; but honoured and set on high; sought unto by all the earth, even its greatest; "the kings of the earth do bring their glory and honour into it." The saints, along with their Lord, receive the tribute of earthly homage. The Bride of Christ shares his dignity and glory.

III. What she brings. It is here simply called "a gift;" but in that how much is comprehended. As the wise men from the east brought their peculiar gifts, so is it with the daughter of Tyre. She comes and lays her merchandise, her wealth, her splendour at Immanuel's feet. In Ezekiel we have the full enumeration of her articles of value and beauty. All luxuries, all necessaries, all precious metals, all gems, apparel,— everything that the world admires, gathered from every region. What a gift! Unsought by the church. Tyre brings her gift, hastening to do homage to the glorious King, and adorning her with all that is beautiful, and precious, and perfect.

IV. What she teaches us. To lay our all at Christ's feet,— nationally and individually. That shall be the day of full consecration to God, the acknowledgment of Christ's right to the ownership of everything. As yet we have no true idea of consecration,—the consecration of ourselves, all that we have, things common or precious, to God and His Christ. But we shall know it then, and see it as it has never been seen before. And what a consecration shall there be in the latter day, even were it only of Tyre. How much more when it is of far greater cities and kingdoms than Tyre, our own for instance, to which Tyre is a mere village, or merchant depot. As Tyre was the great commercial metropolis of the old world, so is Great Britain, with its mighty London, the great commercial metropolis of the modern earth. All that made Tyre great and glorious is to be found ten times magnified and multiplied in her.

All things that God has made are precious, and meant to glorify him. Every creature of God is good. We are not to conclude that because gold, and silver, and gems have been abused for pride, and luxury, and vain

glory, they Ought to be despised by the Christian. They are all capable of consecration to God; all intended to glorify him. It is not easy to consecrate the splendid and the beautiful things of earth to his glory just now. There are so many evil influences at work, perverting them, degrading them, defiling them. They are, and have been so long, the ministers of creature pride; idols, vanities, follies. But still they are all capable of good and noble uses; and shall one day take their proper place in creation, like the stars above and the flowers below.

Meanwhile let us use all we have for God. The widowed church just now does not need the gems of earth to adorn her; nay, they would be incongruous with her widow's weeds. We can dispense with ornament and show God does not need these at present, though he will one day bring to light all the treasures hid in his storehouse of the beautiful and glorious; and they shall adorn the new Jerusalem, and the new earth, where dwelleth righteousness. But our substance, our money, let us consecrate to God, lay out our gains for him. He calls on our commercial nation thus to honour him,—to use their gains not for themselves, but for him. He asks for honour and service from our commerce. Men of business, consecrate your gain to him. Jesus is worthy to receive all you have. Give it to him; grudge not. He will repay you a thousandfold.

XLVII.

The Gifts Of The Ascended One

"Thou hast ascended on high, thou hast led captivity captive; thou hast received gifts for men; yea, for the rebellious also, that the Lord God might dwell among them." —

Psalm 68:18

THIS psalm is of and for Messiah. It is He whose name is Jah,—the Lord God of Israel,—He is addressed throughout this psalm as God. It is this psalm which the apostle quotes in Ephesians (4:8), and interprets of Christ and His ascension. It is Christ that David here addresses, "Thou hast ascended on high."

I. The ascension. This is the last point of Messiah's earthly history, and sums up the whole. But according to the interpretation of Paul, it includes all that went before, "what is but that He also descended! The ascent reminds us of a descent. He descended to Bethlehem; and then He descended to Joseph's tomb. After that all was ascension; and the expression of our text includes or rather expresses resurrection. He went down into the lower parts of the earth; he came up again; and then he went on high. This ascending was the completion of his work; the carrying out of His love; the Father's testimony of personal acceptance and delight; and His seal to the absolute perfection of the work for which He descended. It was a real ascension; a glorious one; a very exalted one; far above all principalities and powers; to the Father's throne. "We see Jesus crowned with glory and honour." All heaven is His; and He has entered into possession of His heavenly inheritance. All power is given to Him in heaven and in earth. He filleth all things. The universe now is His.

II. The triumph. "Thou hast led captivity captive." Whether this refers to His leading forth His redeemed out of their captivity, or leading into captivity those who held them bound, the triumph is the same, and

the words point to the same event,—the same enemies, the same battle, the same victory. It is Messiah's triumph; over His enemies, the Father's, and ours. The warfare is that predicted in Paradise, between the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent. That warfare concerns .us; it is for us. He who fights is the captain of our salvation. The battle went on during the ages before He came; it came to a head on the cross; it is not yet finished; and the full consummation of the triumph is reserved for His second coming, when He binds Satan and casts him into the bottomless pit. Then shall He complete His triumph; and shew that He is more than conqueror. Meanwhile His victory upon the cross is ours.

He has fought our battle, and won our victory. "Be of good cheer, I have overcome the world." What enemy can prevail? No weakness of ours can dismay us. We glory in our infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon us. Let us then fight the good fight. The foe is already routed by our Captain; it is only with his broken and scattered troops that we have to do.

III. The recompense. "Thou hast received gifts for men; yea, for the rebellious also." Thus the Father rewards His faithful service. Not only does He receive the Spirit without measure for Himself; but the gifts of the Spirit for others. This is the apt recompense of His self-emptying. He emptied Himself, therefore hath the Father filled Him; filled Him with the Spirit; filled Him with the Spirit's mighty and manifold gifts. Much of the Spirit was given before He came; we read of the Spirit filling holy men; but much was reserved for His glorification, that the connection between Him and the gift of the Spirit might be manifested. When He was glorified, the pentecostal shower came down; the residue of the Spirit was given. This fullness of the Spirit was,—

(1.) For men; not for angels, but men; not for heaven, but for earth. It was as the ascended God-man that He received the Spirit, for those whose nature He took. "I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh;" not on the unfallen, but fallen sons of Adam.

(2.) For the rebellious. For those who stand farthest off; full of enmity and resistance. Not for the good, but the evil. As of the Son of man on earth, so of Him in heaven, we may say, "He came to seek that which was lost; not to call the righteous, but sinners."

Thus Christ has received the Spirit for sinners; as Egypt's corn was entrusted to Joseph for the hungry. Go to Him who has the seven spirits of God; deal with Him who freely dispenses this Spirit. Come to the waters. If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink.

IV. The final result. "That the Lord God might dwell among them." God had been driven from earth, from among men. His object is to return; and all that He has done in and through Christ is to secure that return. He does this,—

(1.) By incarnation. The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us. God thus tabernacled with men.

(2.) By the cross. It is the propitiation that makes it a righteous thing for God thus to dwell. It is the blood that brings it about. No blood, no indwelling.

(3.) By the Holy Ghost. It is this that is referred to in our text. The Spirit purchased by the blood comes down and comes in.

He has been doing this in individual souls. They are the habitation of the Spirit; temples of the Holy Ghost. He is yet to do so more conspicuously when Jesus comes the second time. Then shall this prophecy be fulfilled. The tabernacle of God shall be with men; God shall be with them, their God. Earth shall be full of the Holy Ghost, and glorious with His gifts.

XLVIII.

The Speaker, The Listener, The Peace

"I will hear what God the Lord will speak: for he will speak peace unto his people, and to his saints; but let them not turn again to folly." —

Psalm 85:8

LET us meditate on this verse under the following heads: (1.) The listener; (2.) the speaker; (3.) the message; (4.) the confidence; (5.) the issue.

I. The listener. "I will hear," says the writer of this psalm. He speaks as a listener, as one whose ears are open. "He that hath ears to hear, let him hear." This is our true attitude, into which we came at conversion. God said, "Hear and your soul shall live"; he "opened our ear to hear as the learned," i.e., as "one who is under teaching." So we began to listen; and in listening found life. Such is to be our life; a life of listening; not to man, nor self, nor the world, but to God. As creatures, listening is our proper attitude, much more as sinners. Let the willing ear be ours. How much we lose by the closed ear!

II. The Speaker. God, the Lord; God, even Jehovah. Other speakers may win the ear of the multitude, but it is to God the Lord that the saint listens. His voice is powerful. Its tones are penetrating; its words attractive. God speaks as one entitled to be heard, expecting to be heard. He speaks with authority, waiting for our obedience to the heavenly voice. To less than such a speaker we do not feel constrained to listen, but to Him we must. He speaks, we cannot but hear.

III. The message. He will speak peace to his people. It is peace that Jehovah speaks, for he is the God of peace; "he maketh peace in his high places." Peace is the substance of the message that has all along been carried to us; peace, peace to him that is afar off, and to him that is nigh;

peace in heaven; peace on earth; peace between man and God; the peace of pardon, the peace of reconciliation, the peace that passeth all understanding,—peace through the blood of the cross, through Him who is our peace. It might have been wrath, nay, ought to have been wrath; but it is not wrath, only peace; for He is long-suffering and slow to wrath; nay, God is love.

IV. The confidence. The Psalmist knows what he is to expect from such a God. Before the peace comes, he knows that it is coming; for he knows the God to whom he is called upon to listen. This is the confidence which he has in Him. He does not listen uncertainly, as not knowing what will come forth. He has heard of this God before,—of what He does and speaks—and he opens his ear in happy confidence. He is sure that no wrath will come, only love, only peace. This God is the God of salvation,—the God who gave his Son. Shall He not then speak peace?

V. The issue. "Let them not return to folly;" or, and "they shall not return to folly." He does not say, Let them not turn to folly, and then he will speak peace to them; but he will speak peace first, and then they shall not return to folly. This is God's order; the true and divine order; the reverse of man's. It is not first holiness and then peace, but first peace and then holiness. The root of all holiness is peace with God. Till the clouds are rolled away, and the sun shines out, we cannot be warmed and enlightened. Till the frost is gone, and the ice dissolved, the river cannot flow on and water the fields. Christ did not say, Go, and sin no more, and I will not condemn thee; but, "Neither do I condemn thee; go, and sin no more."

We are in rebellion. Our chief controversy with God is as to the gospel of peace. Our unbelief of this is our sin of sins, our master-sin, to which all others are subordinate. How can we abstain from the lesser sins so long as the master-sin remains; so long as there is no peace between us and God, but only rebellion and controversy. The first step to a holy life is being at peace with God.

In order to a holy life God must come in and dwell in us. He cannot do this till he has brought us into peace with himself,—till we have listened to and believed the tidings of peace which he hath spoken. Reconciliation must be the beginning of all indwelling; and this reconciliation is the result of our believing His message of peace.

Nor indeed has the soul leisure to attend to good works or growth in holiness till the question of peace has been settled. That question must ever be foremost, engrossing us absolutely, and leaving no time nor inclination for anything else. It is too momentous to be left in uncertainty; too vast to be taken up along with others. This great point between us and God once settled, we are free to devote our undivided energies to the work of progress; not till then.

A saint then is one who has listened to God; who has heard the words of peace from His lips; who has believed them; who has been reconciled; and who knows that he is so. Therefore He seeks to be holy. He hates his former folly. He does not return to it. He does not make his free pardon a reason for returning to it.

Brethren, be consistent! Beware of sin, folly, unholiness of every kind. Be Christians out and out. Shew that the peace you have received is a holy peace.

XLIX.

The Believing Man's Confident Appeal

"Preserve my soul, for I am holy." —

Psalm 86:2

SOME mountain-heights, whether of the Alps or Grampians, look very formidable and inaccessible, so that a traveller turns away from them in despair, perhaps in fear. But at length he learns that on one side there is a slope and pathway which make the ascent quite pleasant. So is it with this text; from which many turn away as terrible and repulsive, till they learn what it really means. Just as it was with Luther and the texts relating to "the righteousness of God." Let me shew that our text has really no terror in it; that it is just such as any believing man when coming to God should use; not David only, nor the Son of David, but all who own Him.

It is the word "holy" that makes many shrink. They say, I am not holy, I cannot use it. How then, I ask, could David use it, when he had to say, "Behold I was shapen in iniquity;" and in this psalm once and again casts himself on the God of mercy as a sinner. But this word has no reference to spiritual perfection or even any approach to it. It does not mean "free from sin." It means one on whom God's favour rests, or, as in the margin, "one whom thou favourest." The question then is, who are they on whom God's favour rests, and how do we enter into this favour.

There are some who have never been out of favour; the angels above. There are some who once were in favour, but have lost and shall never regain it nor taste it again,—Satan and his angels. There is only one on whom that favour rests in infinite measure, the Son of God, "this is my beloved Son," &c. But there are some who though they have lost it may regain it, and such are we. God has provided a way for this,— for complete restoration to his favour, and that forevermore.

This restoration is not for the least depraved, but for the chief; not for those who have some strength left, but for those who have none. Nor is it on account of or in proportion to our freedom from sin. It is entirely through another, and on account of Him in whom God is well pleased; and in proportion to His good pleasure or satisfaction in Him and in His work. God's infinite favour towards and delight in Him is the foundation of his favour towards and delight in us. Our belief of God's testimony to his well-pleasement in his Son brings us into the state of being well-pleasing to him.

Respecting this well-beloved Son, God has recorded a testimony; and in connection with it he has given a promise that whosoever receives the testimony is immediately brought into favour with himself. It is not a testimony without a promise, nor a promise without a testimony. It is a promise based upon a testimony; and so connected with it that we are to consider ourselves assured of the favour as soon as we receive the testimony. The moment then that we believe we enter into favour, and may use the cry of our text, "Preserve my soul, for I am one whom thou favourest;" and this without hesitation and without presumption. So long as I do not credit the divine testimony and confide in the divine promise, I am not in favour; *nay*, the wrath of God abideth upon me; but as soon as I thus credit and thus confide, I am in favour, and I ought to know and rejoice in this.

There are thus, properly speaking, just two states in which a man can be before God, wrath or favour, according as he rejects or receives the testimony; and in one of these two he must come to God. Such is the alternative. He must either come saying, "Preserve my soul, for I am under wrath;" or with David, "Preserve my soul, for I am under favour."

Men have framed for themselves other states, less decided than these. There is,

1. Wrath. This is when there is an open and decided rejection of God's testimony. Then it is acknowledged that there is wrath.

2. Semi-wrath. This is when the open rejection has ceased, and there is what is called a wish to believe or a trying to believe. Then men hold that there is a modification of the wrath,—only half wrath; and with this they pacify their consciences.

3. Semi-favour. This is supposed to be when the sinner has taken some good steps in the right direction, made some advances to God, though he has not fully believed the testimony, or believed it in the right way, with the requisite quantity of feeling. He is reckoned as making progress in the way to favour.

4. Favour. This is supposed to be when the sinner has summed up his evidences and ascertained the excellent quality of his faith. Then looking to that quality of his faith he can count on God's favour, not because he has ascertained that "it is a faithful saying," &c., but that his faith is of sufficient substance and excellence.

5. Uncertainty. This is the general state of things. Men, professing to believe the gospel, do not know what they are, nor who they are, nor where they are. They are uncertain as to wrath; they speak as if there was such a thing as semiwrath, or semi-favour. Nay, they rather glory in this uncertainty, as being true humility and genuine Christianity; whereas it is certainty that makes us humble and holy.

But all this is in contradiction to the Bible. In all this there is no right comprehension of either law or gospel. There is no approach to David's posture or David's cry, "Preserve my soul, for I am one whom thou favourest."

Ah, surely a believed gospel was meant to do more for this. It brings us at once out of wrath into favour; as such we live, speak, feel, and pray. We find that in His favour is life.

L.

The Love And The Deliverance

"Because he hath set his love upon me, therefore will I deliver him." —

Psalm 91:14

THIS is one of the psalms of Messiah; and Satan's quotation of the eleventh verse shews that it was accepted as such by the Jews, and by Jesus Himself. (Matthew 4:6.) Yet it is not (one verse excepted) spoken by but to Messiah. It contains the Father's proclamation to Him, and to men regarding Him; and still more, the Father's assurance to Him of fellowship and protection while dwelling in the land of strangers and enemies. It contains some of the words poured into his ear morning by morning, when he wakened his ear to hear as one that is taught (Isaiah 50:4). For as man he was counselled, comforted, strengthened, cheered, taught of God.

The first and second verses are the introduction or key to the whole. In the first the Father, as the Son is about to enter on his mission on earth, amid all the diseases, troubles, hatreds, strifes, conspiracies of this fallen state of danger and sorrow, proclaims, "He that dwelleth in the secret place of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty;" i.e., he that "enters into the chambers" (Isaiah 26:20), or takes up his abode with God in his "pavilion" (Psalm 27:5), shall be under the protection of the Almighty. Or rather we may say that the Father pours these words of cheer into the ears of the Son, making known the secret, the one secret of the security of creaturehood. In the second verse the Son, in words of happy confidence, replies, "I will say of Jehovah, He is my refuge and my fortress, my God, in him will I trust." Then the Father, from the third to the fourteenth verse, pours into the filial ear words of blessed assurance. Deliverance, security, protection, victory over enemies and dangers, power over evil, angelic ministry,—these are the assurances given by the Father to the Son in entering on his awful work in this fallen world. "Be of good

cheer, for I am with you, and there shall not an hair of your head perish," is the substance of the assurance thus so fully given. And if ever such assurance was needed it was then, when the three and thirty years' battle was to be fought with sin and hell.

Then at the fourteenth verse the Father proclaims to the whole world,—to men and angels,—the grand principle of His dealings with His Son; what He did for him, and why He did it, that we may know why and what he does for us. Deliverance and exaltation are the two special blessings promised; the reason of these is (1.) he set his love upon me;

(2.) he knew my name. Let us inquire, 1st, into the deliverance; 2nd, into the love.

I. The deliverance. Messiah was always in danger, and always crying for deliverance,—"Deliver me, O my God." How often that word was on His lips! See Psalms 22, and 40, and 69. Enemies surrounded Him, as Saul did David, and sought His life. Death took hold on Him. Our iniquities (he calls them mine!) took hold on him. The snares of hell took hold on Him. The grave took hold on Him. Innumerable evils compassed Him about. But when He was sinking in deep waters, God sent and drew Him out. When sore pressed on every side, God fought for Him, and put His enemies to flight. He, the poor and needy one, was delivered!

II. The reason for it. "Because he set his love on me." God would not suffer one who loved Him so much to be overpowered. Love like his must be honoured! Love like his must not go down before his enemies. God's desire is to be loved, for He is infinitely loveable! He never found one before that loved him as Christ did, and could do. For Christ loved him with a divine strength! Oh how gloriously was the commandment fulfilled in Christ, when he loved him with the whole of the divine strength, that infinite capacity for loving which belonged to him. God honours Christ's love by granting him continual deliverance. He loved, and he was delivered for his love! Learn,

(1.) That God wants to be loved. He desires the love of creaturehood. He made us to love him, and he cannot be satisfied without our love. Thou shalt love the Lord with all thy heart, is not merely a command, but a thing of earnest desire. God is not indifferent as to our love, nor heedless of our coldness. He asks love, and he feels the refusal of it. "Love me" is his message to us; "give me thy heart." He gave us his heart when he gave his Son, and now he asks ours in return.

(2.) He is infinitely worthy of it. He is the infinitely loveable and glorious one; just such a being as to command our entire affection, and fill our souls. The only question would seem to be, Are we permitted to love such a glorious being? for if so, then let us pour out the whole fullness of our hearts upon him. Who are we that we should be allowed to love him; nay, commanded; nay, punished for not loving?

(3.) He blesses and rewards them that love Him. The crown of life hereafter is to them that love him; and the present blessings of deliverance, support, defence, comfort, is to those that set their love on him. No good thing will he withhold from them that love and fear him. He is their light, their joy, their staff, their shield, their tower, their arm, their strength; he compasses them about with songs of deliverance.

Let us learn to love him. For what he is in himself; for what he has done, and has promised to do for us. Let us love him for his love and for his loveableness. We love him because he first loved us. He has set his love on us, let us set our love on him. God's love to us, and our love to him, Is not this the essence of true religion? What poor, empty,

shrivelled things are these hearts of ours unless filled with the love of God? What a poor thing is life, if not consecrated, gladdened, brightened with this glorious love!

LI.

The Sin And Folly Of Being Unhappy

"Serve the Lord with gladness." —

Psalm 100:2

I once had the question put to me, "Do you think a sinner has any right to be happy here?" Without entering into the truths or errors which that question suggested, I simply answered, "Is there any religion in being miserable?" and I added at another time to a similar question, "I do not think that gloom is a bit better or more acceptable to God than the most frivolous levity." "Be not as the hypocrites, of a sad countenance," said the Lord. Let us consider the sin and folly of being unhappy; specially of rendering unhappy service to God. His yoke is easy, and his burden light.

I. God is happy. He is the blessed God, in whom are the fountains of all gladness. Hence that expression, "the joy of God" is one denoting the joy that is in God, even more than the joy he gives. Christ was a man of sorrows during his earthly life, because he was bearing our sins. But he sorrowed that we might not sorrow, but rejoice. He served the Father in sorrow that we might serve him with gladness.

II. The angels are happy. They are the blessed angels. They only know what sorrow is by seeing it in us when they come to minister to us. Their heaven is a happy heaven, all around them is happiness, their wells never run dry, their sky never clouds, their sun never sets. They do not sigh, nor weep, nor wring their hands, nor sprinkle ashes on their fair heads. They drink always of the rivers of pleasure, which are at the right hand of God. Sometimes their joy rises higher, as when they shouted for joy over the new-made world, or as when they are called on to join in the joy of God over one sinner that repenteth. They serve the Lord with gladness.

III. Forgiven men are happy. This is David's testimony, "Blessed is the man whose transgression is forgiven." These are a two-fold class: (1.) Those who have departed and are with Christ; (2.) Those who are still here. Of that latter section of redeemed men we say they are happy though imperfect, because they are forgiven. They are in an evil world, and have much evil within them,—many trials, sore warfare, great feebleness,—yet they are happy. Why? Because forgiven. The favour of God rests on them. They know it, and find that in his favour is life. Being forgiven, and knowing this, they serve the Lord with gladness.

It would appear, then, not only that there is happiness in heaven with God and the holy angels, but that there is happiness here on earth, and that we may be partakers of it. The basis and the beginning of that happiness must be the forgiveness of sins and the favour of God. These are attainable; they are presented to us as free gifts; we are besought to accept them; we cannot reject them without sinning. We see then that it is both sinful and foolish to be unhappy; that is, where there is unhappiness it must be the result of our own sin and folly in refusing to be happy. Let me notice then,

I. We can only be unhappy by refusing pardon. The pardon is provided, and it is preached to the sons of men. (1.) It is a free pardon; (2.) a righteous pardon; (3.) a present pardon; (4.) a comprehensive pardon, covering all sin; (5.) it is to be had in simply, believing what God has told us about the propitiation of his Son. So that God is not refusing pardon, nor bargaining about it; nor affixing unreasonable conditions, nor indeed conditions of any; kind; nor making it an uncertainty, or the reward of a good life. On the contrary, he is making it known in the; clearest terms; he is laying it down at our feet; he is taking it up and putting it into our hands, pressing us with exceeding and infinite urgency to receive it at once, absolutely, unconditionally, and unchangeably as his free gift. If so, then must not the absence of this pardon be the fruit of our own rejection of it; and not God's sovereignty or unwillingness? We are unhappy, not simply because we are sinful and foolish, but because we are resolutely indulging in the sin and folly of rejecting God's gift, and so of refusing to

be happy. A sinner's unhappiness is the result of his sin and folly. O sinful, foolish man, thus to refuse the happiness provided by God; to prefer the "sad countenance" of the hypocrite to the face shining with pardon.

II. We can only be unhappy by refusing Christ. It is not Christ's refusing us (he never did so), but it is our refusing Christ that keeps us unhappy. He is the free gift of God to us; he, the living, the dying, the buried, the risen Christ; he, the Word made flesh; he, the great vessel of divine fullness; he, the depository of eternal life; he is God's free gift to us; a gift which we are not merely at liberty to accept, but which we refuse at our peril. We can only be unhappy by refusing Christ! Oh the folly and sin of remaining unhappy! Persistence in the rejection of Christ is the true cause of all the unhappiness of earth. You shut your eyes and ears against him, how can you be happy?

III. We can only be unhappy by determining not to turn. God says, "Turn ye, turn ye, why will ye die"; turn and live. It is vain for us to throw the blame off ourselves, and say, "I want to turn, but I cannot, and God will not help me." This is not true. "I am most willing to be converted, but God will not convert me," is just as if the drunkard were to say, "I am most willing to give up drinking, but God will not help me to be sober"; or the swearer, "I am most anxious to cease swearing, but I cannot, and God will not give me the power." Whatever, then, the solemn truth of God's sovereignty may be (and he would not be God were he not sovereign), it is not that sovereignty that is hindering you from turning, but your own determination not to do so. Your not turning is the cause of your unhappiness; you cannot be happy till you turn. Your being unhappy is, then, your own sin and folly. O foolish sinner, to refuse to be happy! O folly, without a name or parallel! But in that unhappy state you cannot serve the Lord.

In like manner is it with all of us. We might be always happy, were we always receiving the gifts which Christ presents to us; crediting the divine testimony as to the sufficiency of the great sacrifice, and the freeness of the great love.

"Unhappiness thus is wilful. "Ye will not come to me." It profiteth nothing. It does not liberate, or strengthen, or sanctify, or comfort. To be unhappy is our folly and our sin. When happy, we can work so much more vigorously and successfully; no toil is irksome; no trouble or annoyance is felt. When unhappy, all is reversed. Be happy then in God (this is one great part of our testimony); taste his love; live in his smile; then you will see what a wise and holy thing happiness is; and when Jesus comes the second time you will enter into his joy.

LII.

The Book Of Books

Proverbs 2:1-5

THE words "my Son" are not spoken at random, or inserted without a meaning. In them God speaks to us as unto children (Hebrews 12). It is a father's voice that speaks to us in the book of Proverbs. Solomon's counsels to Rehoboam are God's messages to us.

The subject here is the divine Word, its nature and use, with the way in which we are to receive it. It is assumed to be,

- (1.) True. Not partially so, but absolutely and perfectly.
- (2.) Infallible. Not imperious or dictatorial, yet infallible.
- (3.) Precious. Containing infinite treasures.
- (4.) Profound. It will bear searching, digging, meditation. It has much on the surface; far more beneath. Go as deep as you like, the vein is not exhausted.
- (5.) Intelligible. Though spoken by God, it is quite as intelligible as that spoken by man. A father's words to his child are meant to be understood.

This Word is here called by many names: "my words," "my commandments," "wisdom," "understanding," "knowledge." The way in which we are to deal with it is spoken of under various figures: "receiving," "hiding," "inclining the ear," "applying the heart," "crying after," "lifting up the voice for," "seeking," "searching"; each of these implying honesty, earnestness, perseverance, faith,—each successive word embodying some more meaning, some deeper truth than its predecessor.

Let us mark then,

I. Solomon's object in the Proverbs. It is good to go back to the original speaker or writer; to remember the instrument through which the Holy Spirit spoke, whether Moses, or David, or Solomon, or Isaiah. This not only brings out better the human side of the book or passage; not only enables us to realize the words as thoroughly human words; but it gives a point and interest and meaning to them which otherwise is lost. Paul's words are not Peter's, nor John's; yet they are all the words of the Holy Ghost. So the words of Solomon the king, and Amos the Tekoan herdsman, are both the words of God, yet there are differences; and these differences have a meaning. The Proverbs of Solomon would have been equally true, though uttered by Amos, yet they would not have had the peculiar point which they possess when coming from the lips of the greatest, richest, wisest of kings. The royal lessons of this royal teacher and father are summed up in "the fear of the Lord, and the knowledge of God." This is his object, even in that book which seems filled with common life, and its maxims and scenes. Fear God; know the Lord; this is the sum of all that he has to say to us.

II. God's object in the Bible. To teach us to know and fear Him. Many subordinate things, but this as the main thing; this as the result of all its precepts, warnings, facts, histories. The Bible terminates on God, as it begins with him. It comes from God, and goes back to him, leading us along with it. The Bible has specially to do with the world to come, even in those books which are occupied with the duties and concerns of this. Let your Bible lead you straight to God; let every perusal teach you more of him. As was God's object in writing the Bible, so let yours be in reading it. Be sure to find him everywhere.

III. The way in which He would have us treat the Bible. (1.) Receive it. Take it as true, divine, infallible. Listen to it, as his voice, his message. Let its words flow in to ear and heart.

(2.) Prize it. It is no common possession. It is treasure, riches, gold,— all divine. As such it must be used lovingly, reverently, devoutly, believingly.

(3.) Study it. It must be "hid," laid up, sought out, searched, weighed. No surface work, no holiday work. Day and night, it must be studied with the whole vigour of our souls.

(4.) It must be prayed over. In the study of it we must deal with God. He has the key for unlocking its chambers; the light for shewing us all its recesses. We must go to him to be taught: "If any man lack wisdom, let him ask of God." Like old Bradford, we must study it on our knees.

Let us notice in conclusion the connection of all this with Christ. He is "the Word of God," and the Bible is " the word of God." He connects the two things together when he says, "If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you." The testimony of all Scripture is to Christ; he is its Alpha and Omega. It is through him that we have the knowledge and the fear of God. To know him is to know the Father, and we find him in the word; the more we dig into the word, we find the more of him. They are they which testify of him. Search the Scriptures! They contain life, and they contain THE LIFE. Let us go to them for both. How little of them do we know; how much we ought to know, and might know, if we would search! Would you be wise? Study the Word, and find THE WISDOM OF GOD there. Would you be holy? Study the Word. It sanctifies its readers. Would you be happy? Study the Word. In its words is blessedness,—the peace and joy of God.

LIII.

The Secret Of Deliverance From Evil

"By the fear of the Lord men depart from evil." —

Proverbs 16:6

THERE is "evil" in the world. The world is now the opposite of what God made it, "good," "very good." It lieth in wickedness. There is evil within and without; evil moral and material. "Every creature of God" was made good, but each one has become evil. There is evil in the sense of disorder, pain, disease, sorrow, death. There is evil in the sense of sin. It is this last that our text points to; for evil in the sense of disease, or death, or sorrow, is not to be cured just now, by the remedy our text suggests, or by any remedy whatever. For such cures as these we wait till the resurrection of the just.

What then is this evil which God calls sin? To know this we must go to the Bible; and the Bible points us to the fall, to the deluge, to Sodom and Gomorrah, to Sinai, to Calvary, that we may learn what it is, and what God thinks of it. Specially the two last, Sinai and Calvary; not Sinai without Calvary, nor Calvary without Sinai; the law must be read in the light of the Cross. There is another revelation or declaration of sin; but it is not yet come; the second death, an eternal hell. And yet when it does come it will not tell us more than the cross has done. Men make light of sin; fools make a mock at sin. At the worst they treat it simply as a calamity, an unavoidable misfortune, a hereditary evil, for which they are not wholly responsible. God's estimate of sin is unspeakably awful. "It is the abominable thing which I hate; it is an evil that I cannot bear; it cast the angels out of heaven; it rained the world; it brought the deluge; it drew down the fire and brimstone; it slew my Son; it will yet set the world on fire; it will kindle hell." God does not look on sin as man looks.

We wonder at all this, and say, Why then does God allow it to remain? Why did he let it enter? Why does he not sweep it off?

We answer, God allowed it to enter, just that it might spread and unfold itself; and yet also that it might at length be utterly rooted out. He did not destroy it at once, because he wished to shew its awful nature, its power to propagate, its manifold aspects, the utter impotency of mere creaturehood; and yet also to crush it forever. God at this moment is carrying on these two processes,—letting sin spread and develop itself, getting quit of it. One great object in redemption is, to destroy it from man's heart and from man's earth. The Bible is a revelation of God's means for thus extirpating sin. The Son of man came to deliver us from it; and he does so by bringing us back to the fear of God.

How am I to get quit of this evil? This is the great question.

1. Not by time. Time cures many things, but not this. It wears the rock, but it cures not sin. Sin only grows more inveterate when left to itself.

2. Not by effort. Strength of human will is no more against sin than the helm of the little skiff in the day of the raging tempest. Human resolution will not do. The enemy is too subtle and too strong.

3. Not by human wisdom. Science and philosophy can do nothing. Human skill, human devices and physical appliances,—laws social, or sanitary, or political, can do nothing. It is too terrible a disease for man to heal.

4. Not by law. By the law is the knowledge of sin, not the cure of it. Law is powerless in such a case. It is but a torch held up at midnight to shew the ruin, and havoc, and woe.

5. Not by terror. By terror evil may be pent up,—compelled to hide itself, not driven out. No terror nor force can make a man holy.

If not by these, then by what is evil expelled from us? By the fear of Jehovah, our text replies. It is only this that goes to the root of the matter. This is the true medicine, the true corrective, the true deterrent, the true

expulsive energy, acting both from without and from within: from without, because He whom we fear is without; from within, because this fear of Jehovah is implanted within us.

By the fear of God we do not mean the dread of God or the terror of the Lord. Dread may restrain evil, but cannot extirpate; it may make a man a plausible hypocrite, but not a saint. The true fear of the Lord, the moment that it begins to act upon the soul, does lead men to depart from evil.

This fear of God has its root in *pardon*. "There is forgiveness with thee that thou mayest be feared." Forgiveness, ascertained forgiveness, conscious forgiveness; this is the beginning of all true fear. The want of pardon, a doubtful pardon, a pardon to be worked for all the days of our life, may produce *dread*, but not *fear*.

This fear resting on an ascertained forgiveness expels a world of evil from the human heart, and keeps it from re-entrance. It loosens the hold which sin has on us; it liberates us, that we may be free to be holy. The evil things which God hates, bondage, gloom, moroseness, doubt, hard thoughts, as well as love of the world and love of sin, are all detached from us, and we from them. Like sunshine falling on a frozen river, the fear of God dissolves our frozen faculties, and sets a flowing the waters of the soul. It works itself out, unfolds itself in such things as those:—

1. Obedience. We obey because we fear. This is the true obedience, the result of filial, happy fear. We are constrained to obey; and yet we obey freely and joyfully.
2. Fellowship. Without the fear which springs from pardon there could be no fellowship. Dread keeps the soul from God; true fear brings it nigh. Dread shuts up the soul against intercourse with God; true fear leads it to unbosom itself without reserve, yet with reverence.
3. Love. Fear produces love, and love produces fear. They minister to each other. God's forgiving love kindles love in us; and yet it is

reverential love, for he who has forgiven and loved us is so infinitely great and glorious.

4. Zeal. Work for this God becomes our second nature. We cannot but work. The effect of this blessed fear upon us is to set all our faculties in motion, to make us zealous men. Slothfulness, and selfishness, and indifference, when touched by this fear, flee away like unclean spirits. Thus we say to ourselves,

1. I fear God, therefore I must listen to him. I am not terrified into listening, I am attracted to it. The voice of that infinite Jehovah who has freely forgiven me is to me the sweetest as well as most solemn of all voices. I love to hear Him speak; and I am always saying, "Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth."

2. I fear God, therefore I must try to please him. I must not merely seek to avoid offending or displeasing, I must try to please him; and I must live, like Enoch, a life of God-pleasing; not man-pleasing, nor self-pleasing.

3. I fear God, therefore I must give up sin. This new fear of God has turned my love of sin into hatred. I hate sin, because I fear God. He hates it, therefore I hate it, and give it up. The more I think of him, the more am I disposed to part with all sin.

4. I fear God, therefore I must do his will. The will of him whom I fear must ever be my rule of duty. The more that I fear him, the more will his will become my rule. Not my will, but thine be done, is what we say to the God whom we fear.

5. I fear God, therefore I must seek to be like him. Mere dread would never lead us to desire conformity to his image; but fear does. It is God's glory that we thus stand in awe of; and beholding it, we are changed into the same image from glory to glory.

Thus it is that by the fear of the Lord men depart from evil. Yes, this is the divine cure for sin. This is our strength against temptation; our refuge against the fear of man; our help against every adversary. And what a glorifying thing it is to God when we say that his fear would deliver you from all sin.

And what a solemn thing it is to tell the sinner,—it is the want of this fear that is making you what you are. "The transgression of the wicked says, There is no fear of God before his eyes!" Yes, the want of this fear is the cause of all the evil, and the presence would be the introducer of all good.

LIV.

The Voice Of The Heavenly Bridegroom

"Rise up my love, my fair one, and come away."—

Song of Solomon 2:10,13

THE speaker is the heavenly Bridegroom, the Lord Jesus Christ. It is his voice we hear; the voice which is as the sound of many waters; which spake the "gracious words" the like of which were never uttered on earth. It is to his bride he speaks; "the bride, the Lamb's wife;" his chosen, redeemed, called, sanctified one; given him of the Father before the world began; his one spouse, his "love, his dove, his undefiled;" of whom it is written, "Christ loved the church, and gave himself for it." Of the saints of all ages is this "bride," this "body," composed; all of them washed in the same blood, and clothed with the same righteousness.

1. It is the voice of love. "My love" is his name for his church. Other names of endearment he has for her, but this is chief. All in him betokens love. All that he is, and says, and does, intimates love; a love that passeth knowledge; a love stronger than death and the grave; a love which many waters cannot quench nor the floods drown. It is in tender love that the Bridegroom thus addresses the Bride.

2. It is the voice of admiration. "My fair one " is his name for her. Thou art all fair, my love, there is no spot in thee. The "fairest among women, "is his name for her, even as her name for him is the "chiefest among ten thousand." The heart of the Bridegroom is full of admiration for the beauty and perfection of his bride. She is "perfect through the comeliness which he has put upon her." He has ravished our heart, and we have ravished his.

3. It is the voice of authority. The husband is the head of the wife; so is Christ the head of the church; and though it is love that speaks, it is

authoritative love. "Arise," "come away." Obedience is our true position; and no amount of love in him can ever alter this. It is not bondage; but it is obedience. It is not sternness on his part, yet it is authority. Our Bridegroom is Jehovah, Immanuel, King of kings, and Lord of lords. Shall we treat his voice as that of an inferior or an equal; or as the voice of him whom no amount of condescension and endearment, and admiration, can ever make less truly the Head of the church, Head of principalities and powers, the Head of the universe, of whom it is said to the church, "He is thy Lord, worship thou him."

But when and in what circumstances does he speak these words to his church? Doubtless at his second coming, when calling her to the honour and glory prepared for her.

I. When he calls her up into the clouds to meet him in the air. He comes for her; and he finds her in the grave. He speaks to her as once before to Lazarus, Come forth; "thou shalt call, and I will answer;" awake and sing, ye that dwell in dust." He summons her from the tomb; he summons her up into the clouds, into his pavilion, where the marriage is celebrated— "Come up hither." He speaks, she hears, and goes up to meet him for whom she had waited so long. "Arise, my love."

II. When he calls her into the marriage chamber. The marriage follows the ascension. She goes in with him to the marriage; blessed are they that are called to the marriage supper; she goes in and sits down beside him as his bride, his queen, in gold of Ophir. "Arise, my love."

III. When he calls her into the new Jerusalem. Out of the marriage chamber they come. They rise up from the feast. They enter the city. He calls her into the city which he has prepared,—the place which he had gone to prepare for her,— the "many mansions." "Arise, my love."

IV. When he calls her up to his throne. This is the final act of blessing. Come sit with me on my throne; come reign with me over a redeemed creation. Now the crown is put upon her head; and the royal

robes invest her. The everlasting kingdom is now hers. She is heir of God, and joint heir with Christ Jesus. "Arise, my love."

Thus he shall speak to his church in the day of his coming glory; for then shall the song of songs be realised to the full.

Meanwhile he speaks thus to us singly. As he said to Abraham in Ur, Get thee out of this land, so does he speak to each of his Abrahams, his chosen ones,—Come out and be separate; arise, shine, for thy light is come; arise, leave the world; become a pilgrim; arise, quit thy sins, become holy; arise, take up thy cross and follow me. He spoke thus to each of us at first; he speaks thus to each of us still each day; for each day is a repetition of the first message on his part, and the first obedience on ours. Arise,—come away,—follow me. He speaks as the Saviour, and as the Bridegroom. Let us hear, let us follow. Upward, still upward; onward, still onward, is his beckoning. This is no place of tarrying; no congenial air or climate or company for the bride, the Lamb's wife. This is not our rest; this is not the resurrection-land; nor the marriagehall, nor the new Jerusalem, nor the kingdom. We must not tarry here. We have foretastes here, but that is all; the Lord's supper reminds us of the marriage supper. It is well to sit for an hour at the earthly table, but it is better to sit down forever at the eternal table. With such a summons and such a hope, let us not sleep as do others; let us awake and arise, and come away; away from sin, and dearth, and sorrow; away to the everlasting hills, the everlasting city, the everlasting glory. We are joint-heirs with him; partakers of his throne and crown.

LV.

The Love That Passeth Knowledge

"Many waters cannot quench love, neither can the floods drown it: if a man would give all the substance of his house for love, it would utterly be contemned." —

Song of Solomon 8:7

LET us take this verse as descriptive of the love of Christ, the "love that passeth knowledge." It is he who speaks in the fifth verse, "I raised thee up under the apple tree"; and his words here remind us of similar ones elsewhere: "I have loved thee with an everlasting love, and with loving-kindness have I drawn thee"; "I drew them with cords of love, and with the bands of a man"; "he found him in a desert land, and in a waste howling wilderness"; only these three passages refer to Israel, whereas our text refers to the whole church from the beginning, of which it is said, "Christ loved the church, and gave himself for it."

We might say that the passage carries us back to Eve, "the mother of all living,"—Eve under the fatal tree. The redeemer comes and raises up her offspring under that tree, for she is the mother of the living; and there this mother of the living brought her children forth in sorrow, according to the original sentence on woman, "In sorrow shalt thou bring forth children."

Jesus thus declares his love to his church, and she replies, "Set me as a seal," not only on thy heart, but on thine arm, thine inner, and thine outer part,—thy place of love; thy place of strength; thy place of energy and action. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? His love is invincible and irresistible as death; it is a jealous love, unyielding and inexorable as the grave. Its true figure is that of fire,—coals of fire,—the very flame of Jehovah. Here, then, is the love of Christ! Its breadth, length, height, and depth, are absolutely immeasurable. But our text

singles out two things especially concerning this love: (1.) It is unquenchable; (2.) it is unpurchaseable.

I. It is unquenchable. It is not all love that is unquenchable; but this is. It is love forevermore. As the great old poet writes—

....."Love is not love, Which alters when it alteration finds, Or bends, with the remover to remove; Oh no, it is an ever-fixed mark, That looks on tempests, and is never shaken. It is the star to every wandering bark, Whose worth's unknown, although his height be taken."

Beyond a father's, or a mother's, or a brother's, or a sister's, or a lover's love, is this great love of Christ; the one and only love that passeth knowledge; the one love that nothing in heaven, or earth, or hell is able to extinguish or cool; the one love whose dimensions are beyond all measure. It is here spoken of as a thing of fire; and of it as such it is affirmed that "waters," "many waters" (Psalm 69:1,2) cannot quench it; as a thing of life which the floods cannot drown (Psalm 69:15, 93:3).

(1.) The waters of shame and suffering sought to quench and drown it. They would have hindered its outflowing, and come (like Peter) between the Saviour and the cross; but this love refused to be arrested on its way to Calvary; it would not be either quenched or drowned. Herein was love! It overleaped all the barriers in its way; it refused to be extinguished or drowned. Its fire would not be quenched, its life would not be drowned.

(2.) The waters of death sought to quench it. Their waves and billows went over him. The grave sought to cool or quench it; but it proved itself stronger than death. Neither death nor the grave could alter or weaken it. It came out of both as strong as before. Love defied death, and overcame it.

(3.) The waters of our unworthiness could not quench nor drown love. In general we find love drawing to the loveable; and when anything

unbecoming occurs, withdrawing from its object. Not so here. All our unfitness and unloveableness could not quench nor drown his love. It clung to the unlovely, and refused to be torn away.

(4.) The waters of our long rejection sought to quench it. After that the gospel had shewed us that personal unworthiness could not arrest the love of Christ, we continued to reject him and his love. Yet his love surmounted this unbelief, and survived this rejection. In spite of all it remained unquenched.

(5.) The waters of our daily inconsistency sought to quench it. Even after we have believed, we are constantly coming short. Ah what inconsistencies, coldness, backslidings, lukewarmness, doubtings, worldliness, and such like, are daily flowing over this love to quench its fire and drown its life! Yet it survives all; it remains unquenched and unquenchable.

All these infinite evils in us are like "waters," "many waters"; like "floods"; torrents of sin, waves and billows of evil,—all constantly labouring to quench and drown the love of Christ! And truly they would have annihilated any other love; any love less than divine. But this is unchangeable and everlasting.

II. It is unpurchaseable. "If a man should give all the substance of his house for love, it would be utterly contemned." The full meaning of this will come out under the following heads. All that a man has can do nothing in such a case. Love is not merchandise; it is no marketable commodity. It has nothing to do with gold and silver. A man's whole substance is unavailing and useless,

(1.) As a gift to persuade him to love. Love does not come by gifts, least of all does divine love come by human gifts. Christ's favour cannot be purchased by money. He loves without gifts, and before all gifts. Let us do justice to his free love!

(2.) As payment for having been loved. Neither before nor after has gold anything to do with love. Pay a man for loving! How revolting the thought! Pay Christ for loving! What a wickedness and what an impossibility in the thought! Love is altogether free.

(3.) As a bribe to tempt him NOT to love. Should the whole universe be offered to Christ on condition of his ceasing to love us, it would be utterly contemned. Who or what shall separate us from the love of Christ? All earth and heaven together would be ineffectual to cool or quench this mighty love. He cannot but love, whatever may be the gifts proffered to stay his love.

(4.) As a substitute for love. As if a man should say to another,—a father to a son, or a brother to a sister,—I cannot love you, but here is money to make up for my want of love! Would not such a proposal be utterly contemned? Were Christ to say to us, I cannot love you, but I give you heaven, would that suffice? Would not the answer be, What are all these gifts without love. Though we give our body to be burned, what would this be without love? Or what can Christ say to us for bringing him gifts, offerings, prayers, tears, money,— everything but love! Without love, what are the riches of the universe? It is love he asks; it is love we need. Love we must have. What shall be given in exchange for love?

The love of Christ truly passeth knowledge. It is infinite like himself. It emerges out of every storm or flood. It survives all unworthiness, and unbelief, and rejection. It is this that fills the soul; that liberates us from bondage; that gladdens us in the most sorrowful hour. Love is the true sunshine of life; and with this love Christ is to fill, not heaven only, but also earth, when he comes again in his glory.

LVI.

The Vision Of The Glory

Isaiah 6:1-13

WHETHER this vision records Isaiah's first call to the prophetic ministry matters not. It is either the introduction to his whole ministry, or to a new section of it, probably the latter; the first five chapters describing Israel as ripening for judgment, and the sixth as receiving the sentence. Let us take up the chapter under the following heads.

I. The vision. It was a temple vision, a vision of glory, the glory of Jehovah of hosts, as such, the glory of the King and the Priest, of the throne and temple; and all this when Uzziah the king lay dying or was dead,—the earthly king passing away, the heavenly King shewing himself. It was truly a royal and glorious vision,—Jehovah himself the centre of it,—King of kings and Lord of lords, true King of Israel and of the earth, true Melchizedek, a Priest upon his throne. In connection with this King are the seraphim. Probably these are the same as cherubim, as they are almost identical with those described in Ezekiel and John. In Genesis and in the historical books they appear as cherubim, "figures"; in Isaiah as seraphim, or "burners"; in Ezekiel and John as "living creatures." Here they stand upon the train of the royal robe which filled the temple. They have six wings. Two cover the face,—as if the glory were overwhelming to them (as Moses hid his face, Exodus 3:6); two their feet,—to hide their whole person, body ("their bodies," Ezekiel 1:23), and feet from the brightness; two they fly with, as if ready to go forth on the errands of this mighty King. Is not this the true posture of every saint of God? Solemn awe in presence of the divine majesty, as unfit to look upon the glorious One; profound self-abasement, as unfit to be looked upon by one so holy; readiness to do the work of God, to go forth on his service on the wings of faith and love.

II. The voice. It was the voice of the seraphim, a responsive song,— "one cried unto another." Their song was, (1.) Of Jehovah of hosts and of his three-fold holiness; (2.) Of earth,—the whole earth,—earth filled with His glory. Thus the voice interprets the vision. It is a vision of latter-day glory,— when the Lord alone shall be exalted, when holiness to the Lord shall be seen and heard everywhere, when the glory of the Lord shall fill the world. What a contrast the state of things thus revealed to that in the day of the prophet! This holy glory was to him exceeding marvellous,—a holy glory in connection with Jehovah of hosts as King of all the earth. It is the times of restitution of all things, when the Lord alone shall be exalted.

III. The shaking. The posts of the door, or foundations of the threshold moved, or shook, at the voice of the seraphim, and the temple was filled with smoke. The foundations of God's own house are moved at the voice of the marvellous song, and the house is filled with that which symbolises Jehovah's holy anger against sin (Psalm 18:9). The vision seems to be that of God coming down in his holiness, to shake the earth, and to express his hatred against sin, and especially against Israel's sin, in His own sanctuary (Isaiah 65:5). He is spoken of here as arising to shake terribly the earth,— beginning at His own temple, but not ceasing till He has shaken all that can be shaken, that those things which cannot be shaken may remain. When God's anger waxes hot against sin, then all the earth shall be as Sinai,—when the mountain shook, and was covered with smoke from the presence of the holy Lord God. The "battles of shaking" for our world are yet to come (Isaiah 30:32).

The Prophets alarm. (verse 5) His cry is, "Woe is me"; nay, "I am undone." The reason of his alarm is a new and deeper view of his own sinfulness, from a new view of Jehovah's holiness. "A man of unclean lips am I;" nay, "among a people of unclean lips do I dwell." He gives the reason,— "the King, Jehovah of hosts, mine eyes have seen." Thus the nearer God comes to us, the more are we made aware of our uncleanness (even that of our lips, and feel the uncleanness of a world of unclean lips in which we dwell. The vision of earth filled with holy glory, and with the

presence of its glorious King, has overwhelmed him. As in the case of Daniel (10:8), and John (Revelation 1:17). The more we realise a present God, and an earth filled with his glory, the more shall we feel our own unholiness and cry out in fear, even though we be saints. We feel the awful contrast between our unholy lips and the holy lips of those who are singing, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts." It was Israel's "unclean lips" that cried, "Crucify him"; and for the words of their unclean lips they are now suffering the woes of God.

God's cure for this alarm. A live coal from the altar applied to his lips,—that special part which he felt impure, and in which purity was specially needed by him as a prophet. A prophet is a man like ourselves, yet God must purify his lips that he may speak. He does this by fire and blood; for the live coal was from the altar of burnt-offering. Thus the blood makes clean and the fire purifies,—"the spirit of burning." This application of fire and blood to his lips removes, (1.) his fears; (2.) his personal uncleanness; (3.) national uncleanness; for the fire and blood were meant to apply to "the people of the unclean lips" as well as to himself. Thus the sense of uncleanness is removed. Thus the terror which the nearer presence of God produces is removed by that which assures the sinner of pardon and cleansing. The man's terrors are dispelled; he feels that he can now act and speak for God.

VI. God's inquiry for a messenger. Jehovah's voice is heard; its utterance is two-fold, (1.) "Whom shall I send;" (2.) "Who will go for us." It is an errand of hardship, painfulness, danger, shame; from which flesh and blood would shrink, as did Moses, Jeremiah, Ezekiel. Still God in every age is looking round and asking for a messenger,—for evangelists, for missionaries, for ministers, Spirit-called, Spirit-filled, Spiritsent messengers. The work is great, the field is large, the message is judgment as well as mercy. Whom shall I send; who will go?

VII. The prophet's answer. "Here am I, send me." He answers the second question first; but he answers both explicitly. He does not shrink. He is ready for shame, for prison, for death,—as indeed he found at last.

The spirit is willing and the flesh has overcome its weakness. The fire and blood have removed the terror, and made him bold. Thus it was with Whitefield.

VIII. The message. It is one of judgment; (1.) For the people, the worst of judgments, hear on and understand not, look on but see not. A hard heart, an insensible and impenetrable soul, a seared conscience, given over to a reprobate mind; (2.) For the land,—to lie waste and desolate, its fields untilled, its cities forsaken. This is the message of double judgment,— complete and terrible ruin. This is the end of the people of "unclean lips."

IX. The promise. All Israel's judgments have a promise mixed up with them,—a hope appended to them. They are not forever. Their unbelief is not forever. Their land's desolation is not forever. There is a holy Seed or root, in which the blessing lies hid, even in the midst of the curse; and out of this seed, or root, or stump, the future tree is to arise, more glorious than the first. Israel shall blossom, and bud, and fill the face of the world with fruit. Here is the gleam of hope in the midst of despair and darkness. But how terrible the history through which Israel passes to this! How fearfully God avenges unbelief and rejection of his grace! Yet the day dawns at last! The King comes in His glory.

LVII.

Man's Extremity And Satan's Opportunity

Isaiah 8:19-22

"Man's extremity," says the good proverb, "is God's opportunity"; but we may coin another proverb, and say, "Man's extremity is the devil's opportunity." It was so in the case of Saul at Endor, and of Jehoram at Ekron, when, in the hour of despair they threw themselves into the arms of the devil. It will be so, as long as there is a devil to waylay and ensnare us. He is ready with his temptations always, but specially in the day of human darkness and depression. He has special work to do at such a time, and he knows how to do it. God and Satan stand with arms outstretched to receive the poor overwhelmed and sorrowful one; but how often does he prefer the embrace and the counsel of hell to those of heaven! He preferred it even in Paradise!

The picture here drawn is that of Israel,—Israel specially in the last days, when their unbelief and darkness increase, when calamities the most appalling are overflowing them and their land. Then it is that when God's Spirit leaves them utterly, when judgments are showering clown, when despair takes possession of them, that Satan suggests, Try my wisdom, my wizards, my familiar spirits. They try these, but it only makes the evil worse. Hardly bestead and hungry, they fret and curse both king and God. They look above, but all is darkness; they look beneath, but all is trouble and "dimness of anguish"; all round them is darkness that may be felt. They are passing through great tribulation, their last sorrow; it is the time of Jacob's trouble. Let us learn God's lessons here.

I. There are critical seasons in the history of a soul. It has been tossed fearfully; fightings without, and fears within. Unbelief, scepticism, atheism, uncertainty of every kind, these, like the four winds of heaven, rush at once over and through the soul. It feels itself drifting on the rocks; it turns round, and in desperation tries to face the storm. Like the stag at

bay, it wheels round upon its merciless pursuers. Shall it battle them, or give itself up to be torn in pieces without a struggle? These are fearful moments for the soul. It is an unearthly struggle. It seems hurrying the sinner to despair. In such a condition, how profound should be our pity! Shall we be angry? Shall we rage at these troubled ones? Shall we call them hard names? No, let us compassionate them. They are just upon the rocks; the breakers are whitening over them. If ever there was a case for Christian love, it is here. "Let those rage against you," says Augustine, "who know not with what labour truth is found; with what groans and sighs we get to understand the very least of God."

II. Of these critical seasons Satan avails himself. He comes proffering help; holding out his hand; offering his own wisdom and strength, or man's wisdom and strength; endeavouring in every way to prevent the soul betaking itself to God, to his Spirit, to the Bible. Anything rather than the cross, or the blood, or the righteousness! All doubts and difficulties in reference to these are started. It is whispered that the Bible is not true, not wholly inspired; that there is no hell, or that none shall go there; "ye shall not surely die;" that science is more noble than revelation, that reason is a higher thing than faith; that the creeds of other days are obsolete: that there must be progress and development. All these suggestions are grateful to the pride of man, and eagerly seized upon. In how many such cases and junctures has he triumphed. Man's extremity has been his opportunity. He has stepped in with his lies and flatteries, and he has prevailed. The soul has turned away from God and Christ, and the Bible, to "familiar spirits," to "doctrines of devils," to "strong delusions."

III. These appliances of Satan only make matters worse. They remove no doubts; they only increase them; deepening the darkness; leading on from depth to depth; from error to error; from unbelief to unbelief, from blasphemy to blasphemy. No man ever gained by yielding to Satan, or lost by yielding to God. Dark as the soul may be, it only becomes darker by believing Satan's falsehoods. It becomes more wretched and more

hopeless, the more that it deserts the divine teaching and listens either to that of earth or hell, however plausible it may be.

At such seasons God comes specially near to proffer his aid. He never deserts a man on this side of hell. He follows him into the thick darkness, proffering light; into the lowest depth offering help. He is at hand in the day of evil, even to the most evil of the sons of men. No man can say, God has abandoned me to the devil, or to myself, or to error, or to sin. Christ's tears over Jerusalem are the proof of this.

At such seasons Christians ought specially to pity and to help. These distractions and doubts that we see around us are the signals of distress, unconsciously held up by a wretched world. These errors and disbeliefs are the rockets sent up from wrecked barques. This is a day of fearful disbelief and change; men rushing from one opinion to another to soothe their restlessness. Surely it is a day for pity, not for anger; a day for prayer more than for argument. Now the world is in extremity, let the church's pity and prayers go forth day and night. Now is the time for tears and intercessions. To thy knees, O Church of God!

LVIII.

The Day Of Clear Vision To The Dim Eyes

"The eyes of them that see shall not be dim." —

Isaiah 32:3

THESE blessed words tell us four things, (1.) There are eyes that do not see; (2.) there are eyes that do see; (3.) of the eyes that see some are dim; (4.) the time is at hand when they shall not be dim.

I. There are eyes that see not. Of the dead idols this is said,—*"They have eyes but see not;"* and this is not wonderful. But that the same should be said of living men is marvelous. It is not true of angels; it is not true of devils; they have eyes and see. It is true of men; of millions; of the greater part of our race; they have eyes but see not. They shut them; they turn them away from their proper objects; they allow scales to grow over them; they deliberately veil them. O fearful calamity! O bitter curse! And yet for all this, they themselves are responsible. It is not God that blinds them, or veils, or darkens. They are their own undoers. They did not wish to see; they were resolved not to see. Selfblinded, not God-blinded! They suffer this world to blind or dazzle them; so that their eyes are useless. They let Satan, the god of this world, put his hand over their eyes; or bewilder them with his snares and enticements. Thus, having eyes they see not.

II. There are eyes that see. These are they whom God hath enlightened; whose eyes the son of God hath opened; for it is his work to open the eyes of the blind. They did not open their own eyes. Their eyes did not open by chance. Once they were blind,—quite as blind as others; but now they see. There are not many of whom this can be said; yet there are some. And what do they see? (1.) They see God; (2.) they see Christ; (3.) they see themselves; (4.) they see the word of God; (5.) they see the things within the veil. They are not like the men of this world, with eyes

that see outward things, sun, moon, and stars, earth and sea, woods and hills and fields. They see beyond all these,—that which is spiritual and divine; that which is true and glorious. Yes; they see! In a blinded generation they see! How great a thing and how blessed to be able to say this of them,—they see! They have got eyes that are not useless; eyes that do not mislead; eyes that present things in their proper light and proportions and distances! Their eyes have been anointed with the heavenly eyesalve, and they see! They no longer stumble nor grope in the dark, nor go after false objects. They see, and they know that they see!

III. Of these eyes that see some are dim. They see; but they do not see afar off (2 Peter 1:9). They see; but it is dimly. Their vision is defective. They see men as trees walking. They are near-sighted, short-sighted. Their eyes require further purging. They ought to see fully and truly; but they do not. They were not meant to be dim. God has no pleasure in their being dim. The objects are vivid and distinct; yet they are seen dimly. In what respects is this the case? (1.) They see but part or parts of the truth; (2.) what they do see is imperfectly realised. The gospel is but half a gospel. The cross is not so full of peace and light as it ought to be. The way of life is but partially known. The coming glory has but a feeble radiance. The advent of Christ has but little value to them. Christ himself has but little of the excellence which he ought to possess to them, and is but poorly appreciated. There is no doubt something in the atmosphere of this present evil world that hinders vision and beclouds the eye; but still, after all, it is the dimness of the eye that is the evil. How many are all their lifetime afflicted with this imperfect vision. How much they lose by this! Their faith is not the substance of things hoped for; it is but the shadow of that substance. Hope is to them a vague expectation, with little of certainty or brightness in it. Their life has more of the cloud than of the sunshine about it.

IV. The time is at hand when these eyes shall not be dim. There are many partial removals of this dimness even now; times when we see farther and more clearly. At Pentecost this was the case. At the Reformation also. In times of revival it has been so. In individual cases

this has been known. Paul was a man that saw clearly. Augustine, Wycliffe, Luther, Calvin, Knox, Rutherford, Edwards; these were clear-sighted men, from whom the Holy Spirit had purged the scales and the dimness. But the reference here is prophetic. The prophet points to a coming; era of perfection, when we shall see Him as he is; see as we are seen, know as we are known. No dimness then; no defective vision; no cloudy atmosphere; no diseased organ of sight. All brightness and distinctness. The cross clear and bright. The light and love unclouded. Christ seen face to face, no longer in a glass darkly. Every ray of glory coming freshly from his revealed countenance; every feature fair and perfect; Himself the chief among ten thousand; His kingdom infinitely glorious. No doubting either as to the things of Christ, or our interest in them. No unbelief; no error; no mist. All the perfection of vision, and the perfection of light. O day of brightness and true vision, dawn! O Morning-star, arise! O Prince of light, light of the world, make haste, end the long darkness of humanity, and cover earth with celestial sunshine!

LIX.

The Unfainting Creator And The Fainting Creature

Isaiah 40:28-31

THIS was God's answer to Israel of old in their day of trouble; it is still his answer to a desponding spirit which thinks its case hopeless and itself forsaken of God. God himself thus speaks in his love to such. Instead of taking each clause separately, let us thus classify the various points here brought before us,—(1.) an unfainting God; (2.) a fainting sinner; (3.) an unfainting saint.

I. An unfainting God. It is to himself that he draws our eye in our disquietude,—"Look unto me;" "trust ye in Jehovah." He wonders that we should not have known nor heard of him and his greatness; or that having heard of him, we should ever give way to despondency. With such a God to go to, how can we be careful or troubled?

(1.) His name. It is fourfold, and each of its four parts most full and suitable,—"God," "The Everlasting," "Jehovah," "Creator of the ends of the earth." What a name; what a declaration of himself is this! Excellency, duration, life, power, all are here! Ah, surely they that know such a name will put their trust in him.

(2.) His character. "He fainteth not;" "he is not weary;" he is unsearchable in wisdom. Here is the unfainting God,—the God only wise. Past ages have proved him such; the experience of those who have known him has borne testimony to him.

Time, work, difficulty, cannot make him faint or weary.

Nothing in earth, or heaven, or hell can affect him. He has been working hitherto, and is still working (John 5:17), but he is not weary.

(3.) His ways. They are not as our ways. They are the ways of bountifulness and love. He is the giving one; he is always giving; giving more and more; never weary of giving; giving power, strength, all that is needed. Yes, he that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him freely give us all things.

This is the God with whom we have to do! Such is his name, his character, his ways! Have we not known him, nor heard? To know him is life; to listen to him is peace forevermore.

II. A fainting sinner. The object toward which the power of this mighty God is turned is a sinner; one who is "faint," who "has no might." It is the utter helplessness of the object that attracts him. It is not "like drawing to like"; but the unlike. It is the unlikeness that constitutes the attraction and the fitness. "When we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly." Thus the two extremes meet, the weakness of the creature, the power of the Creator; each so exactly suiting the other, and each requiring the other. It is this state of things that shews the folly of those who despair of being saved because they are so weak. The truth is, they are not yet weak enough for God to save them. They must come down to a lower degree of helplessness ere God can interfere. Yes, it is our strength, not our weakness, that is our hindrance and stumbling block. It is the weak that God is in quest of, not the strong; the weaker the better for the display of his strength. "To them that have no might he increaseth strength." "In the Lord have I righteousness and strength." "When I am weak then am I strong." It is our "infirmities" that God uses as his opportunity for the magnifying of his grace and power. Are you willing to take the place of weakness which God assigns to you, and in which alone he can interfere to save?

III. An unfainting saint. The saint is here described as one who "waits upon the Lord." He has come to give up his waiting on all else; to wait on this living and mighty God alone. It is thus that out of weakness he becomes strong. His weakness is not less than it was, but he gets a substitute for it, in the strength of Jehovah. Everybody else, even the

young and vigorous shall fail; but he shall not. When every one gives way he shall stand; he shall lift up his head. This is described under four figures.

(1.) They that wait on Jehovah shall renew their strength. Our strength wastes by daily use; theirs increases and is renewed. That which would fatigue and exhaust others shall invigorate them. They shall become stronger and stronger. The greater their former weakness the greater their present power.

(2.) They shall mount up with wings as eagles. Many a lofty height shall they ascend and look down on the world beneath them, soaring higher and higher, gazing from Lebanon, and Hermon, and Amana (Song of Solomon 4:8), from the mountains of myrrh, and the hills of frankincense. As God bore Israel through the desert on eagles' wings, so shall they be borne. They who once had not strength to creep or move, have now strength to fly aloft as eagles. Such is the way in which strength comes out of weakness.

(3.) They shall run and not be weary. They are not always flying or soaring; but when running,—running their race here,—they shall not be weary. They shall run with patience, perseverance, success, triumph. Theirs shall be a blessed and untiring race.

(4.) They shall walk and not faint. The greater part of their life is to be a walking. Occasionally they may fly or run; more generally they walk; ever moving onward without ceasing. In this walk they shall not faint. It may be long, but they shall not faint. It may be rough and dark, but they shall not faint. Here then is the unfainting saint, made out of a fainting sinner, by the power of an unfainting God. Wait then, O saint, on God, and thou shalt know his power; how he can uphold and strengthen thee even to the end, that thou mayest be presented faultless before him at his coming. "He keepeth the feet of his saints."

LX.

The Knowledge That Justifies

"By his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many."

Isaiah 53:11

OF whom speaketh the prophet this? Of himself, or of some other man?" said the Ethiopian ruler (Acts 8:34). Of some other man doubtless; of one greater than himself; higher, and yet lower than any of the sons of men. For only of one, in all earth's histories from the beginning could these things be said. Is not his name "Wonderful"? Here we have,

I. The Father's righteous servant. "My righteous servant," says God, as if he had never had another. My servant! My righteous servant! Servant is a name of subjection and obedience, yet also of honour, according to the rank of him whom he serves. As servant he is the doer of the Father's will; the Father's servant for us, and in this sense our servant: "I am among you as he that serveth"; "the son of man came not to be served, but to serve." As servant he is the fulfiller of the law; the obedient One in all things; not pleasing himself, nor doing his own will. "My righteous servant," says God, as delighting in him; for never before had he got such service and such righteousness; divine, yet human service; divine, yet human righteousness. It is of this righteous servant that the whole chapter speaks. It is he who grows up before him as a tender plant, as a root out of a dry ground. It is he in whom men saw no beauty; whom they despised and rejected. It is he who was the man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief. It is he from whom men hid their faces; who was brought as a lamb to the slaughter; who was taken from prison and from judgment; who was cut off out of the land of the living. O wondrous servant! O gracious service! What or where should we be without such a servant and such a service! All we need is ministered to us by thee, freely, liberally, lovingly! Why should we be so slow to own thee as the servant, and to accept thy service in our behalf. Thy life on earth was one of service for us; and thy

life in heaven is still the same. For is not thy intercession, thy advocacy, service of the best and truest kind?

II. This righteous servant justifies. He is no common servant. He is the great Judge of all; the Justifier of the sinner; he who acquits and pardons the guilty. He acted as such on earth, when he said, "Neither do I condemn thee,"—"thy sins be forgiven." He acts as such in heaven. Our justification is in his hands; we go to him to be justified. In one aspect it is the Father that justifies; in another, it is the Son. He "justifies many." All power is given him; judicial power, royal power, priestly power. We get acquittal and acceptance from his priestly-royal hands. Let us then come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy. He sits there to receive sinners. He takes up the case of the condemned,—as such he justifies them, He recognises all their sin and guilt, and then he delivers. They come to him as condemned; he owns the sentence as just; but cancels it,—cancels it for evermore. His justifying sentence reverses the law's condemning sentence. It is with the condemned that he deals; it is them that he pardons. There was justice in the condemnation; there is no less justice in the pardon. The Justifier is the Father's servant; the Word made flesh; the Son of God, who came in the name of the Lord to save us. Grace and righteousness in all their fullness are to be found in him.

III. This righteous servant justifies by his knowledge. The knowledge is the link between the many and justification. He justifies them by giving them the knowledge of himself as the Justifier, and of his work as the justifying thing. Knowledge is not here used in the sense of wisdom or understanding. It means that which he teaches them to know. We are justified by knowing the righteous servant. It is not by working, or praying, or suffering, but by knowing, that we enter on the state of acceptance: "This is life eternal, that they might know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent." This is one of the simplest aspects in which the gospel is presented to us. There is no mystery or darkness here. To know Jesus is to be justified! The justified man can say nothing in his own behalf; nothing good has he found in himself, in his

works, or his feelings, or his character. All is evil, only evil. He is utterly unfit for pardon, according as men judge of fitness. All that he can say for himself is, that he knows Jehovah's righteous servant, and in that knowledge has found deliverance from the wrath and curse. That knowledge has brought him into the state of "no condemnation." Satisfied with that knowledge (though satisfied with nothing about himself) he can say with certainty and gladness, "Who is he that condemneth? "

IV. This righteous servant justifies by bearing the iniquities of those whom he justifies. He justifies as a judge; as a judge giving righteous judgment; righteous judgment in acquitting the unrighteous. The ground on which he justifies is not mere grace; it is also righteousness.

Not that sin is trivial; but that he has borne iniquity in room of the unrighteous. This bearing of iniquity was his great work on earth, from his cradle to his cross. It was laid on him. He took it willingly. He was able to bear it. He has borne it. The sin-bearer has triumphed. The sin-bearing work is done. He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities. The work is done! Iniquity is borne. That which pacifies has been completed. To all this God himself has borne witness.

It is on divine testimony that we rest our belief; and from the promise annexed to this divine testimony we draw the blessed conclusion that, in believing, we shall enter on that peace which has been made. God has given us a testimony to the work of his Son; and he has added the promise, that whosoever believes that testimony is straightway justified. We believe, and are justified. We know that we are so because of the sure word of promise to him who receives the testimony. This is what is called "appropriation." It is the simple conclusion we draw from our believing the testimony. He that believeth hath everlasting life. We believe, and we know therefore, that all this life is ours: "For God is not a man that he should lie."

We shall know when He comes again how much we lost by not crediting this *true testimony*; how much more peaceful, and holy, and successful

would have been our life had we believed that testimony in its simplicity and fullness.

LXI.

The Heritage And Its Title-Deeds

"This is the heritage of the servants of the Lord." —

Isaiah 54:17

IT is of "servants" that God is here speaking,—this is the name he gives them; "servants," yet "heirs:" for it is in connection with the "heritage" that he calls them "servants." The apostle joins together "sons" and "heirs;" here the prophet joins "servants" and "heirs." Israel gets this name,— "servants of Jehovah;" the church gets it; apostles get it; each saint gets it. The dwellers in the old Jerusalem had it; the citizens of the New Jerusalem have it too. "His servants shall serve him." We are to serve as angels do; nay, as Jesus did; for He was the Father's servant. We are to serve the Father; and to serve the Son "the Lord Christ;" we are to serve the church; we are to serve the world; all in love; for it is to loving filial service that we are called.

But it is specially of these two things that the passage speaks: (1.) the heritage; (2.) our title to it.

I. The heritage. It is fully described in the previous part of the chapter; and in reading it we may say, "the lines have fallen unto us in pleasant places; yea we have a goodly heritage." It contains,—

(1.) Deliverance from sorrow and tempest (ver. 11). The time of these has been long; but the day of deliverance longer. It is everlasting deliverance.

(2.) Glory and beauty (ver. 11,12). All that the eye of man or the eye of God delights in, and pronounces good, in earth or heaven, shall be ours.

(3.) Knowledge (ver. 13). We shall be "taught of God;" all of us. No ignorance then, nor unbelief; only wisdom ; not the wisdom of this world,

but of the world to come.

(4.) Peace (ver. 13). "Great peace;" peace like a river; peace that passeth all understanding; God's own peace; within and without; and with the certainty that no future disquietude shall ever arise. Eternal peace; in the land of peace, under the reign of the Prince of Peace.

(5.) Stability (ver. 14). We are to be steadfast and immoveable here; we shall be still more so hereafter; for our heritage is the kingdom that cannot be moved.

(6.) Security (ver. 14). No possibility of evil from any quarter; nothing but good. Security (1.) from oppression, (2.) from alarm, (3.) from enemies, (4.) from war, (5.) from accusations and evil reports.

All these things, negative and positive, go to make up the inheritance of Israel in the latter days; still more the inheritance of the saints in light, the kingdom which cannot be moved, the inheritance which is incorruptible and undefiled. It is the very heaven of heavens; glorious, and marvellous, and perfect beyond conception. Ah, surely this is what eye hath not seen nor ear heard. Because of it God is not ashamed to be called our God.

II. *Our title to it.* "Their righteousness is of me, saith the Lord." This righteousness avails not merely for personal acceptance, but for giving us the inheritance.

This is the tenure by which we hold it, and shall hold it forever. Thus it is secured to us,—secured by God himself; not simply made ours once, but secured to us forever. Our title, then, or tenure, is,

(1.) Divine. It "is of me, saith the Lord." He gives the heritage, and he gives also the title by which it is secured to us. Nay, he gives us a divine title; such as our father had not to Paradise; a title not of self, nor of man, nor of earth, but of God; a title so truly divine that we may say, God

himself is my title to the heritage which God has given me; for the righteousness by which it is secured to me is the righteousness of God. My title-deeds are truly divine; the purchase-money is divine; the conveyance is divine; the security is divine. One with him who bought the heritage for us, we have the same title to it that he has; for we get it through means of his righteousness. As the righteous one, He was the purchaser of the kingdom which He gives to us. His righteousness bought it.

(2.) Righteous. This is implied in the expression, "their righteousness is of me," intimating that it is by righteousness that the heritage is secured to us. This heritage is more than the mere gift of love; it is the gift of righteousness. We get it in a righteous way; we hold it in virtue of a righteous price paid for it; our security for it is more than the grace of God; it is the righteousness of God. Our pardon is a righteous pardon, so is our title a righteous title,—divinely righteous,—a title which the law recognises, and which the law will make good to us against all opposers or counter-claimants, if such there be. "If God be for us, who shall be against us?" In our title-deeds there is no flaw nor ambiguity, for they are drawn up by a righteous God, subscribed by a righteous God, and presented to us by a righteous God. Everything connected with our entrance into, and possession of, the heritage is in righteousness.

(3.) Free. Our heritage is a "purchased possession;" purchased for us by another; fully paid for by a divine equivalent; so fully paid for that there is nothing for us to pay. All is free. Canaan was God's free gift to Israel, so the inheritance is God's free gift to us. We could not pay, were it needed; and we do not need. All payment is refused. It is so precious that none save God could pay a price for it: and He has paid the price. As life is free, and salvation free, so is the heritage; absolutely and unconditionally free; free in the sense of unbought; free in the sense of undeserved; free in the sense of its being the gift of God.

(4.) Eternal. Our title, being thus divine and righteous, must be indefeasible. It must stand forever. An eternal title to an eternal

inheritance,—this is what we rejoice in. Hence the inheritance itself, and all connected with it, are described in language that intimates perpetuity absolutely unending and unlimited. No second fall; no second loss of Paradise. No future tempter nor temptation. We enter to go out no more. For the church is "the blessed of the Lord," to whom it shall be said, "Come ye blessed of my Father." One with the Son of God, "partakers of Christ," "joint heirs with Christ Jesus," our tenure of the inheritance must be as sure and as everlasting as His own.

It is this heritage that God in his gospel is presenting to us. He points to it, as he pointed Israel to Canaan, and says, Yonder is the glory, trust me for it, and you shall enter in.

Israel could not enter in because of unbelief; and so it is only this that shuts the sinner out of the kingdom. We preach the kingdom, and we announce that he who receives God's testimony concerning his only-begotten Son shall obtain it freely. But the word preached does not profit, not being mixed with faith in them who hear it. God's testimony is true; it is a testimony intended specially for sinners. Shall we disregard it? Shall we treat it as worthless? Shall we make Him a liar? Shall we shut the open gate against ourselves? Shall we refuse to enter in? We that have believed do enter into rest. How free, how simple, how ready the entrance! It is God himself who stands at the open door and bids us come; beckons us in. Shall such a heritage be lost to us? Shall such a glory be despised?

LXII.

The Meeting Between The Sinner And God

"Thou meetest him that rejoiceth and worketh righteousness; those that remember thee in thy ways: behold, thou art wroth; for we have sinned; in those is continuance, and we shall be saved." —

Isaiah 64:5

THE verse preceding is quoted by Paul (1 Corinthians 2:9), in reference to "the hidden wisdom which God ordained before the world unto our glory," so that we may take it and our text, as indicating God's thoughts of wisdom as coming out in his dealings with us in Christ; his dealings with Israel, his dealings with the church; as seen both at the first and the second comings of Christ; his dealings with man in grace, that is, according to his own free love. "My thoughts are not your thoughts; neither are your ways my ways." In our text we have a specimen of God's thoughts and ways.

I. God meets man. "Thou meetest." Distance is our natural condition; sin produced it; Adam shewed it; man loves it. As far from God as possible. Depart from us, men say. So the prodigal went into the far country. Man wants no meeting with God. He would rather that the distance were preserved forever. The thought of meeting God is unpleasant. Hence the irksomeness of religion, the weariness of Sabbaths, even though the meeting be of the vaguest and most formal shadowy kind. He must meet Him at the judgment day, but he tries not to think of this, and hopes that he may be ready when it comes. But though man will not draw nigh to God, God draws nigh to man. He does not love the distance and separation. He comes nigh. He did so in the person of the prophets and such like messengers. He did so specially in the Angel of the Covenant, and in the Word made flesh. But his object is not merely to visit earth, but to come up to, to draw near to each of his creatures. He is desirous of a meeting, a loving friendly meeting, not of judgment, or

reproof, or vengeance, but of grace. Isaiah speaks as one who knew this. "Thou meetest," he says; that is, thou art in the habit of doing so. It is thy practice, thy wont to meet the sinner. This is our message in the gospel, God wants to meet you,—to meet each of you. He proposes a meeting. He tells you that there is no coldness nor unwillingness on his part; that all things are ready. Come, meet with me, I wish to meet with you.

II. How does he meet man. In love. As the Lord God merciful and gracious. He meets him as Jesus met the Galilean fishermen, and said,

follow me; as Jesus met the woman of Sychar, Zaccheus, Mary Magdalene. He meets him with pardon and reconciliation. He meets him as Melchizedek met Abraham, to bless him. Man dislikes the meeting, either for blessing or cursing; God desires it, that he may bless.

III. Where does he meet man. At the cross. That is the meeting-place. There is no other. It is a safe one, and a blessed one. There there is no wrath, no condemnation, no darkness. God stands at the cross and cries aloud, Meet me here. Not on a spot of your own choosing, but here on the spot which I have chosen; here where the blood was shed, and Christ's sacrifice offered up. This is the meeting-place. Two meeting-places; one the cross, now; the other the judgment-seat, hereafter. Which do you choose? One you must have.

IV. What men are they whom he meets. Now in what follows we are not to understand that the class is narrowed or restricted; that he shuts out the worst, and will have none of them. The description given refers simply to the footing on which he receives them,—on that footing he is willing to receive any, all. On that footing all may place themselves, and so be sure of a welcome. Our text, however, evidently does not refer exclusively to the first meeting, but to the whole subsequent intercourse, and describes the footing on which that fellowship is to go on and be maintained. There are three things declared as to those with whom God meets; and these three things follow each other in a certain order.

(1.) The rejoicing man. He is one who has found in the gospel glad tidings of great joy; one of those described by David in the 32nd Psalm, a man of blessedness. He has found the rejoicing of the hope; and he holds it to the end. He has accepted the good news, and as such he is accepted of God. God meets him.

(2.) The man that worketh righteousness. (1.) He works,—he is not slothful; (2.) he works righteousness,—good works; (3.) he works righteousness, because he rejoiceth. He does not rejoice because he works, but he works because he rejoices. His joy makes him a worker,— a doer of the will of God; able for suffering or labouring. His life is a doing of righteousness.

(3.) Those that remember thee in thy ways. This corresponds with the apostolic "looking unto Jesus." We remember God,— we remember him in his ways, his footsteps, his doings, as recorded in Scripture. When we call him to remembrance we do so in connection with some of his many ways recorded there.

This meeting is a life-long one. Not yesterday, nor today, nor tomorrow, but continual; begun at conversion, carried on through life, consummated in the kingdom. It is a meeting for pardon; a meeting for fellowship; a meeting for the bestowal of all love and blessing; prelude of the more glorious meeting when Jesus comes the second time to begin his endless reign.

LXIII.

God's Love And God's Way Of Blessing

"Go and proclaim these words toward the north, and say, Return, thou backsliding Israel, saith the Lord, and I will not cause mine anger to fall upon you: for I am merciful, saith the Lord, and I will not keep anger forever. Only acknowledge thine iniquity, that thou hast transgressed against the Lord thy God, and hast scattered thy ways to the strangers under every green tree, and ye have not obeyed my voice, saith the Lord." —

Jeremiah 3:12,13

LET us mark here two things: (1.) God's message of love; (2.) His way of blessing.

I. God's message of love. He is evidently in earnest about this. There is nothing of coldness, or delay, or insincerity. He calls a messenger, a special messenger, for the occasion. He sends him out with, "Go," as did our Lord, "Go ye into all nations"; like an arrow from a bow. "Proclaim," speak, lift up thy voice like a herald, that all may hear, and that there may be no mistake. "Toward the north," where "backsliding Israel" dwelt, and where her idolatries were practised, as Bethel and Samaria; it is like, "Begin at Jerusalem"; go to the worst, to the very centre of the sin and the evil; go to Bethel, go to Samaria, go to the chief of sinners; go to the backslider, the apostate, the idolater. And with what message? The message of love and reconciliation! The chief point of the message is the word "return." Like the prodigal they had departed; and the Father's voice calls to them, "Come back," come back to me. God speaks as one in earnest; as a father; as a father who has lost a child, and yearns over his lost son. "How shall I give thee up" is his feeling; how can I part with thee. God is not indifferent to our departure or our absence. Though he has all heaven, with all its angels, he feels the blank made by one sinner's

departure. The sea feels not the abstraction of a drop, nor the sun of a ray; the monarch of a mighty empire does not feel the departure of one subject, but God feels and mourns over the revolt and alienation of one sinner. While urging home this word, "Return," God enforces it with encouragements and arguments.

(1.) I will not cause mine anger to fall upon you. This is more exactly, "I will not cause my countenance to fall on you"; that is, I will not frown upon you; the words are the same as in describing Cain: "his countenance fell." Instead of the frown shall come the smile upon my countenance: "I will lift up my countenance upon you." This is grace and tender love. The sinner is thus told what he is to expect from God in returning. "When he was yet a great way off, the father saw him," &c.

(2.) I will be merciful. With Jehovah there is mercy; for his name is the Lord God, merciful and gracious. Israel had tried his mercy to the uttermost, but it was not exhausted. Its fullness was undiminished. Where sin had abounded, grace had much more abounded; and the announcement here of his mercy is to tell Israel that all their backslidings, and apostasies, and idolatries had not altered or lessened that mercy. It was mercy to the uttermost, mercy to the last.

(3.) I will not keep anger forever. Indirectly this tells the terrible truth that there had been, and was still, anger against them. In wrath he had smitten them and scattered them. It had lain heavy and sore upon them. But it was not to be perpetual anger. "His anger is but a moment"; it passes away, and he teaches Israel to sing, "Though thou wast angry with me, thine anger is turned away."

Such is God's message of love; sent in truth and earnestness to Israel; sent with no less truth and earnestness to us! Return and be forgiven! Return and be blest! Return and let me pour out on you the fullness of my forgiving love!

II. *The way of blessing.* There is but one way to this; not merit, or goodness, or labour, or earnestness, but simply acknowledgment of sin. In this acknowledgment there is nothing meritorious, nothing *in itself* fitted to attract or secure blessing. But it is the way of God's appointment; it is the channel through which the forgiveness flows; it places us on that footing in which alone God can bless the sinner. So long as there is on the part of the sinner the slightest thought that he deserves to be blessed, that God ought to bless him, that he has done or felt anything which makes him more fit or qualified for blessing, he is not in a position in which God can be glorified in blessing him; nay, he is retaining that selfrighteous position which renders it impossible that God can honourably and righteously bless him. But the moment that he forgoes all claims, and takes the sinner's place before God, as one deserving nothing, that moment he is in the position in which God can and will bless.

"Only acknowledge"! These are his words to us, announcing the way of blessing. "Only acknowledge"! Thus he speaks to us still (1 John 1:9).

The particulars of the acknowledgment follow: (1.) iniquity; (2.) transgression against the Lord our God; (3.) going after idols; (4.) not obeying the voice of Jehovah. Just the sins in particular that Israel had committed. It is this particular enumeration of sin that he asks of us. Go into particulars when you come before the Lord. Beware of *general* confessions. They do not touch the conscience, and they do not reach God. Be very special and minute in all that you tell God concerning your sins. Yet with the full confidence of receiving pardon; for if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins.

Only acknowledge! This is the one thing that God asks; it is the one thing that the sinner shrinks from. For it brings him down so far. It strips him absolutely of all goodness. Yet on no other footing will God deal with any sinner. So was it in the case of the Pharisee and the publican. This was Laodicea's special sin; refusal to acknowledge poverty. It was to this that the Lord urged her. So he urges us. It is our pride that stands between us and blessing. Take the sinner's place and all is ours. Let us deal with him

now as sinners; and when he comes again he will own us as sons and heirs.

LXIV.

Divine Jealousy For The Truth

"O Lord, are not thine eyes upon the truth?" —

Jeremiah 5:3

THIS first clause of the third verse should be connected with the two previous verses, in which the Lord complains that truth was gone from his city and his people; that even when swearing by his name men disregarded it. Jerusalem had become a city of falsehood; Israel a nation of false men.

They said, God regardeth it not. He allows the speaker of falsehood to go on unpunished. His eyes are not on such men or such things. They are of no moment to him. The prophet breaks in here with his question, his appeal, "O Jehovah, are not thine eyes upon the truth?" Whatever men may say, Dost not thou regard it? Dost not thou abhor the untrue? Dost not thou cut off the liar? Dost thou not condemn him who utters error?

The word "truth" in Scripture refers both to doctrine and practice. It points both to the "error" and the "lie." It classes both together. It condemns both. *False speaking*, whether in reference to teaching or witness-bearing, is declared to be abominable to God. His eyes are upon the truth. They watch over it, to guard it and to maintain it. The eyes of Jehovah are upon the truth, whatever men may say; and that which is *untrue*, whatever form it takes, he marks and will avenge; the untrue thing, whatever its nature or object, the untrue word, the untrue look, the untrue act, private or public, is not tolerated by him, though tolerated by man, and though God himself bear long with it.

The theory of many is that God's eyes are not upon the truth, and that therefore a man may believe what he pleases, and say what he likes, without fearing God's displeasure. It is only when the untrue thing which

he thinks and says interferes with human rights, or social privileges that he is to be visited with punishment. Jehovah's eyes, then, are upon the truth,— the truth as found on earth among the sons of men.

I. They are watchful eyes. They close not. He whose eyes they are neither slumbereth nor sleepeth. Not a sound, a thought, a word from pen or lip, but He notices. He who sees the sparrows, numbers the hairs, and feeds the ravens, has His eye on all human utterances, all writings of man, books or tracts, all openings of man's lips in private or public.

II. They are discerning eyes. They are like flames of fire. They search and try everything. There is no indifference about their gaze. They are keen to discriminate between truth and error. They are the eyes of a judge who loves the true and hates the false. Man thinks whatever is earnestly spoken is good; not so with God. He discerns, he judges, he sifts, he tries every word, every phrase, every thought, every plan. There is such a thing as divine censorship, minute but unerring criticism.

III. They are just eyes. They do not make a man an offender for a word, yet they weigh everything in equal balances. There is no overvaluing nor under-valuing what is spoken or written. Each thing is judged without favour or partiality, and it is approved or condemned according as it is true or false. The standard of measurement is divine and perfect. No bribery here, no acceptance of man's person whether poor or rich. It is "just judgment," a just verdict that is pronounced. The righteous Lord loveth righteousness. With nothing less than truth, in every sense, will he be satisfied. Truth from man; truth between himself and man, truth between man and man; the true word, the true thought, the true look, and voice, and tone.

In this watchfulness, this discernment, this justice, there are some things specially to be observed.

1. There is but one standard of truth. God fixes the standard and acts on it, without caprice, or partiality, or compromise. Error is a thousand-

fold,—pliable, moveable, uncertain,—truth is ONE. On this God calls on us to act, on this he acts himself. So that man cannot excuse his error or his falsehood on the ground that there were more standards than one.

2. This one standard is definite. It is not vague or shadowy. It does not merely settle certain great principles, but smaller ones as well. It is so very definite and precise as to leave man without excuse. It lets man know explicitly God's present estimate of truth and falsehood, as well as his future judgment on these. It is so distinct that no one with an open ear and eye can hesitate about it. In our day men call this narrowness, bigotry, littleness. But if we only insist on being of one mind with God, he that condemns us condemns God himself. Let us be as broad as he is, but no broader; that is enough, whatever the age may say.

3. That one standard is universal. It is for every age and clime. It never becomes obsolete. It is like God himself,—unchangeable; like the Christ of God,—the same yesterday, today, and forever. It was given to our fathers, it is given to us. It suited the East, it suits the West. It suited the Jew, it suits the Gentile also; barbarian, Scythian, bond, or free. It suited the Asian, it suits the European. It suits the Briton, it suits the Indian, and the African. It suits the unlearned, it suits the learned too. One standard for all! One universal test or measurement of truth.

4. That one standard is the Bible. It is no secret standard that He judges us by, or by which He tests truth and error. The test which He gives to us He acts upon himself. The Bible is His book of truth as well as ours. That book contains what God calls truth,—truth definite, fixed, certain, not moveable, nor waxing obsolete, nor falling behind the age.

The Bible is the one book of the age, nay, of the ages,—of all ages and all climes. Man's present unbelief seeks to loosen its authority, to dilute its statements, to render indefinite its doctrines. But the word of the Lord endureth forever. God is not a man that he should lie. His word is sure, his truth is everlasting, his book is like the sun in the firmament; a light for all ages and lands.

Thus God's eyes are on the truth. It is truth that he delights in, it is error that he abhors. It is truth that he is seeking for among the sons of men. What a condemnation to the laxity of thought in the present day! As if man were at liberty to think as he pleases, irrespective of God and his book! God watches over the truth; he marks each error, each deviation from his one standard.

O man, hast thou received the very truth, and the whole truth of God? He has given man a book for a standard, not that he may speculate, but that he may not speculate, but believe. What God, in and by that book, demands of men is not criticism, opinion, speculation, but BELIEF. God's eyes are on the truth, to see if men believe it.

The day is at hand, the great day of the Lord, when TRUTH only shall be set on high, and error put to shame. O man, God's eyes are on the truth, let thine be on it too. Be true to truth; be true to thyself; be true to God.

LXV.

Divine Love And Human Rejection Of It

"I hearkened and heard, but they spake not aright: no man repented him of his wickedness, saying, What have I done? every one turned to his course, as the horse rusheth into the battle. Yea, the stork in the heaven knoweth her appointed times; and the turtle, and the crane, and the swallow, observe the time of their coming; but my people know not the judgments of the Lord." —

Jeremiah 8:6,7

THE prophet is predicting judgment upon rebellious Israel; he is depicting the woes that were suspended over Jerusalem, like the sword of the destroying angel, sorrow upon sorrow, terror upon terror, death upon death.

Through this infinite gloom there shoot rays of light, as once and again God makes mention of his love; and how brightly do these words of love gleam through the terrible darkness! But Israel quenches all these beams; he will have none of them, he loves the darkness rather than the light; he says, Darkness, be thou my light; evil, be thou my good; night, be thou my day. And at last God leaves him to his doom,—"The Lord hath rejected and forsaken the generation of his wrath."

Let us now look at the two sides of the picture—the divine and the human, the heart of God and the heart of man, God's attitude towards man, and man's towards God. For what is written here for Israel is written for us. God's love, and man's rejection of it, are the two points.

I. God's love. "I hearkened and heard, but they spake not aright." He speaks as one on the watch for good, not for evil; like the prodigal's father, looking eagerly out for his son's return. The scene reminds us of Christ's "Oh that thou hadst known." It reminds us of "How shall I give

thee up, O Ephraim"; of "Since I spake against him I do earnestly remember him still." It tells us of God's eager desire to hear the faintest sigh of the returning sinner, His longing to get one word of remembrance from His alienated sons and daughters. It tells us also of God's disappointment at hearing nothing from us,—at man's silence, and distance, and refusal to return.

God is not indifferent to man's position, and danger, and wretchedness. He does not say as we do, "It is his loss, not mine," or, "He has none but himself to blame for it,—let him take it." No such hard-hearted speeches ever come from the lips of our loving God. He never loses sight of us, he pities us, yearns over us, longs to hear the inquiring voice, and the sound of the returning footstep. And when He hears it not, it "grieves Him at the heart," His heart is turned within Him,— His repentings are kindled together.

He is hearkening and listening at our doors, to catch the lowest word or sigh. Each day He listens,—He listened this morning when you rose, He listens now! Oh the joy it would give Him to hear from any of you, "I will arise, and go to my Father." Will you not give Him this joy? Will you grieve him by your silence? Shall His longsuffering not melt you?

II. Man's rejection of it. This is very strongly put in our text; and in several ways and forms.

(1.) The wrong words. He did hear words from them, but not those He wanted; perhaps the words of pride, of selfrighteousness, of blasphemy, of worldliness, of lust; not the prodigal's words, "I will arise," which alone are sweet to Him; perhaps the self-sufficiency of the Pharisee, "I thank thee that I am not as other men," or, "We are lords," or, We are the temple of the Lord; not, God be merciful to me a sinner.

"They spake not aright."

(2.) The impenitence. "No man repented of his wickedness, saying, What have I done." Their hearts were hardened. Goodness and severity had both

failed. There was no sense of sin, no shame because of evil, no dread of danger. Israel's was the impenitent heart. And such is the heart of multitudes amongst us; the heart of our nation, we may say, nay, the heart of our world; would to God that we could not say, the heart of the churches. Impenitence! How dreadful the condition of one to whom this description belongs! Dost thou repent of thy way, O man; dost thou say in bitterness of soul,

"Oh what, what have I done!"

(3.) The recklessness. "Every one turned to his course, as the horse rusheth into the battle." He is blind, madly blind, both to danger and to sin. Furiously he plunges on in evil, from sin to sin, from lust to lust, daring every venture, defying God, braving his anger, setting at nought his threats, scoffing at his judgments, rushing against his buckler, mocking at his hell. How much is there of recklessness amongst us! Recklessness in sin, crime, self-indulgence, pleasure, lust. Utter defiance of God:—bold, unblushing audacity, which nothing will daunt; which mocks at judgments, sorrows, trials, sermons, ministers, and plunges on in evil, treasuring up wrath against the day of wrath.

(4.) Stupidity. "The stork knoweth her appointed times," &c. We were going to say brutish stupidity, but God means to tell us that it is something worse than that. Beast and bird obey the ordained laws and keep to their appointed seasons; they return when the season calls them. But man discerns nothing, heeds nothing; times, laws, seasons, instincts, are all disregarded by him. He is void of understanding, he has closed the eye and ear, his whole intellect has lost its power of perception, not only of duty but of danger. "My people know not the judgment of the Lord." Their heart is waxed gross. They go down lower than the beasts which perish.

Yet God leaves us not. He does not say, Let him alone, in the sense of leave him to perish. He stretches out His hands to us, He bends over us, He is longsuffering, not willing that any should perish; He listens and listens. As He does at the door of the saint (Malachi 3:16), so of the

sinner. What shall He hear? Ephraim bemoaning himself? Or the words of unbelief, and impenitence, and sin?

LXVI.

God's Desire To Bless The Sinner

"Woe unto thee, O Jerusalem! wilt thou not be made clean ? when shall it once be ?" —

Jeremiah 13:27

WITHOUT dwelling on Jerusalem and her apostasy, which this verse specially brings before us, we pass at once to the application of the words to man in general.

I. Man's uncleanness. The uncleanness here spoken of is spiritual, and refers specially to unfaithfulness to God,—the soul's lust and lewdness, its preference for another husband, and its desire for another love than that of God. It was with this spiritual adultery that God so often charged Israel and Jerusalem; it is with this he charges the church; and with this the whole race. We are unfaithful to God!

(1.) In heart. It was meant that he should have the first place there; he has the last, if any place at all. He is shut out from our love. We love others, but not God; the world, but not God; friends, but not God; money, but not God. O man, thy heart is false to God; unfaithful in all its movements.

(2.) In life. As is the heart, so is the life; as is the inner, so is the outer man. God is not in our life. He is excluded from every part; thrust into a corner. Life is devoted to other objects. It is false to him. Word, deed, plan, behaviour, business, education; life in all its movements, life in all its enjoyments, is false to God.

(3.) In religion. A man's religion is often the most untrue and hollow part of his life. In it he is more false to God than in any other of his actings. In religion he professedly comes nearest to God; yet in it he is often farthest

away. In it he is like Jerusalem committing spiritual adultery,—worshipping false gods, while pretending to worship the true.

Such is man in relation to God! All falsehood, unfaithfulness, lewdness. There is no part clean.

II. God's desire that we should be clean. He desireth truth in the inward parts. He is faithful to us, and he wishes us to be faithful to him. God is not indifferent to our unfaithfulness, as if it mattered not to him. Nor does he treat it as a mere affront, or only as a sin, with which he is angry and which he condemns and will avenge. He wants our heart, our whole undivided heart; he wants it all for himself; he wants to fill it. He is a jealous God. Moreover he pities us because of the misery which our unfaithfulness brings on us. He sees us gaining nothing, but losing everything by it; and he pities us; he yearns over us; for our own sakes he desires to see us faithful to himself. Such is the God with whom we have to do. He is one who takes a deep and loving interest in our welfare, and who pities us even when he judges us.

III. His expostulation with us. Wilt thou not be made clean; when shall it once be? These are earnest words; words of solemn and urgent appeal to us. His pity is not idle. He comes down to us. He speaks to us. He stretches out his hands to us. Wilt thou? Wilt thou not? When shall it be? Shall it not be now? Can words be more energetic, more personal, more explicit and direct? Every man must feel himself spoken to; spoken to most urgently; entreated, besought, expostulated with. He wants us to be cleansed,—to turn, to seek his face, to give him our loyal love; he wants this immediately. Not a day to be lost. The time past has been enough, nay, too long. He presses us with his solemn, urgent, loving now! No delay, no lingering, no hesitation. Give up your unbelief, and give it up now. Give up your idolatry, and give it up now. Turn to me, and turn now. Love me, and love me now.

Our refusal. The passage takes for granted our refusal. Man rejects God, refuses to give him his heart,—deliberately persists in hypocrisy,

insincerity, and unfaithfulness. As much externalism as can be asked he will give; but nothing beyond this. Words he will give, but nothing more. Sacrifices, ceremonies, incense, music, the bended knee, the religious voice and tone; all these he will give, but not the heart. That he deliberately refuses; —refuses to love God, to trust God, to obey God, to give God anything but the service of the outer man,—of the lip, the knee, the body.

God's condemnation. Woe unto thee, O Jerusalem! It was this word that our Lord took up, when he uttered woes against the cities of Galilee. How much is involved in that woe! It is the woe of God! He means what he says. His threats are not empty. He will execute his vengeance in the day of vengeance.

Woe to every one that loves not God; that loves the creature better than the creator; that has given his heart to the world in preference to God.

Woe to him who is unfaithful to God; who worships him with the outer man but withholds the inner.

Woe to him whose religion is all unfaithfulness; who exhibits his dislike of God in those very acts in which he deals with God.

Yet he who utters *woe*, utters also *come* (Matthew 11:21,28). And between these two are the sons of men. These are the two words which he sounds aloud to us; making us to feel his profound sincerity and his unutterable love.

LXVII.

The Resting-Place Forgotten

"They have forgotten their resting-place." —

Jeremiah 50:6

IT was of Israel's apostasy that the prophet spoke. As Moses said, "Of the rock that begat thee thou art unmindful, and hast forgotten the God that formed thee" (Deuteronomy 32:18). So here Jeremiah says, "They have forgotten their resting-place." Thus it is with man! He has forgotten his resting-place! He has left God! "There is in him the evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God."

I. The resting-place. Israel had a resting-place. He is compared to a sheep who had a fold, and a shepherd, and pasture. That fold or resting-place was Jehovah's temple in the holy city; or you may say, Jehovah himself. They forsook him and his temple to serve other gods. Yet still he was their resting-place; a place for their rest, if they would but have taken it. So is it with man, the sinner. There is a resting-place for him. He needs it, and God has provided it. It is his resting-place. It is God himself,—Christ Jesus, in whom there is "rest,"—"I will give you rest." As he is our "hiding-place," so he is our "resting-place." In him there is divine provision made for giving rest to the weary. He is the God-man, and that is rest; He is the propitiation for our sins, and that is rest; so that, as the sin-bearer, and the burden-bearer, he is our rest. In him is contained, and presented to us, the great love of God. As the protection from wrath, as the shadow from the heat, as the security from danger, as the divine fullness of all needed blessing, he is our resting-place. The Father knowing what we needed, has made provision in him for us. All that can give a sinner rest is contained in him; for Christ is all and in all. There is but one resting-place; not many. He who gains it has enough; he who misses it, misses everything; for there is no other resting-place for Israel

or for us. One rock, one refuge, one foundation, one salvation, one resting-place!

II. Man's forgetfulness of it. The simple charge here against Israel is that of forgetting the resting-place. No strong words are used, such as despising, or dishonouring, or rejecting. All these may be true, but God confines himself to the mildest and simplest, that no man may evade the charge, or console his conscience with the thought that the description is exaggerated. God simply charges him with "forgetfulness." This "resting place" is not prized nor used; it is forgotten; it is out of sight, out of mind, out of heart. This forgetfulness is strange and unaccountable. There are so many reasons why he should not forget it.

(1.) It is so needful. He cannot dispense with it. Other things may be, this must be. To a weary soul, what so necessary as a resting-place?

(2.) It is so blessed. It contains both rest and blessedness. It is not like sleep, or the insensibility produced by opiates. It is blessedness, as well as rest.

(3.) It has been provided at such a cost. God knew that man needed it, and how much he needed it, and he provided it at an infinite cost.

Yet in spite of all this the fact remains,—he does forget it. How and why is this?

(1.) He does not feel his need of it. He thinks he can do without it. He has others. He has Abana and Pharpar, which are to him better than Jordan.

(2.) He does not know how blessed it would make him. What a rest it would be to him in his day of weariness. His thoughts of blessedness are all earthly and carnal.

(3.) He hates the God that provided it. The natural heart is full of this hatred. Hatred of God must lead men to seek to put all remembrance of

the rest out of mind.

(4.) He hates its provisions. Its provisions are holy and righteous. They are all connected with God himself. And hence man's object is to close his eyes and ears against a rest whose provisions and characteristics are all holy and divine.

III. Man's preference for other rests. We ought not to call them rests, for they are not so. They are labour and weariness, sorrow and trouble. Israel wandered like lost sheep, from mountain to hill, in search of other rests, as if anything were better than God's. So does man. He wanders about seeking rest, and finding none. But poor as the other rests are, man prefers them to that of One in whom he has no delight. The sinner is weary, and he seeks rest. He seeks it for himself. He goes from place to place, from object to object, seeking rest. Each one is poor, but he prefers it to God and to God's rest. This preference of creature-objects as the soul's rest is unspeakably sad and sinful; yet it is universal. There is hardly any object in creation which man has not tried, in preference, deliberate preference, to God. For it is all deliberate. It is not hasty, nor sudden, nor transient, but prolonged and resolute,—thoroughly wilful. It is this deliberate preference of other resting-places for the soul that is the great aggravation of his apostasy.

IV. The evil of all this. It is thoroughly evil; evil without palliation or excuse; evil towards God, and evil to himself. It brings punishment with it; it leaves the soul unsatisfied.

(1.) It brings punishment with it. God avenges this forgetfulness, this preference of other objects; for God is jealous. He chastened Israel; he does so to the sinner, both here and hereafter. God does not let us suppose that he overlooks the sin. He judges the sinner, and will judge him hereafter. He shews us how he resents the dishonour. Many a sorrow of earth is God's stroke of vengeance because of this forgetfulness. And will not hell be the completed vengeance of Jehovah because of this? God

sends blight here on man for this contempt of the resting-place. But the eternal blight hereafter is infinitely terrible.

(2.) It leaves the soul unsatisfied. It fills no part of it; it does nothing to make it happy. It may drown the awful sense of emptiness for a while, but that is all. The weariness returns; and still the soul asks, Who will shew us any good? No amount of pleasure, or excitement, or gaiety, or business can remove the weariness. Rather is that weariness increased the more it is tried to be removed.

1. Do you know that there is a resting-place? Have you not heard the report of it? There is such a thing as rest in a weary world. The goodness of it has gone abroad, Do not say then, it is vain to think to be happy; rest is impossible here. There is a resting-place.

2. Do you know what and where that resting-place is? It is to be found in God and his Son Christ Jesus. It is not afar off, but near. It is not inaccessible, but quite open and approachable. It is not costly, but free: "Come unto me, and I will give you rest."

3. Are you forgetting it, and preferring other rests to it? Most men are doing so. Are you? This is the way of the world; is it your way? Are you a forgetter of the rest? You may be no open sinner, but are you a forgetter of the rest?

4. Do you know the peril of so doing? It is misery here, it is woe hereafter. The wrath of God abideth upon you. That soul of yours is sad even in the midst of pleasure. Your prospects are fearful in the extreme; for what but everlasting burnings are in store for them that forget God, or forget the restingplace? Take the resting-place as it is. It is sufficient for you. It will remove your weariness. Go then and rest.

LXVIII.

The Day That Will Right All Wrongs

"Thou wilt bring the day that thou hast called." —

Lamentations 1:21

THIS is the voice of faith; sorrowful faith, yet still faith,—faith anticipating the coming day of right and truth. Jerusalem had fallen, her sons had gone into captivity, her walls and gates were in ruins, her streets were red with blood, her enemies were triumphant, and worse than all, her own sins had gone up to the heavens and brought down on her this terrible vengeance. In the midst of all this Jeremiah sits and mourns. All around is dark. There is only one bright spot, and that is in the distant future; the arrival of the day which God had "called" or summoned. For he looks up to God as the righteous Judge, the avenger of the wrongs of Israel as well as the punisher of her sins. He comforts himself by the thought that "God hath appointed (or called, that is, proclaimed) a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness." This is Jeremiah's one hope, the solitary ray of light in the midst of utter gloom.

So is it with us now. We are troubled with the evil that surrounds us. The wicked triumph. The good are few, and their names are cast out as evil. Evil men and seducers wax worse and worse. We are helpless in the midst of all this sin and blasphemy and defiance of God. What, then, is our consolation? That God will bring the day that he has "called;" that man's day and Satan's day shall not last forever, but that God's day is at hand; for he that shall come will come and will not tarry. Having done our utmost to arrest the flood of iniquity, to maintain the cause of God, to lift up a banner for the truth; and feeling that we are wholly impotent against the powers of earth and hell, we call to mind the promise that God has appointed a day for setting all things right, and we fall back on this sure word, comforting ourselves with the thought that the cause is really God's,

and not ours, and that He will vindicate it in due time. This enables us to possess our souls in patience.

God, by his prophet Amos (v. 18) speaks of this day, 'and of those who look for it, thus, "Woe unto you that desire the day of the Lord, to what end is it for you? "As if he would say, Ye know not what ye are doing; why do you desire that day? It is darkness, and not light. And this is, indeed, one awful aspect of the coming day. It is not to be desired, but dreaded. But there is another aspect of it, so that it is a day to be desired, not dreaded. Let us speak of the reasons why a believing man should desire the judgment-day and the judgment-seat, and looking up calmly, should say to God with longing heart, Thou wilt bring the day that Thou hast called; —should respond to words of Christ regarding his arrival, with "Amen, even so come, Lord Jesus."

I. God shall no longer be shut out of His own world. He is now excluded. Jehovah is not the God of this world. Man shuts Him out, and has done so from the first. Depart from us, is the world's all but unanimous voice. In so far as the individual will, or the united will of humanity can do it, God has been shut out. But when the day that God has called shall arrive, God shall interpose. He shall come in and shew Himself. He shall take to Himself His great power and reign. What a world it will be when God shall no longer be shut out! In vain men strive to banish Him. They may do so for a little, but the day of God is coming. He will force open the world's long shut gates, and enter triumphantly.

II. Christ shall no longer be denied and blasphemed. The special enmity of the race has been directed against the Son, the Christ of God; against Him in whom God specially reveals himself. It is Him that men deny and blaspheme. A Christ in some shape they may own, but not the Christ of God. The Christ of Socinus, or Strauss, or Renan, or Colenso, they will tolerate, but at aught beyond this they scoff and gnash their teeth. How often are our souls troubled, and our hearts all but broken, at the sounds of blasphemy, the utterances of hatred against Christ. Then we fall back on the promise regarding the coming day, when Christ shall be

exalted and His name honoured! O day to be desired, when thus it shall be! Lord, hasten the day that Thou hast called.

III. Evil shall no longer prevail. God's will shall be done on earth as it is in heaven. The world shall be no longer what it now is. Satan shall no more have dominion, as the god of this world, the prince of the power of the air; he shall be dethroned and bound. Antichrist shall no longer have power, but be smitten. Iniquity shall no more overflow. The curse shall pass away, and creation be delivered. The cry of the preacher (Ecclesiastes 1:8) shall no more be heard, all things are full of labour, vanity of vanities, all is vanity. Man shall not put light for darkness, or darkness for light, nor call evil good and good evil. The vile person shall no more be called liberal, nor the churl said to be bountiful. The effects of the fall shall disappear, and all things be made new.

IV. Error shall give place to truth. The first sin was at once an error and a disobedience. Man allowed dark and untrue thoughts of God to come in. Since then error has overflowed the earth like a deluge. It has spread, and ramified, and multiplied. Out of God's book of truth men have (in perverse ways) drawn errors and falsehoods innumerable. Some of the worst untruths have been those professedly deduced from the book of truth. Nay, and men glory in error, provided it be either clever or earnest. They call it speculation, philosophy, free thought. Yet all error is sin. And we find error everywhere; in the world and in the church. God is dishonoured by it. His Son is denied. His book is set aside or misinterpreted. But when man's day is over, and God's day shall come,

then error shall depart, and truth shall flourish. False science, vain philosophy, impure literature shall no more be known. True knowledge shall cover earth and fill the souls of men. Truth shall then be prized and exalted when He who is the truth and the true One shall reign. His throne shall be the throne of truth; His crown the crown of truth. His light shall put darkness to flight. Every falsehood and unreality shall disappear. All shall be real and true.

V. The saints of God shall be no more maligned. All along, hatred, contempt, misrepresentation, have been their portion. All manner of evil has been spoken and written concerning them, both in life and after death. They have been treated as the offscouring of all things. But when that day shall come which God has called, this shall be all reversed. Their lives shall be all re-written, and that by a divine hand; no misrepresentation, no falsehood there. The one-sided or malevolent histories that have calumniated them shall vanish. God himself shall proclaim their true character and noble deeds or sacrifices, which the world denied or sneered at. We shall have new and noble volumes of "worthies," of saints and martyrs whose names the world never introduced into its histories. What a day of redressing injuries and righting the wronged shall God's day be! Let us then be patient under the calumnies of evil men. Let ungodly historians vilify our noblest men,—our Reformers, our Covenanters. Let them slander Knox and Calvin,—or Melville and Rutherford,—or Whitefield and the evangelists of his age; the day of redress is coming. The falsehoods will not always lie upon their memories. God himself shall undertake their vindication, to the confusion of their slanderers. What a day for the clearing up of characters, and the placing of events, and words, and deeds in their proper light. Then shall the lie be answered, the accusation confuted before the universe. Then shall the righteous shine as the sun in the kingdom of their Father.

Let us then rest in hope. Let us be patient. Let us meekly bear wrongs and reproaches. He that believeth doth not make haste. This is night; but the morning .cometh. Let us rejoice in the prospect of it, and do our work regardless of present censure and reproach, anticipating the "well done" of the great Master and Judge. He standeth before the door.

LXIX.

The Glory And The Love

"This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord!" —

Ezekiel 1:28

THE Book of Ezekiel corresponds in many respects with the Apocalypse. These books begin and end much in the same way; only the Old Testament prophet takes more the earthly aspects of things, the New Testament prophet the heavenly. Ezekiel's first chapter is a description of the shekinah and cherubim, John's first chapter is a description of Christ himself. Ezekiel's last chapters relate to Israel and the earthly Jerusalem, John's to the church and the heavenly Jerusalem.

Ezekiel's is the first full description we have of the shekinah and the cherubim. They are often alluded to in Jewish history; Isaiah specially mentions them; but they are described only here. Much about them was probably known to the Jews; for the high priest once a year was permitted to look upon them, and would relate when he came out what he saw; at least we do not read that what he saw when he went in were among the unspeakable things "which it is not lawful for a man to utter." But here the prophet is inspired to write down the details of the "great sight" in the holy of holies.

God was about to remove the glory from Israel; but before doing so, he does two things. He first describes the glory, that Israel might know what they were losing; and secondly, He gives his reasons for removing it (ver. 12), the sins of Jerusalem and of Israel. This, first chapter is a description of the glory, and the following chapters contain the reasons for the withdrawal; while the concluding chapters contain a prediction of its return in greater splendour,—never again to depart; the intermediate chapters containing God's judgments on those Gentile nations which were

more or less in connection with Israel. Thus the book of Ezekiel is connected in all its parts throughout; simple, yet complete in its object and execution.

Let us mark the several words of our text—each of them full of meaning.

I. The Lord. That is, Jehovah. This is sometimes the name of Godhead; but more frequently (and originally) Messiah's name. In the New Testament, "Lord" is almost always the name of Christ. Here in Ezekiel it may be either or both. That which is seen there relates to God;—to the Godhead;—but then it is in Messiah, in the Word made flesh, that God comes into sight. So that while what the prophet saw relates to Godhead,—it does so in connection with Messiah as the manifestation or revelation of Godhead.

II. The glory. Jehovah is the glorious One. To him we ascribe the GLORY,—that is, all infinite perfection and excellence. That which we call his "perfections," Scripture calls his "glory." It was this glory which Moses prayed to see; and it was this which God made known to him when He passed by and proclaimed His name (Exodus 33:22; 34:6,7). It was something infinitely admirable, perfect, loveable; solemn and awful, yet beautiful and attractive. It is the full glory of the Lord that we behold in Jesus.

III. The likeness. The word is the same as in Genesis 1:26, "After our likeness" and occurs more frequently in Ezekiel than in all Scripture beside. Man was originally God's "likeness;" but this being defaced, God makes another and more perfect likeness of Himself. The full development of this "likeness" is in Jesus Christ, "the express image of his person;" but there was an imperfect foreshadowing of this in that which was placed in the tabernacle and temple,—which "dwelt between the cherubim," or rather, which "inhabited the cherubim." Every other "likeness," or attempt to make a likeness, God has forbidden. For none can reveal God but himself.

IV. The appearance. That is "the vision" that met the eye,— the rays streaming from the glory; the brightness or "offshining" of the glory, as Paul expresses it (Hebrews 1:3); the "light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (2 Corinthians 4:6). The "vision," or "appearance," or "visible form," was meant for man's eye to look upon,— it was the visible representation of the invisible God, in such a way as should reveal the glory to creatures who otherwise cannot see God,—the "King eternal, immortal, and invisible. "

Thus God gave to Israel a glorious discovery of himself, a visible manifestation of his invisible perfections,—a perfect embodiment to man's creature-senses of God's character and excellencies; so that by looking to it man might know God, in his love, his greatness, his holiness, his majesty. All this was afterwards gathered up and embodied in the man Christ Jesus. Old Testament saints thus got glimpses of God and of his glory; enough to gladden them and produce happy confidence, but not enough fully to satisfy; for all these appearances said, There is still something behind, something still to come; and that something was nothing less than the only begotten of the Father. So is it said to us, "There is much yet to be revealed,"—"good things to come."

The residence of this glory in the temple was the special mark of God's favour to Israel,—his special honour bestowed on Jerusalem. For ages that glory dwelt in that city, among that people. Its presence proclaimed the love of God, and his desire that Israel should know him. When, therefore, Israel had sinned beyond divine forbearance, God marked his condemnation and displeasure by removing the glory. But before He did so, he warned, and threatened, and entreated; then when he could bear their sins no longer, he sent his prophets to announce the departure of the glory. But even to the last his long-suffering shews itself, just as when Jesus wept over Jerusalem. The glory first comes out from the sanctuary, and lingers at the threshold,—unwilling to leave. Then it takes its place over the city,—lingering, and unwilling to leave. Then it goes to the mount of Olives,—still fondly lingering, desirous if possible to remain in

the beloved city. Then at last, when every message is vain, it takes to itself wings and vanishes away.

What a lesson is here! What love, what pity, what longsuffering, what yearning! Truly the Lord "hateth putting away." He would fain abide in the place of which He had said, "This is my rest." Slowly, slowly he turns away from it; by that lingering slowness inviting them to ask him to return,—to lift the universal cry, Stay, oh stay! And he would have stayed; even at the last; but Israel would have none of Him. Rather did they pray Him to depart out of their coasts.

Thus God lingers over his well-beloved world! Why this long delay of judgment? Why these ages of suspended wrath?

Iniquity abounds, yet God smites not. Men provoke Him to the uttermost, yet he yearns over them with his old unwearied utterance of love, "How shall I give thee up?" He has not forgotten his threatenings. He is not trifling with sin, nor indifferent to the crimes of earth. But he is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. Yes; the meaning of the delay and the longsuffering is SALVATION. He has no pleasure in the death of the wicked. He would fain spare even Sodom, much more Jerusalem. For God is love, and the last days of earth's apostasy will yet bear testimony to the sincerity of his messages,—to the riches of divine grace; to the unquenched love of God.

LXX.

False Religion And Its Doom

"I will scatter your bones round about your altars." —

Ezekiel 6:5

IT is of Israel's idolatries that the prophet is speaking; her false gods, her idol-altars, her lying prophets and priests. Jehovah abhorred them, for he is a jealous God, and with him there is but one religion, one creed, one Bible, one God. Men may speak of their right to believe as they please, and worship as they think fit. But God claims the right of deciding for us in these things. We are not under man in these, but we are under God. He will not tolerate falsehood, or error, or unbelief, or superstition, or anything inconsistent with His revelation. Every false religion He will destroy, every false religionist He will condemn. The true and the false religion are in His eyes as far asunder as east and west, as unlike as night and day. There can be no compromise, no fellowship of light with darkness, of Christ with Belial, of the believer with the infidel. God is not a man that he should lie, or that he should overlook the lies of others. If he is the true God, let us follow him, let us worship him in spirit and in truth. Man says that he wants sincerity and earnestness; but what God asks is truth, THE truth, the one truth, the one religion which he has revealed. Mark these three things, (1.) false religion; (2.) its uselessness; (3.) its hatefulness; (4.) its doom.

I. False religion. There is such a thing as false religion. It may be earnest and zealous, yet false. No amount of sincerity or zeal will make that true which is in itself false. False religion is the worship of a false God, or the false worship of the true God. In general both are mixed, though in different proportions. To worship Baal or Molech would be to worship a false God. But have we not, unconsciously, perhaps, many Baals and Molechs, which we worship under the name of Jehovah, as the statue of Jupiter at Rome is adored as that of Peter. We worship a false god when

we do not worship the very God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ; and we worship the true God untruly when we give him only half a heart, half a soul, when we go to Him with the doubt, and the gloom, and the unbelief that belong to Baal. Go to Baal with your uncertain and doubtful worship, go not to the living God, and think not that the utterance of some true words or the expression of a little sentimental devotion is the true worship of the true God.

II. Its uselessness. It profits nothing and nobody, either here or hereafter. It is not acceptable to God. It will not be counted a substitute for the true. It does not satisfy the conscience. It does not make the man happy. It does not fill the heart. It does not heal diseases nor remove burdens. It does not give a man a good hope toward God, or brighten his prospects for eternity. It is irksome and unprofitable, only cheating the poor worshipper into the belief that he has felt or performed something good and worthy. It will not stand the fire. It is but wood, and hay, and stubble. The judgment will sweep it all away. It does neither for time nor eternity, neither for earth nor heaven. It is so unreal.

III. Its hatefulness. God abhors it. It has not one feature that is pleasing to Him. It is outward, it is untrue, it is against His revelation, it is dishonouring, it is self-exalting. Therefore God abhors it. He wants the heart, it has not that. He wants love, trust, peace, joy, child-like confidence, reverence; it has none of these. It is deficient in every essential element that God expects in worship. Against false worship His prophets were commanded to speak. It was as smoke in His nostrils,—abominable in His eyes. It is hateful in itself, it makes the worshipper hateful, it is pure mockery. It is rottenness and death; a skeleton, not a thing of flesh and blood, a mouthful of words, a handful of dust and ashes. Surely it is hateful to Him who is true, who desireth truth in the inward parts.

IV. Its doom. The worship shall be destroyed and the worshipper covered with shame and everlasting contempt. The scattering of the bones of the worshippers round the altars (2 Kings 23:16), like that of mingling

their blood with their sacrifices, was the indication of utter contempt as well as condemnation. It was vengeance extending even to the dust, (1.) Certain condemnation, for God is to do it, and he will not lie. (2.) Utter condemnation, for here is God's hand interposing to judge completely. (3.) Visible condemnation. Before men's eyes, in a visible and striking form, so that there may be no mistake, not in a corner but in open day before all. (4.) Expressive condemnation, such as will mark the sin; not at random, nor general, each man's sin shall bear its own peculiar brand of punishment. (5.) Contemptuous condemnation, mingling the worshipper and his worship in one common ruin. Both shall perish,—perish together, perish in the same doom; God shall laugh at their calamity, and mock when their fear cometh. (6.) Everlasting condemnation. Their altars shall never rise again. They and their false religion shall perish forever. No falsehoods in hell. No hollow religion amid the everlasting burnings.

See that your religion is true,—your worship real. Beware of hollowness, falsehood, externalism,—of everything that will not stand the fan of the great Husbandman when He comes in his glory for sifting and for judgment.

LXXI.

No Breath No Life

"And when I beheld, lo, the sinews and the flesh came up upon them, and the skin covered them above: but there was no breath in them." —

Ezekiel 37:8

THIS scene has two aspects (contains an event and a truth), the prophetic, which specially points to Israel's restoration in the latter day; the spiritual, pointing to the case of individual souls, or churches or congregations.

There are four **stages** presented to us,—(1.) the bone-heaps in the valley, "very dry;" (2.) the gathering and reconstruction of these bones; (3.) the clothing with flesh, sinews, and skin; (4.) the infusion of breath or life. It is through the **last** of these that the living man is constituted; and without it there is but the picture or statue of a man.

The "breath" is manifestly the "life;" communicated by the Spirit of life. This life may have different stages; but wherever it is there is a true and complete man. The disciples had life before our Lord breathed on them, but then they attained more. They had life before Pentecost, but then they obtained more. It was life that God communicated when he created man; it is life (of a higher kind) that the Spirit of God communicates to the soul at conversion. The last Adam, as the possessor of the Holy Ghost, is thus a quickening Spirit.

Thus a man may be very like a saint and yet not be one. A church or congregation may be very like a Christian one, with a fair appearance and compact organisation; all in excellent bustling order, numerous, liberal, united, earnest after a sort;—and yet lack one thing which neutralises and paralyses all the rest,—the breath of life.

I. Our creed may be sound, and yet we may not be Christians. Balaam's creed seems to have been sound; also that of Judas and Demas. It may be the creed of apostles and reformers, the creed of the Synod of Dort, or the Assembly of Westminster; yet all within may be wrong. It will form part of the bones, or the sinews, or the flesh; but that is all. Nay, its soundness may be the occasion of serious self-deception; we may mistake orthodoxy for life,—the correctness of our confession of faith for the "breath." An inanimate, unproductive creed, what will it do for you in the day of the Lord? What will it do for you now? Does it give you real peace,—real liberty,—real fellowship with God?

II. Our religion may be externally complete, and yet we may not be Christians. By religion I mean all that pertains to the worship and service of God, private or public; our praises, our prayers, our sanctuary services, our family worship. What are all these without the inward breath? What is routine without life? Mechanical religion may do for the gods of Greece and Rome, but not for the living and true God. Mechanical religion may do for those who fancy that religious performances are work done, or money paid, in order to ward off divine anger, and persuade God to keep them out of hell; but not for those who know that they are the channels of fellowship with God. Your sanctuary attendance may be regular and reverent; but what if there be no breath in it? Your prayers and praises may be punctual and unexceptionable, but what if there be no breath in them? Will God accept them? Will they satisfy you? Will they make you happy? Will they not be irksome and intolerable? And the more you multiply them, the more intolerable.

III. Our good works may be numerous and praiseworthy, yet we may not be Christians. It is not the work that makes the Christian, but the Christian that makes the work. This is a day of good works; of benevolent schemes; of societies great and small; of organisations for the relief of the poor, and the reformation of the wicked. They who conduct them may be earnest and self-denying men. But is the breath there? They often wonder why so much should be done with so little fruit. But is there not a cause?

Is there breath, life, in all this? Can statues, or machines, or steam-engines do the work of the living God? No; it is life that does real work; it is life that is successful; it is life that God honours, and by which He works. Let us see that in doing Christian work, we ourselves are Christians; else we shall be but Noah's carpenters after all.

We may do many good works, and yet not be Christians. Many shall come in that day, saying, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name, &c. But the answer is, "I never knew you."

IV. Our life may be exemplary, and yet we may not be Christians. There may be bones, and sinews, and flesh, and yet no breath, no life! There are many who mistake a fair external deportment for Christian life. A man may be so like a Christian that another could not suppose that there was anything wrong; and yet there might be no breath!

A life with "no breath" must be,—

(1.) A very imperfect life. Many features wanting,—even outward ones, much more inward. The light will be dim; the salt will lack savour.

(2.) A very unhappy life. There is the secret feeling that all is wrong. Everything is irksome; for want of the divine internal reality.

(3.) A very unsuccessful life. It is not mere bustle, or earnestness, or zeal that does the true work for God. If there be no breath, what are these? All will be labour in vain.

There is breath for you, O sinner,—in Him who has the Spirit, who is our breath. You will not be able to say, I perished, or I was unhappy, or useless, because God would not give me this breath.

LXXII.

Every Christian A Teacher

"They that understand among the people shall instruct many."

Daniel 11:33

WE do not receive knowledge for ourselves alone. We must share it with others. Like our High Priest, we must "have compassion on the ignorant," and must remember Him who said, "Learn of me."

In the days here spoken of by Daniel there shall be some, it is said, "who do know their God" (ver. 32). These are "they that understand"; for it is the knowledge of God that is alone accounted understanding in the Bible. He who knows God is a man of understanding, he who knows Him not is "void of understanding,"—"a fool." For this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent.

They that have understanding are evidently few. They are described as "among the people," as if they were a light in a dark place; a few who are of God, while the whole world lieth in wickedness. "Not many wise" are called, is the law of this age; nay, not many of the world who become wise. To be wise in Christ is the privilege of few; in order to this they must become "fools,"—fools in the eye of men,—"fools that they may be wise," for the wisdom of God is foolishness with men. It is a great thing to know God,—to understand the things of God. Happy they who thus know and understand.

Taking these words as applicable to every Christian man and woman, let us see what they teach us.

I. A Christian is one among the people. He is in the world, but not of it. He has been delivered out of it. He is of the same stock as the rest of

mankind, just one of the people, one of Adam's race. He is one of a small band, not one of a multitude; one of those of whom our Lord spake when he said, "Few there be that find it." He was born of the flesh before he was born of the spirit; he bore the image of the earthly before he bore the image of the heavenly.

II. He is one that has understanding. It is this that specially marks him out from "the people." He knows what they know not. He has come to be of an understanding heart. He may not have much of earthly literature or human science, but he knows God; not only knows about him, but knows him. He has not much to say for himself save this, that he knows God. The special distinctiveness of a Christian is that he is a man of understanding. He may be poor, obscure, unlearned, untravelled, yet he understands what millions understand not. He may not know the world and its wonders, but he knows Him who made all these, he knows His greatness and His love.

III. A Christian is one who does not keep his knowledge to himself. He is not proud because he knows what others know not. He pities others, and longs to share his treasures; not to divide his inheritance, for that is impossible, but to impart what he possesses. He gives, yet he retains; he shares, yet he is none the poorer. He has got a loving and unselfish heart as well as an understanding one. He becomes a liberal giver of what God has given. He is like the clouds, which cannot contain their water within themselves; like the sun, which cannot but shine; like the river, which cannot but scatter fertility; like the flower, which cannot but dispense fragrance.

A Christian is an instructor. He has been taught, and he becomes a teacher. He has found the preciousness of knowledge and he seeks to impart it. He feels that what he formerly needed so much was *teaching*, that what the world still needs is *teaching*, and so he becomes a *teacher*. Not as if setting up for superior powers or knowledge, but simply as one who has had a treasure imparted to him, and who therefore longs to impart to his poorer fellow-creatures his divine gold and silver. He sees

that the great need of humanity is teaching, true teaching, teaching in the things pertaining to the true God, and he sets himself fervently to *teaching* an untaught world. Christians, you must be *teachers*. This is your vocation, as those who have themselves been taught of God. Teach by your lives. Teach also in words. Lose no opportunity of instructing others, young or old. Let your lips keep knowledge for all. Live an *instructive* life.

A Christian is an instructor of many. He does not confine himself to a small inner circle, but he has his eye on everybody. Not with one or two is he content. He remembers the words of commendation to Levi, "He walked with me in peace and truth, and did turn away MANY from iniquity." Many, many, is his watchword. Like Joseph Alleine, he becomes "insatiably greedy of souls." Many, many is the burden of his prayers. Many, many is inscribed on all his plans. His spirit widens and widens, his eye and heart take in larger and larger circles. He remembers the multitudes whom his Master taught, the thousands in the early days of the Church, and he seeks *many, many*.

LXXIII.

Work, Rest, And Recompence

"Go thou thy way till the end be: for thou shalt rest, and stand in thy lot at the end of the days." —

Daniel 12:13

DANIEL reminds us of John. The one was the "man greatly beloved," the other "the disciple whom Jesus loved." The one had frequent revelations and visions, specially of the times and seasons, so had the other. The one fainted and was without strength at the sight of Messiah's glory; the other fell at Christ's feet as one dead. Both were comforted by the hand of Jesus laid upon them. Both were exiles in a Gentile land. Both were very aged men. In our text we are reminded of the last words of our Lord to John, "Follow me." To Daniel it is, Go thy way till the end.

Here we have three things for God's Daniels, God's saints, in these days: (1.) a saint's present work; (2.) a saint's coming rest; (3.) a saint's future glory.

I. A saint's present work. "Go thou thy way till the end be." This reminds us of "If I will that he tarry till I come." These visions are not to make thee remiss in duty, heedless of common things, neglectful of daily work. No, go thy way till the end be,—work while it is day. It was meant.

(1.) To calm. That which he had seen and heard was fitted to trouble, and excite, and discompose. He had been in the presence of God, like Paul, in the third heaven. He had been carried forward into the marvelous events of the latter day. He needed a calming word. And here it is, "Go thy way till the end." Do thy ordinary work; walk in the simple way of common life. In the midst of this age's convulsions, and storms, and heat; in the prospect of what is coming on the earth in the last days, we need calming words too. Let us listen to the calm, holy voice that speaks to us ever from

heaven, "Be still, and know that I am God;" "Let not your hearts be troubled;" "Keep your selves in the love of God;" "What is that to thee? Follow me."

(2.) To exhort. The words are those of command or exhortation, like those of Jesus, "Follow thou me." It is not that we are permitted to attend to our daily duties in the midst of all these vast events, present or to come; we are commanded to do so; to work while it is day. Sow thy seed. Be not slothful in business. Be careful and scrupulous in filling up the common daily outline of life. Do its little things well, no less than its great.

(3.) To cheer. The word speaks of an end. It is not perpetual toil,—endless weariness. There remaineth a rest. The end cometh! It may not be long. Life will soon be done. Or the Lord may soon be here. Be not weary or disheartened. Be of good cheer. What are a few years of toil in prospect of the eternal rest. How needful to keep in mind these words, "Go thou thy way till the end be." Let us not be turned aside from the plain path; nor troubled in mind; nor disconcerted in plans; nor led to slacken our diligence. Let us press on, fight on, work on, run on; stedfast and unmoveable in the work of the Lord. We have a daily work to do in the sight of God; let us do it well. Let us be faithful in all things; men in earnest; bent on doing the work which lies to our hand.

II. A saint's coming rest. There remaineth a rest! Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord; yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours. The great rest is when the Lord cometh. But there are two other rests. There is present rest in Jesus; and there is rest in the grave. And it is this rest in the grave that seems the one promised to Daniel, as to Abraham, "Thou shalt go to thy fathers in peace" (Genesis 15:15). He was to live long, but not always; and as soon as his time here was done he was to rest. This rest is the same as that which is called "sleeping in Jesus." He that sleeps in Jesus rests. We are warranted then to set this rest before our eyes. Though death is our enemy, not our friend; and though death is not the same as the Lord's coming, still death does introduce the saints into rest. It is the "saint's rest," an earnest of the saint's everlasting rest; when we shall toil no more, and be vexed no more, and be weary no more, and

be pained no more, and be burdened no more. Work well, then, for the work-day is not long, and the rest-day cometh! "Thou shalt rest," is God's promise to us as well as to Daniel.

III. A saint's future glory. "Thou shalt stand (or rise) in thy lot at the end of the days." Here we have,

(1.) the days. The days are those mentioned in the previous verses; the end of these days is the beginning of blessedness; "blessed is he that cometh to the 1335 days." It seems intimated to Daniel that the end of these days is not to be in his lifetime. As for us, we know not when the end shall be; we know not the times and seasons; we know not when the Lord cometh.

(2.) The standing. To "stand" or "rise" are used as synonymous. "The ungodly shall not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous" (Psalm 1:5).

This "standing" is evidently resurrection, in both passages, as in Daniel 12:2. "Many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake." It is of resurrection that God here speaks to Daniel. He shall arise! This is the great promise, so often reiterated in the New Testament: "Thou shalt be recompensed at the resurrection of the just." Intermediate blessing there is; promises of intermediate rest abound; but the final glory is yet in reserve; both for Daniel and for us. Resurrection. The first resurrection! Resurrection unto life! The better resurrection! Corruption exchanged for incorruption; dishonour for glory.

(3.) The lot. Daniel has a lot, or portion, or special recompense of his own. To this he shall arise after he has rested in the grave from his weary work on earth. There may be a twofold reference here,—

(a) *General.* The first resurrection, or resurrection of the just, or "resurrection from among the dead," or resurrection unto everlasting life, or the better resurrection; these expressions refer to the saint's reward when the Lord comes. "Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection." This glorious resurrection is held before Daniel's eyes as

his recompence. It is held before ours! "My dead body shall thou arise" (Isa. 26:19).

(b) *Special.* There seems something more special promised here to Daniel (as to Zerubbabel, Haggai 2:23); some personal and peculiar reward. What that may be we know not. "A prophet's reward" is referred to by our Lord as something special and great. Each saint shall have his own crown, his own weight of glory, his own inheritance, "*thy* crown" (Revelation 3:11).

The message, then, in these last days (days of excitement, and change, and darkness), is, labour on,—perseveringly, calmly, joyfully, hopefully. The Lord is at hand. The resurrection cometh. The glory of that day will be an ample recompence.

LXXIV.

Human Heedlessness And Divine Remembrance

"They consider not in their hearts that I remember their wickedness." —

Hosea 7:2

LET me present this passage to you under these two heads: (1.) human sin; (2.) the divine remembrance of it.

I. Human sin. What is sin? It is not (1.) an accident, (2.) nor an imprudence, (3.) nor a misfortune, (4.) nor a disease, (5.) nor a weakness. It may be all these, perhaps; but it is something beyond all these; something of a more fatal and terrible character. It is something (1.) with which law has to do, (2.) which righteousness abhors, (3.) which the judge condemns, (4.) which calls for the infliction of punishment from God. In other words, it is GUILT,—it is CRIME. Man's tendency is either to deny it or to extenuate it. He either pleads not guilty, or he smooths over the evil; giving it specious names. Or if he do not succeed in these, he casts the blame off himself; he shifts the responsibility to his nature, his birth, his circumstances, his education; nay, to God himself. But human sin is not thus to be diluted or transformed into a shadow. It is infinitely real,—true,—deep,—terrible in the eyes of Him with whom we have to do. It is the transgression of law; and as such must be dealt with by God, and felt by ourselves. Let us not trifle with sin, either in the conscience or the intellect. Let us learn its true nature from the terribleness of the wrath and condemnation threatened by God against every sin, great or small.

II. The divine remembrance of it. God remembers. His memory fails not in any one thing. Nothing escapes it, great or small. Nothing effaces aught from it.

(1.) Time does not efface it. Ages blot out nothing. The past is as clear and full as the present.

(2.) Other events do not efface it. With man one fact expels another; today's doings destroy the recollection of yesterday's. Not so with God.

(3.) Our own forgetfulness will not efface it. Our memory and God's are very different. Our forgetfulness does not make Him forget.

God remembers! Nothing can make Him forget. He may seem to do so; but it is only seeming. He remembers the person,—the time,—the circumstances,—the thing itself; public or secret; bad or good; negative or positive. He remembers SINS. Let no one say he is too good to remember them. He cannot but do so. He would not be God if it were otherwise. God can forget nothing; for memory is but the knowledge of the past, and He knows everything. It may be found hereafter that man forgets nothing either; and that the bitterness of a ruined eternity will lie in memory. But though man should forget, God remembers; and He can call up sin to remembrance. It will and must come up at last. Men may try to forget it; to drown all thought of it; to efface all traces of it; but it will come up! As even Job said, My bones are full of the sins of my youth. For a season here men succeed often in forgetting sin. And having forgot it they conclude that God has done the same. "They consider not in their hearts that I remember their wickedness." They conceive that God's memory is as treacherous as their own. For this God reproves them. "Thou thoughtest that I was altogether such an one as thyself,"—that my memory was as faithless as thine. But the day is coming which shall shew how foolish, how criminal was such a thought! The opening of the books will shew this if nothing else will.

But there is such a thing as forgetfulness with God. "Their sins and iniquities will I remember no more." This is the true oblivion; divine oblivion of sin; perfect and eternal oblivion. And how is this? The prophet in the Old Testament, and the apostle in the New, tell us that this is one of

the provisions and results of the New Covenant; that covenant which has been sealed with the blood of the Son of God. It is the blood that enables God to forget sin; that blots out all sin of ours from His eternal memory; so that it becomes as if it had never been. But this oblivion is no accident; no mere result of time and intervening circumstances. It is righteous oblivion! Oblivion which righteousness constrains! O blessed oblivion which is the result of righteousness. Had it been accomplished in any other way, there would always have been the danger of reviving memory; memory rousing itself from dormancy, and calling for vengeance after all. But where righteousness has produced the forgetfulness, all is well forever. Sin is buried beyond the possibility of resurrection.

But when does God cease to remember sin in my individual case? When I have accepted the covenant; when I have fixed my eyes upon the blood; when I have received the divine testimony to that great propitiation which has made it a righteous thing in God to remember my sins no more!

Is not this a description of our world? It is not here the fool saying, "There is no God;" nor is it men saying, God has forgotten us; but it is, God has forgotten our sins!

Indifference to sin like their own, forgetfulness like their own, they ascribe to Him! "God does not remember sin," is this great world's motto. And so they neglect the sacrifice for sin, and put away all fear of hell. "They consider not in their hearts that I remember their wickedness." What will they say when the Judge arrives?

LXXV. Lies The Food Of Man

"Ye have eaten the fruit of lies." —

Hosea 10:13

THE subject suggested by these words is, "lies, their fruit, and man's eating it;" or simply, "lies and their fruit." The word is used in a twofold sense,—a lie as to fact, and a lie as to doctrine; untrue reports and unsound teaching, false testimony and false knowledge (or dogma). This falsity may be negative or positive, as "Ye shall not surely die," and "Ye shall be as gods." The lie comes sometimes from man, sometimes from Satan, but never from God, for God is not a man that he should lie; never from the works of God when rightly interpreted and understood.

By two great lies was man led away from God. By the same two lies has the estrangement been kept up. On these two lies the world has been feeding ever since the fall. Their fruit has been woe and death. These lies are those referred to above,—the one a denial of Godhead-perfection; the other, an assertion of creature-perfection; the one saying, there is no such thing as sin and punishment, the other, that there is no such thing as creature-hood limitation and dependency. "Ye shall not die," "Ye shall be as gods."

These two lies God has written his Bible to contradict, for the whole divine word is a confutation of them. But the special confutation is to be seen in the life and death of the Christ of God. His death, as the sin-bearer, said, Ye shall surely die; and His life, as the dependent Son of Man, shewed, that no circumstances, no progress, no knowledge could ever make man God, the creature the Creator; but the human, however blessed, and holy, and wise, must ever be the human, and the divine the divine.

Israel's history, to which our passage refers, is the history of the fruit of lies. "They believed not God," is the accusation brought against them. They rejected the truth, they received the lie, and the fruit of this was judgment. Every sorrow that came on them was the fruit of a lie. Their last great sorrow, the ruin of Jerusalem, and the slaughter of its citizens, was the fruit of a lie. And are they not now, in their dispersion, eating the fruit of lies?

The world's history is the same. Our race has been eating the fruit of lies; not simply of sin, but of lies. The sorrows, sighs, tears, pains of our race are the fruit of lies,—the original lie of Paradise, and a thousand such since then. The sweating-toils of man, the travail-pangs of woman, the cries of suffering infancy,—what are they but the fruit of a lie? Yon tossing sickbed, yon weary death-bed ("The long day's dying"—Milton),

yon swelling churchyard, yon shroud, yon coffin, yon funeral, yon open grave, what are they? The fruit of a lie. It is bitter, poisonous, long-lasting fruit. And the world's last days are no improvement upon its first, for in them comes "the strong delusion that they should believe a *lie*."

What is every false religion but the belief of a lie, and the judgments with which God has visited its professors, the eating the fruit of a lie. Anti-Christianity is the special and preeminent exhibition of the belief of a lie, and the doom of antichrist will be the special and awful exhibition of "eating the fruit of lies."

Each soul's history resembles the above. It is the history of the belief of lies,—of a thousand lies. We begin to believe lies as soon as we can believe anything at all, and we act daily upon believed lies. The two original Satanic lies are continually coming up, and along with them myriads of others, all leading us astray. Each day brings forth the lie, the fruit, the eating thereof. Satan, or the world, or the flesh, or a friend, or a book, or a scene whispers the lie; it is fair and specious, we believe it; it brings forth fruit, we eat of it, and the end is bitterness and disappointment. We "feed on lies."

What is pleasure, or lust, or revelry? It is the belief of a lie, the feeding on a lie. What is worldliness, the love of gaiety, the absorption of the heart in business? The belief of a lie, and the feeding on a lie. We persuade ourselves that this world is good, and pleasant, and excellent, and so we pursue it in preference to the world to come. But the belief of the lie is quickly followed up by disappointment, the sense of hollowness and dissatisfaction. God makes us thus eat of the fruit of lies, that we may be torn from them and betake ourselves to the truth.

What keeps us from Christ? A lie, or lies! What makes us choose the broad way? A lie, or lies! What is unbelief but the belief of a lie? Whence come our doubts and fears but from the belief of lies in preference to the truth; nay, from our making God a liar, in not believing the record which he has given of his Son? Whence comes backsliding, or the loss of first love, but from our returning to the lie which we had rejected?

God, in his gospel, meets the lie, and all the lies which have sprung up on earth. He sends us the truth; He sends us the true One. And while He meets the lie, He does it in His own divine way. He says, Yes, ye shall not surely die,—but that deliverance shall not be in the way you think. Death is the wages of sin, yet I bring life to the sinner, everlasting life, life through the belief of the truth, even as death came through the belief of a lie. He says, Yes, ye shall be as gods, but not in your way. will make you partakers of the divine nature, not by eating the forbidden tree, but by eating of Him whose flesh is meat indeed and whose blood is drink indeed.

What stress God lays on truth, and on our believing it! What sin He declares to be in a lie and in our believing it! All untruth, all error, all false doctrine, as well as false statement, has in it the nature of a lie. Men in our day think man is not responsible for the truth, and that there is no sin in the reception of error. God protests against this, and calls on men to receive truth, his truth, as expounded in his one revelation! Gloriously yet

awfully shall all this be manifested, when He who is THE TRUTH shall come the second time to vindicate both truth and righteousness!

LXXVI.

The Love And The Calling

"When Israel was a child, then I loved him, and called my son out of Egypt." —

Hosea 11:1

GOD'S words to Israel by this prophet are hard and stern. Though intermixed with expressions of tenderness, as, "How shall I give thee up?" this book is full of fearful things. In the midst of these God here stops and reminds them of his love,—his first love,—the kindness of their youth, the time of their espousals. It was sincere and deep; all along it had been so; and all his messages by the prophets were no proof of hatred or enmity. He loved them in Abraham; he loved them in Jacob; he loved them when they went down to Egypt; he loved them in the days of their bondage; and he shewed his love in calling him,—even Israel his son, his first-born,—out of Egypt. The deliverance from Egypt was always in after ages the great standing proof to which God appealed, of his love: "When Israel was a child, then I loved him, and called my son out of Egypt."

This calling out of Egypt was done more than once. The most marvelous was that under Moses; but in after ages, when they were carried into Egypt, God interposed and called them out. Neither Egypt nor Babylon was to be the home of his people; only a sojourn, a place of exile; no more. Out of it they must be called. They whom God did not love might remain there; they whom he loved could not be allowed to do so. Servants or friends might, but not sons. For sons there was Canaan and Jerusalem,—the land flowing with milk and honey.

The last fulfilling or "filling up" of these words, was in the case of God's only-begotten Son. Israel's history was the rehearsal of his. He was in certain points to tread in their steps, to go over their history in himself. And what a closeness of connection, what a oneness between Him and

them does this imply! Thus in him many words of the prophets received a filling up, a completion, an exhaustion, which makes every one who reads feel how true, how accurate, how overflowingly full are the words of God. It is not by accommodation, or allusion, or figure that these words are applied to Christ. No; in him they receive their last filling up, their perfect accomplishment; the last drop of the purposed metal is poured into the mould; it can contain no more; it needs no more. Then was that fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet: "Out of Egypt have I called my son." Egypt was not to be the home of Jesus; and yet it was to have the honour of sheltering him; yes, sheltering him when Israel cast him out. But out of it he must be called. God's purpose and God's word demanded it. O marvellous fullness of the divine word! O superhuman perfection of exactness in each announcement! Not one jot or tittle fails! Heaven and earth may pass; star after star may be broken or blotted out; but the divine word remains unharmed and glorious amid the universal wreck. All that is on earth of beauty and excellence may come to nought; the grass withereth, the flower fadeth, but the word of our God shall stand forever!

In both these cases we see the word literally fulfilled. The nation of God and the Son of God were called out of the land of Egypt and the house of bondage.

Why this calling? Could they not remain? Was not Goshen as fruitful as Canaan? In the case of the Son of God the reason is obvious. It was in no sense his home or native land. He had fled to it for shelter, and it had received him, even as it did Israel at first. But he had work to do elsewhere; work which could not be done in Egypt. It was to the lost sheep of the house of Israel that he was sent. In the case of Israel, we may say also, they could not remain. Though born in Egypt, it was not their true home. They were the heirs of another heritage, given by God himself; they too had work to do which could not be done in Egypt; there was a purpose to be fulfilled in them by their settlement in Canaan; too long connection with Egypt would have corrupted them with its idolatry, and worldliness, and pleasures; they had a testimony to bear in behalf of the true God which could not be borne in Egypt, so that even though they had

never been oppressed, they could not have remained. It was to Jerusalem, to Canaan, to Zion, to Lebanon that they were bound. Not out of the Nile, but of Jordan, are they to drink; with streams from Lebanon are they to quench their thirst. Whatever attractions Egypt might have (in the case of Moses it was riches, and royalty, and learning, and luxurious ease), they must not tarry; nor look behind, like Lot's wife; nor sigh, as they did afterwards in the desert, for its carnal plenty.

But the word is for us figuratively what it was for Israel literally. It is for us, for we are one with Israel, and one with the Son of God. Out of Egypt the church is called; each chosen one, each saint, each son, each Israelite indeed is called. Let us consider our history under the following chapters:—(1.) Our birthplace; (2.) Our calling; (3.) Our journey; (4.) Our home.

I. Our birthplace. It is this Egypt world,—"this present evil world." It is evil, yet it is fair to look upon, with its pleasures, its gaities, its riches, its glories, its pomps, its glitter, its songs, its magnificent palaces and gorgeous array. Egypt was one of the best specimens of the world. Into it were gathered all the world's wealth, and art, and science, and philosophy, and splendour of every kind. It was a fascinating region; every object in it magnetic to the natural man, and intoxicating to the unregenerate heart. Everything was there but the true God. The world's religion was there decked out in its goodliness of temple, picture, statue, and image of every kind. The world's wisdom was all there; its astronomy, its natural science, its mechanical arts, its architecture, its skill in ornament, with all fascinations for the natural man, all stimulants for the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life. All natural knowledge, natural beauty, natural progress, are here; intellect, power, greatness, pomp, splendour,—all are here. Yet amid all these the true God is not. Human intellect is at its highest, religion at its lowest! The world by wisdom knows not God. All idolatry, of the vilest and most foolish kind, is here. All sensuality, oppression, wickedness are here! As was Egypt, so is this world! It is this "present evil world"; it "lieth in wickedness"; and it is our birthplace. Not Bethlehem, as in the case of the Son of God, nor Jerusalem, but Egypt is our birthplace. Children of wrath;

sons of the evil one; born in sin,—these are the figures which describe us. We are by nature men of Egypt.

II. Our calling. We did not rise and flee of ourselves. We would have remained there forever. We loved Egypt, and delighted in its vanities. It was the home of our hearts. But God called us. He "called us with an holy calling." He called us as he did Abraham out of Ur; as he did Israel out of Egypt; as he did the fishermen out of their boats. With his own almighty voice he called us. We could not but obey. It was irresistible. Hence He made us willing in the day of his power. Many voices within and without had called us. Conscience said, Arise, and depart. The soul's deep longings after something higher said the same. Every pain, trial, disappointment, vexation, bereavement said, Arise, and depart. But all these failed. Then God spoke the word, and we found it irresistible, He spake, and it was done. Then all those former voices which we had hitherto slighted gathered strength. Pain, grief, weariness, affliction, all spoke out now; and God spoke in them. Even the feeblest voice of all seemed irresistible. It was not so much one call as a thousand; each one irresistible. Yes, out of Egypt God called us. Blessed and holy calling!

III. Our journey. It is through the desert. Not at once into the kingdom; not at once to heaven; but circuitously. And this long round, not for smoothness, but for roughness! It is a waste howling wilderness; a land of barrenness, of heat, of thirst, and hunger, and weariness. It is the right path, for God is our leader; it is safe, for God is our keeper; it is blessed, for God is our companion; but still it is rough, and dark, and dreary. Yet it is needful, (1.) The length of it is needful, that patience may have her perfect work; (2.) the roughness of it is needful, that we may be purified; (3.) the intricacies of it are needful, that God may have his opportunities for guiding us; (4.) the darkness of it is needful, that Christ may be realised as the sun; (5.) the sorrow of it is needful, that the Holy Spirit may be known as the Comforter. How much less should we know of God and of ourselves were this journey different! How much should we lose were we taken at once into the kingdom; as there can be no second

opportunity hereafter of going over the way again! Let us prize the journey in all its aspects.

IV. Our home. Canaan is our promised land, and Jerusalem our city. For God has prepared for us both a land and a city; a home for eternity; not merely better than the desert, but better than Egypt; a home that more than makes up for all that we have left behind; eternal in the heavens, an incorruptible inheritance; the many mansions; God's home and ours; Christ's home and the church's forever; better than the earthly Jerusalem or the earthly paradise; in which we shall never be disturbed; from which we cannot be driven; in which we can neither be tempted nor sin; everlasting and glorious. It is to that we are bound, and we lay up our treasure there.

It is love that has done all this: "When Israel was a child, then I loved him, and called my son out of Egypt." God's love has done it! It is love that calls us out and draws us out; the mighty love of God. It is love that takes us as we are, and which we are to take as it is. It is love like that to Abraham and to Israel. It is the love of the shepherd to his sheep; of the woman to her lost piece of silver; of the father to his lost son. It is love to which he himself bears witness: "I loved him,"—loved him even from the days of his childhood. It is love exhibited in the cross; love realised in the tens of thousands that have been called out of Egypt by it.

LXXVII.

The Anger And The Goodness

"Who can stand before his indignation? and who can abide in the fierceness of his anger? his fury is poured out like fire, and the rocks are thrown down by him. The Lord is good, a strong hold in the day of trouble; and he knoweth them that trust in him." —

Nahum 1:6,7

THROUGHOUT this chapter, and specially in these verses, let us note these two things, (1.) Jehovah's anger, (2.) Jehovah's goodness. They stand out very strongly in this "burden."

I. Jehovah's anger, (1.) It is real. There is such a thing as anger in God. Many are the expressions used concerning it both in this chapter and elsewhere,—jealousy, vengeance, fury, wrath; all to indicate its existence, and to shew us that the human theories of divine universal benevolence are not true; being got up for a purpose, and that purpose to persuade the sinner's own conscience that he need not be alarmed because of his guilt; and that no one need dread the infliction of punishment, except perhaps a few of the most wicked of our race. But God's words are not exaggerations, nor words of course. There is a terrible truth contained in these oft repeated words of Scripture, "His anger was kindled." Loving and gracious as Jehovah is, his anger is real. When Jesus comes the second time he comes to "take vengeance."

(2.) It is righteous. It is not the rage of selfishness, or passion, or affront. It is judicial anger; the anger of the righteous judge. It is anger against sin, against the sinner; anger because of insulted law and dishonoured righteousness. Nothing in it is unjust, or cruel, or arbitrary. Then the condemned soul will be compelled hereafter to say, it was all right and just; it shall be right and just to all eternity.

(3.) It is terrible. Though calm, it is unutterably awful; nay, overwhelming. No power and no numbers shall be able to stand before it. It shall sweep everything before it like a whirlwind. The expulsion from Paradise, the deluge, the ruin of Sodom, are specimens of its terribleness. The lost soul shall be utterly overwhelmed.

(4.) It is inexorable. Nothing shall turn it aside or soften it when once it is kindled. "The vengeance of eternal fire," the "everlasting burnings," the "worm that dieth not," these are awful words. No bribery, no argument, no influence shall prevail. Nor pity to the poor soul. God will forget to be gracious; repentance shall be hid from his eyes.

O anger of Jehovah, how real, how righteous, how terrible, how inexorable! Yet, let me say one thing, should you be one of the eternally lost, and should you, in the course of your weary and tormented eternity, say to yourself, Oh that God were not so just; then think what a wish that would be for yourself. Your security against unjust and over-severe punishment is that very justice against which you petition. Bad as your case may be at the hands of a just God, it would be unspeakably worse at the hands of an unjust God. The anger of a righteous God is no doubt terrible, but the unbridled fury of an unrighteous God is something too horrible even to think upon.

II. Jehovah's goodness. He is good, and he doeth good. He is kind to the unthankful and the unworthy. God is love. God loves the sinner.

(1.) His goodness is sincere. He does not utter words of course, nor pretend to feelings which are not in him. His words mean just what they say; his deeds mean just what they indicate; the works of his hands have a most substantial and authentic expression of goodness. God is not a man that he should lie, either in his words of goodness or of anger.

(2.) It is powerful. It is Almighty goodness. He is able to deliver those whom he loves. Their interests are safe in his hands. "He is slow to anger,

and great in power." Who can withstand his love? "It is God that justifieth, who is he that condemneth?"

(3.) It is watchful. His eye is on us at all times, specially in the day of trouble. His is watchful goodness. His is the unsleeping eye, and the untiring hand. He is not weary of blessing. He delights in opportunities for pouring out his love; and our extremities are his opportunities.

(4.) It is unchanging. Like himself, his goodness is without variableness; not ebbing and flowing, but always flowing. His heart is the heart of the unchangeable one. Not like the tides, or the seasons; but like the sky above us, ever one calm arch of gentle, loving azure, embracing earth.

Such is the God with whom we have to do. He is righteous and cannot allow sin to go uncondemned and unpunished. Yet is he good and gracious, not willing to destroy or to take vengeance; a God before whom the sinner may tremble; a God in whom the chief of sinners may find forgiveness. I remind you of two passages which will form the practical improvement of all I have said.

(1.) "The great day of his wrath is come, and who shall be able to stand!" It is not yet come; but it is coming. Judgment lingereth not, damnation slumbereth not. It will be a day of terror for the sinner when the pent up wrath of God shall pour itself out, not in seven vials, or seventy times seven, but in an eternity of vials without number.

(2.) "He is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance." Such is his goodness now. He is rich in mercy. His patience is beyond all conception or measure. And in his longsuffering there is salvation,—salvation to the uttermost. He pities, yearns, pleads, beseeches, spares, prolongs the day of grace, presents pardon, salvation, life to the ungodliest, free. Yes, freely to the last! Let this longsuffering goodness draw us, melt us, awaken confidence, and win us to love.

LXXVIII.

Darkness Pursuing The Sinne

"Darkness shall pursue his enemies." —

Nahum 1:8

IT is of Nineveh and Assyria that this prophet utters his fearful burden. That city and its inhabitants were to bear the judgments of Jehovah. It was to be swept from the earth, and they were to be driven out, pursued by destruction from the Lord. "The Assyrian" was Israel's great enemy, God's great enemy; type of the Church's great enemy in the last days. The capital city had been warned, had repented, and had returned like the dog to its vomit. Now the last blast of the prophetic trumpet is sounded; a warning to Nineveh, a consolation to Israel. Darkness has settled down on Nineveh from that day to this, and has pursued its dwellers,—a type and earnest of the blackness of darkness forever.

Let us take Assyria as a specimen of sinners; and this prediction as a declaration of God's way of dealing with them.

I. A sinner is an enemy to God. This is a strong word, and worthy of solemn thought. It means much. Scripture speaks of the sinner as, (1.) not loving God; (2.) forgetting God; (3.) disobeying God; (4.) departing from God. But this is more than all these; stronger, more decided, more terrible. It means such things as the following:—

(1.) He hates God. Hater of God is his name; hater of Christ also,—hater of his whole being, his righteousness, his truth, his holiness, his power, his sovereignty, nay, his love.

(2.) He tries to injure God. He would fain carry his hatred into effect by injury, in every way; he robs God, he mocks God, he tries to dethrone Him, and to oppose Him.

(3.) He tries to make away with God. Enmity, when it runs its course, ends in murder. So man, if he could, would take the life of God. When the fool says in his heart there is no God, he speaks as a murderer. When the Son of God came to earth, they rested not till they had slain him. Crucify him, crucify him, was a cry, the intensity of whose bitterness and malignity arose from the suspicion in the hearts of the Jews that he was really the Son of God.

Thus every sinner is an enemy of God, an injurer, a rebel, a robber, a murderer. All sin is the indication of this, and when fully carried out ends in this. And all unbelief is crucifixion of the Son of God.

II. God means to deal with these his enemies. He is not indifferent to their enmity, he is not blind to it, he does not mean to overlook it. But he is longsuffering, not willing that any should perish. He wishes to give them time to repent; he tries by this love of his to melt them, but, if all fail, he will at length arise and deal with them. They shall know his power and righteousness, his wrath and vengeance. Darkness shall pursue his enemies. He does not use many words, nor strong language; the threat here is very decided no doubt, but it is very calm; all the more terrible and certain from being so calm. It refers both to time and eternity; present darkness, eternal darkness.

(1.) There is darkness in store for the sinner. It is not fire or torment that is here spoken of, it is simply darkness. As such it is, (1.) The absence of all that gives health, and gladness, and life; for without light there is no life, no verdure, no bloom, either for man or man's earth. A world without a sun! How dismal! (2.) The presence of that which produces gloom, uncertainty, perplexity, terror, despair. How cheerless is a cloudy day; how much more days of never-ending cloud and darkness. No knowledge of the way, groping perpetually, exposure to dangers and enemies. How dismal would life be with nothing but darkness! Yet such is the portion of God's enemies! They have rejected the light of the world, and darkness must be their lot, a common lot with him who is the prince of darkness.

(2.) This darkness is from God. It does not come by chance, nor from man, nor from natural causes. It is produced and sent by Him who has both light and darkness at disposal. It comes as punishment,—specially for their rejection of the light. Darkness coming in any way is sad, but coming from God it is infinitely terrible. We must go astray, we must stumble, we must wander forever. O enemy of God, think what it will be to be enveloped in darkness and followed by darkness forever.

(3.) This darkness shall pursue them. It shall be to them as an enemy, or as a beast of prey,—ever following them, seeking their destruction. Wherever they go this darkness shall be upon their heels, and they shall not escape. In vain shall they seek for light, gross darkness shall compass them about. Eternal darkness shall be their portion, the blackness of darkness forever. Darkness like a rushing whirlwind shall sweep them before it,—"they shall be driven to darkness." (4.) Every enemy of God must expect this. It is a certainty. It is not possible to be an enemy of God and yet escape the darkness. However swiftly they may flee, the darkness shall overtake them like a tempest. Their enmity to God must be avenged! For the darkness does not come at random; it follows in the track of the enmity. It marks the enemy, and follows him; it finds him and pursues him.

LXXIX.

Jerusalem The Centre Of The World's Peace

"In this place will I give peace, saith the Lord of hosts." —

Haggai 2:9

IT is to something still future that this whole passage refers. Thus Paul expounds it, "Now he hath promised, saying, Yet once more I shake not the earth only, but also heaven" (Heb. 12:26). There was a shaking at Sinai; there is yet to be a greater and more universal shaking; there is to be the removal of the things that are shaken, that those things which cannot be shaken may remain; and out of these shakings and removings, the successive dissolutions of the four Gentile monarchies, there comes the kingdom that cannot be moved, the "everlasting dominion which shall not pass away, the kingdom which shall not be destroyed" (Dan. 7:14); the great "fifth monarchy" which shall stand forever. There is to be a more stable kingdom than earth has ever seen, under the sceptre of the righteous King. There is to be another Jerusalem, more firmly built than that of David and Solomon. There is to be another house more glorious than the temple of old. Both Israel and the church look for something more blessed, more excellent, and more enduring than eye has yet seen. For this it is that we must wait the advent of the great Melchizedek, with his "royal priesthood;" the arrival of the new heavens and earth wherein dwelleth righteousness. Then shall the words of our text be fulfilled, "In this place will I give peace." Here we learn, (1.) Man needs peace; (2.) Peace is the gift of the Lord of hosts; (3.) Peace is given in connection with Israel's house; (4.) Peace is to be specially given at the special time here predicted.

I. Man needs peace. He had it at first, but he flung away the pearl. Since then all has been trouble and variance. God and he are not at peace. His fellows and he are not at peace. Discord, war, confusion, hatred are everywhere. Yes; man needs peace; man's earth needs peace; creation

needs peace; the animals that people man's earth need peace. Israel needs peace; Israel's land needs peace. There is a cry for peace, often unconscious and inarticulate, everywhere. The whole creation groaneth. It cries for rest. For unrest is the condition into which sin has brought man and man's earth, with all that it contains. "There is no peace." Yet man was made for peace; creation was made for peace. How sorely has this peace been needed! How deeply has the want of it been felt these many ages,—ages of unrest.

II. Peace is the gift of the Lord of hosts. One of God's special names is, "the God of peace." Man can break the peace, but cannot restore it. Peace seems a small thing; yet it is so great that only He whose name is "Jehovah of hosts" can give it. Man can neither make it nor purchase it. God must do both. "I create peace." "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you." It is the free gift of Omnipotence. It is the free gift of Him who, as the Lord of hosts, the Captain of Jehovah's hosts, has fought our fight, overthrown our enemies, wrought righteousness in our behalf, secured peace for us. At his birth, "peace on earth" was proclaimed. He went about as the peacemaker. He died to make peace by the blood of his cross. He is our peace, who hath made both one. For man, for Israel, for man's earth, for creation He has purchased peace; and this purchased peace He is yet to give. Glorious gift for a weary, unrestful world! Peace, peace, to him that is far off, and to him that is nigh. He gives it to his church now; he is ere long to give it to the whole earth.

III. Peace is given in connection with Israel's temple. The place of peace was strictly the altar. Here the pacification was accomplished, for here the propitiation was made. From the beginning the altar was set up, and the blood shed, in token of peace. Afterwards the altar was enclosed in a tabernacle, and again in a temple. From these came out the voice of peace from the Lord of hosts. Then He shewed Himself as the peacemaker. His peace was always in connection with his temple. No altar, no peace. No blood, no peace. These, of course, were symbols,—figures,—shadows of good things to come. In the fullness of time He came who is temple, and altar, and sacrifice, and peace,—all in one. He is

our priest. He, as priest in his own house, gives peace. It is peace proceeding from himself as the Lord of hosts.

It is royal and priestly peace; peace flowing from the righteous removal of all that which had broken up our peace; peace which shall never again be broken, because its foundations are stable and divine; peace unchangeable and everlasting.

IV. Peace is to be specially given at the time and in the place here signified. Though peace has been secured, the work being done which pacifies,—not to be done again,—yet peace is as yet but partially given. A few here and there are reconciled to God; that is all. The world still remains without peace. There is still distance, variance, controversy between man and God. There is still tumult, and storm, and bitterness on earth. Man and man's earth, as a whole, are just what they were. But our text foretells a time when all shall be pacified. Then shall peace be universal on earth; peace in Israel's land; peace in Jerusalem; peace issuing from the house of the Lord of hosts. Creation shall have peace. The curse shall depart. Evil passions among men shall cease. The beasts of field and forest shall have peace. "The wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid" (Isaiah 11:6). There shall be nothing to hurt nor to destroy in all the holy mountain. The centre and fountainhead of all this harmony, and love, and peace, shall be Salem the city of peace; and the house of Jehovah, the dwelling place. Living waters, waters of health and peace, shall go forth from Jerusalem; not only throughout the land, but to the ends of the earth. That city shall be earth's holy and blessed metropolis, from which all peace is to proceed. "In this place will I give peace, saith the Lord of hosts." The Prince of peace, the true Solomon, shall be the giver and dispenser of that peace to a happy city, a happy land, a happy world, a happy race. What a scene of order, rest, holiness, and beauty, when Jesus reigns, and all things are put under him.

Thus then we preach,—

(1.) Peace. Not man's peace, nor man-made peace, nor church-made peace; but divine peace, God-made peace; the peace of God; peace from God; peace in God; peace from the God of peace. Receive the peace-proclaiming testimony,—the gospel of peace,—and be at peace.

(2.) Peace through Jesus Christ. It is from him that all peace proceeds. He is the peace-maker, the peace-purchaser, and the peace-giver. It is with him personally that we must deal in order to obtain it. Go to him for it. It is free. Take it from his hand.

(3.) Peace now. Yes; we preach a present peace; immediate and sure; without working or waiting; simply in believing God's testimony to the work which has made peace; to the blood which has secured the reconciliation; to the love which has done all we need.

(4.) Peace the earnest of a world-wide peace. As God is now giving peace to souls, so ere long is he to give it to the whole earth. And we accept our "peace in believing" as the earnest of a coming day of wider and more glorious peace. He who has given peace to us, will ere long give peace to the world. This is our hope, in the midst of convulsion, and war, and tempest. Come, O Prince of peace; set up thy kingdom of peace; reign in peace over this troubled world. Come, put on thy crown of peace. Earth has long been without thee, and without thy peace. Make haste; come thyself; and bring with thee thine everlasting peace.

LXXX.

Jerusalem And Her King

"Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem: behold, thy king cometh unto thee: he is just, and having salvation; lowly, and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt the foal of an ass. And I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim, and the horse from Jerusalem, and the battle-bow shall be cut off; and he shall speak peace unto the heathen; and his dominion shall be from sea even to sea, and from the river even to the ends of the earth."

Zechariah 9:9,10

IT is over a wide span of time and history that these two verses stretch. They predict the scenes of Messiah's first and second comings. There is a long, long interval between the events of the ninth verse and those of the tenth. The former has been already fulfilled (and that how literally!),—eighteen centuries ago; the latter yet waits to be fulfilled. The former is a glimpse of Messiah's humiliation, the latter of his exaltation, and power, and glory. He came the first time to be despised and rejected of men; He comes the second time to triumph and to reign. Jerusalem has seen his lowliness, it is yet to see his majesty. It has witnessed his cross, it is yet to behold his throne.

Let us note here, (1.) Jerusalem's joy; (2.) Jerusalem's King; (3.) Jerusalem's glory.

I. Jerusalem's joy. Zion and Jerusalem are the two different parts of the one city,—the city of the great King. It is the inhabitants or daughters of this twofold city that are here summoned to "rejoicing" and "shouting," to "great" rejoicing, and to the loud utterance of it. To gladness and shouting is the city called by God. It is "the joyous city." Babylon may mourn, but Zion must rejoice. Egypt may howl, Jerusalem must shout.

They who have received Messiah are inhabitants of no mean city. To them belongs the heavenly Jerusalem, the everlasting Zion. Their citizenship is in heaven. They are not yet in the city, but they are looking for it. And the prospect of it is enough to make them rejoice and shout. O Christian, be glad. Be not of a heavy heart. He who believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and the citizen of the joyous city.

II. Jerusalem's King. It is written elsewhere, "Let the children of Zion be joyful in their King" (Psalm 149:2). So here. Let us take each of the words relating to the King, in order.

(1.) Behold. It is the prophet speaking to his fellow-citizens, it is the Holy Spirit turning our eyes to Jesus. "Behold!" See this great sight. What is there on earth to be compared to it.

(2.) Thy King. Jerusalem has a King. He is "the great King," "King of kings," "King of Israel," "King of nations," "Prince of the kings of the earth." His name is Jesus of Nazareth. He is "the Word made flesh," God-man, "Emmanuel, God with us." She is now kingless. She has no David, no Solomon, no Hezekiah. Yet to her really belongs a King,— greater than all the kings of earth, "THY King."

(3.) Cometh. He was long "the coming one," now he is "come." For four thousand years the promise spoke of his coming. Now he comes at length! He tarries no longer. His feet tread our earth. His eyes look on our hills and skies.

Bethlehem receives him Nazareth gives him a home. Bethany welcomes. Jerusalem shouts hosanna at his approach. But he has left! He is not now here. He is now "the coming One" again. And he may soon be here. Behold he cometh!

(4.) Unto thee. Yes; specially to thee. Jerusalem is to reject him, to crucify him. He knows this, but he comes to her. O sinner, he comes to thee and he bids thee come to him. He stands not afar off, he comes nigh.

(5.) Just and having salvation. A just God and a Saviour. Just and the Justifier. The Saviour and the Justifier, because he is the Just One. He came with a righteous salvation for unrighteous men. He presents that righteous salvation still. It is salvation to the uttermost. He is mighty to save, he is just to save! He came to seek and to save that which was lost. Oh good news. The righteous One loveth the unrighteous. Jesus Christ the righteous came into the world to save sinners.

(6.) Lowly, and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt the foal of an ass. He is meek and lowly; and even when he comes to Jerusalem in triumph, he shews his meekness by the way in which he comes. No troops of soldiers; no guards; no procession; no banners waving! No chariot, no war horse! He rides upon an ass, and alongside there is the colt, just as they were found, unprepared and unadorned. He is at once the loftiest and the lowliest of the sons of men. None ever came from such a height, or went down to such a depth. In birth, and life, and death he was alike the lowly One. May he not well say, then, "Come unto me," and "learn of me." He is distant to none. He repulses none. Even to the little ones he says, "Suffer them to come to me." In word, and look, and action, he is infinitely attractive to all. No one needs to dread him, nor to stand aloof in suspicion or distrust. O sinner, come and learn of this lowly one. He will give you rest. O Christian, trust Him more. Do not misinterpret him or do him injustice. Give Him thy fullest confidence, in spite of all the evil, and the darkness, and the folly that are in thee. Keep ever near his side. Look at him, love him, speak to him, trust him. Does he frown? Does he turn away? Nay, he bids thee welcome; and the more thy dealings are with him, the more welcome. He thus gets opportunities for bringing out his stores.

III. Jerusalem's glory. The first feature of this glory is the cessation of war, and the destruction of all the implements of war, chariot, horse, and battle-bow. No more of these. Jerusalem is now the city of peace, the true Salem. But there is peace to the heathen too: he speaks peace to them,— "peace to them that are afar off." The sound of peace goes out from Salem to the whole world. Jerusalem is now a quiet habitation; peace is in all her borders; the heathen share it; and universal dominion now belongs to

Zion's King. The earth is his as well as Jerusalem. He is King of kings. As yet this has not been fulfilled. Satan still roams and reigns. The kingdoms of this world are still unchristian or antichristian.

But the vision will not lie. Jesus is coming the second time to fulfil these words. He fulfilled the ninth verse at his first coming, he is to fulfil the tenth at his second. He comes as King as well as Saviour. He comes not only to judge, but to reign. He comes to end all war; to bind Satan; to smite antichrist; to renew creation; to rebuild Jerusalem; to restore Israel; to convert the nations; to reign in peace as earth's righteous King. His dominion shall be as universal as it is everlasting. His kingdom is that which cannot be moved. Then shall be the long expected reign of righteousness and peace.

LXXXI.

Looking To The Pierced One

"They shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him, as one mourneth for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for him, as one that is in bitterness for his first-born." —

Zechariah 12:10

LET us take up this passage under the following heads, which will bring out all its parts: (1.) the pierced one; (2.) the piercers; (3.) the lookers; (4.) the mourners.

I. The pierced one. Messiah,—the seed of the woman; the man with the bruised heel; he is the pierced one. It is He, Himself, who speaks. He was pierced by the nails and by the spear; by the nails to effect his death, by the spear to prove it; both of these, the exhibitions of man's hatred, before and after death. It is as the pierced one that we see him in the twenty-second Psalm and in the fifty-third of Isaiah; as such on the cross; as such in heaven, the Lamb slain. Divine yet human; human yet divine; both of these perfectly; human, that he might be pierced; divine, that his piercing might be efficacious. By his stripes we are healed.

II. The piercers. These in the first place are the Jews and the Romans, at the cross; Jew and Gentile uniting in this act, the Jew the planner and counsellor, the Gentile the executioner.

It was the united hatred of Jew and Gentile that did the deed. The crowd surrounding the cross, they are consenting and partaking,—and all to whom the proclamation of this piercing comes, who do not come out from the crowd and protest against the deed by believing in the pierced one. In this way it is that all the world is guilty of the deed.

III. The lookers. In one sense the first piercers were lookers. They looked and pierced; they pierced and looked. But that looking wrought no

change; they looked and hated only the more. Jew and Gentile then looked, but they remained the same. The lookers in our text are not those who surrounded the cross, but those who came afterwards, not looking at the actual cross, but listening to the story of the pierced one. How idly they talk who say, Had we seen the cross we should have been melted down! At Pentecost we find these lookers; in many places, and times, and ages we find them; we find them still. In the latter day our text is to be more fully verified to Jew and Gentile, "Behold he cometh with clouds, and every eye shall see him," i.e., look upon him. The whole world shall be lookers then,—"every eye." In our day we may say that it is by the ear we look; it is the record that brings the cross before the eye,

and presents to us the pierced one. We preach the story of the cross and say, Look!

IV. The mourners. The actual piercers at the cross did not mourn; they railed and wagged their heads; the sight of the pierced one then produced only hatred and mockery. A man might see the cross and remain hardhearted. The cross and the crucifix in themselves can do nothing for a soul. Yet the pierced one is the object to which God turns our eye. It is of him that the Holy Spirit makes use in breaking the hard heart and binding up the broken one. He does not work save in connection with the cross of Christ. He uses the cross for producing godly sorrow. Mark,

1. The sorrow here referred to is very deep. It is like mourning for an only son; it is like the bitterness of soul for a first-born. It is not the sorrow of a moment or an hour, but prolonged; not surface-sorrow, but deep; not sentimentalism, but genuine grief,—the grief of the whole man.

2. It is sorrow produced by the Holy Spirit. His hand is in it, else we might look a thousand times over at the cross and remain unmoved. It is not the sorrow produced by pictures, or statues, or the sight of Sinai or Jerusalem, or harrowing descriptions, or sad poetry, or plaintive music, like the "Miserere" of Rome, or by the darkness of a gloomy chamber,—these are artificial and mechanical ways of calling up apparent religious

feeling; but it is only the sorrow of the world which worketh death, not godly sorrow working repentance unto life, nor is it even so deep as that of Judas when he said, "I have sinned." It is man-made conviction, if it be conviction at all, not the sorrow of the Holy Ghost.

3. It is sorrow flowing from looking at the pierced one. We do not first mourn and then look; we look and mourn. Not the one without the other; and not the mourning before the looking. Many, in their self-righteousness, would first mourn, and then carry their mourning to God as a recommendation. But there is no sorrow genuine save that which flows directly from looking at the pierced one. What do we see in this pierced one that produces such a result?

(1.) We see infinite love. This melts the heart and draws tears from the eyes. It is love that is bleeding on that cross.

(2.) We see our own rejection of that love. We have long been rejecters, despisers of it. Our years of rejection come up before us and fill us with bitterness. What, so long despise such love!

(3.) We see suffering. It is suffering beyond all suffering of man. It is the suffering of love. The sufferer is love itself. He suffers because he loves. He loves and suffers!

(4.) We see that suffering caused by ourselves. We not only rejected the love, but we nailed the loving sufferer to the tree. This is sin; this is our sin. We are the murderers. We hated, mocked, nailed, slew. Oh,

what sin is ours; and what must sin be! Yet hear his voice,
"Look unto me, and be ye saved!"

LXXXII.

The Holiness Of Common Things

"In that day shall there be upon the bells of the horses, Holiness unto the Lord; and the pots in the Lord's house shall be like the bowls before the altar. Yea, every pot in Jerusalem and in Judah shall be holiness unto the Lord of hosts; and all they that sacrifice shall come and take of them, and see the therein: and in that day there shall be no more the Canaanite in the house of the Lord of hosts." —

Zechariah 14:20,21

IT is of millennial days that the prophet is speaking; days when Paradise shall be restored, and earth shall be as heaven; when Israel shall be restored, Jerusalem rebuilt, and the great kingdom set up that cannot be moved.

Of this period it is the holiness that he specially points to; so unlike everything in Jerusalem or on the earth in preceding days. "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty," shall then be the burden of every song. Jerusalem shall be truly what it is now, and has been hitherto, but in name, "the holy city."

But it is the holiness of common things that he yet more specially dwells on. Not holy men merely, or holy service, or holy songs, or holy Sabbaths; but holy vessels of every kind; holy bells (or bridles), holy pots, holy bowls, with the holy use of all these; so that every sight and sound shall proclaim holiness. On wall, and gate, and bar, on houses, and doors, and posts, and lintel, shall be inscribed "holiness." On leaf, and flower, and tree shall be holiness.

The following paraphrase will bring out the exact meaning of each clause. "In that day shall there be even upon such common things as the horse-bells, holiness unto the Lord; every vessel in the temple shall be holy, and

even the common boiling pots shall be as sacred as the altar-bowls; nay, not the temple-pots alone, but every pot in Jerusalem and throughout the land shall be holiness to the Lord of hosts; and all they that come from afar to sacrifice shall make use of them: and there shall be no more the Canaanite (like the present Moslem) in the house of the Lord of hosts."

Thus the commonest of common things are selected to illustrate the great truth or fact of that day, viz., the universality of consecration. Nothing shall be left unsanctified. Everything shall be for God; everything shall glorify him; exhibiting the full meaning of the text, "Whether ye eat or drink, do all to the glory of God."

It is not then the spiritual nature of the things themselves that is needed for the consecration. The things named are evidently chosen to prevent that mistake. It is of the holiness of things that are not in themselves spiritual that the prophet speaks. These common things we are to lift up out of their low position,—to ennoble and dignify them.

And how is this to be done? Not by changing their nature; not by spiritualising them. But by the right use of them. By connecting them with God, and God with them. By refastening the link between the material and the spiritual; not by transforming the material into the spiritual. It is the right use of common things, in connection with God, that is the true consecration. They are not consecrated by some mysterious process, in order to their glorifying God; but the right use of them in the service of God is the true consecration.

God is here dealing with us about common daily things; common, daily, and as men would say, carnal duties. He wants,—

Holiness in our common works and words; our eating and drinking; our ploughing, and sowing, and reaping; holiness in the shop, holiness in the market-place; holiness in each room of the house; in journeying and in resting, in buying and selling; holiness in the railway carriage, and upon the highway; holiness in our reading, our conversation, and our letter-

writing; holiness in our business, and our recreation; holiness in our mirth, in our feasts, in our ordinary intercourse. All our common works so done that God shall be glorified in them. Many forget all this. They think that a religious life should omit as many as possible of common duties, whereas it is by the right doing of these that we are to exemplify true religion. A religious life is not a life by itself, the life of a recluse or hermit; it is common life sanctified. Many say, Were I but a minister, with nothing to do but with religious subjects and acts, it would be well. Ah, a minister has not the opportunities of glorifying God which others have; he has not so many of life's every-day duties to discharge. Or they say, Had I more time to spare, I could glorify God more. Ah, it is seldom the idle man, the man of leisure, that does this. A life of leisure is not so easily managed or sanctified as many think; self comes in; irregularities come in; time is not properly valued; efforts are desultory. It needs much grace to regulate and lay out for God a life of leisure. There is much meaning in the words, "six days shalt thou labour."

The little things of life are to be attended to; the common, menial, earthly things. In these Adam served God when he tilled the ground; Abel when he kept sheep; Amos when he gathered sycamore fruit; Joseph when he wrought as a carpenter; Paul when he made tents. It is thus that we are to glorify God,—inscribing "holiness to the Lord" on everything we do; so transacting daily business that men shall say of us, "They fear God;" so making our plans that in them God shall always have a place; so speaking the little or common words of each hour, that men shall recognise in us the servants of God. It is easy, and it is well, to hang up a text upon the walls of our chamber; but let our words and deeds be a continual recognition of the holy Lord God, and this shall be more efficacious. Let us make ourselves the texts. Regulate your house (with every room in it) so that it shall speak of God. Make your family arrangements such that they shall all speak of God. It is not at family worship, or in asking a blessing, alone that God is to be seen. These are mockeries, if he be left out of all the rest of the day. Let him be everywhere seen and felt. Do all to his glory. While consecrating common things, beware of profaning holy things. Reverence and godly fear become us in dealing with all that is divine.

LXXXIII.

Wearying Jehovah With Our Words

"Ye have wearied the Lord with your words: yet ye say, Wherein have we wearied him? When ye say, Every one that doth evil is good in the sight of the Lord, and he delighteth in them; or, Where is the God of judgment?" —

Malachi 2:17

THE prophet's charge against Israel is of "wearying the Lord"; as Isaiah had long before this said to Ahaz, "Will ye weary my God also?" And while God charged them with wearying him, he solemnly denies having wearied them, and asks, Wherein have I wearied thee?

The charge is not of "provoking," but of "wearying"; and is one of deeply-touching pathos, indicating sorrow, patience, longsuffering, love, the profound affection of a heart that yearns over unworthy objects, unwilling to abandon them to their deserved doom, that beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil.

There are many ways in which we weary God. Such as, by our

- (1.) Carelessness. Worldliness, love of self, and vanity, and folly.
- (2.) Opposition. Dislike of himself, his law, his gospel.
- (3.) Unteachableness. Foolishness, hardness of heart, perversity.
- (4.) Unbelief. Distrust of himself, rejection of his love.
- (5.) Want of zeal. "This did I for thee, what doest thou for me."
- (6.) Inconsistency. Life and creed at variance. A name, no more.

In many such ways we weary God continually; we vex, grieve, resist, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. To this wearying he might at once put an end, and refuse to be so treated by us any longer. But he has long patience, he bears much before he interposes in his wrath. Knowing the fearful consequences to us of his being worn out by us and allowing righteousness and vengeance to do their work, he waits, and pities, and entreats, and expostulates with us to the last.

The prophet's words, "Oh that thou hadst hearkened to my commandments," are expressive of this feeling; and our Lord's tears over Jerusalem are the intimation at once of God's unutterable patience, and of the exhaustion of it at last.

But let us mark the particular kind of wearying, to which the prophet points.

I. It is wearying with words. "Ye have wearied me with your words" Words in themselves do not weary God. They are pleasant sounds. He delights in listening to what his creatures say. All sights and sounds, coming from the works of his hands, are meant to be "good": sunshine,

starlight, earth's green, heaven's blue, ocean's brilliance, the music of birds, the voice of the wind, the roar of the thunder, the noise of many waters, these are among the things which He pronounced "good." So with the human voice and human words. But when they are dissociated from the feeling within, so as not to be the expression of the heart but only of the lip; or when they are the utterance of error or falsehood, unmeaning and hollow, then they cease to be good, they displease him; and when repeated, and reiterated, they weary Him. Talk, talk, mere talk, the talk of the lips, it may be respectable, religious talk, but if mere talk, it not only wearies man but God. And think of the innumerable millions of words uttered every hour by the millions of earth, all of which go up unto the ear of God! Think of the discords, and dissonances, and impurities, and follies, and blasphemies, and hypocrisies that are hourly heard by God!

Oh how He must be wearied with the words of men! How He must be grieved with the sounds of earth!

II. It is wearying by questions.—We say, Wherein have we wearied him? Men do not like to be challenged by God, and yet they shrink from the denial of the charge. Instead of honest confession or bold denial, they speak like Cain, and ask, Am I my brother's keeper? Wherein have I wearied him? What more fitted to weary God than such a course of hypocritical questioning, captious questioning, fault-finding, pretending surprise at what they could not but know they were committing. O mockery of God! For men to look up in his face, and say, Wherein have we wearied thee?

III. It is wearying by denial of the difference between good and evil. One of the most explicit of all Bible teachings is as to the difference between the evil person and the good person, the evil thing and the good thing, the evil opinion and the good opinion. Man sees often little of this difference; God sees it strongly. Man likes to efface or smooth over this difference; God keeps up the line, broad, and deep, and clear,—as between sea and land. He is wearied by man's asseverations of the little difference between things and persons, and by man's attempts to obliterate moral and spiritual distinctions, to call light darkness and darkness light. Is not the present age wearying God in this way?

IV. It is wearying by disbelief of coming judgment. "Where is the God of judgment?" is the infidel question, like that of the scoffer in the last days: "Where is the promise of his coming?" No judgment, and no God of judgment, is the watchword of many. Every man a judge to himself; a judge of all truth and error; the measurer of God, and the judge of his character and ways. This is not exactly the fool's saying, There is no god, but it is next to it; for it means that there is no god but such an one as suits man's philosophy. God's non-interposition for so many ages, and his allowance of confusion and error, lead men to conclude that there is no God of judgment. This "wearies

God"; this semi-atheism; this misinterpretation of his love and patience. God's longsuffering, instead of leading to repentance, leads to unbelief.

The Lord will come. He may come soon. Let us be ready. The Judge standeth before the door.

LXXXIV.

Dies Irae

Malachi 4:1-6

THIS is a notable specimen of a double prophecy. It contains several distinct predictions,—twice or oftener fulfilled; at first very partially, and then fully; at first almost apparently a failure, at last a perfect fulfillment. The centre of these prophecies is Messiah himself; Messiah in connection with Israel; Messiah both in his first and second comings; the things predicted having a partial and shadowy fulfillment at his first, and awaiting an exhaustive fulfillment at his second coming. By taking these both apart and united, we shall have a clear insight into the meaning of this difficult prophecy.

In the previous chapter there is a "day" spoken of,—a time of mingled wrath and grace; and it is of this "day" that the present chapter is full. It is called "the day" (ver. 1) twice over; "the day that I shall do this" (ver. 3), or, "that I shall work"; "the great and dreadful day of the Lord" (ver. 5). It is the day of Christ,—Messiah's day, as seen by the prophets, embracing both his first and second comings; and conjoining in one period the events of both these.

"For behold"! God calls men's heedless eyes to the events of the future. "For behold the day cometh;" yes, "the day that shall burn as a furnace;" the "day of vengeance" (Isaiah 61:2; 64:2; 66:15,16). Then shall all "the proud" (Psalm 94:2,3), especially "he that exalteth himself above all that is called God" (2 Thessalonians 2:4); and "all that do wickedly," the wicked one and all his hosts,—be "as stubble,"—as "chaff" (Matthew 3:12.) for the unquenchable fire. Yea, "the day that cometh shall burn them up, saith the Lord of hosts, and leave neither root nor branch;" they "shall be utterly burned with fire" (2 Samuel 23:7). Such is "the day of the Lord" that shall come as a thief in the night (2 Peter 3:10). To this day of fire and destruction John the Baptist referred when he began to preach

repentance (Matthew 3:2-10); as if reminding the Jews of Malachi, and his awful words.

In the midst of this fiery havoc there shall be a remnant "spared" (3:17), described by the expression "you that fear my name." Yes; the fearers of Jehovah's name are (as in the case of Noah) to be spared in the fiery deluge that is coming. Nay, on them a glorious morning is to dawn (2 Samuel 23:4), the Sun of righteousness is to arise; not with destruction, but with "healing" in his rays or "wings," and under his genial warmth and light, these fearers of the Lord shall go forth as the flocks and herds to pasture. Blessed morning to those who fear the Lord and think on his name (Malachi 3:16), the "morning without clouds" (2 Samuel 23:4); ushered in by "the bright and morning star" (Revelation 2:28). This was in a measure fulfilled when Jesus came as "the light of the world;" but the full accomplishment is reserved for his second appearing.

Then (ver. 3.) shall these fearers of the Lord accompany him in executing his vengeance,— "this honour have all his saints" (Psalm 149:9); for "the Lord cometh with ten thousand of his saints to execute judgment upon all" (Jude 14). They come with their Lord to "tread down the wicked," to "tread them in anger, and trample them in fury" (Isaiah 63:3; Revelation 19:15). Yes; antichrist and all his enemies, with all who "know not God and obey not his gospel," shall be "as ashes" under them in that day of fire (ver. 1). Thus shall the saints triumph. Victory shall be theirs on that very earth where they were overcome and trodden on. They shall be associated with the King of kings in wielding the rod of iron (Psalm 2:9; Revelation 2:27). That day shall be one of exaltation and triumph for the fearers of the Lord,— "The saints of the Most High shall take the kingdom" (Daniel 7:18); and then shall the song of the redeemed be fulfilled, "Thou hast made us unto our God kings and priests, and we shall reign on the earth" (Revelation 5:10).

In the fourth verse we have a statement which, while it refers most of all to Israel, applies to the world also,— "Remember ye the law of Moses," &c. It was probably to this that our Lord referred, when once and again he

said, "I am not come to destroy the law, but to fulfil." Throughout the whole dispensation that law was to be exhibited and magnified, as the law of laws, holy, just, and good. Christ himself did this in life and in death; and God, even under this dispensation of grace, cannot suffer one jot or tittle of that righteous law to be infringed. It shall stand forever.

Then the forerunner is announced, before the great and dreadful day of the Lord; whether actually before it, or just about its commencement (for it is not a mere day of twentyfour hours), we know not,—"I will send Elijah the prophet." As we find Joel's prophecy (2:31) receiving a faint and partial fulfilment at Pentecost, though it awaits a fuller one hereafter; so we have a double Elias,—an Elias of the first, and an Elias of the second coming. The mission of both is alike,—to call Israel to repentance, and to bring the whole nation, fathers and children, into happy unity before God; the warning being annexed, "Lest I come and smite the land (earth) with a curse." John the Baptist was a burning and shining light,—the vivid likeness of the Tishbite; but his ministry did not accomplish the end specified. The heart of the nation was not turned; and instead of oneness, there was division and a sword (Luke 12:51,52); son against father, and father against son. They repented not, and so they were smitten; and not only they, but their land; so that it remains a desolation and a curse until this day. But when the literal Elijah comes, at Messiah's second advent, then shall be the blessing and not the curse. His mission shall be effectual. The heart of the nation shall be turned;

God will give them "ONE heart" (Ezekiel 11:19); "the people shall be all righteous"; people and land shall alike be blessed of the Lord; division and discord shall cease; unity and love shall overflow. Then shall be the reign of peace, under the sceptre of the Prince of peace. As the Old Testament ends with that awful word, "curse," the New Testament begins and ends with blessing: "Blessed are the poor, blessed are the meek, blessed are the pure in heart"; and "the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all" (Revelation 22:21).

1. The great warning (ver. 1). There is a day coming that shall decide everything. All that God hates shall be utterly swept away. Sinner, tremble and turn.
2. The consolation of the faithful (ver. 2). There is a remnant; and the mark of this is that "they fear God's name." What stress God lays on this "fear." What honour he puts on those in whom it is found.
3. The mighty victory (ver. 3). These "fearers" are "warriors" too. They fight, and overcome, and triumph. The reward of victory is theirs; the palm and crown.
4. The unchangeable standard of holiness (ver. 4). God's law is perfect. It stands forever. In the last ages, as well as the first, it is the great rule. It tells what God loves and what he hates.
5. The world's last sermon. It comes from venerable lips; from one who has been near three thousand years in heaven. Elijah comes to give God's great message to Israel. The nation hears. The blessing comes.

To all this we are looking forward in these last days. When the great day may come, we know not. It may be near. Let us look for its signs. Let us listen for its sounds of warning. The message has gone forth. WATCH. In such an hour as ye think not, the son of man cometh! "Little children, it is the last time" (1 John 2:18).

The world is not ready for its Judge. In the day when He comes it will be dumb. "What wilt thou say when he shall punish thee?" asks the prophet (Jeremiah 13:21). Yes; the world is unready. But this will not hinder his coming. "He that shall come will come, and will not tarry." As a thief he shall come. As the lightning he shall come. As a snare he shall come. As a judge he shall come. As an avenger he shall come. As the wielder of the iron rod he shall come. As King of kings and Lord of lords he shall come.

O Sons of men, take warning. When ye are saying peace and safety, sudden destruction will come. When ye are enjoying your lusts and pleasures,—in the theatre, or the opera, or the ball-room, or the turf, or the gaming-table,—he, the Judge of quick and dead, shall come. Oh, ere he thus comes to you, come ye to him! Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and ye perish in the way.

Make haste, for judgment lingereth not, damnation slumbereth not. The time is short. But the gate is open; and he who has opened it bids you enter. He pities you, he yearns over you, in the deep sincerity of divine compassion. "He is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance." While yet then he lingers in his love,—oh haste to be saved. He may soon be here. The trumpet of the Judge may soon sound. The day which shall burn as an oven may soon begin. Oh turn ye, turn ye, why will ye die?